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Dirty Politics behind Iran's ban on fuel trucks

By Hanan Habibzai

01/07/2011

This winter, Iran, a major fuel supplier for Afghanistan, plans to use this position to pressure Kabul into backing their policies. Tehran tried this before, back in 2007, when they forced tens of thousands of Afghan refugees to leave the country in the middle of winter, more “blackmail” to get Kabul to follow Iranian dictates. Afghanistan sits in the middle, NATO and America on one side, and Iran, and its attempts to dictate to Kabul on the other.

Another factor is Iran's extremist legal system, currently holding hundreds of Afghan prisoners charged with crimes, many drug related, facing injustice and barbarism. So, I was not surprised when I read news stories on Iran's illegal ban on fuel trucks entering Afghanistan, for the reason that Tehran continuously trying to use countless ways to secure its interests in Afghanistan.

I remembered the caches of US dollars funnelled to high ranking Afghan officials including presidential palace. Through these links Iran influenced wide range of political and cultural decisions in Kabul.

As soon as Iran's notoriety unveiled by investigative journalists, Tehran tried to jerk Afghans from the wound which instantly need medications, means the upcoming winter and empty pockets ,where ordinary Afghans are suffering the most.

Officials in Kabul say, the tankers are bringing fuel to meet the increased demand by ordinary Afghans during the winter. According to Associated Press Iran's ban on fuel trucks is pushing prices up over 70 percent , officials threaten to leave millions of Afghans shivering as winter rolls in.

Approximately two-week-old embargo has stranded up to 2,600 trucks or fuel tankers at the border with Afghanistan. A high level Afghan official Farid Sherzai considers the ban against international transit laws. Intentionally putting a war shattered nation in scarcity is against Islamic precepts, he says.

Afghan officials say if the ban continues, could halt transportation between the south and Kabul because of fuel shortages.

Associated Press reported that Iran acknowledged a link between the ban and its recent decision to slash domestic fuel subsidies in a bid to cut costs and boost an economy squeezed by international sanctions.

Iran's ambassador to Kabul claims that Tehran is intensely concerned about reports that its fuel shipments to Afghanistan are given to US-led foreign forces in the country.

Iran "wants to impose a kind of sanction or embargo on us," Farid Shirzai , head of the Afghan Commerce Ministry's fuel department, told the Associated Press.

"This is un-Islamic and against international transit law. They have no right to stop (the tankers) because they are merely passing through Iranian territory."

Iran supplies about 30 percent of the country's refined fuel, Afghan officials say. The remainder of the blocked shipments of vehicle and heating fuel comes from Iraq and Turkmenistan and is only transiting Iran, they say. Around 30 percent of Afghanistan's fuel is thought to come through transport routes from Iran, with much of the rest coming through the central Asian republics which border Afghanistan.

Throughout an official agreement between Afghanistan and Iran, Tehran has no right to stop shipments and trade transits to Kabul.

It is only an excuse; the actual story is something else which has been financed by Tehran. Iran wants broader rule in Afghanistan, which enable Tehran to influence foreign and demotic strategies in Kabul.

Americans and its allies don't use the same fuel which Iran banned near border with Afghanistan. American supplies it's logistic via Pakistan which has miles distance with Iran.

The ban is a pressure on Hamid Karzai to inaugurate the so-called new parliament which will be more pro-Iranian than American, so the fuel tankers ban by Iranian government has direct link with the results of 2010's Parliamentary election which has been considered unlawful and null by Afghan attorney general.

Among 249 Parliamentarians, there will be larger presence of ethnic Tajiks and Shiites who has religious and linguistic links with Iran. They may challenge Karzai's traditional power among Pashtuns, Afghanistan's largest ethnic group. Iran is desperately seeking a desired force in Afghanistan to challenge the power of Sunni Pashtuns.

The pan-Iranism and pan-farsism is a theory, Tehran is trying to bring it forward to change the identities of several regional countries including Afghanistan. Pashtuns are only Sunnite power which opposed Iranian agendas, therefore Tehran hates them.

Reports suggest that Hamid Karzai ordered the cancellation of 2010 parliamentary election and he fears that Iranian dominated legislative procedure may be frustrated for Afghan's western allies.

According to Reuters dozens of candidates and election officials are being investigated and the IEC has thrown out about a quarter of the 5.6 million votes cast as fake.

Some candidates and supporters have been protesting since last month, calling for the result to be scrapped.

The troubles send a worrying message of ongoing instability to U.S. President Barack Obama as he completes a review of his Afghanistan war strategy this week.

Consistent allegations of vote fraud in the September poll, has raised questions about the credibility of Karzai and his government as a partner at a time when U.S. and NATO leaders are assessing their long-term commitment to Afghanistan.

Just recently, at the end of December 2010 Hamid Karzai's deputy Qasim Fahim was in Tehran to discuss the ban. He said Iran has agreed to lift a ban on fuel tankers crossing into Afghanistan that has left hundreds of trucks stranded at the border, but Iran was not loyal to its commitment with war torn neighbor.