

MMU: Afghanistan - back to the future with Obama, 22 July 2008

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FEATURE STORY

Afghanistan - back to the future with Obama

INDEX

BUSINESS

Generator power increase costs by 20%

NATION

Ex-prosecutors accuse Jabar Sabet of corruption

Suicide bomb kills three Afghan civilians in Kabul

Afghanistan moves back to centre-stage

Obama meets with Karzai

Afghanistan Doesn't Need a 'Surge'

Obama calls for transfer of troops to Afghanistan from Iraq

District in Ghazni taken by Taliban

Taliban rebels capture portion of Afghanistan

Afghan police progress in baby steps

Turkish engineers freed

Obama Polishes Foreign-Policy Credentials in Mideast

Answer with force in Afghanistan

Kabul gears up for 'cleanliness day'

Obama's Balancing Act Abroad

Five Afghans held with explosive-laden vehicle in Quetta

12 Afghans wounded in clash between militants and foreign troops in eastern Afghanistan

U.S. embassies advised to limit aid to Obama, McCain

Taliban leader held in Quetta

Afghanistan coalition member killed in bombing

Europe expected to pull weight on Afghanistan in revival of links

ISAF accidentally kills 4 civilians in Paktika

Afghan interrogations ruled inadmissible in first Gitmo tribunal

When Spies Don't Play Well With Their Allies

Judge Bars Some Bin Laden Driver Evidence

Chemicals used for heroin production seized in Afghanistan - UN

So, who is the terrorist here?

8,000 foreign fighters in Fata ring alarm bells in Islamabad

Taliban kill Afghan provincial govt spokesman: official

Hard man in a hard country

Thousands march in Afghan dispute over land, grazing

HUMANITARIAN

No articles featured today

PRESS RELEASES

No articles featured today

FEATURE STORY

Afghanistan - back to the future with Obama

ABC News (Australia)

By Mark Corcoran

I flick on the TV to watch the evening news and nearly fall out of my lounge chair.

At first, the familiar images of Afghanistan appear - the stark almost lunar landscape, determined coalition troops hunting the Taliban, traumatised villagers caught in the crossfire.

Then, in a war that for me long ago ceased to surprise or shock, something completely different.

US presidential contender Barack Obama, on a whirlwind tour of the war zones, is backslapping a familiar figure.

I do a double-take at that figure alongside Senator Obama. Yes it is him. The bearded bear-like figure beams as he stands alongside the-man-who-would-be US president. US media reports describe him as "a no nonsense, bullish former warlord".

He is Gul Agha Sherzai, Governor of Nangahar province.

I stare at the screen in disbelief at the man, who in early 2002, played a key part in a scheme that ensured the continued opium and heroin operations of one of country's biggest drug lords, Taliban ally Haji Bashar Noorzai.

At the time Noorzai was described to me by one counter narcotics official as "the Pablo Escobar of Afghanistan", and as we would discover, the US had just done a deal with him.

I had arrived in Kandahar in early 2002. There was still sporadic fighting in the area as Special Forces troops of the US, Australia and half a dozen other western countries hunted down Taliban remnants.

The US had just installed Gul Agha Sherzai as Kandahar's Governor. Backed by his US Special Forces minders, he had seized power after a brief gun battle with Hamid Karzai's nominee for the job.

We meet one evening in the Governor's Palace. Rifles are propped against walls and there is food on the table, which the Governor seems to attack with his fists, looking up only to grunt acknowledgment of an order to a subordinate, or to deliver a message to his US advisers, heard but unseen in the next room.

"The Americans gave me a citation for being a hero and that's why all the people think I'm a military officer" he confides.

This is Sherzai's second term as Governor. He previously ran Kandahar during the chaotic rule of the Mujahadeen in the early 90s, when the city first emerged as Afghanistan's opium capital. Top of his agenda, he claims, is the destruction of the new opium crop.

"I will fight very strongly against the cultivation of opium and the production of heroin," he insists.

This was the Taliban heartland. It was also the de-facto capital of a narcotics trade that supplied more than 70 per cent of the world's opium and heroin.

But for the Americans, in early 2002, there is only one, desperate priority: Hunting down Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

Amid the wreckage of Kandahar Airport, where the Special Forces troops are based, the prevailing attitude is "whatever it takes".

The Americans have just offered Haji Bashar Noorzai an extraordinary deal - surrender your forces and provide intelligence on the whereabouts of the Taliban and Al Qaeda leadership and US forces will turn a blind eye to your drug operations.

A straightforward deal of desperation that has had since had unimaginable consequences.

Kandahar's new Governor, Gul Agha Sherzai is pivotal to the agreement and he maintains close links with the US's favourite drug lord.

"I cannot call him a personal friend, but he and his tribe are guaranteeing and they also guarantee America that he will not be involved in anti-state activities in the future," Sherzai says.

He may not be a friend, but the Governor is certainly a tenant. We drive past Noorzai's palatial Kandahar home, where Gul Agha Sherzai's family are guests-in-residence. The compound is guarded by the Governor's troops who eye us suspiciously as we cruise by.

The Governor boasts that he is in constant contact with Haji Bashar and makes a great show of speaking to him on a US-supplied satellite phone as we film.

We also contact Noorzai by satellite phone but are politely warned that his gunmen have orders to shoot any journalist who approaches him.

Most deals that appear too good to be true usually are - and this extraordinary agreement is no different.

Arrest Haji Bashar Noorzai's drug operations remain intact through the critical transition of power and opium production soars, but he provides little intelligence of value to the US and the deal is quietly revoked.

By April 2003, Noorzai is officially a wanted man, a fact confirmed when I see his name and picture on a secret US Army hit list.

For Afghanistan's "Mr Big", the story ends badly. In 2006 he was arrested in New York after being lured there in an elaborate sting operation orchestrated by the US Drug Enforcement Administration.

A few months after our report is broadcast, Gul Agha Sherzai is sacked as Governor of Kandahar, although he remains in Hamid Karzai's inner circle.

Afghanistan's struggling President cannot afford to make any more enemies. Neither can I really, as I discover when I have the misfortune to run into an underemployed Sherzai, glowering at me from across a corridor at the presidential Palace in Kabul. Afghan friends later advise that I should not plan on returning to Kandahar any time soon.

It appears Gul Agha Sherzai is the only real winner, recently rewarded with a second Governorship in Nangahar, another region covered in opium poppies.

The US says it admires his strong leadership style, and can-do attitude in opium poppy eradication. Sherzai now fancies himself as a presidential contender when Mr Karzai exits the scene.

For me, it seems as if the political establishment suffers from some form of collective amnesia. But then six years is a long time in Afghan politics.

Observing events unfold in Afghanistan is like watching a train wreck in slow motion. Inevitable, compelling, tragic.

The US Government and its allies urgently herald reports of an insurgency spiralling out of control, the Taliban operating out of sanctuaries in neighbouring Pakistan, opium profits funding the insurgency - as if these are revelations - rather than very obvious predictions that were made six years ago.

In 2008, enter Barack Obama, descending from clear skies with lofty ideals of good versus evil only to find that he has landed in a grey world of compromise.

At Jalalabad airbase he receives a security briefing from Governor Sherzai.

"Obama promised us that if he becomes a president in the future, he will support and help Afghanistan not only in its security sector but also in reconstruction, development and economic sector," a pleased Sherzai tells the Associated Press.

The Democrat's presidential contender says, if elected, "I'll fight terror with vigour."

As he stands shoulder to shoulder with the "no-nonsense, bullish former warlord", Barack Obama's fight might be a lot closer than he realises.

[Back to Top](#)

BUSINESS

Generator power increase costs by 20%

www.quqnoos.com

Written by Anwar Hashimi

Monday, 21 July 2008

Many Afghan businesses are facing increased costs as they have to generate their own power

Many Afghan businesses are forced to use generators for the provision of power in industrial factories of the country resulting in increased costs of up to 20% for end customers, according to leading businessmen.

Some investors have suggested lack of access to clean electricity and proper markets for their products, as the main reasons for the low base of investment in production facilities in Afghanistan.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industries and the Organization for the Support of Investors has promised to provide permanent electricity for all factories in Kabul at a price of 6 Afs per kilowatt hour.

This is a significant reduction on current costs of up to 20 Afs per kilowatt hour.

The Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Commerce and Industries told Quqnoos.com on Sunday, that in the industrial park of Juma Mohammad Mohammadi, currently generators are used to provide electricity to the factories but by the end of current year hydro-electric power will be allotted to them.

In other factories located in the industrial parks of Puli-Charkhi, government electricity is provided at a cost of 6 Afs per kilowatt, but this electricity is not regular and will only be reliable once imported electricity reaches Kabul.

Use of generators to provide electricity and the increase in expenditure such as fuel are the principle reasons that Afghan products are unable to compete with similar foreign products.

Produced power also increases the costs of communicational companies and television networks significantly resulting in increased costs to end customers.

Mohammad Qurban Haqjo, Head of the Executive Commission of the Chamber of Commerce told Quqnoos.com that "if cheap and sufficient electricity is provided to existing factories, naturally they will be able to compete with foreign products, and will be able to satisfy internal needs".

At the same time Dr Omar Zakhilwal, CEO of Afghanistan Investor's Support Agency and advisor to the President of Afghanistan said that "electricity from generators will cost the consumers 20 Afs per kilowatt, therefore the cost of expenses from point of view of electricity is four times higher [than it could be]."

Out of the 34 factories who were supposed to start operations in the industrial park of Juma Mohammad Mohammadi, only 10 factories have commenced operations to date, and they all use diesel generators to provide them with power.

Work on 20 other factories is in progress and about 80% completed, and the Organization of Support of Investors

promised to provide cheap electricity to them, when they are completed.

[Back to Top](#)

NATION

Ex-prosecutors accuse Jabar Sabet of corruption

<http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Written by PAN

Monday, 21 July 2008

Up to 50 ex-governmental staff accuse sacked Attorney-General of corruption and want to stop him fleeing jurisdiction

A number of former government workers who were dismissed from their jobs during the reign of Abdul Jabar Sabit, the former Attorney General, made several accusations against him in a conference on Sunday.

The group included a number of ex-prosecutors from the Attorney-General's department.

The group has alleged that Abdul Jabar Sabet has been involved in corrupt activities and that legal action must be taken against him.

Abdul Jabar Sabit was removed from his job last week, when he announced that he intends to nominate himself for the presidential elections of 2009.

The group of former workers, who numbered around 50, accused Sabet of administrative corruption, and requested from the president to appoint a special commission to investigate these claims against Sabet.

They have demanded that this commission must assess all of the current assets of Sabet and confiscate any assets which were obtained illegally using his position at the Attorney-General.

Specific accusations leveled against Sabet by a former prosecutor from the Attorney-General's office, Mr Faqiree, include corruption and fraud.

The former prosecutor also said that Sabet obtained land in the Green Zone of Wazir Akbar Khan using his position, and constructed a house on that land.

The former chief of staff of Sabet, Saeer Samimi, speaking as Sabet's representative, rejected all the accusations of Mr.

Faqiree, and said that Sabet had not committed any illegal acts. Wakil Amini, the former Chief of the Documentation Department of the Attorney-General's Office, who also removed from his position during Sabit's era, accused Sabet of removing him from his position without a valid reason.

He claimed that Sabet removed about 250 professional staff from their various positions at the Attorney-General's office and appointed in their stead persons with little experience or knowledge.

