

America's Search for the "Good Taliban"

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Reminiscent of a casting call for "America's Next Top Model," the Obama administration has embarked on a search for the ever-elusive "good Taliban" with whom it can negotiate a partial military climb-down.

In an exclusive—and revealing—March 8 [interview](#) with The New York Times, President Barack Obama declared that the United States "was not winning the war in Afghanistan and opened the door to a reconciliation process in which the American military would reach out to moderate elements of the Taliban, much as it did with Sunni militias in Iraq."

Reflecting desperation and ignorance when it comes to the war-scarred Central Asian nation, like its Republican predecessor, the Democratic administration has failed to come to grips with ubiquitous facts on the ground.

A rapidly-expanding Taliban insurgency against the U.S.-led NATO occupation and the warlord-dominated Karzai regime has brought imperialism's regional domination project to a screeching halt.

After seven years of occupation and the slow bleed-out of a protracted war, the Pashtun populated southern Afghan provinces and Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) are effectively controlled by a melange of far-right Islamist Talibs and drug-linked militias loyal to the Hezb-i-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

First [reported](#) February 27 by Al Jazeera, the now not-so-secret talks amongst Afghan officials, European diplomats and Hekmatyar-aligned forces have progressed to the point that the puppet Karzai regime "has been exploring the potential for negotiations with the Taliban leadership council of Mullah Muhammad Omar," according to [The New York Times](#).

In a March 13 follow-up [article](#), the Times previewed the new product line that the administration will soon be rolling-out to a sceptical public tired of imperial wars and self-inflicted economic crises:

The plan reflects in part a conclusion within the administration that most of the insurgent foot soldiers in Afghanistan and Pakistan are "reconcilable" and can be pruned away from the hard-core organizations of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. At least 70 percent of the insurgents, and possibly more, can be encouraged to lay down their arms with the proper incentives, administration officials have said.

However, other unnamed "officials" were far less sanguine of the prospects for the plan's

success and told the Times,

Several European officials said that the overarching theme behind the Afghanistan review was that NATO was looking for a way out of Afghanistan, and that everything done now was toward that end. "The goal now is simply to get to a point to prevent Afghanistan and Pakistan from becoming a place from which you can launch attacks on the West," a senior European official said. (Helene Cooper and Thom Shanker, "Obama Afghan Plan Focuses on Pakistan Aid and Appeal to Militants," The New York Times, March 13, 2009)

While U.S. imperialism continues to dream of pipelines and military bases stretching from Baku to Karachi and beyond, the fact is that boat has long set sail.

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Speaking at NATO headquarters in Brussels on Tuesday, Vice President Joe Biden claimed that "at least 70%" of Islamist Taliban guerrilla fighters were "mercenaries" who could be persuaded—with what else—cold, hard cash, to lay down their arms and join the "peace process."

According to Biden, "Five percent of the Taliban is incorrigible, not susceptible to anything other than being defeated. Another 25% or so are not quite sure, in my view, of the intensity of their commitment to the insurgency. Roughly 70% are involved because of the money."

Memo to the Vice President: that "incorrigible" five percent comprise the top leadership of the far-right Islamist movement, including al-Qaeda-linked commanders such as "Mullah Bradar, Sirajuddin Haqqani and Anwarul Haq Mujahid. These three have pledged their allegiance to Taliban leader Mullah Omar, who has transformed the Taliban into an ultra-conservative force compared to a few years ago when the Taliban were a Pashtun tribal movement," Asia Times [reports](#).

In other words, nothing short of a complete U.S./NATO withdrawal from the Central Asian "battlespace" will satisfy Mullah Omar and his minions. And what of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, suddenly everyone's newest "best friend forever"?

Dubbed the "Michael Corleone of jihad" by [Asia Times](#), the sociopathic former Afghan Prime Minister who pulverized Kabul during the post-Soviet fall-out amongst mujahedin thieves in the early 1990s, is positioning himself for whatever he can grab.

Biden certainly knows that late last year a select group of Afghan diplomats plus Karzai's brother, Ahmad Wali, finally talked to some Taliban, good or bad, with mediation by notorious Taliban-enabler Saudi Arabia. That means, with US approval. ...

Recently in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, the Karzai people thought they had handed Hekmatyar the famous "offer he can't refuse": asylum in Saudi Arabia first, then return to Afghanistan with full immunity. They forgot that a proud Hekmatyar does not want asylum. He wants a piece of the action in Kabul—preferably the meatiest part. (Pepe Escobar, "Taliban set to burn the Reichstag?", Asia Times Online, March 13, 2009)

Lest we forget, this former darling of the United States, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence agency (ISI) during the anti-Soviet jihad received the bulk of CIA-Saudi largesse as America's plan to hand the Soviet Union "its own Vietnam" worked splendidly—for the international narcotics trade and American-linked terrorist jackals.

As Alfred W. McCoy pointed out, it was none other than Hekmatyar, with Hezb-i-Islami as the "beard" for rather profitable operations on both sides of the "Afpak" border, who pioneered refining heroin inside Afghanistan.

