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United States Department of State



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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM
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DECL: 03/25/09

TO: The Secretary
FROM: SA - Karl F. Inderfurth
SUBJECT: Pushing for Peace in Afghanistan

Background

The prospects for peace in Afghanistan are not bright. The onset of spring likely will bring renewed fighting. However, a number of diplomatic cards are in play designed to try to find a path toward peace. To head off the fighting, we should back these efforts, which include attempts to schedule another round of talks between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, continue the Six Plus Two process, and promote a greater role for Afghan neutrals who could play a moderating role with the warring factions. This paper examines our plans to promote a settlement. It also explores possible actions that we could take if that effort fails.

Discussion

Givens

We are operating on a number of working assumptions. With continuing support from Iran and Russia and absent defections by key commanders, Masood likely will survive another fighting season. The Taliban will continue to control most of the country and to receive assistance from Pakistan. The spillover from Afghanistan will continue to threaten American interests in the areas of terrorism, narcotics, regional stability, and human rights, particularly the rights of women and girls. We will continue our efforts to moderate the behavior of the Taliban; Afghan neutrals are willing to assist. The loathsome policies and image of the Taliban limit the rewards we and others in the international community we may be able to offer the Taliban in terms of international acceptance. Pakistan will continue to seek and support a Taliban military victory.

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Iran and Russia will try to counter Pakistan's support with continued covert military support for Masood. Iran and Russia are more likely to end diplomatic and covert support to Masood than Pakistan would be to end its support to the Taliban.

Working for Peace; Building on Ashgabat and the Six Plus Two

Lakhdar Brahimi and his staff and Turkmen Foreign Minister Sheikmuradov deserve considerable credit for getting direct talks started between representatives of the Taliban and the Northern Alliance. As the weaker party, Masood and the Northern Alliance appear sincere in entering the talks. We have suspicions over the true commitment of the Taliban and Pakistan to the talks, however. That said, there is no reason for us not to support the talks and to urge both sides to continue.

If the talks continue, we will turn our attention to the next steps in the Six Plus Two process. We will be guided by the counsel of Brahimi whom I will meet shortly after he returns next week from an extended visit to the region. Our talks with him will help to clarify our thinking on what is possible. At minimum, we will want to follow up the suggestion that the Six Plus Two hold a special meeting at the Deputy Minister level (U/S Pickering) in Tashkent. Such a meeting would be advisable only if it could accomplish something significantly greater than what we might do in New York. A key to that would be representation of Afghans. Such representation would directly build from the Ashgabat talks. It would be hard for either major Afghan faction to avoid dialogue with the Six Plus Two given that they have met themselves. We also will have to determine what other Afghans might participate at Tashkent. The purpose of having the Afghans at Tashkent is to capitalize on their participation to goad the factions toward a political agreement among themselves.

You will have a personal opportunity to advance a possible settlement on the fringes of the upcoming NATO meeting. The heads of state or foreign ministers of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan will be in Washington. The Russians also may be represented at a high level. You or Under Secretary Pickering might consider convoking an informal meeting of this group, along with the Pakistani and Chinese ambassadors to discuss our next steps.

If the factions continue talking and the Six Plus Two group moves forward, a future step would be to take up Japan's offer to host a meeting to discuss the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Afghanistan. This conference would be a centerpiece of our efforts to present the rewards that would stem from peace. We would also consider if a parallel

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political meeting, again bringing the major Afghan players together with an eye toward pushing them to come to terms with themselves, would be appropriate.

Dealing with the Taliban

Taliban control of most of Afghanistan will remain a reality for Afghanistan, for at least the next year and probably beyond. The Taliban has become the vehicle of Pushtun ethnic power. The largest single ethnic groups in Afghanistan, the Pushtuns simply will not permit non-Pushtun suzerainty over the country. We have significant problems with the Taliban on a wide variety of fronts. At the end of the day, we may have to consider the Taliban to be an intrinsic enemy of the U.S. and a new international pariah state. We are not there yet and we do not want to be there. We will continue our policy of trying to mitigate Taliban behavior where and when its ill advised policies cross our path. Its policies now preclude us and others from offering the Taliban what it wants -- recognition as the rulers of Afghanistan. But we could begin to take steps toward recognition **if -- and only if --** the Taliban takes the steps: getting rid of Bin Ladin and the terrorist networks; beginning real efforts against the cultivation, processing and trafficking of illicit narcotics; and improving its respect for human rights in general and treatment of women and girls in particular. To bring this about, we need to continue to engage with the Taliban and seek other levers to influence their behavior.

