

(1) Afghanistan

TAPI simply cannot exist without Taliban approval. According to a statement by Taliban spokesman Qari Mohammad Yusuf Ahmadi, "the Islamic Emirate views this project as an important element of the country's economic infrastructure and believes its proper implementation will benefit the Afghan people. We announce our cooperation in providing security for the project in areas under our control." Another Taliban faction, led by Mullah Mohammad Rasool, also let it be known, via spokesman Mullah Abdul Manan Niazi, that, "we will not allow any group or state to disrupt this project."

When Ahmadi claims TAPI was initially planned when the Taliban were in power in Kabul from 1996 to 2001, he's correct. The Taliban were wined and dined in Houston in 1997, as I reported for Asia Times, but nothing came out of it. The haggling was all about transit fees.

All of the above is code for the Taliban getting their cut - which happens to have been the key point of contention ever since the first Clinton administration decided the then rulers of Afghanistan were worth doing business with.

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For Kabul, the game from now on is about providing adequate security - from construction to operation. After all, this is a major job-creating project bound to involve 30,000 Afghan workers and yield US\$500 million annually for Kabul in transit rights. Rumors swirled in Herat about a bunch of unidentified jihadis, allegedly trained in Iran, planning to attack the inauguration ceremony. There has been no confirmation whatsoever that this is the case - either from Afghan or Iranian sources. Even President Ghani rejected the outlandish idea that Tehran would sabotage TAPI.

The rumors should be traced to a Pipelineistan mini-Cold War between TAPI and IPI - the competing Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline, which, under pressure from the Bush and Obama administrations, was eventually reduced to IP. (AT)

(2) Ousted Afghan

rally was to coincide with an international conference in Kabul Wednesday where President Ghani will present his government's comprehensive plan for promoting peace with the Taliban-led armed opposition. Noor said the protest has been postponed to ensure it does not hamper the "Kabul Process" meeting which is being held to help Afghanistan.

His remarks came a day after visiting U.S. permanent representative to NATO, Kay Bailey Hutchison, stressed the importance of peacefully resolving political differences. She told reporters in Kabul on Saturday that during her four-day visit to Afghanistan she and several colleagues from NATO traveled to Balkh province.

"What we are doing is saying to our Afghan leaders, settle this, let's go forward. We are not taking a role in it but we are certainly saying this is part of reconciliation and moving forward," Hutchison told reporters.

General John Nicholson, who commands U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan, also spoke at Saturday's news conference and strongly urged Afghan political leaders not to allow political differences to hamper security efforts.

"We respect your political process and your political evolution, we respect your politicians. As a military commander, my only request would be that politics not undermine security and we keep in mind our primary goal of helping this country get to a peaceful reconciliation," Nicholson noted.

The political dispute threatens to undermine Afghan parliamentary elections later this year.

Noor in his speech Sunday again accused Ghani's administration of not resolving any of the issues facing the country, including Taliban and ISIS insurgencies, rising ethnic tensions, and economic challenges facing poverty-stricken Afghans.

"The wave of resistance in the wake of my dismissal is not about Balkh. It's about resisting the rule of a small clique and to find solutions for challenges

facing our people," asserted the fired governor.

Noor reiterated that his Jamiat-e-Islami party, which shares power in Ghani's central government, has made a set of demands and will not back down from it. The powerful non-Pashtun politician wants among other things powers to appoint his successor and the provincial police chief.

Last week the governor of Samangan province, which borders Balkh, also refused to accept removal orders from the president but reversed his decision days later after Ghani reportedly promised him another governmental position.

Under President Donald Trump's Afghan war strategy, U.S.-led troops are increasing battlefield pressure on the Taliban-led insurgency to contain its influence and force it to come to the negotiating table for peace talks with the Kabul government.

The U.S. strategy has witnessed increasing intensity in airstrikes against the insurgents and the Taliban has also retaliated with increased attacks, including suicide bombings.

The insurgent group, which controls or contests about 44 percent of Afghanistan's territory, has refused to engage in any peace talks with the government and insists on holding such a dialogue with the U.S. only. The Taliban maintains that only Washington, and not what it calls the "puppet" Afghan leadership, can determine the fate of the war in Afghanistan.