A piece of work from the get-go, Hekmatyar was a former engineering student and founder of Afghanistan's Muslim Brotherhood. This brave mujahid cut his political teeth by throwing vials of acid in the faces of Kabul University women who refused to wear the veil. Accused of murdering a leftist student, Hekmatyar fled to Pakistan where he continued his activities with "guidance" from ISI handlers. When the Carter administration began its destabilization campaign against Kabul's socialist government at the behest of current Obama foreign policy éminence grise, Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, Hekmatyar was waiting in the wings. McCoy writes:

Instead of arranging a meeting with a broad spectrum of resistance leaders, ISI offered the CIA's envoy an alliance with its own Afghan client, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, leader of the small Hezb-i-Islami guerrilla group. The CIA accepted the offer and, over the next decade, gave more than half its covert aid to Hekmatyar's guerrillas. It was, as the U.S. Congress would find a decade later, a dismal decision. Unlike the later resistance leaders who commanded strong popular followings inside Afghanistan, Hekmatyar led a guerrilla force that was a creature of the Pakistan military. After the CIA built his Hezb-i-Islami into the largest Afghan guerrilla force, Hekmatyar would prove himself brutal and corrupt. Not only did he command the largest guerrilla army, but Hekmatyar would use it—with the full support of ISI and the tacit tolerance of the CIA—to become Afghanistan's leading drug lord. (The Politics of Heroin: CIA Complicity in the Global Drug Trade, Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991, pp. 449-450)

And as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime revealed in their [2008 World Drug Report](#), with Afghanistan currently producing 92% of the world's supply of illicit opium, that would give Hekmatyar literally billions of reasons to "get back into the game" as they say.

Although you wouldn't know any of this if you relied solely on The New York Times. In fact, Carlotta Gall, a journalist who certainly knows better, will only report that "Mr. Hekmatyar, a ruthless, hard-line fundamentalist known for reneging on past agreements, is widely rumored to reside in Pakistan," while glossing over his documented history as a world class drug lord fully the rival of Colombia's late, though unlamented, Pablo Escobar. And so it goes.

These however, are pipe dreams bound to end in abysmal failure for the United States. As Asia Times reports, "the Taliban have a virtual siege all around the capital Kabul" and as I write, are busily preparing their spring offensive. And with the Pakistan' Army's truce with Baitullah Mehsud's Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the newly-launched jihadi outfit, Shura Ittihad-ul-Mujahideen (Council of United Holy Warriors), planning to "surge" an estimated 15-20,000 fighters of their own across the border, one can expect a horrendous increase in violence.

In a prescient article [published](#) by Asia Times, independent journalist and researcher

Anthony Fenton cites the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan ([RAWA](#)) on “the anticipated effect of the war’s expansion on Afghans.”

The anti-fundamentalist and anti-occupation women’s rights group states: “The very first outcome of the surge for Afghan people will be increase in the number of civilian casualties ... In the past seven years, thousands of innocent people have been killed or wounded by the US/NATO bombardments. In the past weeks under Obama’s rule, around 100 Afghan civilians have been killed.”

RAWA adds that “The surge in level of troops will also [result in a] surge in protests against the US/NATO in Afghanistan and it will also push more people towards the Taliban and other terrorist groups as a reaction against occupation forces and their mistreatment against people.”

Despite these dire predictions, many of which have already been bourn out on the ground—and on the bodies of ordinary Afghans caught in the crossfire—any discussion of a complete U.S. and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan is “off the table.”

Fenton writes, “Contrary to the elite, bipartisan consensus inside North America that supports the war’s escalation, and echoing fears that are common among Afghans, RAWA argues that ‘We think the 30,000 extra troops will only serve the US regional strategy in changing Afghanistan to its military base, it will [have] nothing to do with fighting the terrorist groups, as they claim’.”

If history is any judge of the present American trajectory, particularly as imperialism embarks on its quixotic quest for the elusive “good Taliban,” if successful, Washington would insure they were “trained-up fierce” and deployed as a new armed force for global destabilization operations in Central, South Asia and the Middle East.

As I [documented](#) in “Unconventional Warfare in the 21st Century: U.S. Surrogates, Terrorists and Narcotraffickers” (Antifascist Calling, December 19, 2008), the Pentagon’s field manual (FM 3-05.130) titled [Unconventional Warfare](#) lays it out in black and white:

Irregulars, or irregular forces, are individuals or groups of individuals who are not members of a regular armed force, police, or other internal security force. They are usually nonstate-sponsored and unconstrained by sovereign nation legalities and boundaries. These forces may include, but are not limited to, specific paramilitary forces, contractors, individuals, businesses, foreign political organizations, resistance or insurgent organizations, expatriates, transnational terrorism adversaries, disillusioned transnational terrorism members, black marketers, and other social or political “undesirables.” (Unconventional Warfare, p. 1-3)

“Paging Mullah Omar, white courtesy telephone!”

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