Another former governmental worker, General Aminullah Amarkhil , who was responsible for Airport Customs, accused Sabet of removing him from his position for personal reasons.

General Amarkhail and Sabet formerly worked together under Ahmad Jalali, former Minister of Interior.

Previously Jalali had endorsed General Amarkhail as a competent and trusted member of his team, but he had not provided the same endorsement in respect of Sabet.

However, Sabet's representative, Samimi, said that General Amarkhail was accused of different crimes and after reviewing allegations against him, he was suspended by Sabet.

He said Amarkhail then escaped to England at that time, in order to avoid prosecution. Amarkhail returned to Afghanistan some time ago and has been in Kabul.

The government had not taken any legal action against him to date. Participants of the conference said on Sunday that the government should bring Abdul Jabar Sabet to justice and immediately seek orders to stop him fleeing the jurisdiction.

Samir Samimi accused all the participants of the news conference on Sunday of being involved in various activities including corruption, bribery, and fraud, and said that they were removed by order of Abdul Jabar Sabet from their duties for these reasons.

[Back to Top](#)

Suicide bomb kills three Afghan civilians in Kabul

The Washington Post

Reuters

Monday, July 21, 2008

KABUL

A suicide bomber killed three civilians and wounded one more in an attack in the Afghan capital, Kabul, on Tuesday, a police official said.

Taliban militants have launched some 100 suicide attacks so far this year, mostly targeting Afghan and international security forces, but as much as 80 percent of their victims are civilians, security experts say.

The bomber struck early in the morning in the Gozargah area of the capital, near to the historic tomb of Babur, the 16th century founder of India's Mughal dynasty.

"The bomber was on foot and detonated himself...killing three civilians and wounding one more," said the police official, who declined to be named.

Bomb attacks in Kabul are comparatively rare compared to cities in the south and east where the Taliban insurgency is concentrated.

Afghan forces beefed up security in Kabul early this year in an attempt to clamp down on suicide bombings, but still some militants have got through the cordon. A suicide car bomber killed 58 people and wounded well over 100 in an attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul on July 7, the most deadly incident in the capital to date.

(Reporting by Hamid Shalizi; Writing by Jon Hemming; Editing by David Fox)

[Back to Top](#)

Afghanistan moves back to centre-stage

Financial Times, UK

By Aunohita Mojumdar and Andrew Ward

Published: July 21 2008

After a brief stopover in Kuwait on Saturday, Barack Obama could have been in Baghdad within two hours. Instead, he chose to make Afghanistan the first big destination of his week-long international tour.

The itinerary highlighted the increasing focus on Afghanistan in the US presidential campaign as it becomes clear that, while conditions in Iraq are improving, the original battleground in the "war on terror" has taken a sharp turn for the worse. Mr Obama is expected in Iraq today. But the fact he spent the first two days of a tour designed to bolster his foreign policy credentials in Afghanistan illustrates how the conflict has returned to the centre of the US political debate.

"We have to understand that the situation is precarious and urgent, and I believe this has to be the central focus, the central front, in the battle against terrorism," he told CBS News.

Coalition deaths in Afghanistan have exceeded US fatalities in Iraq for the past two months, culminating in the death of nine soldiers last week in the deadliest insurgent attack for three years.

The deteriorating situation has left Mr Obama and John McCain, his Republican rival, scrambling to refocus attention on a conflict once dubbed the "forgotten war".

Both candidates pledged last week to send two or three additional combat brigades - between 7,000 and 10,000 troops - to Afghanistan if elected.

But while there is growing consensus on the need for reinforcements, the candidates are sharply at odds over what lessons should be drawn from the resurgence by al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

For Mr Obama, it underscores his argument that the US must extricate itself from an unnecessary war in Iraq and refocus on the original battleground in the "war on terror".

For Mr McCain, it highlights the importance of having a resolute and experienced leader in the Oval Office who can turn around Afghanistan just as the "surge" strategy has reduced violence in Iraq.

David Petraeus, the top US commander in Iraq, said over the weekend that the diverging levels of violence in the two war zones could signal a shift in focus by al-Qaeda back to its original home base in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

He said there were signs that foreign fighters recruited by al-Qaeda to do battle in Iraq were being diverted to the largely ungoverned areas in Pakistan from which fighters can cross into Afghanistan. Attacks by militant groups against the US-led coalition in Afghanistan have risen by 40 per cent this year, compared with 2007, according to the US military.

The worsening outlook in Afghanistan is increasing pressure on the US to accelerate its troop drawdown in Iraq to free up more forces for Afghanistan. The administration agreed on Friday to set a "time horizon" for withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, marking a break from its refusal to consider timelines for ending the war.

The White House insists the target dates will be "aspirational" and that it remains committed to gradual withdrawal subject to continued security improvements - in contrast to Mr Obama's plan to bring home all combat troops within 16 months of taking office.

But the Bush administration and the McCain campaign faced embarrassment over the weekend from reports that Nouri al-Maliki, the Iraqi prime minister, had voiced support for Mr Obama's proposal. According to an interview in Der Spiegel, the German magazine, Mr Maliki said US troops should leave Iraq "as soon as possible", and called Mr Obama's 16-month plan "the right timeframe for a withdrawal".

A spokesman for Mr Maliki yesterday said his views were "not conveyed accurately" by the magazine.

Mr Obama visited two US military bases and met President Hamid Karzai during his two-day stop in Afghanistan, accompanied by Senate colleagues Jack Reed, a Democrat, and Chuck Hagel, a moderate Republican and fierce critic of the war in Iraq.

Before leaving Washington, Mr Obama stressed that he was travelling to Afghanistan and Iraq as a senator before switching back to campaign mode during his planned visits to Jordan, Israel, Germany, France and the UK later this week.

"I'm more interested in listening than doing a lot of talking," he said.

Few details of his meeting with Mr Karzai were provided.

The latter's spokesman said the pair agreed on a wide range of issues although Mr Obama has previously criticised Mr Karzai and his government for failing to "get out of the bunker" to battle insurgents.

His visit came amid mounting public anger in Afghanistan about recent civilian deaths in US and coalition military operations.

[Back to Top](#)

Obama meets with Karzai

Written by <http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Monday, 21 July 2008

US Democratic nominee Barack Obama meets with President Karzai and his team for lunch

US Democratic presidential nominee Senator Barack Obama attended a meeting with President Karzai on the second day of his visit to Afghanistan on Sunday.

Present at the meeting were various members of his cabinet including his first vice president Ahmad Zia Masooud and second vice presidents Abdul Karim Khalile .

The composition of the delegation that met Obama was an indication that the meeting was given prominence by the Karzai government.

This is especially significant because of the recent criticism of Afghanistan's performance and that of the Karzai government by Obama.

At the time, Obama's comments were dismissed by the Karzai government as posturing for US elections.

Homayun Hamidzada, the Presidential spokesman, said that they discussed various issues including problems that Afghanistan faces in fighting corruption, narcotics, and challenges that terrorism and fundamentalism poses to the peoples of Afghanistan, the region, and the world.

Karzai and Obama both confirmed that there is a need for further cooperation in the war on terror.

Obama's Afghanistan visit follows the suspension, by the government of Afghanistan, of its meetings and negotiations with the government of Pakistan.

Barack Obama is a critic of the US military policy in Afghanistan.

He stresses that the roots of terrorist groups should be sought and eliminated in Pakistani tribal areas.

According to Wahid Mozhda, a political analyst, in spite of Mr Obama's criticisms of Karzai's government, Obama and the government of Afghanistan share at least one common thought - that terrorist training centres and support from Pakistan must be addressed.

In fact many Afghans have a positive impression of Senator Obama because of his previous tough comments about

tackling the root of terrorism in the region, which happens to be in Pakistan, not Afghanistan.

He has repeatedly refused to rule out breaching Pakistani territory to attack targets within Pakistan.

A large number of US troops are said to have been stationed near Afghan-Pakistani borders recently following recent insurgent activity and the Indian Embassy bombing.

The US military has yet to confirm the launch of operations in Pakistani tribal areas, but the US Department of Defence has said the deployment of more troops to the areas will affect the process of infiltration of insurgents to Afghanistan from Pakistan.

Amid criticisms of increasing insecurity in Afghanistan, and amid growing possibility of US military engagement in Pakistani tribal areas, the Pakistani prime minister, in a television statement, strongly rejected any operation by foreign troops on Pakistani soil.

[Back to Top](#)

Afghanistan Doesn't Need a 'Surge'

The Wall Street Journal

By ANN MARLOWE

July 22, 2008

Afghanistan needs many things, but two more brigades of U.S. troops are not among them.

Barack Obama said: "We need more troops, more helicopters, better intelligence-gathering and more nonmilitary assistance to accomplish the mission there." Mr. Obama should have supported the surge in Iraq, but that doesn't mean that advocating one in Afghanistan makes sense.

Afghanistan's problems are not the same as Iraq's. Its people aren't recovering from a brutal, all-controlling tyranny, but

from decades of chaos and centuries of bad government. Afghanistan, unlike Iraq, is largely illiterate and has a relatively undeveloped civil society. Afghan society still centers around the family and, for men, the mosque. Its society and traditions are still largely intact, in contrast to Iraq's fractured, urbanized and half-modernized population.

The Afghan insurgency has no broad popular base and doesn't mirror an obvious religious or ethnic fault line. It is also far more linked with Pakistani support than the Iraqi insurgency or militias were with Iran. Afghanistan needs a better president, judiciary and police force -- and a Pakistani government that is not playing footsie with the Taliban.

In Afghanistan, the situation can differ radically in provinces just a half-hour helicopter ride away. There has been much recent hysteria about an incident on July 13 when nine American soldiers were killed in an insurgent assault on a combat outpost in Want, in Nuristan (mistakenly reported as taking place in Wanat in neighboring Kunar Province). This was the deadliest attack on American soldiers since 16 troops were killed in Kunar in 2005. It was a tragic event, but does not demonstrate that the American effort in Afghanistan is on the brink of disaster, as some commentators have risibly argued.

"RC-East has pushed up to new areas and the bad guys are pushing back there," a serving U.S. government official who requested anonymity told me. Regional Command East has been applying a standard formula in 14 Afghan provinces, usually with great success. Even privates can tell you that it's about living among the people, building projects for them, and, in the Pashtun belt, getting the tribes on your side. This won't do the trick unless the governor and sub-governors are decent and respected by the tribal leaders, and the tribes themselves are cohesive.

"But there is no such thing as tribe in Nuristan," the official continued. "There is no unit above the corporate community." The last governor was fired, but it's not clear how much even a brilliant, honest governor could do in a place so unaccustomed to authority above the village level.

Nuristanis -- who were converted from paganism to Islam only about 100 years ago -- live in isolated villages in terrain that is rugged even by Afghan standards. There are no paved roads in the province, and helicopters can be shot down from above in the narrow valleys, as two U.S. military helicopters were in the last year.

So how do we bring security to Nuristan? Is bringing in thousands of American troops the answer?

"No!" the official said. "It's using Special Forces to get the bad guys who are infiltrating from Pakistan. Our enemy only attacks when they expect to win. If we have to go after them, we need the capacity to hunt them with stealth over trackless mountainsides for which our infantry, cavalry and airborne soldiers are not trained or equipped to operate." Defeating the enemy is best accomplished by highly trained fighters who travel light.

Counterinsurgency is not one-size-fits-all. While there are best practices, they must be applied in a nuanced way. In poorly governed countries where insurgencies are likely to arise, the solution may vary from valley to valley.

