

The Subtext of the Stalled Afghan-US Treaty: Will the US Trade Karzai for the Taliban?

By [Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya](#)

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2013 is almost over and the US has still not managed to get NATO-garrisoned Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai to sign the Pentagon's bilateral security agreement. The agreement is of vital strategic importance for the US and NATO in respect to having a position amidst the main players in Eurasia. The United States has set December 2014 as its so-called military withdrawal date from the NATO-manned Central Asian country. Despite the claims of the US, the Pentagon wants to keep a figure of 20,000 or more military personnel [in Afghanistan](#), retain at least nine bases, and to use Afghan airspace and territory for Pentagon operations in Central Asia and beyond...

Afghanistan sits at a strategically important [crossroad](#) in the world and the United States has always sought to capitalize on this. The idea of an American military withdrawal from NATO-garrisoned Afghanistan has always been viewed by the Pentagon as a strategic rollback in Central Asia and more broadly as a rollback from Eurasia. Regardless of the US government's claims, leaving NATO-garrisoned Afghanistan has always been out of the question for the US military. Nonetheless, it was claimed in July 2013 that President Obama was mulling a total withdrawal from the NATO-manned Central Asian country, or so claim the unnamed US and European officials that the reporters Mark Mazzetti and Matthew Rosenberg quoted for *The New York Times* (NYT). When it was published, the July 2013 NYT report by Mazzetti and Rosenberg raised many skeptical eyebrows. The news came while Washington was trying to stamp out some type of long-term security pact with Kabul to let the Pentagon continue using Afghanistan as a giant military base.

The quibbling between the US and its own indigent Afghan puppet, President Karzai, has been nuanced by another set of negotiations that the US had started. Washington had started secretive negotiations with the Taliban that scared America's Afghan puppets in Kabul. The fear of being betrayed by Washington caused Karzai to protest and eventually forced the Obama Administration into using intimidation by threatening a total withdrawal that would leave the puppets in Kabul to fend for themselves against the Taliban and the opposition groups in NATO-garrisoned Afghanistan. Even US Secretary of State John Kerry's personal pleas in October 2013, during an unannounced visit aimed at getting Kabul to sign the security treaty, were rejected by Karzai. Finally, US National Security Advisor Susan Rice delivered an ultimatum to Karzai in November 2013 saying that if he delayed signing that he would be left to his own devices against the Taliban in 2014.

Is the Taliban back in Washington's Good Graces?

US talks with the Taliban are a threat to the interests of China, India, Iran, and Russia. It was

the old Taliban that had kept all of America's rivals out of Afghanistan for Washington. The talks also come at the expense of Washington's own Afghan pawns. Karzai, long derided jokingly as the "Mayor of Kabul" due to his lack of authority outside of the Afghan capital, has been deeply alarmed by Washington's negotiations with the Taliban. His corrupt administration also objected to the fact that a Taliban office has been given recognition by the US government under the name of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, which is the name that the old Taliban had imposed on Afghanistan during their reign of terror that was supported by the US and only recognized diplomatically by Saudi Arabia, [Pakistan](#), and the United Arab Emirates. The Taliban office in Doha essentially functioned as an embassy or diplomatic mission. This status could even have led to the germination of a parallel Afghan government.

Although the Taliban of 2013 is very different from the Taliban of 2001, the tune of American officials has changed since George W. Bush Jr. and Tony Blair invaded Afghanistan and vowed to cleanse the country of the Taliban. The US now appears to be ready to throw in the towel in the fight against the Taliban fighters fighting American and NATO forces in Afghanistan. The Taliban of 2013, more properly described as a series of armed groups opposed to the US-supported Afghan government and to foreign troops on their soil, is insidiously gaining favour in Washington. This is the same brand of geopolitical-cum-regime change US favour that Al-Qaeda affiliated groups like Al-Nusra have enjoyed in Syria and Libya since the so-called Arab Spring erupted.

The Saudi takeover of Qatar's Shows?

