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Examiner

Pakistan sets Mullah Omar deathtrap to disrupt U.S.-Taliban talks

By Michael Hughes

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An Afghan security official told TOLONews on Tuesday that Pakistan's spy agency is scheming to move Taliban leader Mullah Omar from Pakistan to Helmand province and then report his whereabouts to U.S. forces.

The Pakistanis hope Omar is killed on Afghan soil because it will prove terrorist leaders are also hiding in Afghanistan, the source claimed. The same Afghan official said Omar received the ISI order to leave Quetta from former Pakistani spy chief Hamid Gul.

Such a development would disrupt the negotiations reportedly underway between the U.S. and the Taliban. According to the Washington Post, a U.S. representative attended at least three meetings in Qatar and Germany within the last eight or nine days with a Taliban official who is close to Mullah Omar.

U.S. officials claim "exploratory" conversations which began in February have advanced significantly in terms of substance and willingness to engage. The commencement of dialogue predated the Osama bin Laden assassination, but the death of the Al Qaeda leader has put more pressure on insurgent leaders to compromise, experts say.

Rumors of the talks have been chastised by critics who believe that such negotiations will compromise Afghan democracy because it appears Kabul and Washington are seriously considering bestowing the Taliban with whatever the insurgents consider an "acceptable share of

political power.” This would undermine Afghan self-determination by handing over partial control of Afghanistan to the Taliban without the consent of the governed.

Afghan native Khalil Nouri, co-founder of the New World Strategies Coalition (NWSC) commented today in The Huffington Post that “there can only be one legitimate way to obtain stability in Afghanistan; through an all Afghan national ratification of a reconciliation process”. Afghans like Nouri believe neither the U.S. nor the Karzai administration has the legitimacy or the proper mandate to negotiate a settlement on behalf of the Afghan people.

An American official reported that “the Afghans have been fully briefed” on U.S.-Taliban contacts and “the Pakistanis only partially so” because the Obama administration is now of the mind that negotiation with the Quetta Shura does not require Pakistan’s cooperation. One senior administration official was even quoted as saying:

“Some people who have met with the Taliban say that among the reasons [the insurgents] want to establish their own office is so they can get out from under the Pakistanis”.

This, of course, has enraged the Pakistanis, who once fancied themselves the chief interlocutors of any reconciliation process between the Karzai government and the Taliban. It is yet another point of contention between Islamabad and Washington in a relationship that has swiftly deteriorated.

U.S.-Pakistani relations are at the breaking point in the aftermath of the bin Laden raid, with the U.S. furious that Pakistan was harboring the world’s most notorious terrorist while Pakistan feels the U.S. violated its sovereignty.

Pakistan would rather see the Taliban-affiliated Haqqani Network secure a power-share in Afghanistan because the military, which has had a relationship with the Haqqanis for the past three decades, envisions them being an anti-Indian asset in a post-NATO world.

Syed Saleem Shahzad of Asia Times Online backed up this notion, asserting that many within the Pakistani army still want alliances with Sunni Islamist elements in the region as leverage against India and Iran. Shazad went further saying that mid-level cadre – rogue elements within the Pakistani military– aligned with Sunni militants like the Haqqanis could instigate assaults akin to the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

According to the Wall Street Journal, U.S. officials consider the Haqqani Network the most lethal and the most irreconcilable of the insurgent groups:

While U.S. officials say Washington would talk with anyone who is serious about striking a peace deal, they don't believe Mr. Haqqani fits the bill. The Haqqanis haven't been included in recent efforts to open talks with the main Taliban leadership, headed by Mullah Muhammad Omar, U.S. officials say.

A senior ISI official said the Haqqanis could one day be "a force for peace" in Afghanistan, while the U.S. has indicated Haqqani is the target of the next bin Laden-style raid, characterizing

the width of the chasm between the two countries' attitudes about who should partake in the endgame in Kabul.

Not to mention, the Haqqanis are thought to be tightly-aligned with Al Qaeda and the group's leader was known to be close to bin Laden. Omar, on the other hand, has had his differences with both the Haqqani network and bin Laden and the U.S. senses that his organization can be more easily decoupled from Al Qaeda.

The Obama administration is keen on striking a deal with special haste in light of the fact that the withdrawal of American troops is set to begin this summer, and the fact NATO is targeting to have all combat personnel extracted from the region by 2014.