

## **The suspicious murder of Abdul Haq**

**By Larry Chin**

November 7, 2001—I first heard about the death of Abdul Haq while standing in a grocery store checkout line. A slightly scruffy middle-aged man wearing an American flag baseball hat announced it to everyone within earshot. “They murdered Haq” the man said, his voice quivering with anger. “He was one of ours.”

According to the official version carried by every major mainstream American media outlet, opposition leader Abdul Haq’s death at the hands of the Taliban was a tragedy that dealt a severe blow to America’s campaign to liberate Afghanistan and install a new democratic regime. Haq was portrayed in these initial accounts as a courageous and popular anti-Taliban freedom fighter, and one of “America’s best hopes” to rally moderate Afghans behind the former king Mohammed Zahir Shah.

The reporting of Haq’s death in the Oct. 27 Washington Post was typical. In an article titled “Taliban Ambush, Capture, Hang Opposition Leader,” the “execution” by “radical Islamic militia” was a “blow to the US” and a “devastating setback to an effort considered crucial to US attempts to oust and replace the Taliban.”

A New York Times piece from the same day (“Desperate Final Moments of Executed Opposition Leader”) bathed Haq’s demise in a heroic glow, with drama worthy of a spy novel. This version, which was picked up by most networks, went something like this: Haq, the courageous American ally and legendary freedom fighter makes a dangerous foray into Taliban territory. He is surrounded. He makes two desperate phone calls. One to a nephew in Pakistan. Another to an American supporter in Pakistan (James Ritchie, a wealthy supporter of an anti-Taliban coalition). An American warplane is dispatched to the area to assist Haq, but it is too late. Haq is tortured and hanged.

Heroic stuff, which the American public lapped up.

But in the same New York Times piece, other details were revealed. Ritchie had placed a phone call to Robert McFarlane. “Bud” McFarlane—national security adviser to president Ronald Reagan, Oliver North’s Iran-Contra supervisor, and the man indicted on criminal charges of withholding information from Congress about secret aid to the Nicaraguan contras—is best known for his secret diplomatic mission to Iran in which he delivered a Bible and a cake, and offered US weapons in exchange for the release of US hostages. Allegedly, it was McFarlane who contacted the CIA, which in turn dispatched the US “warplane” to Haq’s “coordinates.”

Days later, most of the mainstream media dropped the Haq “legend” to refocus on other things. It was only then that some of the original magic dust began to wear off.

In the Oct. 29 Washington Post (“How CIA Tried to Save Afghan Guerilla”), it was reported that Haq had, in fact, “clashed with the CIA,” and that the CIA and the US military had been “doubtful about Haq’s real capabilities as an Afghan opposition leader”—reversing the media reporting of Haq’s importance to the US effort. The article further stated that the CIA was “irked” by Haq’s independence, and that the agency felt that he was “not always on message.” Both the CIA and the Bush administration disowned the operation, suggesting that Haq’s mission into Taliban territory was “of his own accord.”

Other strange twists are found in foreign accounts. According to the Times of India (Oct. 29), Haq’s expedition was reportedly financed by “wealthy American brothers with US intelligence connections,” but that “the CIA and other western agencies declined to provide Haq with the arms and air support he asked for.” Haq, who reportedly turned down an offer of satellite phones “suspecting they wanted to tap into his conversations, may have been betrayed. Several accounts from Pakistan over the past few months indicated Haq was a bombastic publicity hound with little ground support.”

Was Haq killed by the Taliban because he was working for the US in opposing them? Or was he killed because he opposed the manner in which the war is being waged—on both sides?

Was his death “a blow to the campaign,” or a convenient elimination of an obstacle?

What exactly was Bud McFarlane’s role? What else is McFarlane involved with?

As if Abdul Haq himself returned grave to set the record straight, The Guardian (Nov. 2) published Haq’s final interview, given on Oct. 11 to Anatol Lieven of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The interview (of which the complete transcript is available at <http://www.ceip.org/files/Publications/lievendispatch-haq.asp?from=pubdate>) lifts all doubts about Haq’s opposition to the US military campaign.

Here are a few excerpts:

“Military action by itself in the present circumstances is only making things more difficult—especially if the war goes on a long time and many civilians are killed. The best thing would be for the US to work for a united political solution involving all Afghan groups.”

“I am not sure the air campaign will work.”

“We have been trying to create a revolt within the Taliban, but the US hasn’t given us the chance. They seem to have been determined to attack, even if someone came up with the best proposal in the world to avoid this.”

“The problem is that the Americans cannot control Alliance commanders on the ground if they decide to attack Kabul or massacre people.”

Then the most telling words of all:

“But the US is trying to show its muscle, score a victory and scare everyone in the world. They don’t care about the suffering of the Afghans or how many people we will lose. And we don’t like that. Because Afghans are now being made to suffer for these Arab fanatics, but all know who brought these Arabs to Afghanistan in the 1980s, armed them, and gave them a base. It was the Americans and the CIA. And the Americans who did this got medals and good careers, while all these years Afghans suffered from these Arabs and their allies. Now when America is attacked, instead of punishing the Americans who did this, it punishes the Afghans.”

Was Haq “one of ours”? No.

He was one of theirs. Afghanistan’s.

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