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### INTERVIEW

#### Taliban not talking peace

**Mullah Mohammad Hasan Rahmani**

By Syed Saleem Shahzad

Amid continuing reports of a renewed initiative to hold peace talks with the Taliban over Afghanistan, and confusion over the Taliban's position, the Taliban leadership decided to outline its stance, and chose Mullah Mohammad Hasan Rahmani to speak with Asia Times Online.

Rahmani, about 50, is a member of the Taliban's *shura* (council) and a close adviser to Taliban leader Mullah Omar, with whom he is in daily contact; so much so that in Taliban circles he is considered Mullah Omar's shadow. During Taliban rule (1996-2001), Rahmani was governor of Kandahar province, the Taliban's spiritual heartland.

The interview took place at a location at which both North Atlantic

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Treaty Organization (NATO) and Pakistan security troops operate in their hunt for the Taliban.

**Asia Times Online:** Please introduce yourself. How were you introduced to the Taliban movement? How did you become governor of Kandahar province? What is your relation with the Taliban movement at present?

**Mullah Mohammad Hasan Rahmani:** My name is Hasan Rahmani. I am a former governor of Kandahar province. I was involved with the Taliban movement from its beginning. It was an Islamic movement, and I had been involved in jihad, so I joined it. Later, when some areas were conquered by the Taliban, I was appointed as governor of Kandahar, and till the last I remained in this position.

**ATol:** Where did you get your education?

**HR:** At different places and in different *madrassas* [seminaries] in Afghanistan, Peshawar, Quetta etc.

**ATol:** Since you are still very close to Mullah Omar, and you are part of his *shura*, please explain why the Western media are boosting peace talks with the Taliban and saying that Saudi Arabia has played a major role. One report even says Saudi Arabia has offered Mullah Omar asylum.

**HR:** Today the Taliban are successful and the Americans and the NATO forces are in a state of defeat. The enemy wants to engage the Taliban and deviate their minds. Sometimes they offer talks, sometimes they offer other fake issues. The Taliban never ever tried for such talks, neither do we want these talks to be held. Neither the Saudi Arabian initiative [talks held recently in Mecca] nor the Saudi Arabian proposal [over Mullah Omar] is acceptable.

**ATol:** Al-Sharaq al-Awsat is a very credible [London-based] journal which mentioned two names [among others] which, according to my knowledge, are a part of the Taliban. One is Moulvi Abdul Kabeer, who was governor of Nangarhar province during Taliban rule, the other was Syed Tayyab Agha, who was Mullah Omar's secretary. These people went to Saudi Arabia and dined with King Abdullah. Is this news correct? Were they really there, and if so, in what capacity?

**HR:** This is absolutely wrong. Neither Moulvi Abdul Kabeer nor Tayyab Agha went to Saudi Arabia. In the last days of Ramadan [end of October] the former Taliban ambassador to Pakistan, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef, was invited for dinner, but later the media projected that talks had begun with the Taliban under Saudi mediation. That was to weaken the Taliban and their jihad. The fact is that the Taliban were not part of such talks, nor are they ready to be so.

**ATol:** You have always been one of Mullah Omar's close lieutenants, part of his *shura*. Is he still commanding the Taliban from Afghanistan?

**HR:** Mullah Mohammad Omar Mujahid is still the commander of the faithful. He is the sole leader of the Taliban and solely in charge of their affairs.

**ATol:** Every year there is talk of Kandahar falling to the Taliban, but they have not succeeded in occupying it, or even putting any serious pressure on it. Except for engineering a mass jail break this year, they could not undertake any significant action. Why?

**HR:** This is a battlefield arrangement. Sometimes the Taliban capture several areas and reach near Kandahar, and believe they are in a position to seize it, so they talk about occupying it. But the fact is the Taliban could not occupy Kandahar.

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**ATol:** The Taliban are blamed for attacking unveiled women with acid in Kandahar. What is the reality?

**HR:** This is propaganda aimed at defaming the Taliban. Nobody knows who threw the acid. Throwing acid on any human being, whether a man or a woman, has never been the Taliban's policy and the Taliban deny their involvement in such acts.

**ATol:** Western media project that the Taliban have imposed Islamic laws, even though they don't have a government in Afghanistan. They force people to practice Islam, stop the masses from listening to music and insist that men grow long beards and wear turbans. Is there any substance in this?

**HR:** The reality is that this is the time of resistance and jihad and the entire focus is on resistance. But at the same time, we place emphasis on the implementation of Islamic laws. This is the duty of all Muslims, to practice Islam and motivate others.

**ATol:** The Taliban have made special arrangements to disrupt NATO's supply lines. In Khyber Agency and in the Afghan provinces of Nangarhar and Wardak, the Taliban have carried out many attacks. Recently, similar attacks were witnessed in Kandahar. Are there plans to permanently disrupt NATO's supply lines in Spin Boldak [in Kandahar province] and in Kandahar?

**RH:** The Taliban have occupied all major routes in Afghanistan and have been choking the arteries of supplies for NATO convoys. They are strongly prepared between Wardak and Kandahar to cut off NATO supplies, but all over Afghanistan they are better prepared to do so.

**ATol:** Kandahar is the most important province of Afghanistan. Historically, the ruling elite belonged to this province. All prominent warlords and warriors came from Kandahar. How many Kandahari tribes are with you? I heard that President Hamid Karzai's own tribesmen [Popalzai] supported the Taliban.

**RH:** This is a fact, that Kandahari tribes are with the Taliban, even Hamid Karzai's tribesmen, and even the elders of his tribes are with the Taliban and all the tribes.

**ATol:** Could you please name them, I mean the tribes who collectively decided to side with the Taliban?

**RH:** The Achakzai, Noorzai, Hajizai, Wazir and the tribes stretching up to Kunar and Khost are all with the Taliban ... and the Barakzai tribe.

**ATol:** The Popalzai ... ?

**RH:** Yes, the Popalzai, the Ishaqzai ... those opposed to the Taliban are now embarrassed and are contacting the Taliban, saying that Hamid Karzai deceived them.

**ATol:** Next year, presidential elections are scheduled in Afghanistan. Kandahar is the home of Karzai. When he contested the elections last time, he was supported by some former Taliban, including Mullah Abdul Salam Rocketti. Will it be possible for Karzai to roam freely in Kandahar to solicit votes?

**RH:** The entire world knows that he does not have a base or support. He is a weak person. Nobody believes Karzai is able to be supportive or useful to them. He has even lost the support of

NATO and the Americans, therefore it is unlikely he will get the same attention from the people as he got during the last presidential elections.

**Syed Saleem Shahzad** is Asia Times Online's Pakistan Bureau Chief. He can be reached at [saleem\\_shahzad2002@yahoo.com](mailto:saleem_shahzad2002@yahoo.com)

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**Head Office:** Unit B, 16/F, Li Dong Building, No. 9 Li Yuen Street East, Central, Hong Kong

**Thailand Bureau:** 11/13 Petchkasem Road, Hua Hin, Prachuab Kirikhan, Thailand 77110