

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Interviewee: **Ashraf Naser,**  
**Chief Secretary of Balochistan**  
Location: Naser's Islamabad Apartment  
Date: Monday, October 27, 2003  
Participants: Philip Zelikow, Mike Hurley;  
Brooke Darby (Embassy Islamabad Representative)  
Drafted by: Mike Hurley  
Reviewed by: Philip Zelikow  
Additional Info: The meeting was conducted in English

**Background**

Naser is a career civil servant in Pakistan's federal government. He is the adviser to Balochistan Chief Minister Jan Yusuf. He himself comes from Balochistan and has served the government there for 30 years.

At the start of the late night session, our last meeting on the Islamabad leg of the TDY, Naser explained to us that the proper spelling of "Balochistan" is with an "o" not with a "u". He said that Balochistan comprises 46% of the territory of Pakistan.

**Our Concerns about Balochistan**

We told him that we had concerns about Balochistan, that many informed officials in both Afghanistan and Pakistan had told us that it is unsafe, insecure and that extremists are gaining the upper hand there. Naser disagreed vehemently with this characterization. "Why don't you come to Quetta with me? He invited. Foreign journalists roam freely there. I don't see a problem."

There are two aspects to the security situation, he said: the border with Afghanistan and the tribal problem.

He said that Balochistan traditionally has had secular institutions and religious institutions. The religious influence has been felt in the area "for ages." Warlordism in neighboring Afghanistan created security problems for the Afghan people. They wanted the danger and insecurity to end. They wanted their government to provide them with security. Thus, the Taliban, or student movement emerged.

"Taliban has never been a negative term. Ordinary Talibs from religious madrassas are not bad people." Every Talib is not a terrorist or a "diehard". Recent articles by journalists who are sounding alarms about the resurgence of the Taliban are inaccurate. Those journalists went to 3 or 4 institutions, but they do not see the big picture of the

mostly law-abiding Taliban who have lived in Quetta and elsewhere in Balochistan for years.

The Afghan government is trying to portray Balochistan as the source of the troubles and instability in southeastern Afghanistan. Recently, they [Afghan authorities] threw 10 bodies inside our borders and said they were Pakistanis. There was no proof of this claim. We have arrested bad people in Balochistan. The problem is not great and what is here is under our control.

Naser explained that there is a conspiracy against Pakistan. The authors of the conspiracy are the Tajiks of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan in cahoots with the Indian government. These people, Naser said, want to turn the Afghan people against Pakistan. The problem is that the Kabul government has not been able to win the support of the Pashtuns in southern Afghanistan. President Hamid Karzai, even though he is a Pashtun himself, cannot travel in the south. He cannot rally unity or support because the Pashtuns see him as compromised and under the influence of the Tajik Minister of Defense and leadership of the Afghan National Directorate of Security. What kind of a situation do you have, Naser asked, when a president can't travel into parts of his own country?

That Northern Alliance has troops in Kandahar facing into Balochistan. [Comment: Naser made this claim, and it's clear that he was referring to any troops, whether central government or not, under the command of Afghan Minister of Defense Fahim Khan. We have no independent corroboration of his claims.] "They are all followers of Fahim, and they are provocative to Balochistan," Naser fulminated. "They are there to create problems in Balochistan, to spoil Balochistan relations, and to show the international community that the Baloch are responsible for Afghanistan's problems.

He pointed out that in Quetta, a city of 1.6 million people, there are 500,000 Afghans. There are two types of Afghan refugees. Before 9/11 the UNHCR just left them on their own, so they converged on urban areas such as Quetta. Another 60,000 came after 9/11 and are being looked after by UNHCR. Mostly, the refugees congregate among their own ethnic groups.

Balochistan sees itself as the principal victim of Afghanistan's problems, Naser said. Look at the drug problem, he said. 4,500 tons of poppy from Afghanistan come through Pakistan. Look at the rate of addiction. Profits from this trade go toward buying weapons, weapons that get into the hands of dissidents. It is Afghanistan we blame for this state of affairs.

Zelikow said that U.S. military officers had told us that they are finding Baloch extremists in Kandahar. "We have a 1200-mile border with Afghanistan," Naser said, "we can't control this whole thing." But they are illegal immigrants, unless they are refugees. Our Frontier Corps lacks communications and air surveillance, he said. But it is not true that there are large groups of extremists coming and going. That is disinformation put out by our enemies—the Northern Alliance and India.

We asked whether Naser was confident he knew what was going on in Balochistan. Of course we do, Naser answered. There is no problem our police can't handle. The problem is in Afghanistan. The government there has not been able to reach out to the people, he reiterated, and it is we who are being adversely affected.

He emphasized that a stable Afghanistan would benefit Pakistan. We want this.

Naser said that the U.S. had more or less brought the 9/11 attacks on itself. You left Afghanistan unattended, we told you that was a mistake. We knew what was happening there. But the Pakistanis could not control the Taliban in Afghanistan.

He asserted that the recent sectarian killings in Balochistan were part of an Afghan plot to destabilize the region. The suicide bombers were part of Taliban groups trained in Afghanistan, he said. These suicide bombers were Baloch from south of Quetta, they were trained by Indians in Afghanistan. "The Northern Alliance is openly contemptuous of us."

We asked him for his recommendations on what needed to be done. He replied that Pashtuns had been ruling Afghanistan for centuries. Now they have been reduced to secondary positions. The U.S. has done enough "hammering", it now needs to restrict the influence of the Northern Alliance people. "The Tajiks are too powerful, they are only one-quarter of the population. Afghanistan needs a Pashtun-dominated government, Pashtuns must exercise more power." We have to live together, he said, but we cannot accept further destabilization from the Northern Alliance.

"Their security is our security, and our security is their security. The security of Afghanistan and of Pakistan is inseparable." We need a stronger cross-border dialogue. India must stay out of this. The Indians are not affected directly, but Balochistan is."

We want Afghanistan to stabilize, he said, and, if it does not, it is inevitable that there will be further trouble.

#### Staff Comments

9/11 Classified Information

There is consensus among U.S. officials and of knowledgeable journalists that the extremist threat in Balochistan is gaining strength with each passing day. He blames the Indians and Northern Alliance for all of Balochistan's and Pakistan's problems.

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