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PNS

‘Baradar was arrested to block Taliban-Karzai deal’

08/23/2010

It has emerged that Abdul Ghani Baradar, a senior operational commander of the Taliban, was arrested in January by Pakistani authorities because they feared being left out of a deal that the Taliban was striking with the Hamid Karzai government in Kabul.

The New York Times quoted an unnamed Pakistani security official as saying, “We picked up Baradar and the others because they were trying to make a deal without us... We protect the Taliban. They are dependent on us. We are not going to allow them to make a deal with Karzai and the Indians.”

While early descriptions of Mr. Baradar’s arrest suggested that it was unexpected and fortuitous, suspicions were aroused regarding the role of Pakistani intelligence agencies in the arrest, particularly after Kai Eide, former special representative in Afghanistan for the United Nations Secretary General, said that secret UN discussions with the Taliban in Dubai were destabilised by the arrest of Mr. Baradar.

Regarding the most recent reports confirming the aims of Pakistan’s Inter-Service Intelligence in arresting Mr. Baradar, the New York Times also quoted an anonymous NATO official who said, “We have been played before... That the Pakistanis picked up Baradar to control the tempo of the negotiations is absolutely plausible.”

However U.S. intelligence officials reportedly disputed this account, arguing that although the Central Intelligence Agency may have been unaware of the identity of the person that the ISI had captured, the ISI did not initially know it either. One U.S. official

reportedly said, “We are not convinced that that was why Baradar was picked up,” in a reference to the Taliban-Karzai-UN, however conceding, “But maybe that was why he was held.”

In the context of the arrest and the stalled talks the NYT report also quoted sources saying that Mr. Baradar and other arrested Taliban leaders were warned against carrying out future negotiations without their permission. In particular a former Western diplomat with long experience in the region was reported to have confirmed that the ISI sent a warning to its Taliban protégés that the Taliban should not engage in “flirting” with the Karzai government or other parties in Afghanistan.