

This “government” is also supported by the so-called United States Committee for a Free Lebanon, founded by Lebanese-American and Wall Street “venture capitalist” Ziad K. Abdelnour. According to its official website, the committee’s “Golden Circle” of those who have lent “invaluable support” to its cause, include the leading war-mongers inside and outside the Bush Administration. This includes Douglas Feith, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense for Policy, and Richard Perle, of the ultra-right-wing American Enterprise Institute, a good friend of the leader of the Bush Administration’s war faction, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. Among many others are right-wingers Daniel Pipes, Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.), and Iran-Contra player and former National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane. All are self-proclaimed friends of Sharon.

Tampering With a Witness

On Jan. 23, less than 24 hours before Hobeika’s assassination, a Belgian appeals court heard final arguments by Sharon’s attorneys demanding that the investigation of their client be terminated. As the accompanying interview with Michael Verhaeghe, one of the attorneys representing the Palestinian victims in the case, indicates, the hearing did not seem to go well for Sharon.

Following the Hobeika assassination, Verhaeghe and his colleagues issued a statement, saying, “The elimination of a key protagonist, who had offered to assist with the enquiry, appears as an evident attempt to undermine the case” (see below).

In 1982, Hobeika was the head of intelligence for the Christian Phalangist militia. It was his unit which took part in the Sabra and Chatila massacre. In his checkered career, he went from an Israeli protégé to a politician who served in the Lebanese government in the 1990s. On July 18, 2001, a few weeks after filing the case against Sharon in Belgium, Hobeika, in a press conference, declared his willingness to go to Brussels to testify. “I openly declare that I am very satisfied that the Sabra and Chatila case has been brought to Belgium, perhaps giving me the first opportunity in 19 years to tell the truth and defend myself and my reputation . . . and get cleared of this accusation.”

As he was making this declaration, a formal request by the attorneys representing the Palestinian plaintiffs was made to the investigative prosecutor, calling for Hobeika to be invited to testify. The only reason he was not called to Belgium last year, was that the investigation was suspended, while the appeals process was being carried out. That process has now ended, with the Jan. 23 hearing.

On Jan. 23, Hobeika met with two Belgian Senators, Josy Dubie and Vincent van Quickenbourne, who were on a fact-finding tour in their capacities as members of the Belgian Sabra and Chatila Committee. Hobeika reiterated his intention to come to Belgium and testify in the trial. Less than 24 hours later, he was dead.

Afghanistan Confronts Economic Disaster, Chaos, and Geopolitics

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Three and a half months after the first bombs were dropped on Afghanistan, the stated war aims are far from being reached. The Osama bin Laden/al-Qaeda terrorist networks, though neutralized and disbanded, have not been eliminated; nor have their leaders been located—much less apprehended. The country, which was given a ready-made interim government through an international conference in Bonn, Germany, is not stabilized; despite the presence of international peacekeepers, rival warlords are in outright conflict, and security conditions outside the capital are not adequate for the distribution of humanitarian aid, urgently needed. UN deputy special envoy Francesco Vendrell has said that 30,000 foreign troops would be required to establish security in the major cities.

At the same time, American and other Western military forces are moving in with astonishing rapidity to secure bases, not only in Afghanistan, but in all of Central Asia. This is an ominous development if seen through the eyes of Russia, India, and China, whose leading political and military figures are asking themselves, whether perhaps there is another agenda, than what was officially drawn up in Washington. Especially in Moscow, according to a leading strategist at Moscow’s U.S.A.-Canada Institute, who spoke to *EIR* on Jan. 11, there is a growing feeling in his country that Russia has been “betrayed and double-crossed,” by the United States and Britain.

Afghanistan Ungoverned

The government of Interim Prime Minister Hamid Karzai, which had been shaped at the Bonn conference, and took power on Dec. 22, is powerless. This was demonstrated most cruelly on Jan. 10, when it was reported that seven Taliban officials (including the former justice minister and defense minister) had surrendered in Kandahar, and then been promptly released by the governor, Gul Agha. They were handed over neither to the Karzai government, nor to the United States, which wanted them. Jalal Khan, a close associate of Gul Agha, said that they had been released after recognizing the Karzai government, and promising to stay out of politics. “Those men who have surrendered are our brothers, and we have allowed them to live in a peaceful manner. They

will not be handed over to America," he said.

