

Who will control Kabul - Moscow or Washington?

The Americans and Pakistanis have been caught off-guard by the swift developments on the warfront inside Afghanistan and the easy victory of Northern Alliance, says Zafar Agha

WELL, Kabul has fallen without much of resistance. Taliban, in fact, have abandoned the Afghan capital without any fight, leaving it wide open for its opponent, Northern Alliance, to enter the city that Mullah Omar controlled for about six years. "We entered Kabul a little after 7 in the morning and there were no Taliban around to resist", John Simpson of the BBC reported from the fallen city, that was in a jubilant mood celebrating the end of a repressive regime. Ironically, Americans, and their ally Pakistan, did not seem too pleased with the fall of Kabul. There was no word from United States President George W Bush almost 12 hours after the collapse of Kabul, that signalled the beginning of the end of Taliban inside Afghanistan.

No other senior American official, neither Secretary of State Collin Powell nor Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld reacted to the fall of Kabul for hours. Only junior level Pentagon officials were commenting that "the situation was fluid" while President Bush was huddled in a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin inside the White House. Pakistan officials were trying to impress upon Northern Alliance to wait at the Kabul gates till a UN-led arrangement was in place to govern Kabul. It was quite evident from both American and Pakistani official behaviour that the news of Northern Alliance capturing Kabul that they were not too happy with the development. It seems Russians managed a coup, keeping Americans in the dark while quietly nudging

Northern alliance with fresh supplies of armoured vehicles and munitions in the last one week, which enabled the Northern Alliance to capture Kabul. India too seems to have played

control Kabul? A nervous Pakistan foreign office spokesman first said: "Northern Alliance forces must not occupy Kabul." A little later the tone changed, and Islamabad began to say Kabul be placed under UN

post-Taliban Kabul between Americans and the Pakistanis on one side, and the Russians and Indians on the other, has begun. Americans have all along been harping that post-Taliban Afghanistan should

suggested that an interim arrangement of a peacekeeping force led by soldiers from Muslim nations like Turkey, Bangladesh and Indonesia should control the Afghan capital. Naturally, Powell was trying to keep

Northern Alliance in the last few days, first with the capture of Mazar, then other small towns like Pul-e-Khumri, Taloan, Maimana, Daste Qila and, now, Kabul caught both Washington and Islamabad off guard. Americans still have no post-Taliban alternative ready. Northern Alliance is now sitting pretty inside Kabul. It is now in a bargaining position in any post-Taliban alternative arrangement to emerge in Afghanistan. The Russian-Indian-Iranian axis will now bargain with Americans, and they will try to minimize Pakistani influence in the post-Taliban Afghanistan. The dramatic and unexpected collapse of Taliban, and the quick march of Northern Alliance into Kabul, have upset the American game plan. The Russians and the Indians who had been backing

Northern Alliance for years are back in the game. Both President Bush and General Musharraf must be worried about the swift changes in Afghanistan. So, no one can still say who will eventually control Kabul. The US will try to quietly pressurize Russia to rein in Northern Alliance. India should not let this opportunity slip out of its hands. It should continue to nudge Russia to continue to support Northern Alliance, both militarily and financially. Post-Taliban Afghanistan should no more be allowed to be dominated by Pakistan. India and Russia should not let Americans and Pakistanis play their game in Afghanistan.

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ball with Moscow, encouraging Northern Alliance to oust Taliban from Kabul. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee during his trip to Moscow last week seemed to have impressed upon Putin to go ahead and capture major parts of Afghanistan, so that it will help Russia and India to play a key role in post-Taliban Afghanistan. The question is: who will now

control to keep order in a "demilitarised city". Americans were initially maintaining stoic silence. Later junior officials began to suggest that UN should take control of Kabul. Americans too did not want Northern Alliance to completely take charge of Kabul, and thus emerge a key player in the post-Taliban situation. Clearly, a quiet tussle to control

remain under an American and Pakistani backed set-up. They were pushing for ousted King Zahir Shah to head a UN-supervised arrangement in which Pashtoons (the Afghan tribe close to Pakistan) and Turkey (the only Muslim NATO member country) were supposed to play a key role while Northern Alliance was kept on the margins. Sensing the fall of Kabul, Powell

the Russian-backed Northern Alliance out of Kabul.

