

Taliban Liaison Office in Qatar, A Close Ally of America: “Established with Washington’s US Permission”

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US role in the region

As Pakistan welcomed US back door diplomacy with the Taliban on January 4, a fatigued US, now scrambling for its troops withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014, is eventually embracing the long ignored but, much awaited strategic decision for a negotiated settlement with the same principal stake holder it ousted by military aggression in 2001. A much earlier decision such as this, as opposed to the one, when US- arrogance opted for the drone-strikes, the expansion, in 04, of war in to Pakistan, and the troops-surge in Afghanistan, would have made Washington’s reversal of position on Taliban, now ten years later, much less embarrassing, and, the US Vice- president, Jo -Biden would not have had to declare that “Taliban are not the enemy of the United States”, which is, in fact, a reversal of historic proportions.

A Taliban Contact Office, formally established, and functioning in Qatar with the US permission, is, nothing less than a de facto recognition of Taliban-leadership role in Afghanistan. But that reversal is not enough. A second reversal in US Policy over Pakistan’s role is equally indispensable. Karzai’s chief of staff, Abdul Karim khurram is right that “Pakistan’s role is important in the peace process”. But Khurram elaborated (interview, January 19) the US position on Pakistan’s participation in the peace process: “we asked the Americans whether Pakistan will share in the peace process, they, says Khurram, did not give us a meaningful answer”. Now a slow second reversal in US policy can be seen emerging amid news that Pakistan, and Afghanistan have agreed to talks with the Taliban in Saudi Arabia, although the Saudis still have some reservation in this regard. Pakistan’s foreign minister, Hina Rabbani Khar has just returned from Kabul after ice-breaking talks with Mr. Karzai, as the US-Taliban serious talks get underway in Qatar with premier Gilani concluding his trip to Doha a few days ago. Shall the history repeat itself, and put the Taliban back in to the saddle as they were in pre-9/11 Afghanistan? The road-map that the US seems to be following gives us a lot of reasons to say yes. The US has apparently, realized the cruel reality that there is no peaceful solution achievable for Afghanistan without the representatives of its 60% Pashtun population. In fact, the pre 9/11 Taliban government had 95% of the Afghanistan under their control and management for a period of 5 years from 1996 through 2001. Like it dealt with the Vietnamese in the early 70s, a negotiated settlement leading to the transfer of power to Mulla Umar led Taliban, and others, surely offers to Washington a face-saving exit-strategy from Afghanistan in 2014, or even earlier.

The US backed stage, set in Qatar- the establishment of the Taliban liaison office-and the reported talks in Saudi-Arabia, open dual platforms of formal political negotiations between Pakistan, Afghanistan, the US and the ousted indispensable—the Taliban. Despite his earlier opposition to negotiations with the Taliban, the US-installed Hamid Karzai , whose days are already numbered, has little choice but to go along with Washington. As the US and Nato end their combat role in 2013, any earlier US settlement with the Taliban, could, in fact, terminate Karzai's glory sooner than 2014, which shall also confirm that the US exercise in Afghan- democracy—the so called elections—was Uncle Sam's an other great farce of our time.

While the road to resolution over Afghanistan is being paved at an accelerated pace, though major hurdles remain, the US foreign policy continues to threaten the over all sovereignty of Pakistan, and it's whole range of national security interests in relation to India, Afganistan, Pak- nuclear deterrence, and economic stabilization. A deeper look at US -Pak relationship brings out a sharp conflict between the strategic objectives the two states seek to accomplish. It needs no explanation that the Indo-US strategic partnership forms a frontal assault on Pakistan's role in the region. A US-backed Indian political and military role in Afghanistan undercuts, among other things, what are Pakistan's multiple strategic interests in Afghanistan. A New-Delhi- Kabul alliance, could very well create a strategic threat to Pakistan's western borders in case of a military clash over Kashmir. A pro-India Kabul could, indeed, undermine Pakistan's strategic goals in a political/ diplomatic row with India at the world stage. Similarly, as the two are strategic partners, the US will, needless to say, stand by India in any war, or, crises, to the absolute detriment of Pakistan. Remember the England-Argentina Faulkland- war, the Bombay attacks, and very role the US played, and the Faulkland war As per news reports, the US- drones shall continue their reconnaissance missions over Pakistan, long after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, and shall, therefore, constitute on going threats to the national security, and sovereignty of Pakistan.

As to the nuclear deterrence, the US stiff opposition to it's existence, is an open secret, coupled with the US- Pakistan conflict over FMCT and the CTBT. Pakistan's demonization, and it's economic , and political destabilization by the US, in it's anti-terror war, is certainly inflicting an immeasurable amount of damage on Pakistan. Keeping in view the ground reality, Pakistan must facilitate an expeditious US- Nato withdrawal from Afganistan, strongly discouraging, at the same time, the existence of any foreign military bases in Afghanistan, other wise the drones will become the cheapest, and the easiest means to cripple Pakistan. Convince Karazai, and other elements, as long as they are in power, that the presence of foreign bases would turn their country into western military out post, meaning a non -sovereign state in the region. The US Pak- relations have entered into what is nearly a no through alley. At a time, when Iran could face US- Israeli aggression, the Pak- Iran-Aghan scheduled summit, here in Islamabad, ought to ensure Beijing's leading role in the critical strategic decisions that must be made against the mounting threats.

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