U.S. officials, however, have called on the Taliban to directly engage in a peace and reconciliation process with what they say is the legitimate Afghan government. (VoA)

(3) Afghanistan

will increase the number of schools and will focus on the quality of education and equip them with more facilities.

In the first phase, Turkey will spend \$5 million USD to bring about systematic changes in these schools and this amount will be increased to 20\$ million USD in the coming years, said the MoE. "With the transition, there will be no change in the curricula of the school and more learning programs will be undertaken for students. Entry exams will be conducted across Afghanistan and there will be a 20 percent reduction in fees. Free education will be considered to children of martyrs of the security institutions," said minister of education Mohammad Ibrahim Shinwari.

"Based on the agreement, the number of schools will be increased to 28 and ten new technical and vocational schools will be built. The number of students at these schools will be increased to 18,000 in ten years," added Shinwari. Meanwhile, Turkish Education Minister Ismet Yilmaz has said that his country will continue its cooperation with the Afghan education sector and that Turkey will strongly abide by the provision of the agreement signed between the countries on the transition of the Afghan-Turk schools.

Turkey claims that these schools are run by Turkish cleric Muhammed Fethullah Gülen who is currently in exile in the United States.

Turkey blamed Gülen for orchestrating the failed military takeover in 2016. However, former officials from the Afghan-Turk schools have said the schools had nothing to do with politics and they only provide education to Afghan children.

On Monday, parents of the Afghan-Turk school association called on the Afghan government to keep the schools and students out of politics.

"We maintain the right to raise our voice against the illegal decision made by the government, I again call on the president and the government leadership not to oppress our children," said Mohammad Yusuf Pashtun, head of Afghan-Turk parents' association. According to some reports, the Turkish government reportedly offered a number of incentives in exchange for taking control of these schools.

The incentives reportedly include:

- Student fees to be cut by %20
- Scholarships to be given to some students
- Turkey will consider doubling the number of schools in the country
- Turkey will include languages including English in the curriculum
- Turkey will bring in new, highly qualified teachers
- Turkey will invest \$5 million USD in the first phase so as to improve facilities at schools
- Turkey to plan a ten-year education program to increase student numbers and school buildings

Afghanistan and Turkey have meanwhile not signed any agreement on the fate or repatriation of Turkey nationals currently employed at the schools.

Following the Afghan government's move to arrest three teachers from Afghan-Turk Schools in December 2017, other staff members said they are now refugees in Afghanistan and that any extradition to Turkey by the Afghan government would be illegal. The deputy head of Afghan-Turk Schools, Ahmad Fawad Haidari, rejected the allegations that the schools are part of organizations based in Turkey.

He said the schools have no links to any foreign organization or any organization in other countries.

Three Afghan-Turk teachers, including one Afghan national, and a Turkish businessman were arrested by the National Directorate of Security forces in December 2017.

Afghan Turk International School & Colleges are members of a chain of Turkish educational institutions established in 1995 and believed to be run under the auspices of Afghan Turk International Cag Educational Foundation for the pursuit of excellence in education in Afghanistan.

Currently up to 8,000 students are enrolled at these schools, which has a teacher count of about 800. It is not however clear how many of these teachers are Turkish nationals.

There are eleven Afghan-Turk schools operating across Afghanistan and thousands of students have graduated from these schools over the years. (Tolo news)

(4) Taliban Sniper

what he did.

"My name is Faridullah, I am a resident of Sayed Abad district and I was working for Mawlawi Habibullah group for almost three months and during that time we targeted police and army and I wanted to stop these crimes therefore I made contact with the police chief and joined the peace process," said Faridullah. The Taliban has not yet commented on the incident. (Tolo news)

(5) Senior US

that attack our troops in Afghanistan," she said.

"That game is not acceptable to this administration. We expect far more cooperation from Pakistan in the fight against terrorism," she added.

"The president is willing to go to great lengths to stop all funding from Pakistan as they continue to harbour terrorists," she said.

