



The motivations behind Afghan Taliban leaders arrest in Pakistan

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The Christian Science Monitor reported that Pakistani officials had arrested seven out of fifteen members of the Afghan Taliban leadership council. Among the arrested leaders were, Mullah Abdul Ghani Beradar including many others who have still not been confirmed.² Since the ousting of the Taliban regime in 2001, Pakistan has been playing a double game, protecting the Taliban at one end while displaying their role, albeit an ambiguous one at that, as a frontline state in the war on terror. The Afghan government has repeatedly told Pakistan that the leadership of the Afghan Taliban and its operations are based Pakistani terrain. But Pakistani authorities continuously denied and ignored these claims until the recent arrests which prompted Pakistani officials to accept the fact that senior Taliban leaders did exist within their boundaries. As a result, Pakistan is beginning to acknowledge that time has come for them to considering taking serious actions against these militant networks residing in their country. These arrests clearly show that the Taliban have in the past and are currently using Pakistan as a base to launch attacks in Afghanistan. Now the question that arises from this incident is twofold; firstly, why has Pakistan been so reluctant to investigate reports given to them from Afghanistan that had confirmed the existence of the Taliban bases in Pakistan? And secondly, is there significance in the timing of these arrests and the proposition of the reconciliation and reintegration initiative planned by Afghan President, Hamid Karzai in which dialogue and reprieve are core components in possibly striking a deal with between his administration and the Taliban leaders?

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² The Christian Science Monitor, Half of Afghanistan Taliban leadership arrested in Pakistan, 24th February, 2010

Pakistan's sudden change in attitude towards Afghan Taliban

Though some might view Pakistan's sudden change in attitude a remarkable shift from its previous policy of supporting and providing resources to the Afghan Taliban, it is suggested that Pakistan's present stance could have been dictated by their newly adopted perception of the Afghan Taliban as a direct threat to its national security. Hence, now the Pakistani government has decided to cooperate in true manner with the Afghan government and NATO forces to contain the Taliban movement on their side of the border. However, this is not always quite the case. On 22nd February 2010, Afghan German online reported that Mullah Beradar was acting independently of Pakistan, and other Taliban leaders which had caused friction between him and Mullah Omer in the Quetta Shura.³ The Quetta Shura consists of the most senior leaderships of the Taliban and its role is extremely significant in the overall conflict in Afghanistan as it is more ideologically and militaristically focused. Also, Taliban commanders fighting in Afghanistan get their resources and military direction from the Quetta Shura. There are difference between Mullah Beradar and Mullah Omer which were reportedly so strong that it almost needed the collapse of the Shura itself. Instead, it this friction ends up dividing local Taliban commanders into two groups. Certain commanders followed Mullah Omer and others followed Mullah Beradar. In addition, Mullah Beradar was against foreign Taliban members particularly the existence of Panjabi militants who were among the ranks of the Afghan Taliban because according to him their presence damaged the reputation of Taliban among local supporters in Afghanistan. Most Taliban leaders are arrested in Karachi a long distance from their usual sanctuaries in tribal areas along the Af-Pak border belt. One of the reasons of this could be that the Taliban are fleeing from U.S. drones attacks that happened in the tribal areas and are instead retreating in cities like Karachi where perhaps the government's efforts are not as aggressive in containing militants.

³ <http://www.afghan-german.com>

The arrests targeted key Taliban leaders

Furthermore, the arrests of the mentioned Taliban leaders seem to have been selective in nature, since the Pak Army only went after members of the Quetta Shura playing ignorant to the other militant groups that also operate from Pakistan and who are just as detrimental to the peace and stability in the region. These include groups such as, Jalaludin Haqani's network and Gulbaddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami both of which have had historically strong relations with the Pak Army.