The Taliban office that was opened for negotiations with the US government was located in Doha, Qatar. As noted earlier, the Taliban office in Qatar functioned as the embassy of a Taliban government-in-exile. Karzai repeatedly protested about the Taliban office in Qatar until the office was closed by the Taliban itself in July 2013. Formally, the Taliban closed the office after its white standard version of Afghanistan's flag and its sign were both removed by Qatari authorities. There is a chance that the office was closed just to eliminate the limelight and end Karzai's protests while negotiations between the US and the Taliban continued silently.

Just as the Emirate of Qatar tried to act as the patron of the Muslim Brotherhood, Doha appeared to have been positioning itself to become some type of patron for the Taliban too. This could possibly have been an attempt to compensate slightly for Qatar's lost investments on the declining Muslim Brotherhood's regional project or it could have been part of the same initiative all along. Regardless, Qatar's Al-Thani regime would never have dared to take such bold steps as hosting the Taliban without American approval. Ultimately, Qatari patronage over both the Muslim Brotherhood and its planned patronage over the Taliban have been in service of Washington's interests and, in a manner of speaking, the US had outsourced these particular jobs to the Qataris.

Qatar's regional role declined after the Saudi-supported military coup in Egypt toppled President Morsi and the failure of the regime change project in Syria. Qatar was sidelined by the Saudis in Syria too. Prince Bandar had taken over the lead in trying to oust the Syrian government too. It now seems that Saudi Arabia may also take the lead with the Taliban. In discussions between Afghani and Pakistani officials it was announced that a Taliban office may open up either in Turkey or Saudi Arabia. Karzai has tried to push instead for a Taliban office closer to home, and to his spies and informants, in neighbouring Pakistan as a means

of being able to monitor the group's negotiations with the United States.

A Redo of Egypt in Afghanistan?

Would the US let Karzai be ousted and replaced with the Taliban even though he has admittedly been on the CIA's payroll as a US employee? The answer is absolutely yes. Just looking at what happened in Egypt at the start of July 2013, it should be clear why Karzai may be nervous or distrustful of the US. The Obama Administration betrayed the very same Muslim Brotherhood government that Washington itself was propping up in Egypt. The Egyptian military even consulted the Pentagon before the coup against President Morsi took place. It was Washington that gave the green light for the military to roll out the tanks in Cairo and to oust their own ally Morsi. Of course there are more nuances about the events in Egypt and about why Obama abandoned Morsi, but the example of betrayal, or expendability, here is still undeniable. Obama played all sides and used the Egyptian military, Muslim Brotherhood, and segments of the Egyptian opposition against one another. The same thing can happen in NATO-garrisoned Afghanistan. It is not surprising that Karzai and his corrupt Kabuli entourage have become alert over Washington's secret talks with the Taliban.

Egypt's military leaders want to diversify their ties precisely because of the US strategy of playing one domestic faction against another. In Egypt it has been realized that Cairo can no longer be too dependent on the US. Moreover, all of America's allies and clients realize that the US imperial order is sinking in the broader Middle East. This is also one of the reasons why the American clients and puppets in the Middle East are suddenly becoming brave and speaking out against Washington.

Who can blame the officials in Kabul for thinking that the US government is involved in Machiavellian backdoor deals that could see Obama playing the Taliban against them. Ironically, the Taliban itself use to be an American ally, which the US government even provided with financial and logistical support, before it was tossed aside in 2001 under the pretext of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.* Karzai has actually demanded that the peace negotiations with the Taliban take place directly with the Afghan government itself. The American response has been to effectively refuse to allow direct peace negotiations between Karzai and the Taliban forces. As a result, in June 2013, Karzai suspended the bilateral negotiations on the security treaty. Karzai also announced that the Afghan government would take steps to take its security into its own hands and later to say that he would eventually sign the treaty if revisions were made and after the presidential elections in 2014. Washington's response was to threaten to pull out all of its troops in Afghanistan, which would force Karzai's fledgling military forces to face-off against the Taliban. Funds and supplies to Karzai's military were also cutoff. Susan Rice would also demand that the Karzai sign the treaty before April 2014, which is the date that he suggested.

