

Pak riled by Karzai charges

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
ISLAMABAD, MAY 19

PAKISTAN today rejected as "insidious" Afghan President Hamid Karzai's allegations that it was attempting to destabilise the war-ravaged nation through Taliban and asked him not to loose "cool" as both countries were dealing with a "difficult" situation.

Islamabad was "saddened" by Karzai's charges that Pakistan's intelligence agencies had trained and sent Taliban militants into Afghanistan to destabilise that country, Foreign Minister Khurshid Mehmood Kasuri said.

"I will not give a strong-worded statement on what he (Karzai) had said. I can only say that we are saddened by what has been reported in the newspapers today," Kasuri said winding up a debate in the Senate on foreign



Hamid Karzai

policy. He said a strong Afghanistan is what Pakistan wants, the state-run APP news agency reported.

Lets not trade insults through media. You have a difficult situation there, we have a difficult situation here. Let's not loose our cool," Kasuri said, adding that Pakistan has never and will not ever try to create instability in Afghanistan. "Why would we do things that are against our own interests?"

Kasuri said Afghanistan was dear to Pakistan and noted that the bilateral trade had increased tremendously over the last four years.

"Four years ago our trade stood at mere \$23 million which this year stands at \$1.5 billion."

The Pakistan foreign office has said Islamabad planned to reach an agreement with Nato to provide transit facilities for the grouping's troops deployed in Afghanistan.

20 MAY 2016

KABUL | Karzai tells the world to rethink war on terror, death of civilians including Talibans not acceptable Zawahiri urges Afghans to rise against US

ASSOCIATED PRESS
CAIRO, JUNE 22

AL-QAEDAS No 2 leader issued a new videotape on Thursday calling on Afghans to rise against US-led forces in Afghanistan in the wake of rioting last month in Kabul. The video by Ayman al-Zawahiri was posted on an Islamic website known as a clearing house for al-Qaeda and other militants' statements.

"I am calling upon the Muslims in Kabul in particular and in all Afghanistan in general and for the sake of God to stand up in an honest stand in the face of the infidel forces that are invading Muslim lands," said al-Za-

wahiri, wearing a white turban and sitting in front of a black backdrop with an automatic rifle next to him.

He also called on "the young men of Islam, in the universities and schools of Kabul, to carry out their duties in defence of their religion, honor, land and country".

The 3 1/2-minute tape appears to have been made the day after a May 29 accident in which a US military truck crashed into traffic in Kabul, killing up to five people. The incident sparked anti-foreigner riots in Kabul that left about 20 people dead.

Al-Zawahiri makes no reference to the death of al-Qaeda in Iraq leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who was killed in an

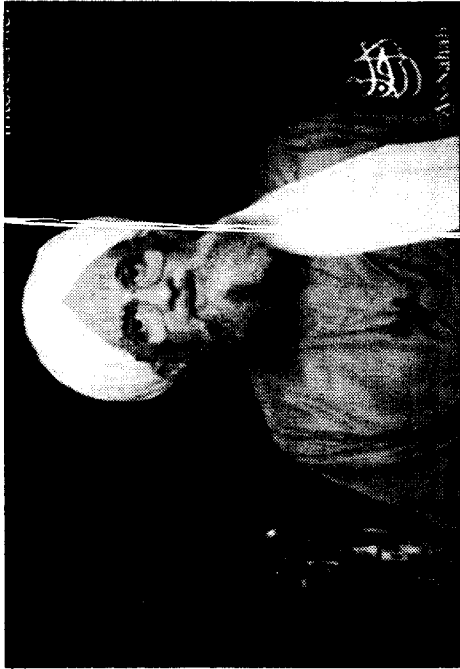
airstrike on June 7. Unlike al-Zawahiri's previous messages, which appeared aimed at Americans, the latest video has no English subtitles. He spoke in Arabic, and web-

sites carried translations of his message in Pashtun and Farsi, two languages widely spoken in Afghanistan. The new message is part of a dramatic increase in videos and audiotapes by al-Qaeda. Osama bin Laden has issued three tapes this year, along with the six from his deputy.

In Kabul, hours after the release of the video, President Hamid Karzai called al-Zawahiri "the enemy of the Afghan people" and blamed him for his country's massive suffering. "He is first the enemy of the Afghan people, and then the enemy of the rest of the world," Karzai said at a press conference.

"He killed Afghans for years, thousands, and then he went to America and destroyed the twin towers," Karzai said, adding al-Zawahiri "is the one who destroyed our mosques and schools, vineyards and orchards". "We in Afghanistan want him arrested and put before justice," he said.

Karzai also urged the international community to reassess its approach to the war on terror, saying on Thursday that the deaths of hundreds of Afghans, including Taliban militants, was "not acceptable". A frustrated Karzai said the approach being taken to hunt down militants does not focus on the roots of terrorism itself. "We must engage strategically in disarming terrorism by stopping their sources of supply of money, equipment and motivation," he said.



Zawahiri in a new videotape reported on Wednesday called on Afghans to defend their religion and country. AP

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Afghan Deaths Linked to Unit at Iraq Prison

By DOUGLAS JEHL and DAVID ROHDE

Published: May 24, 2004

WASHINGTON, May 23 — A military intelligence unit that oversaw interrogations at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq was also in charge of questioning at a detention center in Afghanistan where two prisoners died in December 2002 in incidents that are being investigated as homicides.

For both of the Afghan prisoners, who died in a center known as the Bagram Collection Point, the cause of death listed on certificates signed by American pathologists included blunt force injuries to their legs. Interrogations at the center were supervised by Company A, 519th Military Intelligence Battalion, which moved on early in 2003 to Iraq, where some of its members were assigned to the Joint Interrogation and Debriefing Center at Abu Ghraib. Its service in Afghanistan was known, but its work at Bagram at the time of the deaths has now emerged in interviews with former prisoners, military officials and from documents.

Two men arrested with one of the prisoners who died in the Bagram Detention Center that month said in southeastern Afghanistan on Sunday that they were tortured and sexually humiliated by their American jailers; they said they were held in isolation cells, black hoods were placed over their heads, and their hands at times were chained to the ceiling. "The 10 days that we had was a very bad time," said Zakim Shah, a 20-year-old farmer and a father of two who said he felt he would not survive at times. "We are very lucky."

The account provided by the two men was consistent with those of other former Afghan prisoners, including those interviewed by The New York Times and cited in reports by human rights officials.

In interviews, the two men and other former prisoners who were held at the center in Afghanistan at that time have described an environment similar in some ways to that of Abu Ghraib, whose outlines have been depicted in photographs and testimony. At both places, prisoners were hooded, stripped naked and mocked sexually by female captors, according to a variety of accounts.

In Iraq, at least three members of the 519th Military Intelligence Battalion who had been assigned to the joint interrogation center at Abu Ghraib have been quietly disciplined for conduct involving the abuse of a female Iraqi prisoner there, an Army spokesman said.

At least one officer, Capt. Carolyn A. Wood, served in supervisory positions at the interrogation units both at the Bagram Collection Point from July 2002 to December 2003 and then again at the joint center at Abu Ghraib, according to Army officials. That center was established in the fall of 2003. In Congressional testimony last week, a senior Army lawyer, Col. Marc Warren, praised Captain Wood as an officer who took initiative in Iraq at a time when American commanders had yet to spell out rules for interrogation. But he also singled out Captain Wood and her unit as having brought to Iraq interrogation procedures developed during their service in Afghanistan. No one is known to have accused Captain Wood of any wrongdoing in connection with the abuses at Abu Ghraib or the deaths of prisoners there or in Afghanistan.

A spokesman for the 18th Airborne Corps, in Fort Bragg, N.C., identified Captain Wood as having been in Afghanistan in July 2002 as Company A's interrogation platoon leader, and having later assumed the duties of "operations officer in charge of the Bagram Collection Point." In a written statement sent Friday, that spokesman Lt. Col. Billy Buckner, said Captain Wood had been assigned to the 519th Battalion at Abu Ghraib. But other officers have described her as having served as the officer in charge of the interrogation center there, under the direction of Steve Jordan, a reservist who served as its director.

In an interview on Sunday, Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski, who oversaw Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq but has been admonished and suspended from command, described Captain Wood as an impressive and well-spoken interrogator who oversaw the center. Colonel Buckner said that Captain Wood's commanding officer, Col. Robert Whalen, was not available for comment. To date, seven enlisted personnel from a military unit have been the only soldiers charged with crimes in connection with the abuses at Abu Ghraib. But an Army spokesman completed in March identified Colonel Jordan as among four people who may have been among those "indirectly" responsible for the misconduct.

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Afghan Deaths Linked to Unit at Iraq Prison

Published: May 24, 2004

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Within days after the deaths of the two prisoners in Afghanistan in December 2002, both were ruled homicides by American military doctors in Afghanistan. But in a public statement at the time, the military described at least one death as the result of natural causes.

The deaths of two prisoners at the Bagram Collection Point in Afghanistan in December 2002 are believed to be among nine being investigated by the Army as possible homicides linked to interrogation practices in Iraq and Afghanistan. At least two other deaths being investigated occurred in Abu Ghraib, senior military officers have said, but it is not clear whether those prisoners were under the authority of the Joint Interrogation and Debriefing Center.

