

Confidential

RUSSIA

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Vadim Kozyulin reports from Islamabad, Galiya Ibragimova reports from Tashkent:

AFGHANISTAN: WHAT TO EXPECT, AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR RUSSIA?

The *Taliban* have already won the war. They will remain in Afghanistan, with or without the Americans. Their tactic of refusing to meet the Americans' tanks and aviation head on and waging guerrilla warfare instead has proved a complete success. They have kept their armed strength intact and learned how to keep a high-tech army at bay. It is the *Taliban*, not the coalition forces who now dictate the terms of the negotiations. These terms, apart from an unconditional withdrawal of the US troops, also include a demand less well-known to the general public. The *Taliban* are prepared to negotiate directly with the Americans, but not with Karzai, whom they dismiss as a mere stooge. The *Taliban* is the reality everyone will have to deal with in the post-American Afghanistan.

In order to wield power in the diverse community that is Afghanistan, one needs to have armed strength, money, diplomatic talent and support from friendly neighbors. The international community will try to deprive the *Taliban* of all that. But neither will the central government wield any real power in Afghanistan. The external players who will agree to take part in the post-conflict settlement will need to establish contacts with a whole number of various powers in the country besides Kabul. Yesterday's guerrillas could then become legitimate politicians.

MODERATE EXTREMISTS. In the opinion of the US command, all the militants in Afghanistan except for *Al Qaeda* and foreign *Taliban* militants have a chance for amnesty. The three large rebel groups that will most likely become part of the political landscape in Afghanistan once the war is over include: the *Taliban* itself, led by Mullah Omar, which is especially strong in Kandahar Province; The Siraj Haqqani group, which is strong in the southeast of the country; the Hezb-e Islami party of Afghanistan led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, based in the northeast of the country.

The most dangerous and competent group of militants is led by *Siraj Haqqani*, a *Taliban* field commander. This group is based in the North Waziristan province in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Haqqani is personally acquainted with Bin Laden and speaks excellent Arabic. That gives him a lot of credit among the Arab militants in Afghanistan. He is a diehard advocate of global Jihad against the West. The bulk of Haqqani's armed strength are ethnic Pashtuns from the Zadran tribe, which is hostile to the government of Hamid Karzai. But his group also includes fighters from the Arab countries, Turkey, Uzbekistan and the North Caucasus. He has lost several family members to American attacks. His thirst for revenge will probably make any dialogue with the central government impossible.

The Haqqani group has the backing of Mullah Omar himself. But Pakistan also supports the group in the hope of using it as a pulling string in the upcoming jostling for position in the post-American Afghanistan.

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar won his reputation during the 1979-1989 war, when he received material and financial assistance from the US secret services and Saudi Arabia. He fought against the *Taliban* and was defeated in 1995. But in 2002 he announced that he would work with the Talibs "until the foreign occupants are driven out of the country". The US Department of State has put him on the wanted list as an international terrorist. That forced Hekmatyar to go into radical opposition against the Karzai government and form a renewed Hezb-e Islami party. Hekmatyar has agreed to hold talks with Karzai, but he is not going to play by the Americans' rules. He has drawn up a road map that includes the withdrawal of coalition troops, the handover of security to the local army and police, amnesty for all political prisoners and, once all that has been done, parliamentary and regional elections.

Muhammad Omar, the founder and spiritual leader of the *Taliban* movement, does not have a proper education. But he was injured four times fighting the Najibullah regime. He is neither very charismatic nor a talented public speaker. But 1,200 Pushtun religious leaders have given him the title of the Leader of the Faithful and the Emir of Afghanistan, a symbol of power that no other Mujahideen leader can rival.

