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## Breakaway Taliban Faction Rejects New Leader Akhundzada

By Jason Ditz  
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Despite reports that the appointment of religious scholar Haibatullah Akhundzada as the new leader of the Taliban was a “compromise” move aimed at ending infighting, the breakaway faction led by Mullah Mohammad Rasool indicated that they are just as mad as ever, and reject his appointment.

Rasool’s top deputy, Mullah Niazi, says that Akhundzada “does not represent the people of Afghanistan” and lacks military experience. Akhundzada is primarily a religious scholar, and his role in the Taliban historically has been a religious one, issuing fatwas and educating Taliban members of Islamic theory.

Some had predicted Akhundzada would be a unifying figure, given how many top commanders on both sides are former students of his, but Niazi insisted he is “not popular” and that the Rasool group is expecting an influx of commanders defecting from the parent group.

Rasool's faction split after the election of Mullah Mansour as Taliban leader, with Taliban founder Mullah Omar's son, Mullah Yaqoob, pushing for Rasool. The splinter group is receiving considerable funding from Afghanistan's spy agency, the NDS, with Afghan officials saying the funding is aimed at sewing dissent within the Taliban.

Though there was some fighting in the period following Mansour's election, both sides were also attacking Afghan government targets, trying to outdo each other to establish themselves as the "main" organization. Despite officials hoping to divide the Taliban, this division may again mean a surge in violence nationwide.