A more dramatic expression of the same impotence, is the emergence of conflict among rival warlord factions, which are represented inside the Karzai government. On Jan. 20, fighting broke out west of Kunduz, between Tajik forces loyal to former President Burhanuddin Rabbani and Interim Defense Minister Mohammed Faheem, on the one hand, and those loyal to Uzbek warlord and Interim Deputy Defense Minister Abdul Rashid Dostum, on the other. On Jan. 24, it was announced that Dostum's forces had seized control over the Qale Zall district in northern Afghanistan.

At the same time, in the eastern Khost province of Afghanistan, fighting broke out between the forces of Zakeem Shah Zadran, loyal to Rabbani/Faheem, and those of Bachaa Khan Zadran, loyal to Karzai. The conflict is over who will be the provincial governor.

In western Afghanistan, warlord Ismail Khan is consolidating control, but not unchallenged by Pashtun groups. Pakistani Gen. Mirza Aslam Beg (ret.) told *EIR* on Jan. 24, that what he had predicted at the onset of the war, was unfortunately becoming reality: "There are four or five regions now created, in the Northwest, around Herat, under Ismail Khan; among the Hazaris; in the North and center around Mazar-i-Sharif, under Dostum; in the Panshir Valley under Faheem; and, in the area in the South, in Pashtun territory, I have counted five warlords, each with one to two districts under his control." In sum, "there are about a dozen warlords controlling the country, and there will not be peace there for a long time."

A Struggle for Money

Such conflicts reflect an enduring reality of the country, that, in the absence of a powerful central authority, local, tribal factions will emerge and vie for power. This competition is also a struggle for money. As one Carnegie Institute researcher commented on Jan. 21, the warlords will have to be bought off. In General Beg's view, whatever funds are made available to Afghanistan, will be the subject of massive fighting.

One major problem for Karzai is money. Although he took office in late December, he has not had the financial means to pay civil servants, including police. At the opening of an international donors conference in Tokyo on Jan. 21, Karzai warned that unless serious financial support were provided fast, the country "could remain a source of instability for the world and the region." He stressed that his government would lose all credibility if it could not pay staff or deliver services to the people. Karzai expressed his frustration over bureaucratic delays in getting funds released, saying his government has seen "little sign from the international community in response to our urgent needs." He stressed the country needs grants, for its immediate cash needs, not "pledges."

The donors conference came up with a \$4.5 billion aid package, which is less than half the five-year goal of \$10

billion set by the United Nations. Of the pledges, \$1.8 billion is to be made available this year, and the remaining \$2.7 billion over the following years. The European Union pledged \$500 million for this year; Iran, \$500 million over five years; Japan, \$500 million over two or two and a half years; Saudi Arabia, \$220 million over three years; and the United States, \$296 million for 2002. The order of magnitude being discussed for a reconstruction plan, is \$10-15 billion, over ten years.

The actual needs of the country would require hundreds of billions over decades. Although the international aid is dubbed "for reconstruction," the fact is, it is for basic construction: Afghanistan has no infrastructure, no road system, no railways, electricity, running water, and so forth. The precondition for unifying the country would be to construct a national transportation system, rail and road, which would also be linked up to neighboring states.

Pax Americana in Central Asia

While war continues in fact in Afghanistan, with aerial bombardments, the U.S. military has been massively extending its presence in the region. For the initial military campaign, the United States had managed to convince Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan to provide base facilities. Now, as peacekeeping forces are being deployed in the capital, the logistical basis for further U.S. presence is being built up.

Gen. Tommy Franks, the U.S. Commander of the operations in Afghanistan, was in Uzbekistan beginning on Jan. 21, for talks with President Islam Karimov and Defense Minister Kadyr Gulyamov. Franks was seeking an agreement, which was signed, whereby the United States would rent a base for 25 years! Currently, there are 1,500 Americans at Khanabad air base in Uzbekistan.

Although Franks denied that the United States had any intention of establishing a permanent presence, the facts seemed to contradict him. A leading British strategic analyst told *EIR* on Jan. 21, that the United States is moving to establish bases in all the Central Asian republics. General Franks went on to Kyrgyzstan, where he met again with President Askar Akayev and his defense minister, about basing rights at Manas Airport, where the United States plans to deploy 3,000 troops. Franks was also negotiating for Canadian and French forces to be allowed to join the Americans. He then flew back to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan has no border with Afghanistan, but does have a border with

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China, a fact which has increased apprehensions in Beijing, that the deployments are aimed against China.

In Pakistan, which has been the base for the U.S. war, an agreement was struck on Jan. 24 for a long-term American presence, as the government agreed to provide full operational facilities at Karachi International Airport. The United States has asked Pakistan to provide large tracts of land to build a permanent air base in Pakistan's northwest province of Baluchistan, near the Afghan border.