But Russians pulled a fast one on the nervous Americans, who became restless with the approaching holy month of Ramadan, and some of the Muslim countries, especially Saudi Arabia, pressing the US to end military operations before that. So the swift moves by

Osama's nukes claim

AIR MARSHAL (RETD) AYAZ AHMED KHAN

THE West's worst fears have come true. Osama bin Laden has nuclear and chemical weapons (he claims), and will use them if the US unleashes nukes and chemicals on Afghanistan. Osama said his nukes are a deterrent. This revelation, in a recent interview, have sent shock waves around the world, because nukes and chemical weapons in the hands of Osama the dreaded terrorist are of gravest concern to the global community.

The interview headline, "Osama claims he has nukes" has sent shivers up the spines of world leaders, because of fears that terrorist doomsday scenarios could be unleashed anywhere. The credibility of such a claim must be verified at once, to avert another deadly terrorist act in the US or elsewhere.

Osama's claim to nuclear and chemical weapons is a grave development for the world. Osama and Al-Qaeda have openly denounced the regimes of most Islamic states, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria, Libya, Jordan, Turkey, Sudan, Iran and Pakistan. The US and European countries are

targetted enemies. Should this uncorroborated threat be dismissed or taken seriously? Though Osama has claimed his nukes are a deterrent, it is vital to detect, identify and assess the credibility of the claim and the challenge of the Al-Qaeda's nuclear threat.

A report of November 10 states, "Al-Qaeda nukes may have reached US shores-the UN General Assembly session is the possible target. Pakistani and US investigators think Al-Qaeda may have transported several nuclear, biological and chemical weapons to the US, for a possible attack on the UN General Assembly in its ongoing session. This has not materialized. ISI, FBI and CIA investigators are jointly probing into the possibility of Al-Qaeda possessing weapons of mass destruction, but so far have failed to substantiate this claim. It is said that two briefcase nuclear weapons may have reached US shores. One may have been acquired by Al-Qaeda from a Central Asian rogue state.

The briefcase nuclear device is an 8-kg weapon, with 2 kg of fissionable plutonium and uranium. This device of Russian make carries serial number 9999, was manufac-

tured in October 1998 with a simple design. Radioactive uranium and plutonium are in separate compartments, with a charging mechanism on the top. The firing mechanism could be activated through a timer or a cellphone call. A chemical and biological weapon as claimed by Osama bin Laden has also been identified to be in Al-Qaeda hands. These weapons have 70 capsules of Russian origin. It contains lethal biological agents. Exploded in a crowded place it will cause huge casualties. Another chemical agent developed in the USSR, and allegedly now with Al-Qaeda is Viperia Lebtentina venom, a derivative of snake poison highly toxic against the skin. This could be used via mail mixed with anthrax.

Osama has threatened to use such deadly weapons, if nukes and chemicals are used by the US in Afghanistan. US hawks, including some US Senators, did urge the Bush Administration to use tactical nukes in Afghanistan. They better take note of what Osama has said, which must be corroborated by FBI and CIA without delay.

Earlier this year Al-Qaeda turncoat Jamal Ahmed, during the US embassies bombings trial, dis-

closed his role in a failed 1993 deal for Osama to pay \$ 1.5 million for a cylinder of South African uranium. Osama has tried to buy nuclear waste from Bulgaria. What he would do with nuclear waste should be clarified by his accusers. Time also takes a shot at Pakistani nuclear scientists: "Powell has admitted that Pakistani scientists are high on Washington's worry list. I discussed this issue with President Musharraf. I am confident he understands the importance of ensuring that elements of his nuclear programme are safe". For now they appear to be. As long as Musharraf remains in charge the weapons are well nailed down.... If power should fall into the hands of extremist factions the situation should change fast".

