

AFGHANISTAN AFFECTS US-PAKISTAN DANCE, SIGNING AGREEMENT WITH INDIA; US MET WITH HAQQANI NETWORK

The never-ending twists and turns in the relationship between the US and Pakistan continues, with Afghanistan now entering the picture by signing an agreement with Pakistan's chief rival India. Also, it is being reported that earlier this summer, Pakistan's ISI helped to arrange a meeting between US officials and the Haqqani network. This is a remarkable development since the relationship between the ISI and the Haqqani network has been the central feature of the latest dispute between the US and Pakistan.

While still in New Delhi after signing the agreement with India, Afghan President Hamid Karzai realized he needed to reassure Pakistan, whose biggest fear is that India will have more influence than Pakistan in Afghanistan after the US exit:

"Pakistan is our twin brother, India is a great friend. The agreement we signed with our friend will not affect our brother," Karzai said in a foreign policy speech in New Delhi.

"This strategic partnership ... is not directed against any country ... this strategic partnership is to support Afghanistan."

The Reuters report goes on to characterize the agreement:

Karzai and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh sealed an agreement on

Tuesday that spanned closer political ties to fighting terrorism and allowed India to help train its police and army.

It signals a formal tightening of links that may spark Pakistani concern that India is increasingly competing for leverage in Afghanistan.

In another very remarkable development, the Wall Street Journal is reporting this morning that earlier this summer, Pakistan's ISI arranged a meeting between the US and the Haqqani network. That article is behind a paywall, so here is how Pakistan's Express Tribune reports on the development:

US officials met with leaders of the Haqqani network in a meeting arranged by the Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI) earlier this summer, *The Wall Street Journal* reported on Wednesday.

The meeting was held "in an effort to draw" the group into talks "on winding down the war."

The fact that the US would meet with the Haqqani network is stunning, given the strong rhetoric the US has used in accusing the ISI of aiding the Haqqani network attack on the US embassy and ISAF headquarters. As a result, the story of the meeting seems full of internal inconsistencies:

Officials from Pakistan and the US said the initiative did not yield much. Washington had earlier also said that the group was "beyond reconciliation."

The report states that the US had come to terms with the fact that targeting the group was not the solution and that they would have be drawn into peace talks.

Given the current rhetoric, it is hard to accept

that " the fact that targeting the group was not the solution" is still the operative belief held by the US. In fact, there are reports this morning of the US taking out a major leader of the Haqqani network in an airstrike near the Pakistan border in Afghanistan. Despite the overwhelming evidence that the US position now appears to be one of attacking the Haqqani network until it is decimated, the Express Tribune article carries this quote from a US official describing the decision to meet with the Haqqani network:

We've got no illusions about what the Haqqanis ultimately are. The war is going to end with a deal. That's what we're trying to make inevitable. The more parties involved in talking, that's probably going to make for a better deal.

It would be interesting to know whether the summer meeting, followed by the enhanced rhetoric this fall, represents evolution in the consensus of US leaders, where an attempt at negotiation was found to be fruitless or, alternatively, whether there are competing camps within US leadership who continue to hold to advocate opposite approaches favoring violent or peaceful solutions. Only time will tell.