The two former Afghan prisoners who were interviewed in Afghanistan on Sunday said they believed that their acquaintance, a young man named Dilawar whose death is considered a possible homicide, received the same harsh treatment that they did. Both prisoners were later sent to the American-run detention center in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, but were released with letters from the Army saying they did nothing wrong.

The two men said that at Bagram they were forced to strip naked in the presence of female soldiers when receiving prison clothes, undergoing medical exams and taking showers. They said female soldiers were never present when they were naked in Guantánamo Bay.

Both men said appearing naked in front of women was deeply humiliating for Afghan men, who live in a conservative Islamic culture. "The other things don't matter," Parkhudin said, referring to the kicking and sleep deprivation. "But we are angry about this."

Since 2002, about 350 prisoners have been held at any given time at American-run detention centers in Afghanistan. The Bagram Collection Point, at Bagram Air Base, just north of Kabul, is the main American detention center, and is visited by officials of the International Committee of the Red Cross. No outside inspectors visit roughly 20 smaller American bases around Afghanistan where prisoners are also held.

The two Afghan prisoners who died in American custody in December 2002 are identified on death certificates only as Dilawar and "Ullah, Habib." Friends and

family members have identified Dilawar as a 22-year-old farmer and part-time taxi driver. The second prisoner who died has been identified by family members as Mullah Habibullah, about 30 years old and a brother of a former Taliban commander.

The Dec. 13 death certificate for Dilawar says he died as a result of "blunt force injuries to lower extremities complicating coronary artery disease." The document was signed by Lt. Col. Elizabeth A. Rouse of the Air Force, a military pathologist, and listed as its finding that the "mode of death" was "homicide," rather than "natural," "accident" and "suicide."

At the time, American military officials said Dilawar had died of a heart attack and had coronary artery disease. The fact that the military characterized his death a "homicide" was not publicly known until his family showed from The New York Times his death certificate in late February 2003. Family members, who do not speak English, were unable to understand the certificate.

According to military documents, Dilawar was found dead in his isolation cell on Dec. 10, his fifth day in the center. The military later disclosed that the death in Bagram of Mullah Habibullah, which occurred on Dec. 3, 2003, was also deemed a homicide by an Army pathologist. He too was found collapsed in a cell on the second floor of the center.

The two men interviewed on Sunday in Turiuba, a village in Khost Province in southeastern Afghanistan, had been held in isolation cells on the second floor of the Bagram center for the first 10 days.

Mr. Shah, the 20-year-old farmer, and Parkhudin, a 26-year-old farmer and former soldier, said they were transferred from Bagram to the American detention center in Guantánamo Bay. Their first 10 days in Bagram were by far the most harrowing of their 15 months in American custody, they said.

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Taliban axe hangs on Indian

OUR BUREAU AND AGENCIES

Hyderabad/New Delhi, April 29: The Taliban today threatened to kill an Indian telecom engineer it has taken hostage unless all Indians working in Afghanistan quit the country by tomorrow evening.

K. Suryanarayana and his Afghan driver were abducted last evening by gunmen who waylaid their car on a highway in the southern province of Zabul.

"If India does not pull out all its nationals working in Afghanistan by 6 pm (1330 GMT) tomorrow, we're going to kill him," Taliban spokesman Qari Mohammad Yousuf said over phone from an undisclosed location.

Delhi convened an emergency meeting chaired by cabinet secretary B.K. Chaturvedi, deputing a high-level team

to Afghanistan to help secure the 41-year-old Hyderabad's release.

"We would like to assure Suryanarayana's family that no stone is being left unturned to obtain his release," foreign secretary Shyam Saran said.

Suryanarayana, who the Taliban claimed was an "American spy", was working with Bahrain-based firm Al Moayed, which is engaged in a project for Afghan mobile service provider Roshan Telecom.

Back home in Secunderabad, a shroud of gloom settled on the engineer's Malkajgiri home as relatives and well-wishers kept dropping in by the dozens.

"We want our daddy back. He does not hurt anyone. Uncle, please tell them not to harm my daddy," Suryanarayana's six-year-old daughter Satyateja told **The Telegraph**.

"We are shocked to the core



Suryanarayana's wife Manjula shows his picture in Hyderabad. (PTI)

and don't know what will happen next," added wife Manjula. The couple has two daughters and a son.

A teary-eyed Chandrasekhar, Suryanarayana's 60-year-

old father, looked beside himself with worry. His mother, too, was on the verge of tears.

"My son spoke to me on Wednesday before going to work and said he would be returning to India next month," Chandrasekhar, a retired state government employee, said.

But he added that his son had told him "only junior officials were sent to interior regions and forced to take all the risks". The family, including Suryanarayana's brothers, could not help but worry as the Taliban has killed many Indians after keeping them captive, he said.

Last November, Border Roads Organisation jawan Maniappan R. Kutty was abducted and killed. Delhi had then raised the issue of security of its nationals with Kabul, which had promised Indians would be protected.

■ Another picture on Page 4

30 APR 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

Large scale anti-Taliban operation launched

ASSOCIATED PRESS

KABUL, JUNE 15

MORE than 10,000 Afghan and US-led coalition forces began a massive anti-Taliban operation across southern Afghanistan on Thursday, while a bomb killed seven people riding a bus to a coalition base for work.

Military forces are "moving forward with large-scale operations" in four southern provinces, Uruzgan, Helmand, Kandahar and Zabul, the US military said in a statement. It is the largest offensive since the 2001 invasion that toppled the Taliban regime.

As the offensive began,

however, suspected militants continued their attacks. A bomb hidden in a bus headed to a coalition base in southern Kandahar city exploded, killing seven people and injuring 17, coalition officials and the Interior Ministry said. Afghan police initially said 10 people were killed.

Coalition spokesman Major Quentin Innis blamed the attack on Taliban militants and said it targeted Afghans working for the coalition.

The military offensive, dubbed "Operation Mountain Thrust," is part of a major push to squeeze Taliban fighters responsible for a spate of violence in recent months.

INDIAN EXPRESS

Karzai has failed to tackle the insurgent challenge

By Jal Taraporewala/TNN

The timing of the recent spate of militant attacks in the Pashtun heartland of Afghanistan is scarcely coincidental. In the past three decades which have witnessed political instability in Afghanistan, the end of winter has traditionally been associated with an intensification in guerrilla strikes.

Besides, faced with mounting unrest in Baluchistan, the Musharraf regime has withdrawn around 25,000 of the 75,000 troops stationed in the autonomous tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, and deployed them to counter the challenge posed by the Baluchi activists. This, in turn, has made it easier for the remnants of the Taliban and the Hezb-e-Islami of Gulbuddin Hekmatiyar to operate more freely in the border region.

It is also not surprising that the increase in rebel strikes has come at a time when the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is in the process of expanding its presence in Afghanistan from 9500 to nearly 15,000. The rise in militancy is therefore a signal of defiance to ISAF.

The assertion of the Karzai administration notwithstanding, the odds are that rebel activities will increase in the coming months. The 15,000 ISAF personnel and the 18,000-strong US special forces are an insufficient number to effectively

check the insurgents. In any case, ISAF has merely been entrusted with the mandate of peace-keeping and reconstruction. It lacks the powers that are so essential for staging a sustained counter-insurgency campaign.

The Afghan government will continue to face the added problem of Pakistan's refusal to rein in the activists of the Taliban and the Hezb-e-Islami.

Islamabad's reasons should be interpreted in terms of its concerns about the growing ties between Kabul and New Delhi and the loss of its clout in the Pashtun region of



Despite assertion of Karzai govt, odds are that rebel activities will increase in the coming months

NEWS ANALYSIS

Afghanistan which it regards as its natural sphere of influence.

In addition, Musharraf will calculate that the United States will not find it easy to substantially turn up the heat on Pakistan to control anti-Afghan activities in the border areas.

After all, the US has its hands full in dealing with the issues of Iran and Iraq and it will be reluctant to further pressure Musharraf since he is a key ally in the war against Al Qaida and because his political base of support is fairly fragile.

Karzai will also find it difficult to combat the rebel challenge unless he is able to adequately address the domestic factors which have fuelled militancy. These include underlying ethnic tensions, persisting economic hardships and the slow pace of building a credible Afghan army and police force.

06 APR 2006

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Religious strife

Iraqi Conflict Spills Over Into Arab Countries

The conflict between the Iraqi Sunnis and Shias is gradually spreading to the broader Middle East, putting to test the system of national states created there in the past century. Ethnic-confessional unions may spread across national borders, regaining their dominant role, and insurmountable religious barriers may be erected within the regional countries. This possible future of the Middle East is strongly reminiscent of its recent past. This problem was created by the war in Iraq, though it is Iran that is using it to its advantage.

In early April, Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak told the popular Arabic satellite channel Al Jazeera that "many in the large Shia Muslim populations of Arab states around Iraq are more loyal to Iran than to their own countries". In fact, he has said out loud what many Arab leaders, unhappy with the growing Iranian influence in the region, are silently worrying about. But Shias have sharply criticised Mubarak, saying that such statements could only fan religious strife.

External interference

Religious strife is a fact of life in the region. Mubarak made his statement at a time when different ethnic and confessional groups in Iraq are fighting each other politically and with arms in hand. Disputes over the next Prime Minister have been going on for months, and the situation is complicated by external interference. Teheran supports Shia Muslims, while the United States is backing Kurds and Sunnis.