It shouldn't be hard to see that adding men, helicopters or projects is not always the solution. But then, a would-be commander in chief who announces his prescription for Afghanistan before setting foot there has a lot to learn about America's top job.

Ms. Marlowe is a New York-based writer. This year she completed her 10th trip to Afghanistan and her third embed with U.S. forces there.

[Back to Top](#)

Obama calls for transfer of troops to Afghanistan from Iraq

Globe and Mail, Canada

Reuters, with a report from AP

July 21, 2008

WASHINGTON

As violence flared in Afghanistan, U.S. presidential hopeful Barack Obama called the situation there "precarious and urgent" yesterday and said the United States should start planning to transfer more troops there from Iraq.

The Democratic candidate spoke from Afghanistan on the CBS program Face the Nation after meeting privately with Afghan President Hamid Karzai on the second day of an overseas trip meant to bolster his foreign-policy credentials. He and fellow senators Chuck Hagel and Jack Reed later flew on to Kuwait, headed for Iraq.

"We have to understand that the situation is precarious and urgent here in Afghanistan and I believe this has to be the central focus, the central front, in our battle against terrorism," Mr. Obama said. He said the United States should start planning immediately to shift soldiers from Iraq to Afghanistan.

There are four times as many U.S. troops in Iraq as the 36,000 in Afghanistan, yet more U.S. soldiers were killed in Afghanistan than in Iraq in both May and June. "I think the situation is getting urgent enough that we have to start doing something now," Mr. Obama said.

After arriving in Afghanistan on Saturday, Mr. Obama was briefed by the U.S. commander of NATO-led forces in the country's east, where the alliance said it lost a soldier and accidentally killed at least four civilians on the weekend.

The International Security Assistance Force said its troops fired two mortar rounds that landed several hundred metres short of their target in the eastern province of Paktika. The alliance said it was investigating whether three other civilians also were killed in the district of Barmal. "ISAF deeply regrets this accident, and an investigation as to the exact circumstances of this tragic event is now under way," NATO said in a statement.

Separately, in the western province of Farah, near the Iranian border, a convoy of foreign forces arrived unannounced and clashed with Afghan police, killing nine of them, according to the deputy governor.

Younus Rasuli said the international troops had not informed local officials they were coming, and the police thought they were enemy fighters. The two sides fought for about four hours early yesterday, he said. The U.S.-led coalition said it was investigating the report. It said its forces, along with Afghan troops, had retaliated in defence against "a non-uniformed hostile force."

Mr. Obama, whose foreign tour is also scheduled to include Jordan, Israel, Germany, France and Britain, wants to send two more U.S. brigades to Afghanistan - about 7,000 troops - and shift the emphasis from what he calls the current "single-minded" focus on Iraq.

"There's starting to be a growing consensus that it's time for us to withdraw some of our combat troops out of Iraq, deploy them here in Afghanistan, and I think we have to seize that opportunity. Now is the time for us to do it," he said.

He said that if the United States waits for a new administration to take office, it could take a year before reinforcements arrive in Afghanistan.

[Back to Top](#)

District in Ghazni taken by Taliban

Written by <http://www.quqnoos.com/> & PAN

Monday, 21 July 2008

Ajristan district in Western Ghazni on the border of Uruzgan falls to Taliban

GHAZNI CITY (PAN): Taliban militants have captured Ajristan district in western Ghazi, bordering Uruzgan province, officials said on Monday.

Intelligence chief of police headquarters of Ghazni, Col. Ghani Khan told Pajhwok Afghan News the district was lost to Taliban after an attack last night.

He said one policeman was killed and two including district police chief Sher Mohammad were injured in the attack.

Ghani Khan said the district was lost due to lack of arms and police due to lack of resources had no option but to treat. He said the district was still under the control of Taliban but hoped that very soon it would be recaptured.

Engineer Kabir, representative of the district in the provincial council also confirmed the fall of the district but spokesman for Ghazni governor said the district has been recaptured by the government.

Zabihullah Mujahid, spokesman for Taliban said they have captured the district, collected heavy arms and killed a large number of policemen.

Recently the Taliban captured a US military post in Konar when hundreds of fighters came from the Pakistani side of the border before they were eventually pushed back by coalition and Afghan forces.

[Back to Top](#)

Taliban rebels capture portion of Afghanistan

Irish Sun

Monday 21st July, 2008

Taliban militants have reportedly captured the remote Central Afghanistan district of Ajiristan.

The News quoted Afghan interior ministry sources as saying that one police officer was killed and two others were injured during the attack.

The district lies 200 kilometres southwest of Kabul.

An interior ministry spokesman confirmed that security forces abandoned the district centre after Taliban attacked.

This is the second time that Ajiristan has been captured by Taliban insurgents since October last year.

The Taliban have captured several remote districts in the past but have not been able to hold them for long enough.

[Back to Top](#)

[Afghan police progress in baby steps](#)

[Canadian troops have been training Afghani officers to be honest, professional, survivors](#)

[canada.com](#)

[Graham Thomson](#)

[Canwest News Service](#)

[Published: Monday, July 21, 2008](#)

[BAZAR-I-PANJWAI, Afghanistan](#)

To get an idea of the daunting task facing Canadian troops who are trying to improve the notoriously inept and often corrupt Afghan police forces you need only look a recent patrol in the Panjwaii district, one of the most violent areas of Afghanistan.

A few days ago, Canadian soldiers and an RCMP officer mentoring the police were ready to head out on foot patrol through the streets of Bazar-i-Panjwaii at the crack of dawn.

However, the Afghan police officers never showed up.

The official explanation was the Afghans were suddenly called away by their commanding officer to conduct a raid in Kandahar City, 40 kilometres away. An unofficial reason that leaked out later was they set off for one of the few banks in the city to see if they were getting paid.

Either way, the Canadians were caught by surprise, about to get all dressed up in their battle gear with nowhere to go.

Making a bad situation look even worse was the fact the local Afghan police officers here are supposed to be among the cream of the crop, having recently graduated from a special U.S.-led eight-week training program to improve their skills and weed out corruption.

However, in the bizarre world of policing in Afghanistan, this is actually evidence that things are improving.

For one, the police officers were not out shaking down local Afghans for bribes as they have done for years. For another, they are finally getting paid on a semi-regular basis through a bank in Kandahar City instead of being shortchanged by their government officials who routinely skimmed money off the top. That they even have bank accounts is evidence of progress.

And the officers returned to work later that day, heading off on the next patrol as if nothing had happened.

"People forget in Canada whether it's the Afghan National Army or the police or the justice system or anything, we are building things from nothing, absolute nothing," said Capt. Sheldon Maerz, an infantry officer with 3 Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry based in Wainwright, Alta. "This is an incredibly complex task. It's not like you're trying to build a police force in Saskatoon, Sask., with a bunch of people that don't know anything about policing but at least they can read and write. Here we can't even assume that."

Up until recently most men wearing an Afghan National Police (ANP) uniform were assumed to be cowardly when

dealing with insurgents and crooked when dealing with the public.

"It was largely accepted they were junk, they were corrupt," said Maerz. "They were poorly trained, poorly led, poorly equipped. A lot of times they were nothing better than a private militia or a bunch of thugs or thieves with guns and they couldn't be counted on."

That's starting to slowly change, according to RCMP Cpl. Dave Strachan of Surrey, B.C., who is wrapping up a 12-month tour in the Panjwaii district helping train and equip the local police.

"I've seen the bad old days," said Strachan. "People say, 'Look at the ANP now,' but they never saw what it was like last year. They've still got a lot of work to do, don't get me wrong, but they've improved since last year."

Realizing that the police force's dismal reputation was undermining the Afghan government's credibility with the public, Canadians here have focused on the police this year, copying their existing program widely praised for successfully mentoring the Afghan National Army.

Locals, though, remain skeptical. At a shura, or gathering of leaders, last week between Canadian soldiers and Afghans, an elder complained a police officer had robbed him of money while on an operation. Canadians were suspicious of the accusation, not only because the elder kept inflating the amount of money as he retold the story, but because Canadians had been part of the operation at the time. The Afghan officers had immediately volunteered to be searched and the Canadians found no evidence of theft.

The local district leader, despite being a major supporter of the Canadian soldiers, has demanded a further investigation.

As a way to signal to the public that the widely despised ANP is indeed changing, the force is now being called the Afghan Uniformed Police (AUP) to reflect the new eight-week training program an increasing number of officers are receiving. That might not seem like much by Canadian standards but it's a quantum leap by Afghanistan's.

Coupled with a boost in pay - from the equivalent of \$75 a month for an untrained officer to \$110 for the new upgraded officers - the police force in Bazar-i-Panjwaii is slowly becoming more professional.

The progress might look like baby steps in the grand march toward Afghanistan's modernization but they are part of what the chief of the defence staff, Gen. Walter Natynczyk, recently classified as "localized fragile signs of success."

However, in the same interview, Natynczyk told CTV's Question Period there is a "worsening security situation across

the country" particularly in the east where U.S forces are based and in the south where Canadians are stationed.

Consequently, Canadians are training local police in the basics of combat survival so the Afghan officers can stay alive long enough to one day practice the basics of police work.

"Because this is Panjwai, we have to be realistic," said Maerz. "This isn't a benign policing environment. Someday maybe they could be a police officer in the true sense but they're not going to be if we just fling them out there and they walk around there like the Keystone Kops and they all get slaughtered."

Adding to the risk to the fledgling police force is the treat from even the officers' allies. On the weekend, nine Afghan police were killed when U.S.-led troops mistook them for militants and called in air strikes during a battle that lasted four hours.

[Back to Top](#)

Turkish engineers freed

Written by <http://www.quqnoos.com/> & foreign new disk

Monday, 21 July 2008

Two Turkish engineers who were kidnapped in Herat last week have been freed and will return to Turkey

(Reuters) - Two Turkish engineers kidnapped in western Afghanistan last week have been set free and are returning home, authorities said on Monday.

"They are safe and now are flying to Turkey with a private aircraft," a Turkish Foreign Ministry official, who declined to be named, told Reuters.

The pair would shortly arrive in Ankara.

Afghan police said their employers might have paid a ransom to secure their freedom. The company declined to comment.

Kidnapping has become a lucrative business in Afghanistan and scores of locals and foreigners have been abducted by criminals or Taliban-linked militants in recent years.

The Turkish nationals were working on a project in the western town of Islam Qala, bordering Iran.

The pair were released last night, the police chief for the western zone said.

"Their company might have paid a ransom to the captors and bought their freedom," Ikramuddin Yawar told Reuters.

"Paying ransom to release people further encourages kidnapping in the country," he said, adding the abductors were part of a group of former factional forces who abandoned support for the government two years ago.

Gokhan Gul and Erhan Gunduz were both working for the Turkish construction company Gulsan Insaat.

The company declined to comment on whether any ransom had been paid. Islam Qala is on the main border crossing with Iran, a place where there is little Taliban activity.

Criminals, however, have carried out kidnappings in the past and handed over their captives to the Taliban in return for money.

Two French aid workers were abducted in recent days in central Afghanistan, prompting their organization, Action Against Hunger, to suspend activities in protest.

Nobody has claimed responsibility for their kidnapping.

Ousted from power in 2001, Taliban insurgents have been behind a number of kidnappings in Afghanistan.

Some hostages have been killed, but most of the victims have been released unharmed.

The insurgents kidnapped 23 South Koreans last year, killing two and releasing the rest over a month later.