New Role for Afghan Neutrals

One possible lever to influence the Taliban is the Afghan Diaspora -- technocrats, intellectuals, and former officials who have fled the fighting but still care about their country. Former Afghan King Zahir Shah, with the financial support of Italy, ~~is willing to call a conference of Afghans neutrals and moderates to explore how such a group could foster peace.~~ Zahir Shah would appear as an Afghan citizen, not as a former sovereign. Such a meeting would easily incorporate other neutral Afghan efforts such as the Intra-Afghan Dialogue process that has held meetings in Turkey and Germany and a similar effort that would have received Swiss support if its conclave would have included the former king.

Great care must be taken in promoting the neutrals. The Taliban would have to be assured that the mobilization of neutrals, particularly around Zahir Shah who shares the Taliban's core base among Pushtun tribals, did not represent a political challenge to them. Although the neutrals have no military assets, many of them are held in respect by the Taliban and the movement's core base. We want the neutrals to be available to moderate Taliban behavior and to help explain

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the nuances of internationally respected norms of behavior. If in the future the involvement of the neutrals does serve to diminish the Taliban's power among the Pushtuns, so much the better.

What could the neutrals bring to the Taliban? If there is a viable political settlement that includes the Taliban and the various Afghan ethnic minorities, the neutrals could serve to endorse the process and bring a sense of internal and international respectability and legitimacy. Along with the Taliban, Pakistan also will have to be brought around to supporting a role for the neutrals.

Steps if Diplomatic Efforts Fail

If these diplomatic efforts fail, we need to explore our response. Continued fighting and the absence of a political settlement will make it less likely that we will get satisfaction from the Taliban on our key issues. We will not cease our efforts to negotiate formation of a broader based government or toward our particular concerns over terrorism, narcotics, and human rights, but a new tact will be required. Renewed fighting will call into question the immediate value of the Six Plus Two (and Brahimi's personal involvement). Pakistan and Iran will continue to be key to an eventual settlement. Our efforts will have to shift away from trying to work with Pakistan and to a lesser extent with Iran in the Six Plus Two toward bringing greater pressure to bear on Pakistan and Iran. We will look to Russia to support this process, particularly with Iran. We may have to move from a Six Plus Two process to a "Eight Minus One" (Pakistan) process, emphasizing the isolation of Pakistan.

Pakistan has not been responsive to our requests that it use its full influence on the Taliban surrender of Bin Ladin. ~~We believe that Pakistan can do more, including cutting POE~~ supplies that mostly flow into Afghanistan from Pakistan. We should demand that Pakistan help us meet our core goals in Afghanistan and foster a political settlement compatible with Pakistan's own long-term interests.

If we see continued Pakistani resistance and/or duplicity, we should begin to seriously consider seeking Security Council backing, including reference to Chapter Seven, to ensure that Pakistan and the outside players abide with pledges to cease outside support as called for in UNSCR 1214 and 1193 and in a series of Six Plus Two declarations. Another stick we might consider using on Pakistan is the idea of expanding the Six Plus Two to include other Central Asian states and India, a move Pakistan would oppose.

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Finding a way to end the over twenty years of war in Afghanistan has been a belabored and frustrating process. But now more than ever, the interest for the U.S. to see that peace returns to Afghanistan has never been higher. Our involvement in the peace process will in no way guarantee a success, but if we do not remain directly involved any prospect for peace will be unlikely.

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SUMMARY

DISCUSSION

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Attachments:

Tab 1 -

Tab 2 -

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