

PEACE INITIATIVE GAINS MOMENTUM IN AFGHANISTAN DESPITE LACK OF PARTICIPATION BY US

Last week, Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visited Washington, DC for a series of meetings. The final press appearance by Sharif and Barack Obama was noted by the New York Times to be somewhat awkward as Sharif paid whispered lip service to Pakistani objections to drone attacks while Obama ignored the topic entirely. The joint appearance was quickly overshadowed by release of an article from Greg Miller and Bob Woodward leaking a number of documents relating to the drone program. Both Marcy and I commented on the release and what it could mean.

The concept of the end of the war in Afghanistan got a bit of a mention in the Times article on Sharif's visit:

With the United States' winding down the Afghan war, Mr. Obama reminded Mr. Sharif of the importance of a stable, sovereign Afghanistan. American officials have long been suspicious of links between the Pakistani military and militant groups like the Haqqani network, which has carried out attacks on Westerners in Afghanistan.

For its part, the Sharif government has signaled an interest in negotiating with the Pakistani Taliban, a process that analysts said the United States should encourage.

But heaven forbid that Afghanistan should attempt to talk with Pakistan's Taliban. Recall that earlier this month, the US snatched a high-ranking figure of the Pakistan Taliban from

Afghan security forces as they were bringing him to a meeting. The cover story at the time from Afghanistan was to suggest that they were attempting to start peace talks with Latif Mehsud. An article in yesterday's New York Times suggests that Afghanistan actually intended to work with Mehsud to develop a sort of alliance with the Pakistan Taliban and to use them as a pressure point against Pakistan's government. What intrigues me most about this possibility is that Afghanistan claimed that this tactic was merely an imitation of what the US has done repeatedly in Afghanistan:

Another Afghan official said the logic of the region dictated the need for unseemly alliances. The United States, in fact, has relied on some of Afghanistan's most notorious warlords to fight the insurgency here, the official tartly noted.

"Everyone has an angle," the official said. "That's the way we're thinking. Some people said we needed our own."

Afghan officials said those people included American military officers and C.I.A. operatives. Frustrated by their limited ability to hit Taliban havens in Pakistan, some Americans suggested that the Afghans find a way to do it, they claimed.

So Afghanistan's intelligence agency believed it had a green light from the United States when it was approached by Mr. Mehsud sometime in the past year.

Just in case you've forgotten, the last time we checked, the most notorious warlord war criminal of them all, Rashid Dostum, was still getting about \$100,000 every month from the US while also drawing a salary as Karzai's Army Chief of Staff. Coupling that with the Petraeus plan of incorporating the worst militias directly into the death squads of the Afghan Local Police

while providing them support from the CIA and JSOC, and we can see why Afghanistan would feel that there are zero moral constraints on working with groups having a violent tendency.

But apparently in the Calvinball playing field of Afghanistan, only the US is allowed to make shadowy alliances, and so the US snatched Mehsud away from Afghanistan before any alliance could be formed. But even if we chalk that move up to an honest move to take a noted terrorist out of action, US behavior on other fronts relating to Afghanistan and Pakistan still continue to illustrate that the only US priorities are more military action in Afghanistan and more drone strikes in Pakistan.

Sharif's next stop after Washington was London. But instead of awkward public appearances, the UK has instead set up meetings for Sharif directly with Hamid Karzai:

Afghan President Hamid Karzai is beginning a five-day visit to the UK, during which he will hold talks with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Britain will chair the meeting, which aims to improve troubled relations between the two Asian countries.

And the meetings are already paying off:

Senior Afghan officials will travel to Pakistan soon to speak to former Taliban No.2 leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar following a breakthrough in negotiations during a London summit, the Afghan presidential palace said on Wednesday.

Baradar is a long-time friend of reclusive Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar and is seen by some in Afghanistan as the key to restarting peace talks.

Baradar's status has been subject to numerous,

often conflicting, reports, but the latest information seems to be that he is out of jail but still in a "safe house" that is under ISI control.

Consider for a moment the differing approaches by the US and the UK here. By virtue of its own actions, the US inspired Afghanistan to seek a secret alliance with known terrorists in an attempt to use them to gain influence and move the terrorists' targets away from Afghanistan and into Pakistan. The US intervened, snatching the primary figure who would have been involved in the re-targeting. Meanwhile, the US continues its drive for a Bilateral Security Agreement that will give US forces criminal immunity to continue their counterterrorism activities, presumably using their own terrorists whom they have convinced to change targeting. And in Pakistan, the US continues to claim that it has the right to kill whoever John Brennan wants whenever he wants to, with the drones that hover over the tribal regions 24/7.

The UK, on the other hand, has arranged direct talks between Karzai and Sharif aimed at a true negotiated settlement to hostilities in the area. And in all the coverage of these talks, I see no mention of the US sending a single word of encouragement for the effort. Peace talks are simply not a US priority.