The US obviously has a contingency plan to deal with Musharraf being replaced by insane extremists. Extremists better know that our nuclear assets will be the first casualty, if their planned anarchy overtakes Pakistan.

Time states that, "Detonating a bomb won't take any technical assistance, if Bin Laden acquires suitcase nukes. Soviets have built large number of portable nuclear

explosives, small enough to be carried in a case 20 cm by 40 cm by 60 cm. In 1996 Russian General Alexander Lebed claimed his government had lost track of 134 mini-nukes. Stories were circulated that bin Laden himself had bought 20 of them from the Chechens for \$ 30 million, and two tons of opium."

This obviously is fabricated sensationalism against Osama, because it is known Osama is in possession of only one such canister, the other being a chemical weapon suitcase. Col Gen Igor Valynkin, a top Russian defence official, dismisses this as "ravings". "Though suitcase bombs may be out there, they may also be duds, since the tritium triggers needed to ignite them have probably decayed. You need to recharge it every six years".

Does Osama have a dirty bomb, which detonated in a crowded city could kill and maim thousands, and contaminate a large area? That is what the terrorists would like to have. The US views the Osama nuclear threat seriously. White House spokesman Ken Lisaius said on November 11 "We suspected all along Al-Qaeda has been trying to acquire chemical, biological and

nuclear weapons. We take these statements seriously, and will do everything we can to prevent their acquiring these materials."

The White House has yet to release evidence to back up President Bush's claim on Osama's weapons of mass destruction. The

UK government meanwhile has dismissed the claim. Regardless the claim or its acceptance, it is vital that it be corroborated at the earliest. For Pakistan it is vital to review and upgrade fully the high security of its nuclear-missile assets, against theft, sabotage and leaks.

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Japan: FM's missing-ring mystery

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

JAPAN'S high-profile Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka is having a rough ride recently as a group of political analysts are suggesting that it is now only a matter of time for her to concede defeat in the war that she waged against all-powerful bureaucracy. Tanaka has been fighting a battle of survival with the bureaucrats of her own ministry since taking office in April. After a series of highly publicized clashes with senior officials of the ministry, the foreign minister now appears to have passed the point of no-return. A couple of recent mistakes have shaken her ground even within the close circle of ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) who once had been sympathetic to the outspoken politician.

The possible downfall of the foreign minister started when she tried to remove the head of personnel division of the ministry at the beginning of last week and failed. Soon after that she got involved in a missing-ring mystery that further tainted her reputation as an able administrator and the leading figure in country's diplomatic policy.

On the first day of November, Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka had a scheduled meeting with the visit-

ing Iranian Foreign Minister, Kamal Kharrazi, at 7 in the evening at the foreign ministry's guesthouse in Tokyo. Tanaka was about 30 minutes late for the meeting and offering excuse to reporters for her delay, she said that she couldn't make it in time as she was held up at the Diet exchanging opinions with fellow parliamentarians after attending a special committee meeting on counter-terrorism. She also explained that she had to return to her office at the foreign ministry to review the text of a speech she was to deliver later this month at the United Nations General Assembly.

But ministry bureaucrats offered a different version of the background of that delay which runs totally contrary to what the minister herself explained to the press. According to that contradictory explanation, Tanaka was angry with officials who did not obey her command earlier on the day to deliver a report on the ministry's internal investigation of the misuse of funds by the staff members. She threatened to stay away from the scheduled meeting with her Iranian counterpart unless the report was presented to her.