Shortly afterwards, the White House said it wanted to see Pakistan do more to fight terrorism and that it would likely announce further actions to pressure Islamabad. (Monitoring Desk)

(6) We will Win

Afghan defense minister, Tariq Shah Bahrami assured that Afghan army has no affiliation with any political movements in the country.

"I call on everyone of you to be honest, loyal and committed to the national interests of your country," Bahrami told the army officers. "You must be disciplined, brave and patriot officers." (ATN)

(7) Taliban Wage

provincial capital eight miles south.

For everyone else, the battle that mid-February morning was just beginning. As the Taliban continue an aggressive campaign to control territory across Afghanistan - skipping their traditional winter fighting break while thousands of new U.S. forces arrive to train and strengthen the Afghan security forces - one of their more surprising and successful targets has been Farah province, a remote western region that shares a border with Iran.

The insurgents hold pieces of strategic border provinces such as Kunduz and Helmand but have failed to take permanent control of their capitals despite repeated attempts. Now they are turning to more far-flung, less well-defended provinces, including Farah and Badakhshan. An isolated farming region, Farah has less than 1 million inhabitants and is rarely visited by journalists.

The Taliban have been active in Farah for several years, but the current intense assault began two months ago. In January, they blocked highways to Farah City, seized large portions of neighboring Posht-e-Rod district and overran several security outposts, killing at least 43 policemen and wounding more than 50. Emboldened, they crossed the dried Farah Rud River, a natural barrier to the city, and

attacked a suburban outpost.

The deputy provincial police chief, leading a reinforcement unit to defend the besieged men, was killed when a roadside bomb exploded near his Humvee. In other cases, outposts fell before help could arrive. "The Taliban reached the city's gates," said Amir Mohammad Ayobi, an elder in the capital. "For a week or two, they overran police posts every night." He said local forces were not motivated to fight, and that robbery and theft surged in the capital as the conflict neared. Families fled to neighboring provinces amid the chaos, and angry protests broke out.

The official reaction was swift. The provincial governor resigned, and the police chief was fired. President Ashraf Ghani appointed replacements, and hundreds of reinforcements were sent to prevent the city from falling, including elite Afghan army commandos and U.S. and Italian advisory troops.

In the past several weeks, Afghan ground forces backed by airstrikes have fought to retake lost territory and reopen key roads. But the Taliban have long been entrenched in the province, operating freely in remote and unpoliced areas.

By some estimates, the insurgents now control 60 percent of Farah, while the government controls only the capital and 10 district centers, some of which are too dangerous for district officials to visit. Nationwide, the insurgents control at least 13 percent of the country's 407 districts and are contesting up to one-third.

Authorities in Farah refused to provide casualty statistics, but documents provided at a hospital showed that in the last 10 months, the bodies of 225 policemen, 52 soldiers and 39 civilians were sent there, along with 230 policemen and 52 soldiers treated for wounds.

Despite the heavy deployment of reinforcements, clashes continue in some districts. Farah City has largely returned to normal. Last week, during a visit by a Washington Post reporter, the streets were crowded and shops open. Army and police vehicles patrolled regularly, and attack helicopters circled periodically overhead.

Nighttime patrols were also visible, and late one evening the new governor's chief bodyguard, Maiwand Alozai, took a spin around the capital in his white Toyota Hilux truck, music blaring loudly from the speakers, and stopped to chat at police check posts and late-night groceries. (Stripes)

(8) Syndicates at

departments represented at the port were prepared to speak to TOLONews. While on his way back to Jalalabad from Torkham, a security source informed Hamid he would be wise to change vehicles and that he was at risk of being ambushed along the way as the border syndicates had links with armed groups.

Hamid and the cameraman duly changed vehicles and the driver of the second vehicle confirmed the syndicates had strong links to armed groups in the area.

The driver, who was concerned about his own safety, asked Hamid to keep his identity secret.

"They all wear uniforms that have the same color and it is not known to which group they belong. They are armed and their faces are covered except for their eyes. They present themselves on the streets as Taliban, Daesh and thieves," said the driver.

The interior ministry meanwhile acknowledged that the Torkham syndicates have links to armed groups and said in the past few weeks 10 people have been arrested in connection with illegal activities at the port.