Some of the Taliban leaders are described as moderates, and representatives of the coalition of democratic Western countries are prepared to shake their hands. But the Western definition of the Taliban moderates is sure to shock any independent observer. Moderate means that while not declaring the goal of destroying America, these leaders merely lop off people's hands for stealing, people's noses and ears for shaving off their beards, stone them to death for adultery and hang them for homosexuality. The very fact that the West is now prepared to negotiate with those who would outlaw TV and radio, destroy all non-Islamic monuments and ban education for women demonstrates that America's self-confidence has driven the whole Western civilization into a very unpleasant situation.

KARZAI AND HIS TEAM. The United States have placed all their bets on Hamid Karzai. During the war against the Soviet occupation Karzai did not get his hands dirty with fighting in the field. He began his career in the financial sector, then joined the diplomatic service and eventually became deputy foreign minister in

the Rabbani government. In 2002 Loya Jirga, guarded by a squad of German soldiers, elected him the president of Afghanistan. He held on to his job during two dubious elections in 2004 and 2009.

Karzai hails from the influential Durrani tribe, which has always been well-represented in the Afghan government. But he has never enjoyed any great influence in that tribe itself. He is trying to

The existing balance of forces in Afghanistan is therefore quite similar to the situation back in the 1990s. The neighboring countries continue to support the Afghan groups that are close to them in terms of their religious beliefs and ethnic composition. The only new factor in this familiar situation is the possibility of China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization becoming involved in peaceful settlement.

The United States and members of the Western coalition will try to equip the Afghan territory with electronic monitoring systems, and an army of informants will be recruited from among the Afghan population. Washington will shoulder much of the financial burden of supporting the central government, but it will continue to put pressure on Afghanistan's neighbors to step up their involvement in keeping the peace process afloat.

Pakistan. Meanwhile, is finding itself in an increasingly ambiguous situation. On the one hand, it is trying to counter the spread of radical Islam. But on the other, it will have to help the Islamists in Afghanistan in order to counter the rise of India.

maintain the ethnic and tribal balance in his Cabinet, recruiting political heavyweights such as Marshal Qasim Fahim, the vice president who commands the loyalty of the (predominantly Tajik) officer corps.

Karzai's second vice president is Mohammad Karim Halili, who represents the interests of the Khazar tribe. The chief of the General Staff is Gen Abdul Rashid Dostum, the famous leader of the Northern Alliance's ethnic Uzbek troops. The defense minister is Abdul Rahim Wardak, a Pushtun with military background from the Wardak Province.

RUSSIA AND AFGHANISTAN.

Afghanistan in its current state provides a lot of opportunities to make a profit. Many companies, most of them American, have made a fortune catering to the

needs of the coalition troops in the country. America's partners have also secured a share of the pie.

About 30 percent of all the supplies for the US contingent in Afghanistan are delivered via the so-called northern network: the roads, railways and airways leading to Afghanistan via Central Asia. That network has helped the coalition to involve the Central Asian states in resolving the strategic tasks facing the United States and Europe in Afghanistan.

Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have leased their airports out to the coalitions for use as transport and logistics bases. The railway transit of non-military cargo via the Latvia-Russia-Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan-Afghanistan route also generates a steady stream of revenue. In fact, it has become possible to secure investment for any project in Central Asia if it can be linked in some way to the operation in Afghanistan.

Russia is quite capable of making its own financial contribution to peaceful settlement in Afghanistan. But the Kremlin does not want to play second fiddle to someone else's strategies. The part of the

Russian elite that has retained Soviet pride believes that it does not benefit Russia to become a pawn in a region where the country was a dominant player not so long ago.

So what would the eventual withdrawal of coalition troops from Afghanistan mean for Russia?

Nothing very bad, actually.

The pullout from Afghanistan will be a serious blow for America's reputation on the international arena. The US government will need all the moral and technical support it can get, especially from Afghanistan's neighbors. For Russia this will be a chance to show solidarity and strengthen its partnership with the United States. As the coalition nations gradually lose interest in Afghanistan, Moscow may have to assume the role of an informal coordinator of the anti-*Taliban* bloc. Russia has the largest stockpiles of weapons in the world. As such, can be a natural source of arms supplies to the Karzai government. The first deliveries of small arms and ammunition have already been made.

