

WHO NABBED MUTASIM AGHA JAN IN DUBAI?

While the mainstream press finally catches up to the fact that there were indeed hundreds of violent attacks on election day in Afghanistan (even though hippies could find the data over a week ago), there is yet another disturbing development in the efforts to hold talks between Afghanistan's High Peace Council and the Afghan Taliban. I noted nearly a year ago that Mutasim Agha Jan was beginning to bring some attention to a more moderate faction within the Afghan Taliban. He was successful in getting discussions going with the Afghan High Peace Council, but one of his associates, Abdul Raqib, was gunned down in Peshawar in February just after returning from a negotiating session in Dubai. It has now been confirmed that Mutasim Agha Jan has disappeared while in Dubai as he was preparing for another round of talks there. Here is ToloNews on the disappearance:

Agha Jan, who was one of the few crucial Taliban figures that had direct contact with the HPC, lived in Turkey and recently disappeared during a tour to the UAE.

"The government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is aware of Agha Jan's disappearance in the UAE,"

MoFA spokesman Ahmad Shekib Mustaghna said on Monday.

There are rumors about the possibility that Agha Jan may have been abducted. MoFA has not released a statement in regards to the rumors, but has called the circumstances surrounding the disappearance ambiguous and questionable.

Over the past month, Agha Jan had met with the HPC delegation twice; both sides had agreed to continue peace

discussions.

There is a very interesting bit of language in the Khaama Press story on the disappearance:

The ministry of foreign affairs of Afghanistan confirmed that the former senior Taliban leader Agha Jan Mutasim has gone missing in United Arab Emirates.

Foreign ministry spokesman, Shekib Mostaghni told reporters in Kabul that the Afghan officials have started negotiations with the UAE officials regarding the fate of Agha Jan Mutasim.

Mr. Mostaghni further added that the government of Afghanistan has stepped up efforts to take practical steps to find out Agha Jan Mutasim.

Normally, I would attribute that bit about “negotiations with UAE officials” as poor translation from an initial story about Afghan officials speaking to UAE officials simply to ask questions. But there is also this report in the Express Tribune:

Last week, Mutasim’s family sources and friends confirmed to *The Express Tribune* that they have lost contact with him in Dubai. They were concerned that the UAE authorities might have detained and shifted Mutasim to an undisclosed location in Abu Dhabi.

The Express Tribune article also makes it clear that he has been missing for quite a while:

After a mysterious silence for nearly two weeks, the Afghan foreign ministry on Monday confirmed that Mutasim is missing in the UAE. “The Afghan government confirms that Agha Jan Mutasim has disappeared in the UAE and we are talking to senior Emirati

officials to know his fate,” spokesman Ahmed Shakaib Mustaghni said in Kabul.

“The talks, unfortunately, have not yet produced any results and we do not have any more details,” Mustaghni told a weekly press briefing, according to the recorded version of the briefing received here.

So it would indeed appear that Afghanistan may be in some sort of negotiations with UAE on the fate of Mutasim. But since we don't have confirmation yet that he actually is under UAE control, we could be back to the list of suspects I discussed in the death of Abdul Raqib also being suspects in this case as well (but read here for a pretty strong argument that Taliban hardliners were responsible for Raqib's death). I will keep an eye out for further developments on Mutasim's location and safety.