[Back to Top](#)

Obama Polishes Foreign-Policy Credentials in Mideast

(Update1)

Bloomberg

By Julianna Goldman and Janine Zacharia

July 22, 2008

Middle Eastern and European leaders are lining up to hear what Barack Obama has to say on his seven- country tour this week. For his presidential campaign, what he says on the trip may not be as important as the photos and videos it produces.

``The visual images will say that he can play in the major leagues, and that will be very important for him," said Lee Hamilton, a former Democratic congressman from Indiana and one of Obama's foreign-policy advisers.

Obama, 46, is to arrive in Jordan today after stops in Afghanistan and Iraq, where leaders of both countries offered implicit support for him.

Before their meeting, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said Obama's plan to withdraw U.S. troops within 16 months was ``the correct period of time," though a spokesman later said the comment wasn't intended as an endorsement. After Afghanistan's Hamid Karzai met Obama, a spokesman for the president said he expected to have a ``strong partner" in the White House no matter who wins the U.S. election.

Maliki told Obama and two other senators visiting Baghdad yesterday that he hopes U.S. combat troops will be able to

leave Iraq by 2010, according to a statement issued by the three.

``The prime minister said that now is an appropriate time to start to plan for the reorganization of our troops in Iraq, including their numbers and missions," the senators said.

Lacking Experience

Obama is trying to shed a reputation, promoted by Republican opponent John McCain, as a neophyte on international affairs.

``He has not stepped in any of the potholes and he's looked presidential," said Graeme Bannerman, an adjunct scholar at the Middle East Institute in Washington. ``There's still a lot more to go. It only takes one screw-up to make the whole trip a failure."

The first-term Illinois Democratic senator has an edge over the Arizona Republican senator in most national polls. Still, surveys show most voters think McCain, 71, would be better on national security and overseas matters.

McCain is trying to exploit that gap by emphasizing his 25 years in Congress and more than 20 years of military service including 5 1/2 years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. He criticizes Obama for visiting Iraq only once before and failing to use his chairmanship of a subcommittee on European affairs to hold hearings on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's mission in Afghanistan.

International Stage

``It's clear that the only issue on which John McCain has an advantage -- or at least is in the game -- is international affairs and national security," said Jeremy Ben-Ami, executive director of J Street, a pro-Israel lobby. ``It's an important thing for Barack Obama to burnish his credentials and clearly demonstrate he is ready to engage on the international stage." Ben-Ami's Washington-based group backs diplomatic engagement with Iran, as does Obama.

Hamilton said Obama needs to tread carefully while overseas. ``It's a very delicate thing for an opposition leader to go abroad," Hamilton said. ``If he's criticizing American foreign policy in Europe or in the Mideast, I think it has to be done with a deft touch."

News Anchors

The candidate won't lack for attention. The three major U.S. broadcast television networks have dispatched their evening news anchors to trail and interview him.

Obama left behind his regular retinue of campaign reporters while visiting Iraq and Afghanistan over the weekend; they will accompany him for the rest of the trip.

“Let's drop the pretense that this is a fact-finding trip and call it what it is: the first of its kind campaign rally overseas,” said Jill Hazelbaker, McCain's communications director, in a Fox News interview July 17. McCain on May 28 called the Illinois senator's journey to the two war zones “long overdue.”

McCain didn't bring press along when he traveled to Britain, France and Israel in March. He had reporters on his trip this month to Colombia and Mexico, which was overshadowed by an overhaul of his campaign staff.

Obama plans meetings starting today in Jordan with King Abdullah, in Israel with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and in the Palestinian territories with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Foreign Policy

During those talks, Obama will wrestle with some of the biggest foreign policy challenges facing the next U.S. president. His promise of more active diplomacy in the Israeli- Palestinian peace process and in dealing with Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's nuclear ambitions engenders both hope and wariness in the region.

“Despite the merits of engaging with Iran, I think there will be more skepticism in Israel because the Israelis are truly divided whether there's any political money to be made engaging with the Ahmadinejads of the world,” said Edward Djerejian, founding director of the James A. Baker Institute for Public Policy at Rice University in Houston.

Obama also will visit Chancellor Angela Merkel in Germany, President Nicolas Sarkozy in France and Prime Minister Gordon Brown in the U.K., countries where his commitment to combating climate change and early opposition to the Iraq War make him popular.

Favorable View

A recent Pew Global Attitudes Project survey of 24,000 people in 24 countries found Europeans have an overwhelmingly favorable view of Obama.

In France, 84 percent say Obama will do the right thing in foreign affairs, compared with 33 percent for McCain.

“A lot of European politicians and the vast body of public opinion has fallen in love with Obama,” said Reginald Dale, senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. “They’ve built up such expectations in Europe about Obama where they’ve put themselves in the position where they’re bound to be disappointed if Obama becomes president.”

The centerpiece of the European leg will be a foreign policy address in Berlin. His talks with European leaders likely will focus on Iran, Iraq and NATO’s role in Afghanistan. He also may hear about trade. On July 17, European Union Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson urged Obama to drop “crowd-pleasing” criticism of trade accords.

To contact the reporters on this story: Julianna Goldman in Amman, Jordan, at jgoldman6@bloomberg.net; Janine Zacharia in Washington at jzacharia@bloomberg.net.

[Back to Top](#)

Answer with force in Afghanistan

The Tribune Chronicle, Ohio - Opinion

POSTED: July 22, 2008

Taliban and al-Qaida terrorists seem to be gaining strength in Afghanistan, and may have increased the tempo of their attacks in order to affect elections in the United States.

On Sunday, nine American soldiers were killed when terrorists attacked their small base near the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. During the past few weeks, more people have died as a result of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan than in Iraq.

Also during the weekend, the Taliban issued a bloody reminder of the stakes for Afghans in the current conflict. They executed two women solely because, according to the Taliban, the victims had been working as prostitutes.

One complaint about U.S. involvement in Iraq has been that it does not directly involve al-Qaida (though that group is responsible for some terrorist attacks in Iraq). But the situation in Afghanistan is different. There, our only foes are al-Qaida and the Taliban.

Clearly, then, reaction by U.S. and other forces to the new offensive needs to be overwhelming. Al-Qaida and the Taliban should be eradicated in Afghanistan.

[Back to Top](#)

Kabul gears up for 'cleanliness day'

<http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Written by PAN

Tuesday, 22 July 2008

NGO starts campaign for 'cleanliness day' on 25 July to clean up fast growing city

Officials of a local non-governmental organization on Monday urged the citizens of Kabul to join them on 'cleanliness day' on July 25th.

Aimed to clean Kabul city, the scheme will be conducted by close collaboration of local citizens, governmental and non-governmental workers and the private sector.

The commission which serves Kabul city residents, a non-governmental and non-political commission which was formed by Kabul citizens, began its operation a month back.

Engineer Habiburrahman Habib, the head of the commission, while addressing a news conference here on Monday said

they had attracted supports from local elders and officials in all city districts of this capital as well as private sector representative and governmental institutions.

The scheme works by Kabul residents collecting rubbish and filth from their houses and streets and placing these inside plastic bags to be provided to them before hand. These bags would then be placed in designated spots in the streets of Kabul for collection.

The bags would be collected by Kabul municipality utilizing some 500 transport vehicles that would be provided by governmental and none governmental institutions according to Engineer Habib.

People would also be given hand gloves, masks, spades, wheelbarrows and other required materials, he added, hoping the scheme would be a successful one.

Mr Jarullah, head of the National Environmental Protection Agency, views this project as a positive one.

With a population close to 5 million, Kabul city produces some 1500 tonnes of rubbish every day.

Jarullah worries that Kabul municipality can only cope with disposing of 400 tonnes every day.

[Back to Top](#)

Obama's Balancing Act Abroad

In The Middle East, Obama Juggles Troop And Territory Issues That Are Delicate And Potentially Explosive

CBS News, NY

July 21, 2008

AMMAN, Jordan

This week is more than a series of photo ops. Barack Obama hopes to convince voters back home that he's comfortable on the world stage and can juggle a number of delicate and potentially explosive foreign-policy issues, CBS News anchor Katie Couric reports.

During the primaries, Obama built his candidacy on the premise that he believed the Iraq War was a mistake he opposed all along. As he said: "a war that never should have been authorized. A war that I believe should never should have been waged."

Now he faces a delicate balancing act.

"What he has to do is pull off two difficult tricks," said President of the Council On Foreign Relations Richard Haass. "One is to be sympathetic to the troops there. At the same time, he's been critical of the policy. And secondly, he has to show some consistency with his policy. At the same time, he has to adapt to change. Pulling that off is obviously the political challenge in the immediate time frame that he faces."

Obama says he'd withdraw most U.S. troops from Iraq within the first 16 months of his presidency. But later he gave himself flexibility by saying that after he talked to commanders on the ground he would "refine" his policies.

That's reassuring to some Iraqis who fear being abandonee by the United States.

"They don't like fast withdrawal because they are afraid of consequences, they are afraid create a vacancy that will be used by terrorists," said Dr. Mahmoud Othman, a member of Iraqi parliament.

Not only did Obama oppose the war, he opposed the surge - the addition of some 30,000 troops last year - saying it wouldn't work.

He said on Face The Nation in January of 2007: "We can send 15,000 more troops, 20,000 more troops, 30,000 more troops. I don't know any ... expert on the region or any military officer that I've spoken to privately that believes that that is going to make a substantial difference on the situation on the ground."

John McCain is now citing this as a major error in judgment.

"He was wrong when he said the surge wouldn't succeed," McCain said. "He was wrong when he said an increase in

troops would do no good."

But the success of the surge - it has brought violence in Iraq way down - has paved the way for Obama to propose sending in as many as 10,000 additional troops to Afghanistan.

Violence there is on the rise. Terrorist attacks are up 40 percent this year. More U.S. troops were killed in Afghanistan in May and June than in Iraq. The Taliban are back - and al Qaeda is making its presence known across the border in Pakistan, launching attacks virtually unchallenged.

Often called The Forgotten War, Sen. Obama has pledged to make Afghanistan the focus of the war on terror.

Throughout his trip this week, from Kabul to London, Barack Obama will have to deal with anti-American anger and resentment that's grown since the invasion of Iraq.

Jordan is no exception. About half the population there is Palestinian, and many believe the war on terror will never be won unless the United States addresses the Arab-Israeli conflict.

That's precisely what Obama will try to do when he travels to Israel.

For the first time in years, there are some glimmers of hope in the Arab-Israeli stalemate.

A virtual ceasefire between Israel and Hamas

A prison exchange with Hezbollah

The beginning of low-level talks between Israel and Syria

All that as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has been shuttling to the region to try to broker a peace deal in the final months of the Bush Administration.

Both sides in the conflict want a signal that a president Obama would be involved and engaged from the very beginning.

"You cannot leave a political vacuum," said Hanan Ashrawi, member of the Palestinian legislative council. "Here, that gets filled by violence,"

"As far as the Middle East is concerned, should Obama be elected, he won't have 100 days of mercy. The issues are burning, they are critical, they need experience, they need deep wisdom - simplistic ideas, slogans will not work here," said Haaretz columnist Ari Shavit.

Israel wants assurances its special relationship with the United States will continue. And last month, Obama tried to do just that when he spoke before a powerful American-Jewish group about one of the most contentious issues.

"And Jerusalem will remain the capital of Israel, and it must remain undivided," he said.

But the next day, he seemed to backtrack.

"It's going to be up to the parties to negotiate a range of these issues. And Jerusalem will be part of the negotiations," he said.