What is the view in Russia on these deployments? The strategist from the U.S.A.-Canada Institute in Moscow, cited above, said that people felt "blackmailed": "On Sept. 24, President Putin said demonstratively, and publicly, that Russia was now a 'friend of the West.' Soon thereafter, [British Prime Minister] Tony Blair wrote a letter, promising a new Russian relationship with NATO. But what has actually happened? Nothing!" Not only have there been no gestures from the United States, but there has been "a new pattern of verbal attacks on what we are doing in Chechnya, with no corresponding criticism of what the Americans have done in Afghanistan; and forward moves by the U.S. in Central Asia."

He went on: "We are being treated as a secondary power, as an outcast. It is very ugly." Although President Putin is still "very popular," he said, "we are reaching a threshold. If the United States does now in Kazakstan, what it has been doing in Uzbekistan, with building up military infrastructure and related moves, a threshold of tolerance will have been crossed, and the mood toward Putin will likely change."

Open criticism of the U.S. moves in the region has come from Russian military and political figures. Konstantin Totsky, director of the Border Service (which polices the Tajik/Afghan border), told Interfax Russia that he expected the United States to leave. "Once the operation [in Afghanistan] has ended, that presence here will be superfluous." Speaker of the State Duma (parliament) Gennadi Seleznyov, told the press in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on Jan. 11, that his country is interested in a speedy peace in Afghanistan. "Russia is not interested in various bombings continuing in Afghanistan. We are interested in Afghanistan having a permanent government." He added that Russia did not want "different American or NATO bases to appear" in Tajikistan on a permanent basis. And Putin, it will be recalled, stressed in December that he did not expect the U.S. forces to stay "for a long time."

Raw Materials Resources

In the view of some strategic analysts, Russia could be preparing to "come to an arrangement with the U.S.," as one British source put it. The important factor here is raw materials resources, and control over pipeline routes. The clash of civilizations faction inside the United States, typified by Zbigniew Brzezinski and Samuel Huntington, has been historically associated with the British "Great Game" geopolitical idea, of carving up the nation-states of Eurasia, pitting them

Map Caption: ►

This mapping of major rail lines operating and under development, shows that Afghanistan sticks out because it has no economic infrastructure at all.

one against the other, and looting their raw materials resources. This is clearly one thrust coming out of Washington, as indicated by President Bush's new special envoy for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, a Brzezinski protégé who supported the Taliban and lobbied for the Unocal pipeline project through Afghanistan, which was designed to cut out Iran and Russia from Central Asian oil and gas development.

As several diplomatic sources from Central Asia have told *EIR*, the Russian response to these aggressive U.S. moves will not be military, but diplomatic and economic. It is no secret that the reason why the Central Asian countries have agreed to an American military presence, is that they are "cash-starved," in the words of General Beg. Massive amounts of money are being promised to these countries, and huge oil and gas deals are being consolidated, as a carrot, while the stick being waved, is the continued threat of Taliban-linked extremist insurrections against these governments.

Russia's response to date seems to be, to offer these nations its own economic support, through large cooperation projects in raw materials development. Thus, on Jan. 22, Russian President Putin proposed a "Eurasian alliance of gas producers," to three major Central Asian states. Putin made the proposal during a visit to Moscow by Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov; it would include Turkmenistan, Kazakstan, and Uzbekistan. Putin said that it would "bring an element of stability into the transportation of gas on a long-term basis." Turkmenistan, a neutral country, and Kazakstan, which has not welcomed the U.S. presence, are already members of the alliance; Putin's offer to Uzbekistan is a counterweight to the heavy U.S. presence there.

As the London *Financial Times* noted, Russia wants to win over these countries to pipeline deals, since all the alternative pipeline projects, engineered to exclude Russia and Iran, have failed so far because of financial problems.

Russia is a giant among the raw materials producers: It produces 585 billion cubic meters of gas per year, followed by Uzbekistan with 50 bcm, Turkmenistan with 45 bcm, and Kazakstan with 10 bcm. And, following upgrading of its oil industry, it has become the world's number-one oil exporter.

Each major power—Russia, India, Iran, China—has its own perceived interests in the region, and, prior to the Afghanistan War, were cooperating on large-scale regional projects, for transportation as well as oil and gas infrastructure. The new element, a projected long-term American military presence, is seen to undermine this cooperation, if not to sabotage it outright.

FIGURE 1

Railroad Development in South Asia



John Sigerson / EIRNS 2001

- Existing main rail lines
- == Lines completed since 1996
- Projected new rail routes