Political disputes often take the form of armed violence, with Shias and Sunnis accusing each other of organising religious killings. "During the time Ibrahim Jaafari has been Prime Minister, 40,000 Iraqi Sunnis have been killed", Sheikh Har-eth al-Zari, secretary general of the Association of Muslim Scholars, told Al Jazeera.

Sunnite groups are suspected of orchestrating terrorist attacks in Shia mosques in Iraq. The largest terrorist attack happened in February in the

The author is a political analyst associated with Ria Novosti

Marianna Belenkaya

Askariya shrine in Samarra, about 65 miles north of Baghdad. Within days, hundreds of people died in inter-confessional fighting, provoking the fear that the conflict between the Shia and the Sunni might spill over into other countries.

The religious leaders of

ers there, because Iraq has ceased to be the traditional counter-balance to Iran.

Iraq is being torn apart by various regional forces, primarily Iran and the United States, while the majority of Arab nations are busy trying to ensure their own security and power, solve economic



In the past, Iran's policy in the region was balanced by the surrounding Arab countries, but now Teheran and Washington have become the only real players there, because Iraq has ceased to be the traditional counter-balance to Iran

Iraq and other countries where Shia and Sunnite Muslims live side by side did their best to stop bloodshed, but this is an extremely difficult task. In April one more Shia mosque was blown up in Baghdad, killing 79 and wounding more than 164.

Iraq was pained by Mubarak's words, though he expressed the opinion of many Arab leaders. Jordan's King Abdallah II said almost the same slightly more than a year ago. He warned that Iran was seeking to create "a Shiite crescent" in the Middle East that would also include Iraq, Syria and Lebanon.

Teheran is creating problems for the US and regional neighbours. In the past, Iran's policy in the region was balanced by the surrounding Arab countries, but now Teheran and Washington have become the only real play-

ers there, because Iraq has ceased to be the traditional counter-balance to Iran. Iraq is being torn apart by various regional forces, primarily Iran and the United States, while the majority of Arab nations are busy trying to ensure their own security and power, solve economic

problems, and prevent a social explosion. The Arab countries need the West, though it is a source of problems. Iran rejects the West, which is inspiring the admiration of many regional countries that are dissatisfied with Western (primarily American) policies.

In addition to exerting a natural influence on the Shia communities of the Middle East (in Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Syria), Iran also enjoys the sympathy of the common people in Arab countries irrespective of their religion. Many of them consider Iran the symbol of resistance. Teheran's clear-cut policies are simplifying the creation of a bloc of allies around it. Shias from different countries are playing the key role in it, though the bloc also includes other confessions. The creation of a Shia front or

bloc is not a reason to question the patriotic feelings of the community to their host states. It would be like questioning the loyalty of the Middle Eastern Christians, Turkomans, Kurds and the other numerous regional confessions and ethnic groups to their countries of residence.

But how viable are the Middle Eastern states whose borders were artificially marked during the colonial period? The war in Iraq unleashed processes that had been suppressed for years in the region. The national self-identification of the 20th century is giving way to religious self-assertion. Nationalism has not solved the problems of the Broader Middle East or ensured prosperity and stability there.

And now the people are returning to their sources. In times of trouble, such as the current period, ethnic and confessional communities have always provided financial and political aid to their members and gave them a feeling of being protected. The state as a social system proved ineffective there, and so the people have no choice other than to face religion. Iraq was the first to do this. Who will be next?

Centre of power

The situation in the region, including the existence of numerous external and internal forces each of whom is playing its own game, is speeding up the process of denationalisation. The problem cannot be blamed on Iran (or on Iran alone), which has its own strategy, just as any state that wants to be the centre of power.

Teheran is creating its own political system in the region, and its actions and goals are crystal clear. We can also understand the wish of the Arab countries not to be pushed to secondary roles. Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which have always wanted to determine the policy of the Middle East, have been harmed by this especially badly.

However, US goals in the region are not clear at all. Does it want to maintain the current states or to recarve the political map of the Middle East? Washington leaders are pledging to play according to the former scenario, but their actions are bringing opposite results, whether they want it or not.

Taliban threat growing in southern Afghanistan

Insurgents Target The Region As US Troops Prepare To Leave

Carlotta Gall

Tirin Kot (Afghanistan): Building on a winter campaign of suicide bombings and assassinations and the knowledge that American troops are leaving, the Taliban appear to be moving their insurgency into a new phase, flooding the rural areas of southern Afghanistan with weapons and men.

Each spring with the arrival of warmer weather, the fighting season here starts up, but the scale of the militants' presence and their sheer brazenness have alarmed Afghans and foreign officials far more than in previous years.

"The Taliban and Al Qaida are everywhere," a shopkeeper, Haji Saifullah, told the commander of American forces in Afghanistan, Lt Gen Karl Eikenberry, as the general strolled through the bazaar of this town to talk to people. "It is all right in the city, but if you go outside the city, they are everywhere, and the people have to support them. They have no choice."

The fact that the US troops are pulling out of southern Afghanistan in the coming months, and handing matters over to NATO peacekeepers, who have repeatedly stated that they are not going to fight terrorists, has given a lift to the insurgents, and increased the fears of Afghans.

General Eikenberry appealed for patience and support. "There has not been enough attention paid to Uruzgan," he said in a speech to the elders of Uruzgan Province gathered at the governor's house in Tirin Kot, the provincial capital.

"I think the leaders, the Afghan government and the international commu-



The arrival of a large number of Taliban in the villages has dealt a blow to public confidence in the Afghan government

nity recognise this. There is reform coming and this year you will see it."

The arrival of large numbers of Taliban in the villages, flush with money and weapons, has dealt a blow to public confidence in the Afghan government, already undermined by lack of tangible progress and frustration with corrupt and ineffective leaders.

This small one-street town is in the Taliban heartland, and the message from the townspeople was bleak.

Uruzgan, the province where President Hamid Karzai first rallied support against the Taliban in the months after the Sept 11 attacks, is now, four years later, in the thrall of the Islamic militants

once more, and the provincial capital is increasingly surrounded by areas in Taliban control, local and American officials acknowledge. A recent report by a member of the United Nations mission in Afghanistan shown to The New York Times detailed similar fears.

The new governor, Maulavi Abdul Hakim Munib, 35, who took up his position just a month ago, controls only a 'bubble' around Tirin Kot, an American military officer said. The rest of the province is so thick with insurgents that all the districts are coloured amber or red to indicate that on military maps in the nearby American base. Uruzgan has always been troublesome, yet the map marks a deterioration since last year, when at least one central district had been colored green, the officer said.

"The security situation is not good," Governor Munib told General Eikenberry and a group of cabinet ministers at a meeting with tribal elders. "The number of Taliban and enemy is several times more than that of the police and Afghan National Army in this province," he said.

Uruzgan is not the only province teetering out of control. Helmand and Kandahar to the south have been increasingly overrun by militants this year, as large groups of Taliban are reportedly moving through the countryside, intimidating villagers, ambushing vehicles, and spoiling for a fight with coalition or Afghan forces.

Insurgents also have the run of parts of Zabul, Ghazni and Paktika provinces to the southeast, and have increased ambushes on the main Kabul-Kandahar highway. NYT NEWS SERVICE

04 MAY 2006

Taliban claims ISI's hand in Suryanarayan's killing

AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, MAY 14

A TALIBAN commander has claimed that a Pakistan intelligence agency had a hand in the recent killing of Indian engineer K Suryanarayan in southern Afghanistan, a Kabul-based private TV channel reported today.

A Taliban commander wishing to remain anonymous told Tolu television that Amir Khan Haqqani, the military commander of Taliban fighters in Zabul province, opposed the killing of Suryanarayan. He claimed the Indian engineer was eventually killed by Mullah Latif, a militiaman under the command of Mawlawi Mohammad Alam Andar, allegedly on orders from Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, a little-known Web site *afgha.com* quoted the Tolu report as saying.

Meanwhile Pakistan has



Slain Indian engineer
K Suryanarayan

rejected Taliban's claim. Refuting the allegation, Pakistan's Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmad, in an interview said that ISI was not involved in the killing and that Islamabad was ready to clarify the matter with New Delhi.

Suryanarayan, who was working for a Bahraini company Al Moayed in Afghanistan, was abducted on April 28 in Zabul province and was later beheaded on April 30.

15 MAY 2006

105 die in violence across Afghanistan

HD-15
19/5

KANDAHAR: Some of the fiercest violence since the Taliban's 2001 ouster erupted across Afghanistan, with coalition forces engaging in multiple fire-fights, two suicide car bombs and a massive rebel assault on a small village. Up to 105 persons were killed.

The estimates of Taliban fighters and suicide bombers killed ranged up to 87, with 15 Afghan police, an American civilian, an Afghan civilian and a Canadian soldier also killed in the multiple attacks late on Wednesday and Thursday, officials said.

Assault on town

The battles between Afghan or coalition forces and Taliban militants — which were concentrated in the south — follow months of stepped-up attacks in

the region. An assault by hundreds of fighters on a small southern town was one of the largest attacks by militants since 2001 and marked another escalation in the campaign by supporters of the former Taliban regime to challenge the U.S.-backed Government of President Hamid Karzai.