Experts believe that Pakistan arrested Mullah Beradar because he indirectly started a peace negotiation process with the Afghan government without informing the ISI which many have suggested cooperation with both the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban groups. An Afghan official, who wanted to remain anonymous, stated that the arrests were good news but it could have some negative impacts for the Afghan government since they were depending on Mullah Beradar to start the process of negotiations between them and the Taliban's Quetta Shura members. Hence in sight of this, the arrests of these Taliban leaders came at an undesired time with key personalities that were viewed as strategic to persuading other leaders of the Shura to enter peace talks with the Afghan government. The reason for this could have been Pakistan's annoyance for being alienating from the peace talks on behalf of both the Afghan government and the insurgency. Looking at Pakistan's long battle to sustain their influence in Afghanistan, some strategists have stated that the Pakistani government did not want the Taliban to act independent of them so to maintain their control over the insurgency in Afghanistan. Therefore, negotiations with Taliban without Pakistan's involvement would mean a loss of strategic interests in Afghanistan as those Taliban members who once cooperated with Pakistan will now opt to join the Afghan government. The arrests of these key Taliban figures could most definitely be an obstacle for the peace process seeing as how Mullah Beradar functioned as a link between Mullah Omer, Taliban field commanders and the Afghan government.

Intelligence gathered from arrests must be shared with Afghanistan

It is worth mentioning here, that Mullah Beradar also had first hand information about the Taliban leadership could have shed light on the linkages between the Taliban and the Pakistani intelligence agency, ISI if he had reconciled with the Afghan government. This might be one reason that provoked his arrest. Moreover, from this event one can also deduce Pakistan's reluctance to deport the detained Taliban leaders back to Afghanistan. It is reported that the information leading to Mawlawi Kabir's (former Taliban governor for eastern Ningarhar province) arrest was obtained from

Mullah Beradar. Alternatively, the arrest of these Taliban leaders could weaken the moral, and or discourage the remaining Taliban leaders to participate in the reintegration and reconciliation plan offered by President Karzai. If the Pakistani authorities do not quickly share information from these arrests to the Afghan government the collected intelligence could become useless. This is because, any significant information regarding the whereabouts of prominent leaders or any plans of future attacks could be easily altered by the Taliban. Pakistan may not want to take any steps that may jeopardize its relationship with the Taliban, hence transferring the militants to Afghan and NATO officials could potentially break the trust factor between the two.

Why was Pakistan hesitant in tracing Afghan Taliban in the past?

Another reason for Pakistan's reluctance in taking serious steps against the Afghan Taliban in its territory could be their dependence upon the Afghan Taliban to counter India's growing influence in Afghanistan. Both India and Pakistan have struggled to enhance their influence while limiting the others in Afghanistan. They started a kind of proxy war in Afghanistan after the ousting of the Taliban regime in 2001. In the present scenario, Afghanistan is part of a conflict between India and Pakistan and in many ways it has replaced Kashmir as another battleground for the two rivals. If the Pakistani government transfers the arrested to the Afghan government, it would signal their good intention of arresting. Though, despite the Spokesman of the Afghan Interior Ministry, Zamarai Bashary claiming that Pakistan had agreed to return Mullah Beradar along with the other Taliban leaders to Afghanistan,⁴ the Pakistani Interior Minister, Rehman Malik said no such deal or exchange had been made.⁵ This is a disappointing sign of Pakistan's cooperation in fighting the insurgency.

U.S. pressure on Pakistan to act against militancy

Another interpretation of these arrests could be that Pakistan has come under pressure from the U.S. to cooperate with NATO in tackling the insurgency. Since it is assumed that if Pakistan fails to cooperate this time around, they might end up losing the chance of salvaging its interests in Afghanistan where their rival India is working tirelessly to extend its reach and strategic interests. Secondly, Pakistan might also lose their friendship with the U.S. which will seriously affect Pakistan seeing as how their military is highly dependent on U.S. funds and technology.

⁴ Xinhua, Pakistan to handover Taliban deputy chief to Afghanistan: Official, 25th February, 2010

⁵ CNN, Confusion over Afghan militant transfer deal, 24th February, 2010

In conclusion, it can be determined that the long-term consequences of these arrests are unclear and consequently depend on various variables as mentioned above. If Pakistani officials get useful information from the arrested Taliban leaders including Mullah Abdul Ghani Beradar and communicate it with Afghan and NATO officials it could prove positive in reconciling with the Taliban leadership. Otherwise, the insurgency has the potential of replacing one leader with another that is more ideologically adherent to extremist principles of jihad and militancy.