



Exclusive Interview with Taliban Spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid

January 25, 2008

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[On January 25, 2008, NEFA Foundation Investigator Claudio Franco conducted a telephone interview with Taliban spokesman Zabiullah Mujahid. During the interview, Mujahid discussed the recent suicide bombing of the Serena hotel in Kabul, noting that the attack was an attempt at targeting the Norwegian Foreign Minister. The Taliban spokesman again denied any role in recent turmoil in neighboring Pakistan, insisting, "our activities are inside Afghanistan. This election is an internal matter for Pakistan... we do not care who gets power."]

Q: "Can you explain the significance and importance of the Serena [hotel] operation for the Taliban? Could you describe the operation in detail?"

A: "In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful and Beneficent. The mujahideen of the Islamic Emirate, and other opponents of the government who work under different names, are using every tactic with which we can inflict casualties on the enemy. Our men are using new ways as well as our old tactics. The initial attack on the Serena was by four mujahideen, who carried out the attack on the main entrance. Then they entered the hotel. They had intelligence that the Norwegian Foreign Minister was in the hotel, and so they carried out the attack. According to our reports, more than 20 foreigners were killed or injured."

Q: "Who was your target in the attack, foreigners or Afghan nationals?"

A: "We [also] carry out attacks against those who are not foreigners, those who are called the 'national army' or 'police'. Here our target was those foreigners who have a military role in Afghanistan and have threatened the independence of Afghanistan. That is why this attack was carried out."

Q: "Will you continue attacks on such targets in the future?"

A: "We have to use every tactic through which losses are inflicted on the enemy, to force them to reconsider their military presence in Afghanistan."

Q: "Can you tell us about the Taliban strategy for Kabul?"

A: "It will become clear later, but taking over the government is not our target. Foreigners have come here by force and they have occupied us by force. Before they came here Afghanistan was ruled by an Islamic system, the country was safe, and such crises and problems as exist today were non-existent. They started the war, and now we are forced to fight. It is a war of defence, because they do not allow any Afghan - who could be a Mullah, a Mujahid [holy warrior] or a Taliban - to live their lives in peace. So we will continue our struggle. As to the question of taking Kabul or not, that is a consideration for the future. One thing should be clear: our target is not taking the government. If that was our aim, we could have continued our rule simply by handing over Osama."

Q: "Was it purely a Taliban operation, or did Hizb-e-Islami cooperate on the Serena attack?"

A: "Contact among the Mujahideen does exist. As far as coordination in operations is concerned, that is different. The Mujahideen of the Islamic Emirate have their own strategy and tactics. There is no such coordination among us and them on operations; however their aim, too, is to fight the Crusaders."

Q: "We are getting reports that Jalaluddin Haqqani has been killed. What is your information, can you confirm or reject this report?"

A: "Right now I do not have information on this. If there is anything, I will tell the media, but I cannot reject nor confirm this."

Q: "Recently Mullah Muhammad Omar sacked Mansour Dadullah. Has he accepted the order, and if so who has replaced him?"

A: "We have given authority to his colleagues to elect a new commander from their ranks, and whoever they elect will be confirmed by the leadership of the Islamic Emirate. However they have not elected a new commander. God willing it will happen in the coming days. Whoever they elect, the decision is for the followers of Shaheed Mullah Dadullah Akhund."

Q: "Don't you think this delay will affect your operations? It gives a message to the people that there are differences among the Taliban."

A: "No. The mujahideen of the Islamic Emirate are working under one leadership according to one plan. Installing or removing a person is a routine thing. When the leadership of the Emirate see a problem with someone he is removed and replaced. The Mujahideen of the Islamic Emirate are united and there are no differences among us."

Q: "Media reports say, since clashes in the Pakistani tribal areas have increased, that the Afghan Taliban are helping and training them. What is your reaction to this?"

A: "No. The mujahideen of Afghanistan do not have any involvement in the crisis in Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban have concentrated on Afghanistan, they do not interfere in Pakistan and nor do they need to. We have our enemy in Afghanistan, so there is no need to interfere in Pakistan, nor to cooperate with the Pakistani Taliban in fighting against the military government."

Q: "Being a neighbouring country, what do you expect for the forthcoming elections in Pakistan?"

A: "The Mujahideen of the Islamic Emirate are based in Afghanistan, the leadership is in Afghanistan, and our activities are inside Afghanistan. This election is an internal matter for Pakistan. Whether this will affect the Islamic parties of Pakistan or not, they are separate from us. We do not care who gets power in Pakistan."

Q: "There are some reports that Mullah Naqibullah who escaped from prison, has replaced Mansour Dadullah."

A: "No. We have not heard any such thing yet. He is not appointed. It is still premature to say who will be replacing him and nobody has been appointed yet."

Q: "Did he leave prison with help from the Taliban, or was it his personal act?"

A: "He had his own contacts with the government or officials, there was no cooperation from the Mujahideen. He was released on his own account."

Q: "Do you accept that he was an influential Taliban commander?"

A: "He was a commander, but I cannot say whether he was influential or not. He was not independent, but working with other commanders."

Q: "We have just got a report that an American woman has been kidnapped in Kandahar, can you confirm this?"

A: "No. I have just heard that today in the Kariz area of Kandahar a Tunisian vehicle was stopped by people in a [Toyota] Corolla and that they have taken the woman and her driver. We do not have an exact report as to who may have taken her, whether they were Mujahideen or somebody else. I cannot confirm it now but I will tell the media when I get the exact details."