The attack late on Wednesday and early on Thursday on a police and Government headquarters in Musa Qala in Helmand province sparked eight hours of clashes with security forces. The Interior Ministry said about 40 militants were killed, though police said they had retrieved only 14 bodies.

The Interior Ministry said 13 police were killed and five wounded in the attack some 150 km northwest of Kandahar. — AP

THE TIMES

19 MAY 2006

SHOOTINGS AFTER ACCIDENT INVOLVING US TROOPS TRIGGER VIOLENCE

8 die in Afghan riots

Associated Press

KABUL, May 29: A deadly traffic accident today involving US troops sparked the worst riot in the Afghan capital since the fall of the Taliban regime, with hundreds of protesters looting shops and shouting "Death to America!"

At least eight people were killed and 107 injured, an official said. Hundreds of Afghan army troops and NATO peacekeepers in tanks deployed around the city, as chanting protesters marched on the presidential palace and rioters smashed police guard boxes, set fire to police cars and ransacked buildings, including the compound of aid group Care International. Computers were set on fire and smoke billowed from the buildings.

The unrest started after three US Humvee vehicles coming into the city from the outskirts rammed into a rush-hour traffic jam, hitting several civilian cars, witnesses said.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai issued a statement to call for calm and said the government "will do its utmost to protect the lives of the people and their property." Abdullah Fahim, a health ministry spokesman, said that eight bodies were brought to hospitals in Kabul and 107 more Afghans were treated for injuries.

He said there were no foreigners among the wounded or dead. He had no details on how the casualties occurred, and it wasn't immediately clear if the toll included people from the traffic accident.

The riot was the worst in Kabul since US-led forces



People run as a fire burns during a protest in Kabul on Monday. ■ Reuters/UNI

ousted the Taliban in late 2001. It erupted in the city's northern suburbs before spreading into the city centre and then to other areas frequented with foreigners, including areas near US and NATO bases.

The US-led coalition said at least one person was killed and six injured

in the crash, but police said at least three people were killed and 16 injured.

A Kabul police chief, Sher Shah Usafi, said another person was killed when US troops fired into a crowd of stone-throwing protesters soon after the crash. Col. Thomas Collins, a coalition spokesman, confirmed there

was gunfire at the scene, but said coalition personnel in one military vehicle only fired over the crowd. He expressed regret for the deaths and injuries.

Airstrike

Five Canadian soldiers were hurt and up to six militants killed in a gun battle today, while US-led coalition aircraft bombed

Taliban militants meeting in remote southern Afghanistan, reportedly killing dozens, officials said. The Canadian soldiers were on a patrol about 20 km west of Kandahar when they were ambushed by militants early today, said Maj. Mario Couture, a coalition spokesman.

NY Giving Afghanistan a bad name 29/3/06

FIRST, THE good news. Abdul Rahman, the 41-year-old Afghan who was facing death penalty for converting from Islam to Christianity, has been released from prison after the case against him was dropped. But the bad news is that if one goes by the reaction to Mr Rahman's freedom from certain voluble quarters, one doesn't need the Taliban to drag Afghanistan back to the Middle Ages. Hundreds of clerics, students and ordinary Afghans protested against the court decision and called for Mr Rahman's death, adding that "Islam demands it".

Islam has got enough bad press from such rotten apples in the past and stating that Islamic fundamentalism has little to do with Islam doesn't help. Clearly, the act of arresting Mr Rahman last

month after police discovered him with a *Bible* during a custody dispute over his two daughters, itself shows how a whole nation has been an accessory in punishing apostasy. However much Afghan President Hamid Karzai talks of Afghanistan returning to its moderate ways after the ousting of the Taliban, the fact is that Afghanistan's society (which happens to be **Islamic**) and law (also under Islamic jurisprudence) considers conversion from Islam to any other religion to be punishable by death.

It is to be noted that Mr Rahman was freed *not* because the Afghan court found his conversion to be tolerable, but because he was deemed "mentally unfit to stand trial". Once again, Afghanistan has given Islam — not to mention itself — a bad name.

THINK

29 MAR 2006

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Talabani calls new Parliament's first meeting on March 12

NICK OLIVARI &
FARIS AL-MEHDAWI
BAGHDAD, MARCH 6

IRAQI President Jalal Talabani said on Monday he would convene Parliament in six days, but political wrangling and violence means there is little chance of forming a government of national unity any time soon.

As Talabani met a constitutional requirement to summon Parliament after elections in December, a car bomb north of Baghdad killed six people, including two children.

Nearly three months after the election, Iraq's divided political leaders are still fighting over the crucial post of Prime Minister in the new government. The row means Parliament will only be able to name a new speaker.

Talabani's announcement came after he sent a delegation on Sunday to meet influential Shi'ite cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani to help break the impasse over the premiership.

"I will call today for Parliament to hold the first session



An Iraqi army soldier inspects the wreckage of a car used as a bomb, in Mahmoudiya, Iraq, on Monday. AP

on the 12th of the current month since it is the last day that the Constitution allows," Talabani said.

The impasse has delayed the formation of a unity coalition of Shi'ites, Sunnis and Kurds that Washington has promoted in the hope of fostering stability and allowing US troops to begin withdrawing.

Talabani leads a group of Sunnis, Kurds and others opposed to the nomination of Shi'ite Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari.

Sistani, a semi-recluse in the

city of Najaf, is not directly involved in politics but has huge influence over the bulk of the country's 60 per cent Shi'ite majority.

Talabani said on Monday the delegation to Sistani had returned to Baghdad satisfied.

Sectarian violence has already claimed well over 500 lives since Samarra's Golden Mosque was destroyed by a bomb on February 22.

Monday's car bomb in Baquba just north of Baghdad killed six people, two of whom were girls under four years old,

and wounded 20, police said.

The bomb exploded in a busy market in the city after police arrived to check on a separate incident in which one person had been killed. Five policemen were wounded in the bombing, police said.

The blast destroyed shops in the market, which was busy with women and children.


The religiously mixed city of Baquba, 65 km northeast of Baghdad, has been the scene of several sectarian attacks since the Samarra bombing.

Sunni insurgents battling the Shi'ite-led government frequently launch attacks against US-trained Iraqi security forces.

In northern Baghdad, two policemen and three civilians were wounded when a car bomb exploded as a police patrol passed by, police said.

Human rights in Iraq were also at the forefront on Monday after Amnesty International condemned the detention of 14,000 prisoners without trial, saying the lessons of the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal had not been learned. —Reuters

The New York Times
nytimes.com

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March 6, 2006

Afghan Uses Ax to Assault Peacekeeper

By RUHULLAH KHAPALWAK

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan, March 5 — A Canadian soldier was seriously wounded by an ax-wielding youth during a meeting with village elders in a remote village in southern Afghanistan on Saturday afternoon, a Canadian military press statement said Sunday.

The attacker was shot dead by Canadian troops. The soldier, Lt. Trevor Greene, was wounded in the head and was in a coma, the statement said.

Lieutenant Greene was leading a civilian and military mission in the village of Shinkay, meeting with village elders to discuss their reconstruction needs, when he was attacked from behind.

"Lieutenant Greene had removed his helmet as a sign of respect, as is common practice for military personnel involved in shuras," the press statement said, referring to the customary village gatherings.

A tribal leader from the village, Hajji Muhammad Isa, said in a telephone interview that the attacker was a 16-year-old named Abdul Karim, the son of a shoe repairman. Mr. Isa was not at the gathering, but he said he had learned what happened from those who were there.

Shinkay is in a remote mountainous region of Kandahar Province where there have been frequent attacks on foreign troops and Afghan government personnel. Forces linked to the country's ousted Taliban government have long operated in the region, mounting ambushes and hit-and-run attacks, then retreating into the mountains.

The Canadian unit is part of the United States-led coalition force in southern Afghanistan. About 2,200 Canadian soldiers are serving in Kandahar.

In the commotion after the attack, villagers fled the scene and another villager lobbed a grenade, but there were no injuries as a result, the military statement said.

Afghan National Army soldiers who were with the Canadian patrol started shooting and fired a rocket-propelled grenade, the statement said. The Canadian military said there were no reports of casualties from the exchange, but Mr. Isa said a man, a girl and a boy were wounded in the shooting. Afghan police officers arrived at the village Sunday and were searching houses, he said.

He said Abdul Karim was not a member of the Taliban, nor was anyone in his family, and he just helped his brothers working on their farm. "He was a very quiet boy and not talkative," Mr. Isa said. None of his relatives had been arrested or killed, but American troops had searched the village several times, which could have caused him to resent them, Mr. Isa said.

Lieutenant Greene was evacuated by helicopter and had received emergency treatment at Kandahar air

base, then was transferred to the American military hospital at Landstuhl, Germany.

Last week, two Canadian soldiers were killed when their vehicle overturned in an accident. Another soldier was wounded in a suicide bomb attack.

In the neighboring province of Oruzgan, the World Food Program said on Sunday, attackers last week burned two trucks of food belonging to the program and destined for poor families in a remote village in the province.

Across the border in Pakistan, heavy fighting between Pakistani troops and militants continued through the night but seemed to die down Sunday as hundreds of townspeople were reported to be fleeing the area. The fighting has been some of the most serious since the army started to root out foreign fighters from bases in the Waziristan region two years ago. The government appeared to have lost control of the main town in North Waziristan, Miram Shah, for a few days.