Whether Israel will share Jerusalem is just one issue. There is also the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the right of return for Palestinian refugees who lost their homes in 1948, when Israel was founded.

But beyond the Palestinian Question, Israel and the United States now see an even greater threat to the region's stability looming: a nuclear Iran.

Officials in Israel estimates Iran will be able to build a bomb as early as 2009, and worldwide concerns over a preemptive Israeli military strike are rising.

"Right now, Iran is on the march," Shavit said. "We have not seen America and Europe able to stop it. We've not seen a real change of heart in Tehran; we've not seeing the Iranians where they feel they're paying a high price for their endeavor, which is a dramatically dangerous endeavor."

All these issues will be on the table when Obama continues his whirlwind tour. But the ultimate success of this trip will be measured back home, with American votes, on Nov. 4, 2008.

[Back to Top](#)

Five Afghans held with explosive-laden vehicle in Quetta

PakTribune.Com - Tribune Corner

Tuesday July 22, 2008

QUETTA

The police claimed to have arrested five alleged Afghan terrorists and impounded an explosive-laden vehicle from a house during a search operation conducted in the Kashmirabad area on the Sariab Road. The Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Quetta, Muhammad Akbar, said this while addressing a news conference here on Monday. DIG Police Operations Wazir Khan Nasser and DIG Investigations Rahmatullah Khan Niazi were also present.

The CCPO said a police party, on a secret tip, raided a suspected house in the Kashmirabad area late on Sunday night. The police rounded up Muhammad Rasool Asmatullah, Roohullah, Muhammad Usman and Muhammad Dawood from there. Asmatullah, Roohullah, Usman, Dawood are Afghan nationals and real brothers.

The police also recovered a car in which explosive material weighing around 25 kilogrammes had been fitted in 48 different pieces. The police party also recovered 10 mobile phones, 13 detonators and two radio sets, he said.

The CCPO believed that the explosive-laden car was to be used for subversive act in Quetta. On their information, the police recovered another car parked in an abandoned motor garage in Kuchlak area with no engine installed in it. It was learnt that the terrorists intended to fit the explosive material after their Kashmirabad plan, he added.

The CCPO said: "We had information about four such vehicles, while two of them have been recovered, the search is on for the remaining two."

[Back to Top](#)

12 Afghans wounded in clash between militants and foreign troops in eastern Afghanistan

Associated Press

By RAHIM FAIEZ

July 21, 2008

KABUL, Afghanistan

Militants attacked a NATO patrol in eastern Afghanistan on Monday and 12 people were wounded in the ensuing clash, including some civilians, officials said.

The foreign troops were passing through Pech River Valley in Kunar province, which borders Pakistan, when militants fired on them using civilian homes for cover, provincial police chief Gen. Abdul Jalal Jalal said.

Troops returned fire and 12 people were wounded, Jalal said.

Six of those were sent to a hospital in the provincial capital of Asadabad for treatment, said Dr. Hafizullah, a doctor at the hospital, who like many Afghans goes by one name.

A spokesman for NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Kabul said one of its patrols was fired upon in the area and returned fire. Speaking on customary condition of anonymity, he said he had no reports of casualties.

The civilian population is often caught in the fight against militants, a sore point between the Afghan government and foreign troops. President Hamid Karzai has pleaded with U.S. and other foreign forces to avoid civilian casualties.

On Sunday, six civilians were killed when militants hit a fuel tanker with a rocket-propelled grenade in neighboring Laghman province, said Abdul Wakil Atak, a spokesman for the provincial governor.

Two people were killed inside the truck and four others died in a minibus that was caught in the blast, Atak said.

Also on Sunday militants attacked a police checkpoint near the provincial capital in Helmand killing two officers and wounding another, said Mohammad Hussein Andiwal, a provincial police chief.

Insurgents on Monday attacked a convoy of trucks ferrying goods on the main Kandahar-Kabul highway, killing four private security guards, said Shadi Khan, a local government official in Zabul province.

Also in the south, where the Taliban insurgency is strongest, a U.S.-led coalition member died Monday after being wounded by a roadside bomb in Helmand province a day earlier, the coalition said in a statement.

They did not release the victim's name or nationality pending notification of family. The majority of coalition members are American.

Afghanistan faces intensifying militancy nearly seven years after the U.S.-led invasion ousted the hard-line Islamic Taliban movement from power.

More than 2,500 people have died in insurgency-related violence this year, according to an Associated Press tally of official figures. Most have been militants, but the total includes hundreds of ordinary Afghan citizens.

—

Associated Press writer Noor Khan contributed to this report from Kandahar.

[Back to Top](#)

U.S. embassies advised to limit aid to Obama, McCain

Reuters

Mon Jul 21, 2008

WASHINGTON

The U.S. State Department said on Monday it had advised its embassies to limit the help they give visiting presidential candidates Sens. Barack Obama and John McCain so as to avoid violating U.S. law and policy.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice cabled the advice to all U.S. diplomatic posts on Thursday, the day that Obama left on a trip that has taken him to Afghanistan and Iraq and will include stops elsewhere in the Middle East and in Europe.

Undersecretary of State Pat Kennedy told reporters it was coincidental the cable was sent as the Illinois Democrat left and said its advice echoed that given when McCain, an Arizona Republican, visited Canada, Colombia and Mexico this year.

The cable bars U.S. diplomats from setting up meetings for the candidates, arranging receptions or public events and from using official "funds and resources, beyond a de minimis level, to support a political trip."

However, it said the embassies could assist the candidates' Secret Service protective details and provide "de minimis" help on logistical matters, for example giving the trip organizers information on how to make local travel arrangements.

U.S. diplomats are also allowed to help Obama and McCain with anything related to their Senate work and to provide classified briefings to ensure they were up to speed on recent developments and U.S. policy positions.

The cable draws a distinction between trips by official congressional delegations which are paid for by the U.S. government, and those that are privately funded, such as campaign-related foreign travel.

Congressional delegations can receive far more help than lawmakers who travel privately or for campaign purposes.

U.S. officials said that McCain's visit to Iraq in March was as part of a congressional delegation, while subsequent visits to Canada, Colombia and Mexico were campaign-related.

Obama traveled to Afghanistan and Iraq this week as part of a congressional delegation but the rest of his trip, which is expected to include stops in Israel, Jordan, Britain, France and Germany, will largely be campaign-related.

Under U.S. law, there are restrictions on the partisan political activities of federal employees to prevent them from exerting undue influence on elections. There are also policies governing how federal workers may aid presidential candidates.

"It is imperative that in implementing these various requirements we treat both major presidential candidates evenhandedly," the cable said.

(Editing by Eric Beech and Cynthia Osterman)

[Back to Top](#)

Taliban leader held in Quetta

Dawn

July 21, 2008

QUETTA

Law-enforcement personnel have arrested a suspected Taliban commander from a house in the city's Kharotabad area.

Sources told Dawn on Monday that the arrested commander, Abdul Rahim, belonged to Hilmand province of Afghanistan and had come to Quetta a few days ago.

They said that security officials had arrested the man during a raid.-Staff Correspondent

[Back to Top](#)

Afghanistan coalition member killed in bombing

Associated Press

Mon Jul 21, 2008

KABUL, Afghanistan

The U.S.-led coalition says one of its members has died after being wounded by a roadside bomb in Afghanistan's troubled south.

The coalition says in a statement that the blast occurred in Helmand province Sunday and that the wounded fighter died Monday morning.

It did not release the victim's name or nationality pending notification of family, but the majority of coalition members are American.

Afghanistan is facing a raging insurgency nearly seven years after the Taliban were ousted from power, and the country's south is the primary hub for the militancy. As a sign of the nation's deepening troubles, American casualties are running higher than in Iraq.

[Back to Top](#)

Europe expected to pull weight on Afghanistan in revival of links

Financial Times, UK

By Andrew Ward in Washington

Published: July 22 2008

Barack Obama is ready to revive the transatlantic relationship, but he expects Europe to pull its weight on Afghanistan and he would deepen Washington's engagement with other regions.

According to a senior adviser, the Democratic presidential candidate is expected to pledge to work closely with Europe on terrorism, nuclear proliferation and climate change, as part of his commitment to rekindle a transatlantic alliance after eight years of turbulent relations.

But in an interview with the Financial Times, Susan Rice, Mr Obama's national security adviser, said the senator also believed that the US could not rely on Europe alone to help it deal with global challenges.

"The US and Europe do not have the luxury of focusing solely on a single region," Ms Rice said.

"[He] will also be very engaged with Asia, the Middle East, Latin America and Africa. But a large part of . . . dealing with the issues . . . is a strong relationship between the US and Europe."

Mr Obama, who is to visit to Germany, France and the UK later this week, is shown by opinion polls to be wildly popular with the European public. Yet he has fewer ties to the Continent than John McCain, his Republican rival, causing nervousness among some European diplomats as rising powers such as China and India compete for Washington's attention.

Ms Rice said the senator would use his meetings with European leaders and a high-profile speech in Germany to reassure the Continent of his commitment, while warning that Europe must also do more to reinvigorate the alliance .

"Senator Obama's broad message, both in public remarks and in private meetings, will be the importance he attaches to a renewed and effective transatlantic partnership," she said.

An Obama administration would not "go it alone simply when it is convenient", she said, alluding to European complaints about the unilateralist instincts of President George W. Bush. "We need to be committed to a range of global challenges that matter both to the US, to Europe and the world," she said, singling out climate change as an example.

In return for treating Europe as a "full partner", Mr Obama would expect European countries to fulfil a bigger share of "joint responsibilities" such as counter-terrorism operations in Afghanistan.

Ms Rice said Mr Obama "respects and appreciates" the military contribution by Nato members in Afghanistan but warned he would urge European leaders to offer more troops and reduce restrictions on combat operations. "Senator Obama has been very clear that the US and Nato need to recognise that we share a common stake in success [in Afghanistan] and we cannot succeed on the basis of half measures," she said.

"In broadest terms, Obama's view is that for the US and Europe to maximise their effectiveness we each must do more."

[Back to Top](#)

ISAF accidentally kills 4 civilians in Paktika

Source: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)

July 20, 2008

KABUL, Afghanistan

An ISAF unit on a fire mission accidentally killed four civilians, with an unconfirmed further three deaths. Four civilians were also wounded and are now under treatment by ISAF forces.

The accident occurred last night in the Barmal district of Paktika when an ISAF unit fired two mortar rounds, which landed nearly 1 kilometre away from the intended target. Shortly afterwards wounded civilians presented themselves for treatment at an ISAF base, and a helicopter medical evacuation mission was immediately launched to assist.

ISAF deeply regrets this accident, and an investigation as to the exact circumstances of this tragic event is now underway. Further information will be released as it becomes available.

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[Back to Top](#)

Afghan interrogations ruled inadmissible in first Gitmo tribunal

blogs | World War 4 Report

Submitted by Bill Weinberg

Tue, 07/22/2008

Salim Ahmed Hamdan, a Yemeni who has admitted to being Osama bin Laden's chauffeur in Afghanistan, went on trial at Guantánamo Bay July 21, in the first US war crimes trial since World War II. Hamdan pleaded not guilty to the charges before the military tribunal which could send him to life in prison. (Reuters, July 22) But in a surprise move, the presiding judge, Navy Capt. Keith Allred, excluded as inadmissible all statements obtained from Hamdan's interrogations in Afghanistan, except his first videotaped battlefield interrogation-in which he disclosed no links to bin Laden. "The interests of justice are not served by admitting these statements because of the highly coercive environment and conditions under which they were made," Allred wrote in a 16-page ruling. (McClatchy, July 22)

[Back to Top](#)

When Spies Don't Play Well With Their Allies

New York Times, United States

By MARK MAZZETTI

Published: July 20, 2008

WASHINGTON

As they complete their training at "The Farm," the Central Intelligence Agency's base in the Virginia tidewater, young agency recruits are taught a lesson they are expected never to forget during assignments overseas: there is no such thing as a friendly intelligence service.