Russia will also have to review its relations with Pakistan. Islamabad will probably become the main channel of communications with the *Taliban* and the key mediator at any talks with the *Taliban* leaders. Also, the country has already become a large buyer of Russian helicopters and airborne weapons. The Afghan peaceful settlement will provide a powerful stimulus for a review and development of Russian-Pakistani relations. In Pakistan itself security problems are set to become even worse over the coming decade, so the country can become a large buyer of Russian weapons and special equipment. And if the peace process in Afghanistan succeeds, the trans-Afghan route from Pakistan to Russia via Central Asia will once again become open. That means that Pakistani goods will take just 11 days rather than the current 45 to reach the consumers in Russia.

The US pullout from Afghanistan will also bolster Russia's role as the Western outpost and the conductor of the interests of the Western civilization on the frontier with the Islamic world. Rivalry with the United States for influence in Central Asia will become much less intense. The Central Asian republics will need continuous support in the face of the Islamist threat from Afghanistan and Pakistan. That common threat will diminish the influence of the United States, China, Turkey and Iran in the region, and bolster Russia's positions. The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) will have a change to become a real mechanism of collective security. At the cost of relatively small arms supplies to the Central Asian states the Russian leadership will once again find itself in its accustomed role of the protector of the fraternal nations.

Moscow will have to spend a lot of resources on countering drugs trafficking. But cooperation in this area will be a useful way for the Kremlin to determine which of the government agencies in the Central Asian republics, India, Pakistan and Iran that can really do their job, and cultivate closer ties with them. These ties will become channels for exchanging accurate information about the situation in Afghanistan, about rebel troop movements, as well as their bases and their operational plans. Regionalizing the solutions to the drugs trafficking problem will open the way for

closer cooperation with countries in the region. Creating effective barriers to trafficking, cross-border cooperation, linking aid to achieving targets on reducing drugs production - all such measures will be doubly effective if they are taken collectively. Opening up CIS markets to Afghan agricultural produce could be a useful way of stimulating the farming of legal crops as an alternative to growing poppy in Afghanistan.

Try as it might to avoid spending its own money, Moscow will have to allocate funding for infrastructure projects in Afghanistan. But that will help it to build partnership with those players in Afghanistan who have real influence. By financing useful projects, Moscow will earn the right to demand strict accounting and stimulate the Afghan side to spend the aid money more efficiently.

Russia will receive tangible benefits from becoming involved in the Afghan peaceful settlement. It will be able to secure the loyalty of its arms customers in the country. Because the primary source of financing will be in the United States, Russian defense contractors (and in some cases Eastern European companies) will maintain their positions on the Afghan market for weapons, police equipment and special hardware. Otherwise that market would be snatched by Chinese manufacturers of copied Russian technology. Afghanistan will also become a steady source of repair and maintenance contracts.

There will be huge demand for training military specialists, policemen, engineers and administrators. As of May 2010, the coalition forces had only 23 percent of the required number of instructors. In this situation Russia could launch a whole network of training centers (some of them in the Central Asian republics, possibly under the CSTO auspices) and educate the best Afghan students in Russian universities.

The situation of a frozen conflict is well in line with Russia's interests. Russia's elite is now feeling nostalgic for its Soviet glory. It would be quite happy to freeze the existing unstable situation in Afghanistan. That would keep the Central Asian republics loyal to Moscow. The threat of extremism would push them into Russia's embrace, while the United States and Europe would foot the bills for cleaning up the territory from the *Taliban*.

The American scenario will hardly end up in a catastrophe because of the existing international consensus, which leaves almost no chances for a *Taliban* victory. But if the catastrophe does happen, Russia's role in the region will increase enormously. That will require massive new spending. So far, Russia has chosen to stand aloof from the Afghan process. Its role in the Afghan settlement will therefore be reversely proportionate to the degree of tensions in the region.

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