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## Iran, Pakistan out to weaken Afghanistan, MPs told

By Abasin Zaheer

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Pakistani and Iranian spies have joined hands to weaken the Karzai government by killing Afghan elders and trying to disrupt the current system, senior security officials told parliamentarians on Sunday.

Deputy Interior Minister Gen. Abdul Rahman Rahman and deputy head of the National Directorate of Security (NDS), Mohammad Yasin Zia, were summoned to brief lawmakers on investigation into the assassination of peace negotiator Arsalan Rahmani.

Rahmani was killed last week by unknown gunmen on a motorcycle in Kabul on his way to parliament. Responsibility for his murder has been claimed by little-known Taliban splinter group -- the Mullah Dadullah Front.

The deputy interior minister told the Wolesi Jirga that Iran launched terror activities and propaganda against Afghanistan after Kabul signed a strategic partnership agreement with Washington.

“The Iranian spy agency and Pakistan’s ISI have joined hands in instigating the Haqqani network

and other militant outfits like Lashka-i-Taeba, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan to intensify attacks and kill influential Afghan individuals like Rahmani,” he claimed.

Iran and Pakistan had killed Rahmani because he saw peace talks as the only solution to the Afghan imbroglio and made hectic efforts in this regard, the official continued.

The Taliban had launched their spring offensive -- “Al-Farooq” -- last month against political figures, Rahman said, adding the rebels wanted to extend the war to central and northern Afghanistan from the border region.

“The Al-Farooq operation is aimed at targeting peace negotiators, national assembly members, provincial council members and tribal elders in Kabul, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Balkh, Herat and other provinces,” the deputy minister said.

However, he said, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) had evolved a special plan to protect political figures and elders.

Rahmani was the second top negotiator to be killed by the insurgents. Last year, the High Peace Council chief, Prof. Burhanuddin Rabbani, was killed by a suicide attacker posing a Taliban emissary, with explosives concealed in his turban.

Over the past two years, several high-profile elders, including Ahmad Wali Karzai, the half-brother of President Karzai, Wolesi Jirga members Moammad Hashim Watanwal, Abdul Mutallib Baig, Kunduz police chief Abdul Rahman Syedkheli, 203rd Pamir Zone Police Commander Gen. Daud Daud and others have been killed.

NDS deputy head Mohammad Yasin Zia also accused the intelligence agencies of Pakistan and Iran of killing Afghan elders. He said the rebels wanted to kill lawmakers to stop them from approving the Afghan-US deal and derail the peace process.

The official claimed the militants were plotting to kill Wolesi Jirga member from Kabul Abdul Rab Rassoul Sayaf and Amandulla Guzar, a lawmaker from western Herat province Mohammad Saleh Saljoqi, Kabir Marzaban from northern Takhar province, Speaker Fazl Hadi Muslimyar and his deputy Rafiullah Gul.

He said all the people on the Taliban hit-list knew the NDS had been able to prevent attempts on their lives. Zia added Sirajuddin Haqqani, the son of Jalaluddin Haqqani, and Mullah Taj Mir, a Taliban commander, had been trying for a year to kill the elders.

He said the two militant commanders had sent 18 fighters to target Afghan politicians, but intelligence operatives detained and put them behind bars. Rahmani’s assassination was part of the group’s plan.

“I took photographs of the detainees and showed them to Maulvi Arsalan Rehmani that these individuals wanted to kill him,” he recalled. He told Rahmani the men belonged to commander Taj Mir.

Rahmani did not recognise the men in photos, but said Taj Mir might have been planning his assassination because he lived in an area under his influence.

Zia quoted Rahmani as saying that the ISI had asked him to abandon his efforts at bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan and choose a comfortable life with his family in the neighbouring country.

He said NDS had provided eight bodyguards and MoI four to Rahmani for his security. Three suspects from the Mullah Dadullah Front had been arrested in connection with the negotiator's murder, he said.

At the end of the session, Speaker Fazl Hadi Muslimyar asked house panels, including lawmakers protection and privileges commission, defence affairs and cultural and religious affairs bodies, to cooperate with NDS and MoI in investigating Rahmani's murder.