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Afghanistan Curries Favor with India and Denigrates Pakistan

By Jack Healy and Alissa Johannsen Rubin

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Fuming over what they have called the Pakistani role in exporting terrorism across the border, Afghanistan officials signaled on Tuesday they had little interest, for now, in healing a rift with Pakistan, their eastern neighbor.

Two developments set the tone: In New Delhi, President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan signed a wide-ranging strategic partnership with India, which Pakistan regards as its principal adversary. Mr. Karzai's visit also underscored the growing economic and security ties between India and Afghanistan.

And here in Kabul, intelligence officials investigating the assassination of the head of Afghanistan's peace process said that Pakistan was refusing to cooperate with their inquiry and had failed to crack down on Taliban leaders who, the Afghans say, planned the killing from inside Pakistan.

Both moves were all but certain to draw further ire from Pakistan.

The strategic agreement signed Tuesday by Mr. Karzai and the Indian prime minister, Manmohan Singh, had been in the making for more than five months.

Perhaps most provocatively for the Pakistanis, it paves the way for India to train and equip Afghan security forces to fill what the Afghanistan government fears will be critical gaps as NATO troops leave in the years ahead. Pakistan and India, nuclear-armed neighbors, have long suspected each other's motives in Afghanistan.

There is evidence that Pakistan's spy agency, the Directorate for Inter-Service Intelligence, has used militant groups as proxy fighters in Afghanistan, and may have been behind the bombing of the Indian embassy here in 2009. Pakistan has denied such accusations. But it has long questioned why India opened three consulates around the country — in Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar and Jalalabad — in addition to its embassy in Kabul, suggesting that they are surveillance posts.

Over the past 10 years India has spent nearly \$2 billion in aid to Afghanistan, mainly on reconstruction, road building, health clinics and an array of small development projects. India also runs a scholarship program for Afghan students, not unlike the American Fulbright program.

Wealthy Afghans often travel to India for medical treatment. The number of flights weekly from the Afghan capital to New Delhi has risen steadily over the past several years as young professionals journey there for training programs and trade.

Although Mr. Karzai's trip had long been scheduled in advance, it fell at a particularly strained moment for relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan, coming two weeks after a suicide bomber assassinated the head of the Afghan High Peace Council, former President Burhanuddin Rabbani.

His killing threw the peace process into disarray and stirred angry tirades against Pakistan, as officials in Parliament and Afghans in the dusty streets of the capital accused their neighbor of fostering insurgent groups suspected of orchestrating the assassination.

Earlier this summer, militants from the Pakistan-based Haqqani network launched a brazen attack against the American Embassy in Kabul, transforming the capital into a battle zone for 20 hours. Adm. Mike Mullen, the just-departed chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Pakistan's spy agency had supported the attack.

Afghan investigators say the plot to kill Mr. Rabbani was hatched in the Pakistani border town of Quetta, a stronghold of Taliban leadership. Some Afghan officials have publicly accused Pakistan's spy agency of complicity in the killing — charges that Pakistan has rejected as baseless.

On Tuesday, intelligence officials in Kabul jabbed yet another accusatory finger toward Pakistan. They said Pakistani officials had scuttled a meeting to discuss Mr. Rabbani's assassination and would not cooperate in the investigation.

At a news conference, intelligence officials showed satellite images of Quetta, highlighting three houses with yellow circles. Those, officials said, were the homes of so-called shadow governors of the Taliban and other officials whom Pakistani security forces had not arrested.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry did not respond to the latest complaints, but in a statement released a day earlier, the ministry cast doubt on "the so-called evidence" tying Pakistan's spy agency to Mr. Rabbani's killing.

"Professor Burhanuddin Rabbani was a great friend of Pakistan and widely respected in this country," the statement said.