DID KARZAI FIRE NDS HEAD NABIL FOR CONFIRMING ISI SHARED INTELLIGENCE ON BADRUDDIN HAQQANI'S KILLING?

Afghan President Hamid Karzai today fired the head of Afghanistan's intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security. This move comes as a great surprise, as the NDS was credited with thwarting a recent Haqqani network attack on Kabul and a subsequent attack by another group of militants targeting Afghanistan's Parliament. Complicating the effort to understand Karzai's move is the fact that he is engaged in a battle with the Afghan Parliament. Karzai made a number of moves today that are sure to anger Parliament even further. Citing border incursions from Pakistan, Parliament voted earlier this month to remove the Defense and Interior Ministers. Today, Karzai reappointed the ousted Interior Minister as Defense Minister while at the same time announcing the firing the head of the National Directorate of Security. Parliament has vowed to support the ousted intelligence chief.

Reuters brings us the basics of Karzai's moves today:

> Afghan President Hamid Karzai filled gaps in two top security ministries on Wednesday as part of a reshuffle forced on him by a fractious parliament, but risked a destabilising row with lawmakers by reappointing a sacked minister.
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> Parliament, in a rebuff to Karzai, earlier this month voted to remove Defence Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak and Interior Minister Bismillah Khan

> Mohammadi over deteriorating security, corruption accusations clouding the government and cross-border attacks blamed on Pakistan.
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> But Karzai appointed Mohammadi, an ethnic Tajik with a strong powerbase in northern Afghanistan, as Defence Minister, while removing spy agency chief Rahmatullah Nabil, charged with countering the Taliban and cutting insider attacks by Afghan police and soldiers on foreign troops.
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> "Intelligence chiefs cannot serve more than two years. President Karzai called Nabil today and thanked him for his services," Karzai's chief spokesman Aimal Faizi told Reuters ahead of the announcement.

We get more on the politics of these moves from Khaama Press:

> Afghan lawmakers on Wednesday criticized Afghan president Hamid Karzai for dismissing Afghan National Directorate of Security (NDS) chief Rahmatullah Nabeel from his position.
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> Farkhunda Zahra Naderi Afghan parliament member called Rahmatullah Nabil an effortful person and said neighboring intelligence agencies are behind the decision of president Hamid Karzai to dismiss Rahmatullah Nabeel.

Note the reference to "neighboring intelligence agencies" being behind Karzai's move to fire Nabil. This is a very thinly veiled reference to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence. I had previously noted that there were signs since the new ISI head Zaheer ul-Islam visited the US August 1-3 that important new intelligence information was flowing from ISI to the US. In fact, it seems to me that the sudden intelligence victories by Afghanistan's NDS

could well be explained by this new flow of information from ISI to the US (and then to NDS). I had speculated last week that this increased flow of intelligence may have been over, since the US had embarked on a new "flurry" of drone attacks in North Waziristan, precipitating a formal diplomatic protest from Pakistan and a suggestion from Pakistan's former ambassador to the US that perhaps the US and Pakistan should "divorce".

I'm beginning to think now that the diplomatic protest and the divorce suggestion were merely cover for the continuing flow of intelligence from ISI to the US, because one of the drone strikes last week is credited with killing Badruddin Haqqani. (As an aside, coordinating the diplomatic protest as cover for ISI intelligence sharing would also reflect new-found cooperation between ISI and Pakistan's civilian government.) Turning again to Khaama Press, we have this from Monday:

> According to an Afghan government official, US army in coordination with the Pakistan's Inter Service Intelligence carried out attack on the sanctuary of senior Haqqani Network leader, Badrudin Haqqani.
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> The official speaking on the condition of anonymity said ISI chief provided information regarding Badruddin Haqqani to Gen. Johan Allen during his recent visit to Pakistan.

General Allen's visit to Pakistan occurred at the same time as ul-Islam's visit to the US. Was the Afghan government official who provided confirmation of intelligence sharing from ISI Rahmatullah Nabil himself? Even if the leak came from one of Nabil's underlings, it would seem that the NDS would be the branch of the Afghan government (aside from Karzai and his staff) most likely to know of ISI's role in the killing of Badruddin Haqqani.

If there is indeed a new commitment from ISI to share intelligence with the US, it seems like one of the most fundamental ground rules ISI would insist on having would be the classic condition of “plausible deniability”. That would mean that the US could never acknowledge this new level of cooperation. If that is the case, then it is easy to see how both the ISI and the US would be upset with Monday’s report from Khaama Press.

At least this line of speculation now makes sense. The sudden flow of intelligence from ISI to the US and then to NDS would account for the sudden intelligence coups by NDS allowing the disruption of major attacks before they happened. If Nabil or one of his staff then leaked to Khaama Press the role of ISI intelligence sharing in the Badruddin Haqqani killing, then both the ISI and the US would be very upset that the new arrangement had been exposed and faced having to be curtailed due to the extreme unpopularity of the US inside Pakistan.

Stay tuned for further developments in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, especially when it comes to actions that are based on the collection of intelligence.

Of course, if you want to disregard my speculation entirely, then Nabil could have been fired because another of his responsibilities covers preventing green on blue attacks. Given the huge spike in those attacks, his firing would make complete sense but would run counter to the charge of “neighboring intelligence agencies” being involved.