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## Some Afghan military officers to get training in Pakistan

By Karin Brulliard and Karen DeYoung

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ABUL -- Afghan President Hamid Karzai has agreed to send a group of military officers to Pakistan for training, a significant policy shift that Afghan and Pakistani officials said signals deepening relations between the long-wary neighbors.

The move is a victory for Pakistan, which seeks a major role in Afghanistan as officials in both countries become increasingly convinced that the U.S. war effort there is faltering. Afghan officials said Karzai has begun to see Pakistan as a necessary ally in ending the war through negotiation with the Taliban or on the battlefield.

"This is meant to demonstrate confidence to Pakistan, in the hope of encouraging them to begin a serious consultation and conversation with us on the issue of [the] Taliban," Rangin Dadfar Spanta, Karzai's national security adviser, said of the training agreement.

The previously unpublicized training would involve only a small group of officers, variously described as between a handful and a few dozen, but it has enormous symbolic importance as the first tangible outcome of talks between Karzai and Pakistan's military and intelligence chiefs that began in May. It is likely to be controversial among some Afghans who see Pakistan as a Taliban puppet-master rather than as a cooperative neighbor, and in India, which is wary of Pakistan's intentions in Afghanistan.

Some key U.S. officials involved in Afghanistan said they knew nothing of the

arrangement. "We are neither aware of nor have we been asked to facilitate training of the Afghan officer corps with the Pakistani military," Lt. Gen. William B. Caldwell IV, head of the NATO training command in Afghanistan, said in an e-mail. But Afghanistan, he said, "is a sovereign nation and can make bilateral agreements with other nations to provide training."

The United States has spent \$27 billion to train and equip Afghan security forces since 2002, and President Obama's war strategy calls for doubling the strength of both the army and police force there by October 2011 to facilitate the gradual departure of U.S. troops.

Gen. David H. Petraeus, confirmed Wednesday as the new U.S. and NATO war commander, said this week that the United States wants to "forge a partnership or further the partnership that has been developing between Afghanistan and Pakistan." In addition to taking military action against Taliban sanctuaries inside its borders, Petraeus said, it is "essential" that Pakistan be involved "in some sort of reconciliation agreement" with the insurgents.

U.S. officials are generally pleased with the rapprochement between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but the rapid progress of the talks has given some an uneasy feeling that events are moving outside U.S. control. Karzai told the Obama administration about his first meeting with Pakistani intelligence chief Ahmed Shuja Pasha when he visited Washington in May, but "he didn't say what they talked about, what the Pakistanis offered. He just dangled" the information, one U.S. official said.

That session, and at least one follow-up meeting among Karzai, Pasha and the Pakistani army chief of staff, Gen. Ashfaq Kiyani, included discussion of Pakistan-facilitated talks with Taliban leaders, although the two governments differed on whether the subject was raised with a Pakistan offer or an Afghan request. Both governments denied subsequent reports that Karzai had met face to face with Pakistan-based insurgent leader Sirajuddin Haqqani.

#### Hedging their bets

Pakistan and Afghanistan have long held each other at arm's length. The border between them is disputed, and Afghans resent Pakistan's support for the Taliban government during the 1990s and its tolerance of insurgent sanctuaries. But as they have assessed coalition prospects in the war, both governments appear to have turned to each other as a way of hedging their bets against a possible U.S. withdrawal.

While building Afghanistan's weak army is a key component of U.S. strategy, more than 300 Afghan soldiers are currently being trained under bilateral agreements in other countries, including Turkey and India, Pakistan's traditional adversary. Pakistan has been pushing for months for a training deal, and Spanta said that a "limited" number of officers would be part of the new agreement. Details were still under discussion, but a senior Pakistani government official said the program was expected to begin "soon."

Shuja Nawaz, director of the South Asia Center at the Atlantic Council in Washington and an advocate of a Pakistani training program, said the plan could expedite joint operations between the two militaries and reduce suspicions about Pakistan within the Afghan army.

"This is a major move," Nawaz said. "It will have a powerful signaling effect in both countries."

Fears of Pakistani military influence persist among Afghan ethnic minorities and some in Karzai's government, including one official who compared the training initiative to the Soviet education of Afghan officers in the 1960s and 1970s that he said was "the start of all evil in Afghanistan."

"Pakistanis never trust Afghans. And Afghans never trust Pakistanis," according to a senior Afghan official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to protect his job. "But because the current situation is getting worse and worse, Karzai has to say okay to the Pakistanis and shake hands."

'We have doubts'

Another Afghan official, citing Karzai's recent firing of two top security officials who were highly critical of Pakistan, said the Afghan leader may be moving too far, too fast. The firings, the official said, were a "triumph for the ISI," Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence directorate, which has had a history of backing the Taliban and other militant groups in Afghanistan.

Afghan skeptics noted that Pakistan still refuses Afghanistan's demand to extradite Taliban commander Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, who was captured in Karachi in a joint Pakistani-U.S. raid early this year, or to arrest other senior leaders with whom they believe Pakistan retains ties. "If they were able to arrest Mullah Baradar . . . why haven't they arrested [Afghan Taliban leader] Mullah Omar? Or . . . Haqqani? This is something we have doubts about," one senior Afghan official said.

Baradar, who reportedly had engaged in talks with the Karzai government, "was interested and more willing to negotiate," the official said. "He was tired of fighting. Pakistan wants to use the Taliban as a pressure element. They don't want the Taliban to be in direct contact with the Afghan government."

Some U.S. officials expressed similar wariness about Pakistan's intentions. "What the Pakistanis and the Taliban want," one said, "is a cleaning of the house," including replacement of the Afghan officer corps, currently dominated by ethnic Tajiks whom Pakistan sees as hostile to its interests.

But other officials in all three countries rejected that analysis and pointed to a broader thaw in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations over the past year. Pakistani scholarships have

been accepted by a number of Afghan university students, and Pakistan is training Afghan civilian officials, Spanta said.

"We have seen a paradigm shift in the relationship," said Mohammad Sadiq, Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan. "And of course, both sides are benefiting from it."