



Written by on March 22, 2010

## Afghanistan's Karzai Meets With Insurgents

The Washington Post has reported that Afghan President Hamid Karzai has met with representatives of Hizb-i-Islami — a major Taliban-linked insurgent group — in a step toward national reconciliation, citing a presidential spokesman's March 22 statement.



Karzai's Deputy spokesman Hamed Elmi would not say when the meeting with the delegation from Hizb-i-Islami took place nor did he give any details of what was discussed. A member of Hizb-i-Islami, which is led by former Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, said the meeting occurred on the morning of March 22 and that further talks were expected.

"I can confirm that a delegation of Hizb-i-Islami has arrived in Kabul with a plan and has met with the president," Elmi said.

AFP news cited a Hizb-i-Islami spokeman, Haroon Zarghon, who said: "A delegation comprising senior members of Hezb-e-Islami is in Kabul with a 15-article peace plan to discuss with the government."

The group's leader, Hekmatyar, received generous U.S. military aid during the fight by the Afghan Mujahedeen freedom fighters against the Soviets in the 1980s, but Washington withdrew its support because of his role in the Afghan civil war that followed the Soviet withdrawal. Hekmatyar was considered a close ally of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, but in 2007, he offered to negotiate with the Karzai government.

Unlike some other Mujahedeen who formed political movements and sent representatives to Parliament, reports the *New York Times*, Hekmatyar has continued to sponsor fighters in eastern and northern Afghanistan, although he does not live in Afghanistan and is believed to be in Pakistan.

The *Times* reported that President Karzai is planning a peace jirga, or assembly, to be held near the end of April, and he is issuing invitations to a number of insurgent groups as well as to representatives of different factions in Parliament and Afghan civil society.

However, noted the *Times*, not all senior officials in Karzai's government have totally endorsed negotiations with such notorious enemies as Hekmatyar. Afghanistan's first Vice President, Marshall Muhammad Qasim Fahim, spoke cautiously in an interview on March 22, saying, "We believe in peace and reconciliation, but step by step."

An AP report said that the concept of holding talks with the Taliban and other insurgent groups is gaining popularity in Afghanistan, even as thousands of U.S. and NATO reinforcements are streaming into the nation to counter the insurgents' momentum. The report noted:

Besides finding ways to reconcile with insurgent leaders, the Afghan government is finalizing a plan to use economic incentives to lure low- and mid-level fighters off the battlefield. Regional



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countries such as Pakistan, India and Iran have begun staking out positions as the 8-year conflict nears an endgame.

AP reported that officials of Hizb-i-Islami said the delegation brought a 15-point peace plan to the table, which calls for all foreign troops to leave Afghanistan within six months, beginning in July. This is a full year before President Obama plans to start withdrawing U.S. forces.

Hizb-i-Islami's chief spokesman, Harun Zarghun, said the delegation also hopes to meet with Taliban leaders somewhere in Afghanistan. The U.S. Embassy, however, said there would be no meetings between the group and U.S. officials.

AP also cited the UN's former envoy to Afghanistan, Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide, who said last week that he and other UN officials had been in discussions with senior Taliban officials since last year, but that the arrests of Mullah Baradar and other senior Taliban figures halted the dialogue.

A report from the Russian Novosti news agency noted:

The Islamic Party [Hizb-i-Islami] plans to hold talks with the radical Islamic Taliban group, which controls the country's east. The movement was toppled in a 2001 U.S.-led campaign, but mounted a resurgence of late, with regular attacks on police and troops.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) currently has some 89,000 troops in Afghanistan, with most of them deployed in the country's volatile south and east.

However, a Taliban spokesman has claimed that the movement has decided to refrain from attacks on schools and hospitals, and has also offered to assist with the construction of new such establishments.

U.S. President Barack Obama has pledged to send an additional 30,000 soldiers to the war-ravaged country in the first part of 2010 to defeat the Taliban and establish law and order. Other NATO members have said they will send 7,000 additional troops to Afghanistan.

Anyone considering the sequence of events occurring in Afghanistan since the U.S.-led invasion in 2001 must surely scratch his head in puzzlement. That invasion, launched in response to the 9/11 attacks masterminded by al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden (who once received covert U.S. support to fight the Soviet occupiers of Afghanistan) was waged for the expressed purpose of removing the Taliban government that had provided bin Laden with a safe haven and base of operations.

After the UN-established International Security Assistance Force (IAAF) (which, like most UN forces, was comprised mostly of U.S. troops) succeeded in ousting the Taliban from Kabul, the nation's capital, and other centers of power, the coalition helped Hamid Karzai assume power. The United States and the West have helped prop up Karzai ever since, sending an ever-growing number of troops to help prevent the Taliban from re-asserting control.

Curiously, however, Karzai issued an appeal during his acceptance speech last November 3 to "to bring peace to this soil" and said that Afghans should "ask our Taliban brothers and others to return and embrace their own land."

Will Karzai succeed in negotiating away what U.S., British, and other Western troops have won through sweat and blood?

Furthermore, if U.S. troops are ever completely withdrawn from Afghanistan, will we see a rerun of our years of similar sacrifice in Vietnam, whose corruption-riddled government collapsed shortly after we withdrew?



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Such is the fate of a nation that ignores the wisdom of its founders against becoming involved in entangling alliances, and its own Constitution that mandates that wars must be declared by Congress. But those who point out the folly of such unrestrained interventionism are branded as “isolationists.”

*Photo: Sgt. Kevin Garcia tries to teach the peace sign to Afghans: AP Images*



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