Foreign spy services, even those of America's closest allies, will try to manipulate you. So you had better learn how to manipulate them back.

But most C.I.A. veterans agree that no relationship between the spy agency and a foreign intelligence service is quite as byzantine, or as maddening, as that between the C.I.A. and Pakistan's Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence, or I.S.I.

It is like a bad marriage in which both spouses have long stopped trusting each other, but would never think of breaking up because they have become so mutually dependent.

Without the I.S.I.'s help, American spies in Pakistan would be incapable of carrying out their primary mission in the country: hunting Islamic militants, including top members of Al Qaeda. Without the millions of covert American dollars sent annually to Pakistan, the I.S.I. would have trouble competing with the spy service of its archrival, India.

But the relationship is complicated by a web of competing interests. First off, the top American goal in the region is to shore up Afghanistan's government and security services to better fight the I.S.I.'s traditional proxies, the Taliban, there.

Inside Pakistan, America's primary interest is to dismantle a Taliban and Qaeda safe haven in the mountainous tribal lands. Throughout the 1990s, Pakistan, and especially the I.S.I., used the Taliban and militants from those areas to exert power in Afghanistan and block India from gaining influence there. The I.S.I. has also supported other militant groups that launched operations against Indian troops in Kashmir, something that complicates Washington's efforts to stabilize the region.

Of course, there are few examples in history of spy services really trusting one another. After all, people who earn their salaries by lying and assuming false identities probably don't make the most reliable business partners. Moreover, spies know that the best way to steal secrets is to penetrate the ranks of another spy service.

But circumstances have for years forced successful, if ephemeral, partnerships among spies. The Office of Strategic Services, the C.I.A.'s predecessor, worked with the K.G.B.'s predecessors to hunt Nazis during World War II, even as the United States and the Soviet Union were quickly becoming adversaries.

These days, the relationship between Moscow and Washington is turning frosty again, over a number of issues. But, quietly, American and Russian spies continue to collaborate to combat drug trafficking and organized crime, and to secure nuclear arsenals.

The relationship between the C.I.A. and the I.S.I. was far less complicated when the United States and Pakistan were intently focused on one common goal: kicking the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan. For years in the 1980s, the C.I.A. used the I.S.I. as the conduit to funnel arms and money to Afghan rebels fighting Soviet forces in Afghanistan.

But even in those good old days, the two spy services were far from trusting of each other - in particular over Pakistan's quest for nuclear weapons. In his book "Ghost Wars," the journalist Steve Coll recounts how the I.S.I. chief in the early 1980s, Gen. Akhtar Abdur Rahman, banned all social contact between his I.S.I. officers and C.I.A. operatives in Pakistan. He was also convinced that the C.I.A. had set up an elaborate bugging network, so he had his officers speak in code on the telephone.

When the general and his aides were invited by the C.I.A. to visit agency training sites in the United States, the Pakistanis were forced to wear blindfolds on the flights into the facilities.

Since the Sept. 11 attacks, C.I.A. officers have arrived in Islamabad knowing they will probably depend on the I.S.I. at least as much as they have depended on any liaison spy service in the past. Unlike spying in the capitals of Europe, where agency operatives can blend in to develop a network of informants, only a tiny fraction of C.I.A. officers can walk the streets of Peshawar unnoticed.

And an even smaller fraction could move freely through the tribal areas to scoop up useful information about militant networks there.

Even the powerful I.S.I., which is dominated by Punjabis, Pakistan's largest ethnic group, has difficulties collecting information in the tribal lands, the home of fiercely independent Pashtun tribes. For this reason, the I.S.I. has long been forced to rely on Pashtun tribal leaders - and in some cases Pashtun militants - as key informants.

Given the natural disadvantages, C.I.A. officers try to get any edge they can through technology, the one advantage they have over the local spies.

For example, the Pakistani government has long restricted where the C.I.A. can fly Predator surveillance drones inside Pakistan, limiting flight paths to approved "boxes" on a grid map.

The C.I.A.'s answer to that restriction? It deliberately flies Predators beyond the approved areas, just to test Pakistani radars. According to one former agency officer, the Pakistanis usually notice.

As American and allied casualty rates in Afghanistan have grown in the last two years, the I.S.I. has become a subject of fierce debate within the C.I.A. Many in the spy agency - particularly those stationed in Afghanistan - accuse their agency colleagues at the Islamabad station of actually being too cozy with their I.S.I. counterparts.

There have been bitter fights between the C.I.A. station chiefs in Kabul and Islamabad, particularly about the significance of the militant threat in the tribal areas. At times, the view from Kabul has been not only that the I.S.I. is actively aiding the militants, but that C.I.A. officers in Pakistan refuse to confront the I.S.I. over the issue.

Veterans of the C.I.A. station in Islamabad point to the capture of a number of senior Qaeda leaders in Pakistan in recent years as proof that the Pakistani intelligence service has often shown a serious commitment to roll up terror networks. It was the I.S.I., they say, that did much of the legwork leading to the capture of operatives like Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, Abu Zubaydah and Ramzi bin al-Shibh.

And, they point out, the I.S.I. has just as much reason to distrust the Americans as the C.I.A. has to distrust the I.S.I. The C.I.A. largely pulled up stakes in the region after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, rather than staying to resist the chaos and bloody civil war that led ultimately to the Taliban ascendance in the 1990s.

After the withdrawal, the American tools to understand the complexity of relationships in Central and South Asia became rusty. The I.S.I. operates in a neighborhood of constantly shifting alliances, where double dealing is an accepted rule of the game, and the phenomenon is one that many in Washington still have problems accepting.

Until late last year, when he was elevated to the command of the entire army, the Pakistani spymaster who had been running the I.S.I. was Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani. American officials describe this smart and urbane general as at once engaging and inscrutable, an avid golfer with occasionally odd affectations. During meetings, he will often spend several minutes carefully hand-rolling a cigarette. Then, after taking one puff, he stubs it out.

The grumbling at the C.I.A. about dealing with Pakistan's I.S.I. comes with a certain grudging reverence for the spy service's Machiavellian qualities. Some former spies even talk about the Pakistani agency with a mix of awe and professional jealousy.

One senior C.I.A. official, recently retired, said that of all the foreign spymasters the C.I.A. had dealt with, General Kayani was the most formidable and may have earned the most respect at C.I.A. headquarters in Langley, Va. The soft-spoken general, he said, is a master manipulator.

"We admire those traits," he said.

[Back to Top](#)

[Judge Bars Some Bin Laden Driver Evidence](#)

[War Crimes Judge Says Former Driver Was Subjected To "Highly Coercive" Conditions At Afghan Base](#)

[CBS.com - US - War on terror](#)

July 21, 2008

GUANTANAMO BAY NAVAL BASE, Cuba,

(CBS/AP) The judge in the first American war crimes trial since World War II barred evidence on Monday that interrogators obtained from Osama bin Laden's driver, ruling he was subjected to "highly coercive" conditions in Afghanistan.

But Judge Keith Allred, a Navy captain, left the door open for the prosecution to use statements Salim Hamdan made at Guantanamo, despite defense claims that all of his statements were tainted by alleged abuse including sleep deprivation and solitary confinement.

Hamdan, who was captured at a roadblock in Afghanistan in November 2001, pleaded not guilty at the start of a trial that will be closely watched as the first full test of the Pentagon's system for prosecuting alleged terrorists. He faces a maximum life sentence if convicted of conspiracy and aiding terrorism.

The chief prosecutor for the tribunals, Army Col. Lawrence Morris, said the loss of some of Hamdan's statements will not keep the trial from going forward.

"It does not reduce my confidence in our ability fully to depict Mr. Hamdan's criminality," he told reporters. "We're fine."

The judge said the prosecution cannot use a series of interrogations at the Bagram air base and Panshir, Afghanistan, because of the "highly coercive environments and conditions under which they were made."

At Bagram, Hamdan says he was kept in isolation 24 hours a day with his hands and feet restrained, and armed soldiers prompted him to talk by kneeling him in the back. He says his captors at Panshir repeatedly tied him up, put a bag over his head and knocked him the ground.

Michael Berrigan, the deputy chief defense counsel, described the ruling as a major blow to the tribunal system that allows hearsay and evidence obtained through coercion.

"It's a very significant ruling because these prosecutions are built to make full advantage of statements obtained from detainees," he said.

A jury of six officers with one alternate was selected from a pool of 13 flown in from other U.S. bases over the weekend. Hamdan's lawyers succeeded in barring others, including one who had friends at the Pentagon at the time of the Sept. 11 attacks, and another who had been a key government witness as a student.

Monday marked the first time after years of pretrial hearings and legal challenges that any prisoner reached this stage of the tribunals.

For months his lawyers fought to delay the trial, arguing that military rules don't allow for a fair defense, CBS News correspondent Bob Orr reports.

The U.S. plans to prosecute about 80 Guantanamo prisoners, including the self-proclaimed mastermind of the Sept. 11 attacks and four alleged coconspirators.

Lawyers argue that enemy combatants like Hamdan, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and others may not have complete access to witnesses or classified information that may help their defense. And questionable evidence, produced by harsh interrogations, may be used against them.

The legal advisor to the Military Commissions rejects the concerns, Orr reports.

Hamdan appeared to go along with the process despite earlier threats to boycott. The Yemeni with a fourth-grade education appeared to cooperate fully with his Pentagon-appointed military lawyer, whispering in his ear during the questioning of potential jurors.

"Mr. Hamdan expressed great interest in this," said Charles Swift, one of his civilian attorneys.

In addition to the other interrogations, the judge said he would throw out statements whenever a government witness is unavailable to vouch for the questioners' tactics. He also withheld a ruling on a key interrogation at Guantanamo in May 2003 until defense lawyers can review roughly 600 pages of confinement records provided by the government on Sunday night.

Hamdan has been held at Guantanamo since May 2002. A challenge filed by his lawyers resulted in a 2006 Supreme Court ruling striking down the original rules for the military tribunals. Congress and President Bush responded with new rules, the Military Commissions Act.

Hamdan met bin Laden in Afghanistan in 1996 and began working on his farm before winning a promotion as his driver.

Defense lawyers say he only kept the job for the \$200-a-month salary. But prosecutors allege he was a personal driver and bodyguard of the al Qaeda leader. They say he transported weapons for the Taliban and helped bin Laden escape U.S. retribution following the Sept. 11 attacks.

[Back to Top](#)

Chemicals used for heroin production seized in Afghanistan - UN

IRNA

July 21, 2008

Tehran

More than three tons of precursor chemicals used to produce heroin were recently seized in Afghanistan in an operation supported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Nearly 3,200 kilos of the chemicals, including 2,229 kilos of ammonium chloride and 736 kilos of sodium carbonate, were hidden in sacks of fertilizer and rice and smuggled across the Pakistani border by truck, UN Information Center said.

