

KARZAI: NATO CAUSED LOT OF SUFFERING AND DEATH, YET AFGHANISTAN IS NOT SECURE

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Last week, we learned that Hamid Karzai's strong objection to the US continuing to control death squads inside Afghanistan after the NATO mission officially concludes at the end of 2014 seemed likely to scuttle the US and Afghanistan finalizing the bilateral security agreement that is under negotiation. In a further sign that the agreement now appears to be dead, Karzai unleashed some of his strongest criticism of NATO and the US to date in an interview with BBC:

"On the security front the entire Nato exercise was one that caused Afghanistan a lot of suffering, a lot of loss of life, and no gains because the country is not secure," he said.

He said Nato had incorrectly focused the fight on Afghan villages rather than Taliban safe havens in Pakistan.

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"I am not happy to say that there is partial security. That's not what we are seeking. What we wanted was absolute security and a clear-cut war against terrorism," Mr Karzai said of the Nato campaign.

Unsurprisingly, I have already started seeing grumblings about how ungrateful Karzai is. But really, how could anyone honestly expect him to

be grateful for “a lot of suffering, a lot of loss of life”, when these losses have not achieved the stated mission of security?

Because of these bluntly honest remarks, Karzai also will be attacked by US apologists for his corruption. But his response to the widespread corruption in his government also is sobering and in need of consideration by the chattering classes inside the Beltway:

“Our government is weak and ineffective in comparison to other governments, we’ve just begun,” Mr Karzai said. “But the big corruption, the hundreds of millions of dollars of corruption, it was not Afghan. Now everybody knows that. It was foreign.

“The contracts, the subcontracts, the blind contracts given to people, money thrown around to buy loyalties, money thrown around to buy submissiveness of Afghan government officials, to policies and designs that the Afghans would not agree to. That was the major part of corruption,” he said.

“Goodness”, the chattering class will claim, “we never could have anticipated that all those investments in Afghan security could have turned into opportunities for looting”. Yeah, nobody (and that makes John Sopko and his crew into definite nobodies) could have expected all that money to find its way out of the country and into bank accounts controlled by Afghan bigwigs.

Coverage in the New York Times of Karzai’s remarks has this to say about Karzai’s observation that if an agreement cannot be reached, NATO forces “can leave”:

It would be logistically impossible for European powers to stay on in Afghanistan if no deal was struck with the United States. American and European officials have also said that billions of dollars in aid on which Afghanistan

depends – the country's own revenue covers only about 20 percent of its budget – will be in jeopardy if all foreign military forces depart.

The problem with that smug approach by Washington is that Afghanistan is continuing to make its own deals for a more reliable income stream than endless war. Today's Khaama Press has this interesting announcement:

Officials from the ministry of mines of Afghanistan on Tuesday announced that three major firms were awarded oil and gas extraction projects in northern Afghanistan.

The officials further added that the firms will invest \$12 billion based on an agreement which was signed between the Afghan government and the three firms in northern Mazar-e-Sharif city of Afghanistan.

How big is the oil opportunity in the Afghan-Tajik basin where this deal was made? Big enough that the revenue coming to Afghanistan could meet a significant portion of its expenses:

With oil hovering around \$100 a barrel, an output of 250,000 bpd would earn Afghanistan about \$9.1 billion a year. That would be roughly half the country's gross domestic product of \$20 billion in 2011, according to the World Bank.

And the oil deal announced today appears to be small potatoes when compared to the gas deal that already is in place:

The country also has an estimated 59 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves, about half that of the proven reserves in neighboring Iraq, according to BP.

The gas deal went to China National Petroleum Company in late 2011. The same article from which I pulled these revenue estimates was announcing in July of 2012 that Exxon had bid on the Afghan-Tajik basin oil deal. We learned in November of 2012 (hmm, some dirty hippie starting talking that very same month about how a SOFA seemed unlikely) that Exxon was not on the short list of companies as Afghanistan progressed toward awarding the contracts. The winners, from the Khaama Press article today:

He said the international companies include Turkish Petroleum International Company (TPIC), Dragon Oil from United Arab Emirates.

An Afghan oil and gas company, Ghanzanfar Group is also one of the firms which was awarded the project, and the firms will start extraction work within the next three to five years.

With Western firms shut out the largest contracts for oil and gas in Afghanistan, don't look for a lot of pushback on Karzai's observation that coalition forces "can leave". Only the defense contractors are likely to object at this point.