However, since the arrests have been made, a marked increase in insecurity along the Jalalabad-Torkham highway has been reported, the MoI said.

"They (corrupt people) have ties with criminals and dangerous groups. Our information and assessments show that even some of these corrupt people are paying money to the Taliban," said Interior Minister Wais Ahmad Barmak. A number of traders at Torkhamport said illegal activities was just one of many challenges they faced.

"We had certificates, but our work was not done. Our truck waited at the port for 42 and 43 days and finally the whole load went rotten," said Farid Ahmad, a trader.

Agriculture, irrigation and livestock ministry meanwhile said Pakistan is responsible for the quality of goods certificates for vegetables and fruit at Torkham customs.

"Through official channels we had

asked Pakistan to introduce a certificate system to prevent ongoing problems for the traders," agriculture ministry spokesman Akbar Rustami said.

Afghanistan does not have the capacity to run quality tests on vegetables and fruit exported to other countries. As a result, agriculture ministry's office at Torkham only signs and stamps the certificates that are produced by traders and drivers.

TOLONews' footage last month however showed that an employee for the agriculture ministry at the port refused to accept Pakistani certificates and was sending drivers to some agents at the port to buy fake certificates. (Tolo news)

(9) CEO Announces

foundational factor across the board," he said.

"Afghanistan has, and continues to consolidate its human rights gains. We are now honored to be an elected member of this grand Council - an opportunity to collectively promote and protect the human rights values and principles across continents, for all peoples," he said.

The CEO said Afghanistan has made significant progress to catch up with international norms and in taking steps to implement them in society.

"Unfortunately, events beyond our control interrupted that process which was restored after 2002. Since then, we have made significant strides to catch up with international norms and apply them to our society," said Abdullah.

He said however it is not easy for a country that is still under assault and in a state of continued warfare to overcome almost 30 years of various forms of disruptions and institutional weaknesses.

The CEO meanwhile thanked the international community for considering permanent membership to Afghanistan in the council.

"On behalf of the (National) Unity Government, I thank all nations who supported our candidacy, and today as a member of this Council, Afghanistan very much looks forward to working with all other members on the promotion and protection of human rights as a global public good," he said. We have endorsed the basic pillars of sustainable development, such as economic, social, as well as environmental goals and the integrated principles of peace, justice, and institutional development.

The CEO said that despite weak infrastructures and closure of schools in conflict-hit provinces, today more than nine million children go to school, almost all children receive vaccinations across the country and recruitment of children in military formations is forbidden.

"Over the past 16 years, we have tried to change our children's condition for the better through investment in education, health care, public awareness and laws that protect and prevent abuse. In my country, children have been the subject of various violations, especially at times of heightened conflict in the form of terrorism, indiscriminate violence, displacement, lawlessness and poverty." (Tolo news)

(10) Pakistan Contacts

and articles against the armed forces and the 'sovereignty of Pakistan'.

The complainants alleged Haqqani was responsible for the Memogate scandal and issued visas to CIA and Indian agents while serving as Pakistani ambassador to the US.

They also claimed Haqqani had defamed Pakistan in his books, "which proves that he is a traitor".

Haqqani meanwhile described the Supreme Court order for his arrest as "propaganda antics", Dawn News reported.

In a statement issued by Haqqani, he said: "It is time for Pakistan to stop protecting internationally recognized terrorists such as Hafiz Saeed, Dawood Ibrahim, Siraj Haqqani and Masood Azhar instead of using legal devices for domestic propaganda against dissidents and political critics."

Pakistan's Today reported the Memogatescandal erupted in 2011 when Pakistani-American businessman Mansoor Ijaz claimed to have received an 'anti-army' memo from Haqqani for the then-US joint chiefs chairman Admiral Mike Mullen.

In this regard, a court notice has already been issued to Haqqani and other respondents of the case - including former prime minister Nawaz Sharif. The scandal, taken to the Supreme Court by then opposition leader Nawaz Sharif, led to Haqqani's resignation, Pakistan's Today reported. (Tolo news)