The shipment was intercepted in Kabul by the Counter Narcotics Police in Afghanistan (CNPA), as part of the UNODC-supported "Operation Tarcet" which targets the smuggling of precursor chemicals into the strife-torn nation, which supplies more than 90 per cent of the world's heroin.

Working with UNODC and regional governments, the CNPA has stepped up its efforts to intercept consignments of smuggled precursors through its participation in Operation Tarcet, which began in Afghanistan and now covers the region.

Operation Tarcet has also led to the recent seizure of five tons of acetic anhydride, a chemical needed to produce heroin, in the southern Iranian city of Bandar Abbas, and a 14-ton seizure of the same precursor in Karachi, Pakistan.

"This seizure shows that regional and targeted collaboration works," says Jean-Luc Lemahieu, Chief of UNODC's Europe and Asia Section.

"Dealing with the drug issue is a shared responsibility.

Translating this shared responsibility into action is the art." Operation Tarcet aims to educate law enforcement officials on identifying and intercepting smuggled chemical shipments, and to intercept consignments using modern methodologies.

It is part of UNODC's broader "Rainbow Strategy" to counter Afghan opium production, trafficking and consumption, through cross-border cooperation, intelligence, precursor control, money flows and drug demand reduction.

[Back to Top](#)

So, who is the terrorist here?

Calgary Herald, Canada

Kevin Brooker

Calgary Herald

Published: Monday, July 21, 2008

Upon the release last week of a video showing him suffer through a harsh interrogation, there came a welter of voices both for and against letting Omar Khadr continue to rot in Guantanamo.

Yet, every voice that I heard overlooked the most important issue of all.

Granted, there is much now to be said about Canada's quiet complicity in enforcing Gitmo's legal twilight zone. Perhaps one could argue that Khadr should be tried by a Canadian court rather than a U.S. military tribunal. And maybe the question of whether his family should have been granted Canadian citizenship in the first place is grounds for a fruitful discussion.

But that's all just chat about a horse that has already left the barn. The real issue is why it left the barn at all, and the answer is: because someone broke in, shot the joint up, and stole a whole bunch of horses.

Now, we're never going to know enough about that fateful day in July of 2002 near the town of Khost, Afghanistan. But the broad outline is this: U.S. Special Forces, having set up their headquarters in an abandoned former Soviet army base, sent a patrol into the countryside to where they believed Taliban forces had captured and were using an American satellite phone.

When they reached a compound containing several mud huts, they sent two Afghan translators forward, but the pair was immediately shot dead from within. What then ensued was a chaotic firefight in which shrapnel from a grenade claimed the life of Sgt. First Class Christopher Speer, an elite Delta Force soldier.

Fifteen-year-old Omar Khadr was rounded up that day along with others to join the faceless and forgotten of Guantanamo Bay. It would be years before any official charges were brought, but among them, Khadr is now accused of murder and conspiracy for having thrown that grenade.

So why was Omar Khadr there in the first place?

Family tradition, apparently. A CBC timeline of the Khadr saga states that Omar's father, Ahmed Said Khadr, first went to Afghanistan in 1980 as a volunteer soldier to fight against invading Soviet forces. He is said to have befriended Osama bin Laden (who, it should never be forgotten, was a pawn of the U.S. and thus a "good guy" at the time).

But let us consider the Afghan peasant's perspective. One of the most sophisticated killing machines in the history of mankind invades the country you love and would die to protect -- again. Foreign troops literally take over the address of your previous attacker. When these futuristic super-soldiers step to you with guns pointed, what do you do?

You fight back. Where's the crime in that?

Whatever we, in our comfortable Western homes, may believe about the legitimacy of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, it was nevertheless a sovereign state in 2002. To my knowledge there was never a judicial finding of fact about bin Laden's culpability in 9/11, or indeed, about his presence in Afghanistan at the time. There was only a torrent of Pentagon hearsay followed by a mass invasion, guns blazing.

Afghans will never see this conflict the way we do -- or rather, the way we're told to see it. They don't watch CNN. They don't read the Times of London. They live in mud huts and repel invaders. That's what they do.

As for the Khadrs, one would think that if you're going to be dubbed "Canada's first family of terrorism," you would have

been convicted of at least one act of terrorism somewhere along the way.

But no.

The definition of terrorist is when we say, "You're a terrorist."

It's like the Iraqi who dares -- or is even believed to be tempted -- to take a potshot at foreign invaders busting up his world. Terrorist.

By the way, Khadr himself was shot three times and lost the sight in one eye. Who does he get to sue?

Kevin Brooker is a Calgary writer.

[Back to Top](#)

8,000 foreign fighters in Fata ring alarm bells in Islamabad

The News International (Pakistan)

By Hamid Mir

July 21, 2008

ISLAMABAD

In a disturbing report presented to Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, days before he travels to the United States, the latest figure of foreign fighters present in the tribal areas of Pakistan is estimated to be more than 8,000 but the government is reluctant to officially confirm this number.

At a special cabinet briefing on Sunday in which Asif Ali Zardari was also present, besides the prime minister and Adviser to the Interior Ministry Rehman Malik, said the government will have to use force if the process of dialogue does not produce the results but his view was opposed by the minister from FATA Hamidullah Jan.

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and his key ministers will visit Peshawar on Monday for a special meeting, which could decide the launching of a major operation against foreign fighters in Fata, Interior Ministry Adviser Rehman Malik told The News on Sunday.

It would be a short and effective operation like the one in Bara recently, officials told The News. Information Minister Sherry Rehman confirmed the briefing to The News without giving any number for the foreign fighters but expressed the determination of the government to pull them out. Mr Zardari listened to the briefing without making any comment.

Although officially the government of Pakistan accepts that foreign fighters are present, their unusually large number has set alarm bells ringing in Islamabad and possibly in other capitals as well. Interior Adviser Rehman Malik, when pressed by this correspondent, however, conceded that the number of foreign fighters was about 1,000.

According to the report presented to the PM, a majority of these foreign fighters are living in North and South Waziristan and Bajaur. Prime Minister Gilani has also been informed that some foreign intelligence agencies are pushing their agents into the Pakistani tribal areas from Afghanistan under the cover of Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters. These undercover agents are trying to instigate the local population to fight against Pakistani forces as part of a "great game" in the region.

Taliban sources on the other hand are not ready to confirm that they are hosting thousands of foreign fighters in their areas. They claim that the number of foreigners is just a few hundred and most of them are living in the tribal areas from the time when the American CIA and Pakistani ISI encouraged them to come and fight against the Soviet Union.

Independent sources in both the Pakistani tribal areas and eastern Afghanistan have, however, claimed that number of foreign fighters started increasing in 2007. The biggest attraction for these young militant guests from the Middle East, Central Asia and Europe was the increase in the number of US troops in Afghanistan. A lot of young Muslims are coming to Afghanistan to fight the US troops who, they believe, have come to Afghanistan not to fight terrorism but to occupy more Muslim lands, including Pakistan, and to plunder their resources.

According to some Afghan sources, foreign fighters are welcomed not only in the Pakistani tribal areas but also in eastern, southern and western Afghanistan. The rising number of civilian casualties has created lot of hatred and resentment against foreign security forces in these Afghan and Pakistani areas. Angry locals believe that the foreign fighters are coming to avenge these killings.

A few years ago, Pakistan was the safest route for foreign fighters to enter into Afghanistan but now they rarely use this old route. Most of them come as tourists and traders directly from Dushanbe, Baku, Istanbul, Dubai, Sharjah, Delhi and Frankfurt to Kabul by different airlines. Many Afghans in Kabul, Karachi, Dubai and Delhi are working for them as travel agents. It is also very easy to make a new Afghan passport for them in Kabul.

Two American-born Al-Qaeda operators Adam Gadhan alias Azzam al Amriki and Abu Ahmad alias Amir Butt are known in the Afghan Kunar province for making travel arrangements of these young and educated Muslims from the US, UK, France, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Canada and Australia. Most of these Western Muslims tell their Afghan and Pakistani hosts that they will take not only their revenge from the 'occupying forces' but they will also take the revenge for the sacrilegious cartoons of their prophet from Western governments who encourage such cartoonists in the name of freedom of expression.

Some of these foreigners have married into the tribes of Kunar, Nuristan, North Waziristan and South Waziristan. German-born Turkish fighter Saad Abu Furqan is also known in the Pakistani tribal areas for attracting young Turks to organise Jihad against what he calls the 'crusaders' in Afghanistan. A very well known Taliban leader Ustad Dawood is working as coordinator between these foreign fighters and locals from Afghan Paktika province. Dawood speaks English and Arabic fluently.

A source who knows Ustad Dawood revealed that Al-Qaeda and Taliban are now slowly moving foreign fighters to areas round Kabul for a big attack on the Afghan capital Kabul in near future. Some of the foreign fighters have already entered Kabul as vendors and shopkeepers and provide a lot of intelligence to their commanders.

Ustad Dawood has also established contacts with his old friends in the Northern Alliance and is working with Jalaluddin Haqqani for an alliance between the Taliban, some Northern Alliance groups and the Hizb-e-Islami to jointly fight the foreign forces in Afghanistan.

An independent source said many experienced and hardened Al-Qaeda fighters were coming from Iraq to Afghanistan via Iran by road. These fighters enter the Afghan provinces of Herat and Balkh from Iran illegally.

The Nato forces are aware of this infiltration from Iran and have started bombing civilian vehicles moving close to the Iranian border indiscriminately. The bombing killed nine Afghan policemen in southwest Farah province on July 20 and seven civilians on July 17. Nato was also accused of killing more than 50 civilians in the Shindand area of Herat on July 17.

It is also learnt that many fighters from Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, Jordan, Bahrain, Libya, Iraq, Syria and some from India and Bangladesh prefer to stay in the warmer areas of southern Afghanistan which is a safe haven for the Taliban. The fighters from Morocco, Algeria, Chechnya, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and from western countries like to stay in the eastern Afghanistan provinces of Kunar, Nuristan, Paktia, Paktika, Khost and Pakistani tribal areas bordering these areas.

Sources say that fighters from African countries are not encouraged to come to Afghanistan or Pakistan as Al-Qaeda wants them to go to Darfur in Sudan or Iraq. The foreign fighters in the Pakistani tribal areas and Afghanistan are aware about the presence of some undercover agents in their ranks. Recently, they arrested two Uzbeks, three Afghans and one Pakistani for spying and executed them in North and South Waziristan when they confessed during interrogation that they were working for the CIA and ISI.

Foreign fighters avoid getting in touch with non-tribal Pakistani fighters because they suspect them of having links with Pakistani intelligence. Pakistani officials are putting pressure on the Taliban leadership not to encourage foreigners to cross the border into Afghanistan to fight US and Nato troops. The Taliban are also asking them to put down their guns and register themselves with the local political administration.

While some Taliban leaders in North Waziristan have started discouraging foreigners from crossing the border, some in South Waziristan are not ready to listen to the Pakistani government. Their defiance has created a lot of confusion and resentment in Islamabad because the Pakistan government is already under lot of pressure to use heavy force against the Taliban.

Defiant Taliban leaders are of the view that it is the right of every Muslim to join the Jihad against "crusaders" in Afghanistan and they will not ask any foreigner to leave their area or stop fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan. A Taliban leader said: "We are not against all the Jews and Christians, but we are against crusaders and Zionists, who should leave Afghanistan first and then we will ask our foreign Muslim brothers to leave the area but if the Pakistani rulers want to fight with us, we are ready."