Telephone lines were cut and reports were sketchy, but the government military spokesman, Maj. Gen. Shaukat Sultan, said the militants, both local tribesmen and foreign fighters, had been forced to retreat from Miram Shah, The Associated Press reported.

The fighting had been raging for several days, since an army raid on a militant training camp on Wednesday. Militants and their supporters attacked Miram Shah, seizing control of the telephone exchange and other government buildings and firing rockets and missiles at the government compound and army base outside the town. Fighting was also reported in the nearby town of Mir Ali.

General Sultan said 46 militant fighters and 5 soldiers had been killed in the four days of fighting. It was impossible to verify the casualty figures independently. The Associated Press reported that at least two civilians had been killed, and that their names were posted at the town hospital.

Carlotta Gall contributed reporting from Islamabad, Pakistan, for this article.

Bush in Afghanistan

Short visit but a long haul

Leader

Thursday March 2, 2006

Guardian

George Bush's flying visit to Afghanistan yesterday took him to the first place outside the US where the world really changed after the 9/11 attacks. A failed state that was criminally neglected after the end of the Soviet occupation, was ruled by the reactionary fundamentalists of the Taliban, and gave shelter to Osama bin Laden, fell easily to an unbeatable superpower which manipulated local allies to win the war. Building something better on the ruins was always going to be harder than that swift military victory. The president's impressions during his four-hour stay were limited to Bagram air base and a flight via armed helicopter over dusty plains and mud-brick homes to the presidential palace and the new US embassy in Kabul. "It is possible to replace tyrants with a free society in which men and women are respected, in which young girls can go to school and realise their full potential, in which people are able to realise their dreams," said Mr Bush. His words about the progress made in the last four years were not empty, though they skirted over some very grave problems.

Compared with the disaster in Iraq, Afghanistan is a success story: over 4.5 million refugees have returned home. Presidential elections in October 2004 were followed by parliamentary ones last September. The Pushtun leader Hamid Karzai is a dignified figure with shrewd political instincts which he has used to co-opt or neutralise powerful warlords and others who impeded or undermined him.

Still, there are worries. The under-five mortality rate in Afghanistan is the fourth highest in the world. More than 3 million people need feeding by the UN. Just 13% of Afghans have access to safe water and 12% to adequate sanitation; only 6% have access to mains electricity.

Economists do see signs of recovery but the overall situation is extremely fragile. Security is threatened by Taliban insurgents and al-Qaida militants who have been increasing attacks in recent months, especially in the south and east, where the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom continues to hunt Osama bin Laden. Mr Bush's pledge that the al-Qaida leader and the Taliban's Mullah Omar will be caught smacked of braggadocio. Insistence from Pakistan - the president's last stop on his South Asian tour - that it is doing all it can to stop cross-border incursions was unconvincing. But Mr Bush might usefully have regretted the collateral damage to innocent Pakistani villagers caused by US air strikes.

Another significant difference with Iraq is that the US is not alone or supported only by a dwindling number of allies. Nato, which until recently was floundering for a purpose in the post-cold-war world, was left out of the war for Afghanistan and split over Iraq, has found a challenging new mission. Its 9,000-strong force is about to expand to 15,000. All 26 allies and 10 other non-members are helping the Karzai government to extend its authority.

Afghanistan's biggest single problem is narcotics. Opium poppy cultivation fell by 20% in 2005 but the heroin yield was up by 7% and is set to rise again this year. Opium still generates over half the country's GDP and is one of the greatest threats to the establishment of the rule of law and effective governance. Drugs traffickers need to be tried and jailed in secure conditions and not bribe their way out of trouble.

January's London conference on Afghanistan produced a "compact" that sets out a multi-billion dollar blueprint for partnership between Kabul and the international community to bolster security, economic development and counter-narcotics efforts. That was due acknowledgement, by the US and others, that nation-building has to be a long-term commitment. The world failed Afghanistan for too many years and Afghanistan then caused great damage to the world. Even the shortest presidential visit is enough, so long as it helps ensure that that vital point

is not forgotten.

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washingtonpost.com

Growing Threat Seen In Afghan Insurgency

DIA Chief Cites Surging Violence in Homeland

By Walter Pincus
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, March 1, 2006; A08

The director of the Defense Intelligence Agency told Congress yesterday that the insurgency in Afghanistan is growing and will increase this spring, presenting a greater threat to the central government's expansion of authority "than at any point since late 2001."

"Despite significant progress on the political front, the Taliban-dominated insurgency remains a capable and resilient threat," Lt. Gen. Michael D. Maples said in a statement presented to the Senate Armed Services Committee at its annual hearing on national security threats.

Appearing with Director of National Intelligence John D. Negroponte, Maples said attacks within Afghanistan were up 20 percent between 2004 and 2005, suicide bombings increased "almost fourfold" and use of makeshift bombs, similar to those used in Iraq, had "more than doubled."

Negroponte, in his prepared remarks, acknowledged that "the volume and geographic scope of attacks increased last year," but he added, "the Taliban and other militants have not been able to stop the democratic process" being undertaken by the central government of President Hamid Karzai.

Unlike at a similar hearing last month before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, when Negroponte read his statement for 90 minutes, he summarized his remarks yesterday in 20 minutes, and turned the floor over to Maples, who took even less time.

As a result, committee members had time to pose questions on a range of issues, covering Afghanistan, security in Iraq, North Korea's nuclear programs and the purchase by Dubai Ports World of a British company running terminals at six American ports.

Maples's prepared remarks seemed to frame some of the initial questions, including his statements that, "with over a million Sunni Arab military-aged males in Iraq, insurgents have little difficulty mobilizing enough fighters." He also said, "The elections appear to have heightened tension and polarized sectarian divides."

Sen. John W. Warner (R-Va.), chairman of the panel, led off by asking Negroponte what the "benchmarks" of civil war would be. Negroponte responded he would see it as involving "a complete loss of central government security control, the disintegration or deterioration of the security forces of the country," and "unauthorized forces . . . getting the upper hand in the situation."

Both Negroponte and Maples agreed that the degree to which Shiite and Kurd leaders accommodated

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The advertisement shows a black and white photograph of a house at night, illuminated by a street lamp. The house has a chimney and a window with a flower box. The overall tone is dark and atmospheric.

Sunni demands would determine the outcome. Failure to broaden the government to include Sunnis in key positions "would have the effect of prolonging the insurgency," Negroponte said. Although they both said Iran was providing military support to the Shiites, Maples said he did not think it was in Iran's interest to see a full-scale civil war and Tehran "would probably act to avoid that."

On North Korea, Negroponte declined as he has in the past to provide a specific estimate of the number of nuclear weapons Pyongyang may have. "We assess that they probably have nuclear weapons as they claim that they do," Negroponte said, "but we don't know for a fact that they've got such weapons."

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.), who pressed the issue, noted that CIA Director Porter J. Goss had publicly said the number was "more than one or two," and asked Negroponte what the current unclassified estimate was. "I'm just reluctant to pinpoint a specific number because I don't want to convey the impression that we know for a fact that they have that many weapons," Negroponte said.

Under questioning from Clinton, Maples confirmed the North Koreans are in the process of developing an intercontinental ballistic missile that could deliver a nuclear warhead, though the DIA director added, "They have not done so yet nor have they tested it."

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Taliban, Al-Qaeda men in Afghanistan prison riot

Uniforms to distinguish political, criminal prisoners likely cause

KABUL: About 1,300 prisoners, many of them from Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, seized control of a block at Afghanistan's main jail on Sunday after a riot in which more than 20 inmates were hurt, officials said.

The riot at the Pul-e-Charkhi prison on the outskirts of the capital erupted late Saturday when prisoners clashed with guards and then set alight mattresses and beds, Deputy Justice Minister Mohammad Qasim

Hashimzai told AFP.

Several prison blocks were destroyed in the fire and windows and doors were smashed, said human rights official Nader Nadeery. Guards opened fire to stop the unrest spreading throughout the huge complex, Mr. Hashimzai said.

"According to the prison guards, four to five people have been wounded but according to the rioters, they say they have 20 people who are wounded," he

said. A prison guard was also slightly wounded. "We cannot confirm anybody is dead."

Nadeery, from the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission helping to negotiate with the prisoners, said he had been told there were 31 casualties which could include fatalities. The prisoners were refusing to hand over the injured for treatment, Mr. Hashimzai said. The rioters had broken through walls separating differ-

ent sections of the block, including a women's section, and "have joined together and organised a riot," he said. Some reports said the unrest may have been sparked by resistance to new prison uniforms, which would reportedly distinguish between political and criminal prisoners.

But Mr. Nadeery said it appeared to have been staged by Taliban members trying to escape. "It is very much a political issue." Notorious gangleader Timur Shah, convicted of kidnapping an Italian aid worker last year and sentenced to death for murder, was also involved in provoking the situation, he said.

Mr. Hashimzai said the prisoners had introduced a representative for talks and presented a list of demands, including that they did not have to wear the new uniforms. Another demand was the removal of the grille separating prisoners from visitors.

