

US and Britain to negotiate a “Peace Deal” with the Taliban

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NATO seen following Waziristan lead

By **Khalid Hasan**

WASHINGTON: Following the visit of NATO coalition forces commander for Afghanistan, Gen David Richards, to Islamabad, it is now believed that the United States and Britain have authorised President General Pervez Musharraf to attempt to negotiate a peace deal with the Taliban.

According to a report published on Saturday in an Australian newspaper and circulated here, it had been suggested that prior to his visit to Islamabad, Gen Richards was preparing for a showdown with President Musharraf over “alleged Pakistani double-dealing” with the Taliban and Al Qaeda through the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency. It had even been reported that he would take with him the address in Quetta where Taliban leader Mullah Omar is believed to be living and demand his arrest.

“But far from criticising General Musharraf, it appears the Pakistani leader’s deal with Taliban-supporting tribal militants in the North Waziristan district of the North West Frontier Province could form the basis of an accord aimed at ending the insurgency and bringing the Taliban into the Government in Kabul,” reports The Australian.

The dispatch from its South Asia correspondent Bruce Loudon says that from President Musharraf down, senior Pakistani officials are insisting that NATO is now supporting Islamabad’s bid to reach a peace accord with the Taliban.

Reports in New Delhi have quoted Gen Richards as supporting the agreement with the Taliban in North Waziristan, saying it could set an example of how best to deal with such problems – dashing Indian hopes that NATO would not endorse Pakistan’s strategy. Gen Musharraf has said that Gen Richards “absolutely agrees with the environment and my analysis, and he is asking for our help to do the same thing and we will proceed on the same course”.

The key elements of the North Waziristan deal, criticised by the western media, appear to have been accepted by Britain, the US and other governments that have contributed troops to the NATO coalition in Afghanistan, according to the report.

South Asian strategists in New Delhi said it appeared that Afghan President Hamid Karzai, who has been opposing efforts to bring the Taliban into his government, had clearly not won the battle with Gen Musharraf on the issue. Many of the elements of the North Waziristan

accord, signed on September 5, could form the basis for a peace deal with the Taliban in Afghanistan.

NATO has 31,000 international troops in Afghanistan from 37 countries, including Australia.
Courtesy DailyTimes.com.pk

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