

RELEASE IN FULL

From: Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>
Sent: Wednesday, April 27, 2011 8:06 AM
To: H
Subject: Fw: Karzai Told to Dump U.S. (Wall Street Journal)

From: OpsNewsTicker
Sent: Wednesday, April 27, 2011 08:01 AM
To: NEWS-Afghanistan; NEWS-Mahogany; NEWS-Pakistan; NEWS-SCA
Cc: SES-O_Shift-II; SES-O_OS; SES-O_Shift-III; SES-O_SWO
Subject: Karzai Told to Dump U.S. (Wall Street Journal)

By MATTHEW ROSENBERG

Pakistan is lobbying Afghanistan's president against building a long-term strategic partnership with the U.S., urging him instead to look to Pakistan—and its Chinese ally—for help in striking a peace deal with the Taliban and rebuilding the economy, Afghan officials say.

The pitch was made at an April 16 meeting in Kabul by Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani, who bluntly told Afghan President Hamid Karzai that the Americans had failed them both, according to Afghans familiar with the meeting. Mr. Karzai should forget about allowing a long-term U.S. military presence in his country, Mr. Gilani said, according to the Afghans. Pakistan's bid to cut the U.S. out of Afghanistan's future is the clearest sign to date that, as the nearly 10-year war's endgame begins, tensions between Washington and Islamabad threaten to scuttle America's prospects of ending the conflict on its own terms.

With the bulk of U.S.-led coalition troops slated to withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of 2014, the country's neighbors, including Pakistan, Iran, India and Russia, are beginning to jockey for influence, positioning themselves for Afghanistan's post-American era.

Pakistan enjoys particular leverage in Afghanistan because of its historic role in fostering the Taliban movement and its continuing support for the Afghan Taliban insurgency. Washington's relations with Pakistan, ostensibly an ally, have reached their lowest point in years following a series of missteps on both sides.

Pakistani officials say they no longer have an incentive to follow the American lead in their own backyard. "Pakistan is sole guarantor of its own interest," said a senior Pakistani official. "We're not looking for anyone else to protect us, especially the U.S. If they're leaving, they're leaving and they should go."

Mr. Karzai is wavering on Pakistan's overtures, according to Afghans familiar with his thinking, with pro- and anti-American factions at the presidential palace trying to sway him to their sides.

The leaks about what went on at the April 16 meeting officials appear to be part of that effort. Afghans in the pro-U.S. camp who shared details of the meeting with The Wall Street Journal said they did so to prompt the U.S. to move faster toward securing the strategic partnership agreement, which is intended to spell out the relationship between the two countries after 2014. "The longer they wait...the more time Pakistan has to secure its interests," said one of the pro-U.S. Afghan officials.

A spokesman for Mr. Karzai, Waheed Omar, said: "Pakistan would not make such demands. But even if they did, the Afghan government would never accept it."

Some U.S. officials said they had heard details of the Kabul meeting, and presumed they were informed about Mr. Gilani's entreaties in part, as one official put it, to "raise Afghanistan's asking price" in the partnership talks. That asking price could include high levels of U.S. aid after 2014. The U.S. officials sought to play down the significance of the Pakistani proposal. Such overtures were to be expected at the start of any negotiations, they said; the idea of China taking a leading role in Afghanistan was fanciful at best, they noted.

Yet in a reflection of U.S. concerns about Pakistan's overtures, the commander of the U.S.-led coalition, Gen. David Petraeus, has met Mr. Karzai three times since April 16, in part to reassure the Afghan leader that he has America's support, and to nudge forward progress on the partnership deal, said Afghan and U.S. officials.

The Afghan president, meanwhile, has expressed distrust of American intentions in his country, and has increasingly lashed out against the behavior of the U.S. military. Afghanistan's relations with Pakistani are similarly fraught, though Mr. Karzai has grown closer to Pakistan's leaders over the past year. Still, many Afghans see their neighbor as meddlesome and controlling and fear Pakistani domination once America departs.

Formal negotiations on the so-called Strategic Partnership Declaration began in March. Details of talks between U.S. and Afghan negotiators so far remain sketchy. The most hotly contested issue is the possibility of long-term U.S. military bases remaining in Afghanistan beyond 2014 to buttress and continue training Afghan forces and carry on the fight against al Qaeda.

U.S. officials fear that without a stabilizing U.S. hand in Afghanistan after 2014, the country would be at risk for again becoming a haven for Islamist militants seeking to strike the West.

The opening of talks in March was enough to raise alarms among Afghanistan's neighbors. Senior Iranian and Russian officials quickly made treks to Kabul to express their displeasure at the possibility of a U.S. military presence after 2014, Afghan officials said. The Taliban have always said they wouldn't sign on to any peace process as long as foreign forces remain.

Yet no other party has been as direct, and as actively hostile to the planned U.S.-Afghan pact, as the Pakistanis. Along with Prime Minister Gilani, the Pakistani delegation at the April 16 meeting included Lt. Gen. Ahmad Shuja Pasha, chief of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence spy agency. U.S. officials accuse the ISI of aiding the Taliban, despite it being the Central Intelligence Agency's partner in the fight against Islamist militants in Pakistan. Pakistani officials deny the accusations.

After routine pleasantries about improving bilateral ties and trade, Mr. Gilani told Mr. Karzai that the U.S. had failed both their countries, and that its policy of trying to open peace talks while at the same time fighting the Taliban made no sense, according to Afghans familiar with the meeting.

Mr. Gilani repeatedly referred to America's "imperial designs," playing to a theme that Mr. Karzai has himself often embraced in speeches. He also said that, to end the war, Afghanistan and Pakistan needed to take

"ownership" of the peace process, according to Afghans familiar with what was said at the meeting. Mr. Gilani added that America's economic problems meant it couldn't be expected to support long-term regional development. A better partner would be China, which Pakistanis call their "all-weather" friend, he said, according to participants in the meeting. He said the strategic partnership deal was ultimately an Afghan decision. But, he added, neither Pakistan nor other neighbors were likely to accept such a pact.

Mr. Gilani's office didn't return calls seeking comment. A senior ISI official, speaking about the meeting, said: "It is us who should be cheesed because we are totally out of the loop on what the Americans are doing in Afghanistan.... We have been telling President Karzai that we will support any and all decisions that you take for Afghanistan as long as the process is Afghan-led and not dictated by outside interests."

Although a U.S. ally, Pakistan has its own interests in Afghanistan, believing it needs a pliant government in Kabul to protect its rear flank from India. Pakistani officials regularly complain of how India's influence over Afghanistan has grown in the past decade. Some Pakistani officials say the presence of U.S. and allied forces is the true problem in the region, not the Taliban.

NewsTickers alert senior Department officials to breaking news. This item appears as it did in its original publication and does not contain analysis or commentary by Department sources.