— AFP

U.K. troops to check Al-Qaeda's drug funds

Mark Townsend

LASHKAR GAH (AFGHANISTAN): Opium from the region of southern Afghanistan where thousands of U.K. soldiers are being deployed is helping to finance Al-Qaeda operations,

senior army officers believe.

Hundreds more troops are due to arrive in Helmand province this week — and disrupting Al-Qaeda's funding stream from the poppy fields has emerged as a previously secret aim of the deployment.

Senior officers have confirmed briefings by the British security services and Ministry of Defence (MoD) officials on Helmand's role in the "international terror network." — ©Guardian Newspapers Limited 2006

27/10/2006

THE HINDU

Afghan MP says billions in aid, but no improvement

REUTERS

KABUL, JANUARY 31

BILLIONS of dollars of aid that have poured into Afghanistan have done little to improve people's lives and sweeping personnel changes in government and aid agencies should be made, a former minister said on Tuesday.

"We do not see the least improvement," Ramazan Bhardost, a former planning minister in President Hamid Karzai's US-backed government, told a news conference at Afghanistan's Parliament.

The French-educated Bhardost won a seat in landmark parliamentary elections in September with one of the highest numbers of votes.

Speaking hours before a conference on Afghanistan's aid donors was due to open in London, Bhardost criticised the government, the United Nations and aid groups.

"The people are asking themselves 'if these billions of dollars have been donated, which of our pains have they remedied, what ointment has been put on our wounds'," he said adding, "There is minimum improvement in the lives of the ordinary people."

Aid and how it is used is expected to be a central theme at the London talks, to be chaired by Karzai, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The government is seeking greater control of aid, saying only a fraction of \$11.9 billion disbursed since 2002 has been channeled through international organisations and aid groups and



Karzai with Blair in London on Tuesday. Afghanistan will receive promises of economic and military support from over 50 countries in return for pledges to fight corruption and the illegal opium trade. Reuters

much is wasted. Bhardost backed the government's call for greater control of aid and said top government and aid officials should be replaced because they had wasted aid.

"All ministers and key government figures have lost their legitimacy," he said adding, "There should be changes at the ministerial level, among leading figures of aid agencies, foreign banks and institutions in order to avoid wasting assistance again," he said.

01 FEB 2006

Afghanistan: Qanooni's moment of triumph

M.K. Bhadrakumar

THE 13th century Italian theologian and philosopher, Saint Thomas Aquinas, said that in order for a war to be just, the three things needed would be the "authority of the sovereign," a "just cause," and a "rightful intention." By that moral compass, the war in Afghanistan could probably be on its way to becoming one-third "just."

Whether the Afghan war concerned a "just cause" would be debated long and hard. Some believe the Bush administration viewed Afghanistan as a backwater along the road to Iraq — a sort of detour during which high-tech warfare and the anatomy of "terrorism" were put under scrutiny. Some others say the war itself created an enemy, which the U.S. needed in the post-Cold War world and took an interest in preserving.

As for its "intention," the war transcended Afghanistan and took protean forms. It made an appearance in the Ferghana Valley. It has crossed over to Pakistan's Balochistan province, and may be lurching toward Iran — another turf of Balochi sub-nationalism in a strategic swathe of land with an impressive waterfront facing the Arabian Sea. Indeed, the Afghan war resonates with ancestral voices prophesying war, as Cole-ridge's *Kublai Khan* would have heard amid the tumult of the steppes.

Meanwhile, the "authority of the sovereign" largely escaped attention. It is in this respect that Yunus Qanooni's election as Speaker of the newly elected Afghan Parliament inspires contemplation. The election was genuinely contested. Mr. Qanooni won narrowly defeating Abd al-Rabb al-Rasul Sayyaf. For the first time in the post-Taliban period, a political equilibrium was allowed to develop without manipulation by American viceroys.

Mr. Qanooni was a key aide to Ahmad Shah Masood. He comes from the Afghan *jihad* and the anti-Taliban resistance. A gifted politician, Mr. Qanooni revealed his skill in the three critical weeks following Masood's assassination on September 9, 2001, by negotiating an Afghan government-in-exile to be headed by former King Zahir Shah. Afghans preferred a national front to challenge the Taliban Government in Kabul rather than a foreign invading army. Ha-

With Yunus Qanooni's election as Parliament Speaker, a complex calculus of power is forming. Though they are seen as rivals, Mr. Qanooni's political platform is far from irreconcilable with that of President Hamid Karzai.

mid Karzai made it a point to sideline Mr. Qanooni.

Mr. Sayyaf, on the other hand, has a pedigree going back to Zahir Shah's rule, as an Islamic scholar of high repute in Kabul. He headed the Mujahideen group with Wahhabi leanings (Ittehad), whose cadres subsequently moved in and out of the Taliban movement.

An impression prevails that Mr. Karzai preferred Mr. Sayyaf to Mr. Qanooni. But appearances can be deceptive in Afghanistan. Mr. Sayyaf is an enigmatic and mercurial personality. Where exactly he stood at any given time through the past quarter century *vis-à-vis* Pakistani and Saudi intelligence or the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, no one could tell.

Pakistan seems to have suffered a huge setback in Mr. Qanooni's reappearance in the top echelons of power. With Mr. Sayyaf as Speaker, new vistas would have opened for Pakistan in Kabul's corridors of power.

The Afghan Parliament has a hefty contingent of Mujahideen commanders and Taliban members, former communists who turned Pashtun chauvinists, and tribal leaders rooted in ethnic identity. These elements all grew up in Pakistani playpens some time or the other.

A last-minute closing of ranks between Mr. Qanooni and Tajik leader Burhanuddin Rabbani, on the one hand, and the consolidation of various progressive elements in Parliament who viewed a Sayyaf victory as a retrogressive development, on the other, would seem to have enabled Mr. Qanooni to scrape through.

What does Pakistan do now? The balance sheet of the war on terror reads dismal. Does the low intensity war make sense? The Taliban can surely create mayhem but cannot capture power. The U.S. is about to pass on the baton to

NATO. Pakistan can end up annoying influential Western capitals.

Besides, there are discordant notes within the Afghan resistance. In his customary annual Id message on January 8, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who was in alliance with the Taliban, did some plain speaking about President Pervez Musharraf's Afghan policy. Mr. Hekmatyar said: "The Americans are well aware of everything happening inside Pakistan. The CIA gets to know about developments in the Pakistani President's office faster than news about happenings in the Afghan presidential palace. The CIA and FBI are active inside Pakistan as they are in Afghanistan. Their establishments in Pakistan are as active as in Afghanistan. There too, they can arrest people and lock them up in prisons at will. There too, they fire missiles into the houses of their opponents from their surveillance aircraft, but the Pakistani officials promptly announce that there was an explosion in a house used for making bombs in which a terrorist was killed."

"The Americans have asked the Pakistanis to give up Kashmir and promised that, in return, they will make the Durand Line permanent and will help them bring the tribal areas under Pakistani control, areas which the British failed to control. Officials in Islamabad have accepted this deal."

The Taliban's initial reaction to the political developments in Kabul has been rhetorical. "Amir-al-Momenin" Mullah Mohammad Omar said: "Now a fake parliament has been set up and U.S. Vice-President Dick Cheney inaugurated it, but everyone is aware that the Afghans have not given up their resistance to this fake process. The resistance is getting stronger and is spreading to all parts of the country day by day. We assure all Afghans and the Muslims of the world

that the Americans, apart from such theatrical events, will never succeed... The Americans will be forced to withdraw their forces from Afghanistan just as they are forced to withdraw from Iraq. Our struggle will turn into a national movement because every zealous Afghan Muslim knows that our soil has been given to the Americans by a few puppets."

Much will now depend on what happens in Kabul. Mr. Karzai and Mr. Qanooni have been characterised as political "rivals." But a complex calculus of power is forming. Mr. Qanooni's political platform is far from irreconcilable with Mr. Karzai's.

True, Mr. Qanooni had reason to feel embittered that in the presidential election, he might have "secured the votes but Karzai got the victory." But today, he too is a stakeholder. True, Mr. Qanooni had not minced words in questioning Mr. Karzai's leadership qualities. But he never wanted Mr. Karzai's Government to collapse either, as that would be "tantamount to giving Afghanistan to Pakistan" (to quote him). Also, Mr. Qanooni from his powerful post is finally getting the chance to realise his agenda of "national unity and stability and security."

Problem areas

But there are problem areas. First, the power broker who counts most is 'Ustad' Rabbani. And, there is no certainty whatsoever that the 'Ustad' has forgiven those who unceremoniously forced him out of the presidential palace in Kabul in the winter of 2001 to make way for Mr. Karzai. Whether a coalition of conservative Mujahideen elements cutting across ethnicity would incrementally assemble around 'Ustad' Rabbani remains to be seen. He has extensive links with almost all Mujahideen leaders, including Mr. Hekmatyar or Mr. Sayyaf or Yunus Khalis — and also with Pakistani agencies. In the 1994-95 period, he even helped the Taliban. ('Ustad' Rabbani moved to Pakistan in 1973 as part of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's strategy to exploit political Islam as an instrument of state policy *vis-à-vis* Afghanistan.) Prof. Rabbani is the senior-most Islamist leader in Afghanistan today. Yet he is out of power. There is something odd here. The 'Ustad' is a master tactician, who can be a dogged Afghan nationalist — if he chooses to.

