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The Examiner

Northern Alliance girds for War if U.S. pulls out

By Sara A. Carter

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KABUL - Leaders of Afghanistan's Northern Alliance which helped depose the Taliban in 2001 are preparing to renew the struggle with the Taliban insurgency as American forces begin to withdraw, a confrontation that those leaders fear will plunge the nation into civil war.

The leaders have had several meetings in the past week, at which potential U.S. abandonment was a heated topic.

Former Afghan Vice President Ahmad Zia Massoud discussed those plans with The Washington Examiner during a meeting at his heavily guarded compound in Kabul.

"If the majority of American troops withdraw, along with the international community, the ground will be suitable for the Taliban to return and another civil war will erupt in Afghanistan," Massoud said. "We will not accept Taliban. So far our security institutions are not strong enough to hold off the Taliban, with Pakistan's influence, on their own. So far the plan for nation building has not been achieved. In this kind of sensitive situation, the withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Afghanistan will cause a lot of damage for Afghan people and future security of the West."

Massoud is the younger brother of legendary Northern Alliance resistance leader Ahmad Shah Massoud, who was a key leader in the defeat of the Soviet Union in the 1980s. He was killed by

suicide bombers working for Osama bin Laden just before al Qaeda launched the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Ahmad Zia Massoud is also the son-in-law of assassinated Northern Alliance leader Burhanuddin Rabbani, the former president of Afghanistan who was head of President Hamid Karzai's 68-member High Peace Council until he was killed in his home by a suicide bomber several weeks ago. The younger Massoud is one of several top contenders vying for Rabbani's position as head of the Northern Jamiat-e-Islami party.

The talk of a Northern Alliance movement to take defense of Afghanistan into its own hands is troubling to U.S. intelligence officials, who say the group is not strong enough to defeat the Taliban but that it could escalate civil strife in the country.

"We hope for some sort stability," a U.S. intelligence official said.

Massoud said the situation has become more dire since the U.S. announcement for a drawdown. He accused Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence agency of targeting leaders from his party as a way to strengthen their allies in the Taliban ahead of an anticipated U.S. withdrawal in 2014.

"For a long time we knew that the ISI had a list of all the prominent people of Northern Afghanistan," Massoud said. "This is the strategy of ISI now -- that the prominent Northern leaders should be killed up until 2014, when American troops withdraw from Afghanistan. The U.S. announcement of the drawdown in Afghanistan encouraged the Taliban and Pakistan to push forward with their plans."

Saleh Mohammad Registani, a former senior commander of the Northern Alliance and former Panjshiri representative in the national parliament, told The Washington Examiner that an absolute withdrawal from Afghanistan would spiral the nation into chaos.

"Six years ago I was saying the U.S. and NATO were losing the fight because the Taliban came back," Registani said from his office in Kabul. "We must change the strategy. We know the U.S. needs to draw down troops, but there must be a contingency of least 25,000 to 30,000 troops, mainly Special Forces like in the beginning to work alongside our military, to protect Kabul and the government from the Taliban."

Registani, the former defense attache for the Northern Alliance, said Taliban leaders will pour into the south and east parts of Afghanistan if there is a significant U.S. withdrawal.

"The Taliban will return and we will go back to the '90s," he said. "We will not give in to the Taliban and we will not negotiate with them."

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