[Back to Top](#)

Taliban kill Afghan provincial govt spokesman: official

Yahoo News - Business

22/07/2008

(AFP)

KABUL

Suspected Taliban militants killed a provincial government spokesman in eastern Afghanistan overnight, during an attack on his house that also injured his wife and two relatives, an official said.

Ghamai Khan Mohammadyar, spokesman for the governor of the eastern province of Paktika, was killed in his home in the neighbouring province of Paktia, the official told AFP.

His wife, a nephew and a niece were wounded in a gunfight at the house and his brother was captured by the gunmen, provincial information and culture chief Din Mohammad Darwish said, blaming the attack on Taliban militants.

"Mohammadyar was martyred at his home by Taliban last night," Darwish said late Monday.

Malik Tanai, an official in Paktika's provincial administration, confirmed the incident.

Mohammadyar told an AFP reporter in May that Taliban were threatening to kill him because of his work. The spokesman regularly spoke to the media about attacks carried out by Taliban militants waging an anti-government insurgency.

Insurgents, from the Taliban and other Islamist factions, have killed several government officials, including parliamentarians and a provincial governor, and have tried to assassinate President Hamid Karzai.

They kidnapped a senator two weeks ago and are demanding the release of Taliban prisoners for his freedom.

The insurgency was launched after the Taliban were removed from government in a US-led invasion in late 2001.

[Back to Top](#)

Hard man in a hard country

The Guardian (UK)

July 20, 2008

Tomorrow, there will be no presidential hopefuls, no hordes of advisers and staff, no senior TV anchors, none of the razzmatazz of an American election campaign. The routine lack of routine that is life in Kabul will have been restored. President Hamid Karzai will have a moment to ponder the past few days.

On Thursday, he travelled by (American) helicopter to the east of Afghanistan to offer his condolences to families of dozens of civilians killed in an (American) air strike two weeks ago. On Friday, aides had no idea when Barack Obama

would be arriving. On Saturday, the candidate was there. On Sunday, he was gone.

The complexities of the presidential diary are revealing. For the bittersweet story of Karzai is also the bittersweet story of the Western involvement with Afghanistan.

In the heady aftermath of the 2001 war, everything seemed possible and Karzai, with his hawk nose, multicoloured Uzbek cape and astrakhan hat, was, like his country, handsome, brave, rugged, exotic and romantically wreathed in gunsmoke. Convincing both at home and abroad, effective enough to be useful, malleable enough not to be a threat, he was the perfect friend in a far-flung land.

Seven years on, Karzai, like his country, has become a problem. Tricky, conservative, proud, prickly, his views, like those of his countrymen, are not always those of his Western interlocutors. He does not do what he is told. In short, he is a bit too Afghan. But then so, as we are discovering, is Afghanistan.

Karzai was born in 1957 in the village of Karz, in the south eastern province of Kandahar, one of eight children of the chief of the half-a-million-strong Popalzai and thus a scion of one of the most powerful tribes of Afghanistan. Educated in Kabul and in India, he was 22 when the Soviets invaded his homeland.

For the next decade, based in Pakistan, Karzai was involved in liaison for a mujahideen faction. In 1992, he was with the first group of mujahideen leaders into a liberated Kabul and then watched the West walk away and his country dissolve into anarchy and civil war.

So when a religious militia known as the Taliban established rule of law in the mid-90s from bases in his native Kandahar, Karzai, like many Afghans, supported them. Despite his apparent Westernisation, the President is, though far from an intolerant fundamentalist, a devout man. He never touches alcohol - abroad or in private - and prays five times a day. His piety is allied to a social conservatism that sees his wife, a literate medical doctor, kept out of sight. Mrs Karzai was not much in evidence yesterday.

The excesses of the Taliban, as well as their probable murder of his father and the support they received from Pakistani intelligence services, turned Karzai against them. But with nobody very interested in Afghanistan, lobbying in Western capitals went nowhere. Until 9/11 changed everything.

Just under two months after the attack, Karzai, armed with little more than a satellite phone, some CIA contact numbers, his old mujahideen networks and the loyalty owed to him as chief of the Popalzai, headed into Afghanistan. It was an extremely brave gamble and it paid off. By December 2001, with the Taliban temporarily destroyed, and the old mujahideen leaders dead or discredited, he was the obvious man to take power.

Impressive in Western capitals, Karzai is at his best in Kabul where the painfully blue sky, the snowy mountains on the

horizon, the danger, the wood smoke, the hawkers, the poverty and the simple fact of being there combine with the altitude to half stun many visiting statesmen. 'He's well-read, funny and can talk about everything from 19th-century politics to poetry to pots,' says one Westerner who has dealt closely with him.

Karzai is also charismatic and, for a head of state, unpretentious. His abrupt, exuberant hand gestures give the impression of energy and decision. In interviews, he often sits on the edge of his chair, listening intently, apparently barely able to contain his desire to act.

With Karzai head of an interim government backed by billions in international aid, endorsed by a traditional loya jirga assembly of tribal leaders, embraced by half the statesman of the planet, elected President for a five-year term in an astonishing and moving poll, 2002 saw the climax of the sudden love affair between the new Afghan leader and his country and the West. And then things started going downhill.

This was not inevitable. Part of the bitterness that Karzai will have sought to hide from Obama yesterday is a consequence of the unforced nature of the failures in Afghanistan. Errors in Iraq made a very tough job virtually impossible. Errors in Afghanistan have made a delicate task that could, given intelligence, subtlety, courage and luck, have been a relatively rapid success, much, much harder.

One early error was the decision to opt for 'nation building lite'. The West did the easy bits of Afghanistan first. So Kabul, the relatively stable north, the prosperous western city of Herat all saw funds, troops and development while the tough and dangerous south east was left to rot. So in came the consultants, the private contractors but far fewer soldiers with far less expertise in post-conflict or counter-insurgency training than were needed. Instead of a massive military presence that could be downscaled to tighter, focused, special forces operations, the opposite happened. Early military expeditions in search of 'al-Qaeda/Taliban' were laughably clumsy. Development progress was painfully slow. And then everyone got distracted by Iraq.

It was 2006 before anyone woke up, despite Karzai's increasingly shrill alarm calls. In Kabul and the stable areas, the change in five years had been enormous. Anyone who had seen Taliban Afghanistan could not but be impressed by the new telephone networks, reconstruction and commercial activity. But while everyone looked away, the Taliban had regrouped, al-Qaeda had found a new safe haven in Pakistan, drugs production had exploded and in Kandahar's hospitals small children were still dying of malnutrition. The militants, with the complicity of opium and heroin smugglers, had filled the vacuum the West and the pitifully weak Afghan government had left.

When the British went into southern Helmand as part of a massive new Western deployment, they got a much nastier reception than anticipated and rows broke out between London and Kabul over political and military strategy. Relations between Karzai and British policy-makers became venomous. The Westerners were depicted as arrogant, blundering neo-imperialists. Karzai was dismissed as 'the mayor of Kabul', an insult based partly in frustration at the President's seeming inability to impose his will in the provinces. Certainly, his air of decisiveness and energy hides a failure to energise or control even his close associates.

'It's bewildering,' said one former diplomat in Kabul. 'You'd expect him to be charging around firing off memos, harassing subordinates ... but that isn't his style. The exercise of power itself doesn't seem to interest him - or perhaps he is just not very good at it.'

Yet Karzai's defenders point out that no central government in Afghanistan has ever done anything other than rule through co-opted local power-brokers. 'This is not Sweden,' said one aide. Relations have not recovered.

Karzai is infuriated by foreigners' blithe assumption that they 'understand the Afghan' better than he and by misspent aid money. He is genuinely outraged and wounded by the continued civilian casualties caused by hamfisted military strikes. Angry and bellicose sallies against Pakistan, which he blames for much of the violence in his country, are symptomatic of a deep frustration with the failure of the international community to grasp the regional nature of the conflict as much as traditional Afghan anti-Pakistani sentiment.

Among the international community, there is frustration about a lack of progress on justice, accountability and women's rights, principles which do not necessarily always agree with Karzai's conservative views.

With security deteriorating, contact between the 'internationals' and the Afghans, whether President or pauper, is now minimal. Westerners increasingly move in heavily armed convoys, live behind blast walls and ship in their supplies from abroad. Once welcomed, they are becoming just the latest in the series of powers over the centuries that have hoped to shape Afghanistan, if not in their image, then as they would like.

As the gulf widens, the unpleasant realisation is growing, perhaps none too soon, that Afghanistan is not just exotic and quaint but is very, very different and that Westerners here, American presidential hopefuls included, are a very, very long way from home.

The Karzai lowdown

Born in Kandahar, southern Afghanistan, on 24 December 1957, the hereditary kahn (chief) of the Popalzai. His father was an MP and supported King Zahir Shah. Gained an MA in political science at Shimla in India. In 1999 he married Dr Zeenat Quraishi. They have a son, Mirwais.

Best of times Already President of the Afghan Transitional Administration, Karzai won 55.4 per cent of the vote in the 2004 Afghan presidential election. He was officially sworn in as the first elected President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on 7 December 2004.

Worst of times Karzai's father Abdul Ahad Karzai was assassinated by, it's thought, the Taliban while organising resistance from his base in Quetta, Pakistan, in August 1999. Karzai himself survived an assassination attempt in December 2001.

What he says 'It was terrorism that brutalised the whole of Afghanistan. They tried to give it names and justifications, and those names and justifications were ethnic or political, but it was clearly a terrorist movement, backed by outsiders, to take Afghanistan and to create a different kind of warlord.'

What others say 'He is a strong and courageous advocate for the freedom and independence of his country and people.'
George Rupp, president of the International Rescue Committee.

[Back to Top](#)

Thousands march in Afghan dispute over land, grazing

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(AFP)

KABUL

Thousands of ethnic Hazaras marched through the Afghan capital Tuesday in a tense protest over a dispute with nomads about land and grazing that demonstrators said left several people dead.

Hundreds of riot police were out to control the angry crowd on the outskirts of the city centre and a Hazara security team was also trying to calm the protesters, an AFP reporter at the scene said.

There was extra security across the city and helicopters patrolling the sky amid concern the protest could boil over into violence.

Organiser Kazim Wahidi from a group called the Defending Committee for the Dignity of the People claimed 80,000 people took part. Police could not immediately provide a figure; AFP reporters said there were thousands of demonstrators but it was difficult to gauge the numbers.

The dispute erupted when Kuchi nomads moved into Wardak province's Behsud area, about 100 kilometres (60 miles) east of Kabul, in recent months in search of grazing for their animals.

Hazaras allege that the nomads, who are ethnic Pashtuns, forced their way in and killed several people, and destroyed houses and crops.

Ethnicity is a sensitive issue in Afghanistan, which is still scarred by the 1992-1996 civil war in which different groups massacred, raped and tortured each other. The violence left around 80,000 people dead in Kabul alone.

"The demonstration is to protest against the Kuchi invasion," said Akram Gizabi, spokesman for a group at the protest called the Civil Movement of Afghanistan.

"Kuchi people attacked Hazarajat (Hazara land). They killed our people and destroyed our land and the government does not do anything because the government supports such people," said protester Massoom Ali, 16.

The demonstrators shouted slogans and carried posters of nine people including four children they alleged were killed by Kuchis.

There have been media reports of the clashes but officials have not confirmed casualties.

Banners read "Hazara people want justice" and "The Kuchi should be disarmed."

Kuchi nomads, whose numbers are not known, move up from the south and east every summer in search of grazing. For the past three years there have been tensions between them and Hazara in Wardak.

[Back to Top](#)

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