Secondly, Mr. Qanooni must come up with something far better than Mr. Karzai's policies, which he himself has condemned as "driven by ethnicity and private gains." On the other hand, thanks to Mr. Karzai's ploys to create a pliable parliament, Mr. Qanooni is being handed down a factionalised legislature. He must now make it work. Thirdly, Mr. Qanooni has reservations about Mr. Karzai's Cabinet choices, which would come up for parliament's approval. He felt the Green Card holders from the Afghan diaspora who surrounded Mr. Karzai were out of touch with the realities of Afghan life.

Besides, Mr. Qanooni strongly feels that a parliamentary form of government suits Afghanistan's needs better. Mr. Karzai and his supporters, on the other hand, fought hard to enshrine in the constitution a very strong presidency. Equally so, the confusion in Iraq would have disillusioned the Americans too about the parliamentary form of government.

Not that Mr. Qanooni is prone to "anti-Americanism." He believes that an open-ended NATO presence suits Afghanistan's security needs. He has no problems if Afghanistan calls itself the U.S.' "strategic partner." But Mr. Qanooni regrets that Washington's policies take shape under "Pakistani influence," and "there are special groups in Pakistan who want to destroy Afghanistan's stability." He is on record that the Taliban's resurgence itself is not accidental but forms part of Islamabad's "strategic" plan of undermining Afghanistan's sovereignty. Of course, he has been critical of Mr. Karzai's ambivalent policy towards the Taliban.

Mr. Qanooni's election on the whole holds the potential for enhancing the "authority of the sovereign" in Afghanistan. But the sovereign is called upon to share power. Naturally, there is indignation that at this delicate juncture, Washington is inclined to announce "victory" in the Afghan war and march on.

CARTOONSCAPE



Karzai invites Mullah Omar for dialogue



1 AFGHANISTAN PRESIDENT
2 Hamid Karzai invited Taliban
3 leader Mullah Mohammed Omar
4 to contact his government to seek
5 reconciliation, but he said on
6 Sunday that he did not expect the
7 fugitive to come out of hiding.

"We would like all Afghans,
Taliban or non-Taliban, to partic-
ipate in the life of this coun-
try. It's their home, they're wel-
come," Karzai said.

Asked if his offer included
Omar, Karzai said, "If he wants
to come, he should get in touch
with us. We would see what he
has to say, of course. But I don't
think he will come. He has so
much on his hands against
Afghanistan. We don't even
know as to where he is hiding.
He has to first give us an account
of what he has done."

Omar has been in hiding since
US-led forces ousted his Taliban
regime in 2001 for hosting Osa-
ma bin Laden. US officials be-
lieve the two are hiding in the
mountains on the Afghanistan-
Pakistan border. Karzai said the
hunt for the two would continue.
"I am sure we will find them one
day," he said.

Omar is believed to be leading
a rebellion against Karzai's gov-
ernment.

AP, Kabul

9 JAN 2006

THE TELEGRAPH

A new ruler for Dubai

Dubai and the United Arab Emirates have lost a far-sighted leader with the death of Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid al-Maktoum. Under his rule from 1990, Dubai, one of the seven UAE states, metamorphosed from a trading outpost into a dynamic business and commercial hub of the region and a fast-growing cosmopolis. A sound decision to diversify into non-oil sectors — the emirate is not as oil rich as some others in the federation — preceded Sheikh Maktoum's rule, but it was only in the last decade that Dubai plunged energetically into new areas of economic growth such as finance and tourism. This in turn propelled a huge construction boom. Oil now contributes merely 5.8 per cent of Dubai's gross domestic product, according to data from the Dubai Department of Economic Development, making it a model among other states in the UAE and in the Gulf region. The last few years also saw this emirate make rapid strides in education and the information technology sector. Although free speech is written into the UAE Constitution, news outlets work under some restraints, including a 1988 law that prescribes subjects acceptable for publication or broadcast. Still Dubai aspires to be a nodal point for dissemination of news about the region, and recently set up a media park where some of the major international and regional news networks have opened shop.

Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, who has succeeded his brother as Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE, is expected to provide continuity in change. With the ruler backing him, he took charge of Dubai's economic development and led the thrust into the new sectors. The rest of the world has high stakes in the makeover of Dubai and is interested in where Sheikh Mohammed will take it. As the emirate's second largest trade partner, India is an important contributor to the Dubai success story as well as its beneficiary. Of nearly 1.2 million Indians in the UAE, more than half are in Dubai and other northern emirates. Indian workers — unskilled, semi-skilled, and professional — are a vital part of the UAE economy. This, in turn, has taken some pressure off the Indian job market, especially Kerala's. Indians in the UAE send back annually \$2 billion in remittances. There had been concerns that some Indian and Pakistani underworld elements were sheltering in Dubai. It took a while (despite a 1999 extradition treaty) for the UAE to respond to New Delhi's requests to hand over men wanted in India for various crimes. Diplomacy, and the post-9/11 situation, have led to positive developments on this front beginning with the deportation of Aftab Ansari, wanted in the Kolkota American Centre blast case. The hope is that with Sheikh Mohammed at the helm, India's partnership with Dubai will be strengthened and its concerns more expeditiously met. This will be in keeping with the enlightened modernity associated with Dubai and its new ruler.

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19 Killed as Afghan Fighting Spills Across Pakistani Border

Two-Day Battle Leaves 41 Dead, Underscores Challenge Facing Troops in Restive Southern Province

By Noor Khan
Associated Press
Sunday, February 5, 2006; A22

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan -- Militants attacked government offices and a police convoy Saturday, continuing a series of assaults that have left at least 41 people dead in the southern region over two days, government officials said.

About 250 Afghan forces fought more than 200 rebels in some of the area's fiercest fighting in months. At least 19 people were killed in Afghanistan and Pakistan Saturday.

Fighting began Friday with a mountain ambush on a police convoy that left 16 militants and six policemen dead and scores wounded, said Amir Mohammed Akhund, the deputy governor of Helmand province, which borders Pakistan.

The violence spread across the border as a roadside bomb exploded by an army vehicle Saturday in a northwestern tribal region of Pakistan, killing three Pakistani security personnel, an official said.

No one immediately asserted responsibility, but security officials pointed to militants linked to al Qaeda in previous attacks in the area, where Pakistan has sent thousands of troops to flush out insurgents.

Afghan officials said U.S. forces joined the battle Friday and Saturday, but a U.S. military spokesman said he could confirm involvement only in the first lay of fighting.

The bloodshed Saturday underscored the challenge facing thousands of British and Canadian troops in coming months as they gradually relieve American forces in southern Afghanistan, a hotbed of insurgency and the drug trade.

American and British warplanes bombed suspected Taliban militants fleeing the fighting around midnight Friday, killing eight of them, said Khan Mohammed, a police chief in Helmand province. The fighting prompted dozens of families to flee their villages, he said.

A group of militants who escaped from the initial clash attacked a government office early Saturday, killing the government chief and wounding four police officers, said Akhund, the deputy governor.

Later in the day, another group of militants attacked the main government office in a neighboring district, setting off a two-hour gun battle that left one policeman and three suspected Taliban fighters

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dead, he said.

Militants used a remote-controlled bomb to attack a police convoy in Kandahar, the main city in southern Afghanistan and a former Taliban stronghold, said Sher Mohammed, a police officer.

A woman and a child who were walking in the area were killed, and three other passersby were wounded, he added.

Also in Kandahar, a Taliban commander, Abdul Samad, was killed by border forces as he tried to enter illegally from neighboring Pakistan, said Asadullah Khalid, the governor of Kandahar. Ten other militants fled back across the frontier.

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U.S. Cedes Duties in Rebuilding Afghanistan

NATO, Other Allies Take On New Roles

By Griff Witte
Washington Post Foreign Service
Tuesday, January 3, 2006; A01

KABUL, Afghanistan -- Four years into a mammoth reconstruction effort here that has been largely led, funded and secured by Americans, the United States is showing a growing willingness to cede those jobs to others.

The most dramatic example will come by this summer, when the U.S. military officially hands over control of the volatile southern region -- plagued by persistent attacks from Islamic militias -- to an international force led by the NATO alliance. The United States will cut its troop strength by 2,500, even though it is not clear how aggressively NATO troops will pursue insurgents, who have shown no sign of relenting.

At the same time, the U.S. government is increasingly allowing Western allies, or Afghans themselves, to take on the tasks of rebuilding a country that has suffered more than two decades of fighting and remains beset by poverty, drugs and insurgency.

The United States says that its shifting approach complements Afghanistan's evolution into a self-sustaining democracy and that Washington has no plans to pull out altogether.