Moreover, the ministry insiders further suggested that rather than going straight to the guesthouse

from the Diet, the foreign minister returned to her office not to review any text of her speech, but to look for a ring she had intended to wear for the evening appointment. But to her surprise the ring somehow had disappeared from the place she kept it and it annoyed her so much that she even accusingly asked her secretary if he had not stolen the ring from the office. The secretary, a career bureaucrat of the ministry, was not only hurt by such straightforward accusation, but was also broken to the point that soon after the incident he reportedly expressed his desire to resign. When the ring was not found anywhere in the office, Tanaka instructed the secretary to buy an exact replacement. At the same time she also instructed the aides to call the Iranian delegation to inform that she would be late for the appointment. She finally left the ministry at around 7:30 pm and the Iranian foreign minister was held up by that time at his hotel.

It is not known how important the missing ring was for the minister. Also not known if the ring concerned was her all-important wedding ring or not. But the incident did create lot of embarrassment for the government and speaking at a press conference next day, Chief Cabinet

Secretary Yasuo Fukuda remarked that general understanding would suggest it to be inappropriate to keep guests waiting unless there was very sound reason for the delay.

A number of critics in Japan accuse that Tanaka is not only making things difficult for the foreign ministry to workout a sound diplomatic policy at a time when the world is facing a crisis after the September 11 terrorist attacks, but also doesn't have any vision of her own about diplomacy itself. In a country considered to be one of the most important partners of the United States, Tanaka has virtually been unseen in all those diplomatic discussions and negotiations set off by the terrorist attacks. She had left Japan only once since September 11.

Tanaka is also known for denying remarks attributed to her by the media and in one such recent denial that became focus of attention, she got involved in a heated debate with an opposition MP at the Diet committee on national security. Democratic Party lawmaker Shu Watanabe asked the foreign minister if it was true that she refused to visit Pakistan because she did not want to go to a dirty place. Tanaka outrightly denied making any such comment and instead blamed the media for misleading people.

However, later she told a lower house committee that she wishes to visit Pakistan and Iran towards the end of the month. She indeed once rejected a proposal for visiting Pakistan, sending senior vice minister Seiken Sugiura instead.

Her earlier request to attend the UN general assembly session and G-8 foreign ministers' meeting, both taking place this week in New York, was rejected by the chairmen of Diet affairs committees of the ruling as well as opposition parties on the ground that the foreign minister's full participation in parliamentary deliberations on a proposed supplementary budget is essential and she was asked to stay in Japan. Parliamentary deliberations are to start from Monday at the budget committees of both houses of the Diet.

Although the decisions taken by the chairmen of the Diet affairs committees of both ruling and opposition parties suggest that the foreign minister's participation at the committee deliberations is essential for the supplementary budget to ensure its approval, the punitive tone is quite obvious. The proposed supplementary budget includes no new allocation for Japan's ODA sector and hence the foreign ministry's involvement is minimum. Moreover, proposed expenditure on anti-terror measures in the supplementary budget also does not fit in exactly to country's foreign policy sector. Much of that expenditure is supposed to be handled by the defense agency as well as the justice ministry. Tanaka is recently being criticized by both ruling and opposition parties for not fulfilling her duties as the nation's top diplomat while being preoccupied with her conflicts with bureaucrats of her own ministry. Barring her from attending important international gatherings is simply an extension of that criticism to a certain form of punitive action. Tanaka later had sought the support of her most important ally, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, to reverse the decision. But even Koizumi was not in a position to extend helping hand.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda told reporters Wednesday before the last that the government has decided to send former Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa to the UN General Assembly session as a proxy for Foreign Minister Makiko Tanaka. Mr Miyazawa will address the UN gathering on behalf of the government and it was also announced that the deputy vice foreign minister Toshiyuki Takano is expected to attend G-8 ministerial talks as a proxy for the foreign minister.

Do all these dramatic turns of events signal an end to Makiko Tanaka's career as an influential figure in Japan's political arena? Despite the fact that her powerful foes, both at the foreign ministry and within the Diet, are gaining ground for a final onslaught, it is still too early to come to a definite positive conclusion. She still remains a popular political figure among ordinary Japanese people, a majority of who utterly distrusts country's highly influential bureaucracy.