There is an added dimension to this narrative. Even though the US has committed itself to preparing and equipping Afghanistan's military and security forces, it has been taking very contradictory steps the whole time. In an unprecedented move, the US has been destroying approximately seven billion dollars (US) worth of military equipment as it reduces its military presence in NATO-garrisoned Afghanistan. Instead of helping to strengthen the Afghan military by handing over the Pentagon's old military equipment to it, the US government has opted to do the opposite by destroying its military equipment.

Afghanistan is the Pentagon's Base in the War for Eurasia

America needs Afghanistan to challenge Russia, China, and Iran. Obama's threats to pullout from NATO-garrisoned Afghanistan are part of a bluff designed to intimidate Kabul. The Pentagon wants to beef up its infrastructure in Central Asia and not to reduce it. Afghanistan is viewed as a means of entry for the US and NATO into Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and the Caspian Sea. It is also a doorway into the Indian sub-continent. The Pentagon would never surrender its military bases in such a strategically important geographic location that borders Iran, China, Pakistan, and the post-Soviet space. Furthermore, the Pentagon's troop reduction is also being compensated by private battalions of security contractors or, in plain language, mercenaries that will allow the US to bypass many legalities and international liabilities by utilizing private armies.

Washington wants to stay in Afghanistan without fighting the Taliban. This is the Pentagon's real objective. It is with this objective in mind that Obama is trying to negotiate a peace deal with the Taliban while he is also trying to secure a bilateral security treaty with a scared Karzai who is worried about his own skin.

Karzai rightly suspects that the US could be willing to let him collapse if a deal with the Taliban is reached. These are the reasons why Afghan officials have refused to cooperate with Obama by signing the Pentagon's bilateral treaty. As a means of intimidating Karzai into signing the security treaty, this is what has forced Obama to use the threat of withdrawing all US troops as leverage and cut aid to the Afghan military. What a total US withdrawal would mean for Afghanistan's government is that Kabul would come under siege by the Taliban and others in a battle for power.

In spite of everything, these games between Hamid Karzai and the US government are not new. Washington and Karzai have put pressure on one another whenever there have been differences between the two sides. US officials put pressure on Karzai in 2009 when there were arguments about the Afghan elections and the political configuration of the Afghan government. Ahmed Wali Karzai, President Karzai's brother, was exposed in the crossfire as a CIA operative and drug dealer by US officials. Karzai's response came by way of General Khodadad, Afghanistan's counter-narcotics minister, who revealed to IRNA in a tit-for-tat statement that the drugs in Afghanistan are mostly "stockpiled in two provinces controlled by troops from the US, the UK, and Canada" which "NATO forces are taxing" as accomplices in the international narcotics trade.

The US strategy in NATO-garrisoned Afghanistan seeks to pit the different Afghan factions as counter-weights to one another as a means of ensuring the continuation of US influence. Washington could tilt the balance of power to one side when another side gets out of line and refuses to comply with Washington's edicts and desires. Nevertheless, it is not skeptical whatsoever to speculate that in the process of making peace with the Taliban that Washington may hand over much of Afghanistan back to them. It is in this context that the Russian government had warned in June 2013 that peace talks require direct consultations between Afghan officials and the Taliban whereas visiting Afghan officials led by Ershad Ahmadi, Karzai's deputy foreign minister, have been warned in Tehran not to trust the US with their fate.

NOTE

* The 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US were not committed by the Taliban or any Afghan citizens. The Taliban leadership originally offered to hand Osama bin Ladin over to the US if the US government provided evidence of his involvement in the event. After the US began

the war, the Taliban even offered to surrender Osama bin Ladin to the United States.

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About the author:

An award-winning author and geopolitical analyst, Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya is the author of *The Globalization of NATO* (Clarity Press) and a forthcoming book *The War on Libya and the Re-Colonization of Africa*. He has also contributed to several other books ranging from cultural critique to international relations. He is a Sociologist and Research Associate at the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), a contributor at the Strategic Culture Foundation (SCF), Moscow, and a member of the Scientific Committee of Geopolitica, Italy.

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