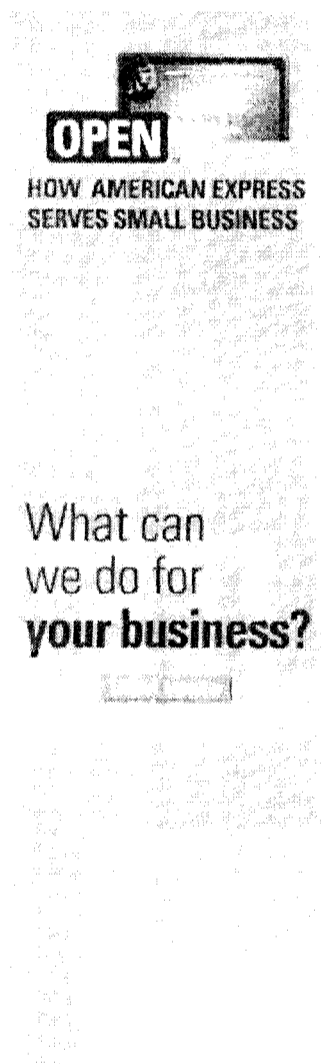
"The Afghans have to have enough space to make their own decisions, even to stumble sometimes," said U.S. Ambassador Ronald Neumann. "But we shouldn't leave them without critical support before they're strong enough."

As the U.S. presence becomes less visible, however, Afghans are starting to question whether the U.S. support is sufficient. Some Afghan officials express concern that the Bush administration's priorities are simply shifting elsewhere and that the United States may abandon their country prematurely, much the way it did in the early 1990s following the withdrawal of Soviet troops.

Funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development, which topped \$1 billion for 2005 and has helped build highways, schools and clinics across the country during the last four years, will be reduced to just over \$600 million in 2006, unless Congress appropriates more money.

On one of the biggest threats facing the country, the illicit drug trade, the United States has largely ceded leadership to the British government and is pinning its hopes on Afghan provincial governors to eradicate poppy fields. Although U.S. officials have warned repeatedly about the need to curb the burgeoning opium business, they have so far spent only modest amounts to help and now say Kabul must take the initiative.

Politically, too, the United States has been less willing to exert its influence. The previous ambassador,



Zalmay Khalilzad, played a strong, high-profile role here, negotiating directly with recalcitrant regional leaders and openly advising President Hamid Karzai. Neumann, who arrived several months ago, is a quieter presence who rarely interferes in Karzai's decisions.

Earlier last month, to the surprise of many Afghans, the U.S. Embassy stood by silently during a struggle for the leadership of the new parliament, in which Karzai's government was believed to have backed a radical Islamic scholar and ex-militia leader accused of past human rights abuses over a more moderate candidate who had run against Karzai for president.

Some foreign allies are encouraged by the signs that the United States is willing to loosen its grip and allow others a greater role in the country's rebirth. Several Afghan officials said they welcomed the increased responsibility.

"We don't want to be a permanent burden on the international community," said Defense Minister Rahim Wardak. "This country has been defended by us for 5,000 years. That is our duty." Still, Wardak noted, the abrupt withdrawal of U.S. support after the decade-long Soviet occupation ended in 1989 precipitated a civil war that culminated with the Taliban movement taking power.

"I hope the international community, and especially the U.S., has learned the lesson of what happened," he said. "I hope that history will not repeat itself this time."

The transfer of power in southern Afghanistan will provide the first critical test of the new U.S. strategy. The shift will allow the Bush administration, which has spent more than \$47 billion on military efforts in Afghanistan since 2001, to cut the U.S. troop presence by 13 percent, from 19,000 to 16,500.

The move will leave U.S. forces in charge only in the eastern provinces, and only until NATO is ready to assume command there as well. That could happen later in the year, allowing the United States to reduce its troop commitment further.

The reduction, the first since the U.S.-led invasion, comes after a year in which nearly 100 American soldiers were killed in Afghanistan, more than double the deaths during 2004. Military commanders said the higher toll was a result of their more aggressive strategy for battling the insurgency. They also asserted there would be a seamless transition when NATO troops take over, with help from the Afghan army.

"It's understood that NATO will be in a position to carry on the same counterinsurgency fight that we're running today," said Col. Don C. McGraw, who directs U.S. military operations here.

But the Afghan army remains in its infancy, and mounting a counterinsurgency has not been NATO's job. Questions remain about whether it will be willing to take on that task once its troops are deployed in the south, where on Monday, a suicide bomber in the city of Kandahar attacked a convoy of foreign troops, injuring a U.S. soldier and two Afghan civilians.

Until now, NATO has commanded the north and the west, which have been less violent than the south and the east. In Kabul, its troops have been a familiar and friendly sight on street patrols. In the countryside, they have spent much of their time coordinating reconstruction efforts -- and none chasing Taliban insurgents.

NATO's rules of engagement will be loosened when it takes over the south, allowing its forces to be more aggressive, but it is unclear exactly how much more. One member country, the Netherlands, is

wavering over whether it wants to send troops to the area, a longtime Taliban stronghold that has recently been the site of numerous battles and suicide bombings. Maj. Andrew Elmes, a British spokesman for the NATO force -- officially called the International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF -- said he expects its soldiers will primarily serve in a peacekeeping function, unlike U.S. troops, who have been initiating battles with insurgents.

"If you think of a policeman, who is armed but he doesn't go out looking for a fight, that's along the lines we're looking at," he said of the expanded ISAF mission, which will add 6,000 soldiers to the 9,000 currently in the country.

Some knowledgeable Afghans predicted that such a limited NATO role would not succeed in the more dangerous territory. "The threat in the south is terrorism, drug trafficking and organized crime," said Ali Ahmad Jalali, who recently resigned as Karzai's interior minister. He spoke by telephone from Washington, where he now teaches at the National Defense University. "If they don't get involved in fighting those things, what will they be providing for the security of the country?"

Another major question is how the transition will affect U.S. efforts to track down top fugitives such as al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, his deputy Ayman Zawahiri and Taliban leader Mohammad Omar, all of whom are believed to be hiding in the region.

NATO has said it will not spend its time hunting individuals. The U.S. military will keep only a small residual presence in the south, but officials maintain that they will bring in Special Operations troops as the need arises.

"If Mullah Omar shows up in Kandahar," McGraw said, "we'll go to Kandahar."

Still, the U.S. willingness to cede authority in the south suggests just how remote the possibility of catching notorious fugitives within Afghanistan may be. Many security officials here say they believe bin Laden and others are across the border in Pakistan, where the United States has a much smaller presence.

That likelihood is another reason many Afghans wonder how much longer the United States will stay, and whether it is as committed to reconstruction as it is to catching terrorists. The possible dramatic cuts in USAID funds for Afghanistan -- the result of tightened budgets because of heavy U.S. spending in Iraq and domestic hurricane relief -- have increased that concern.

Neumann said the \$623 million in aid planned for 2006 will not be enough, and he is hoping Congress will allocate more through a supplemental spending bill, as it has in past years. But he acknowledged that getting lawmakers to understand the importance of the U.S. commitment here "takes more explanation" than it once did.

Despite considerable reconstruction in the past four years, he said, much more needs to be done. Building more roads, he said, would strengthen the government, improve security and cut opium production by giving farmers access to markets for other products.

"This is too critical to just say we want victory but we want it on the cheap," Neumann said. "We're still in a war, and we need to win."

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The New York Times

January 2, 2006

New Afghan Parliament and Karzai Act to Rid Streets of Kabul of Security Barriers

By CARLOTTA GALL

KABUL, Afghanistan, Jan. 1 - Afghanistan's new Parliament is already showing its teeth, pressing the government to act on the inconvenience in the capital caused by security barriers set up by foreign elements, including embassies, contractors and the American military.

President Hamid Karzai and the Ministry of Interior, apparently responding to pressure from the new Parliament and longstanding public grumbling, on Friday ordered all organizations, foreign and domestic, to remove barriers obstructing Kabul's streets within a week.

On Sunday, security contractors for the American military held three employees of the television network Al Jazeera as they tried to film security barriers near the United States military headquarters here. The American Embassy and American military headquarters have closed streets around their premises.

After spending 10 days discussing rules of procedure for Parliament, the lawmakers on Sunday formally turned for the first time to pressing problems facing Afghans.

For an hour, representatives spoke with passion of the suffering of the homeless from cold weather, disease and poverty, and of government corruption and the fate of people in American military detention.

But the issue that threatens to cause an international incident is frustration about traffic problems in Kabul and the closing of whole districts when foreign or government dignitaries visit - like when Vice President Dick Cheney attended the recent opening of Parliament.

"We have to open the roads that have been closed by foreign princes and war princes," said Ramazan Bashardost, a populist member of Parliament.

After Mr. Karzai's decree on Friday, the Ministry of Interior informed various foreign organizations, including the American military, American security contractors like DynCorp, private aid organizations and several embassies, at a meeting Saturday that they had a week to remove their barriers.

The ministry had identified 46 sites in Kabul where the barriers must come down, said a ministry spokesman, Yousuf Stanizai. A presidential spokesman, Khaleeq Ahmad, said no exceptions would be made to the decree.

American military forces were not rushing to comply. Representatives of the American-led coalition forces, among others, "registered their concerns about the general proposal" on Saturday, said an

American military spokesman, Lt. Col. Laurent Fox. The issue was not resolved and would be discussed again, he said.

The security contractors for the American military detained Al Jazeera's employees on Sunday as they filmed across the street from the United States military headquarters here.

The crew, a journalist, a cameraman and a driver, were held for six hours, handed to the Afghan police, and eventually freed without charge, but American soldiers kept their equipment, including the camera, said Samir Allawi, Al Jazeera's Kabul bureau chief.

An American military spokesman, Lt. Mike Cody, said the security forces had evidence that the crew had filmed "security features" of the headquarters, which was forbidden by a sign at the base.