

# Incident Report

## Capture of Mullah Baradar

(February 15, 2010)

### Incident Details

Mullah Baradar, the Taliban's top military commander has been arrested in Karachi Pakistan after a joint CIA-Pakistani raid.<sup>1</sup> However, the Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid rejected the news as propaganda by the west to demoralize the Taliban fighters countering the coalition forces in the operation *Mushtarak* (Together) underway in Marja town of the Helmand province. The Taliban spokesperson told the Associated Press that Mullah Baradar was still free carrying out his tasks but he did not provide any evidence to prove.<sup>2</sup>

### Mullah Baradar's Portfolios and Theories Surrounding his Arrest

Mullah Baradar is one of the most senior Afghan Taliban leaders. He is second-in-command to the Taliban's supreme leader Mullah Muhammad Omar, who has gone into hiding since 2001. Mullah Baradar is reported to be in charge of all long-term strategic military planning for the Taliban in southern Afghanistan. He is said to run the Taliban's day-to-day operations, both military and financial. He allocates Taliban funds, appoints military commanders and designs military tactics. Mullah Baradar was elevated to head the Taliban's military council after the death of military chief Mullah Akhtar Mohammed Usmani in 2006. He coordinated the Taliban's military operations throughout the south and southwest of Afghanistan. His area of direct responsibility covers Kandahar, Helmand, Nimroz, Zabul and Uruzgan, which are the most restive provinces in Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> According to Interpol, Mullah Baradar was the deputy defence minister in the Taliban regime which ruled over 90 % of Afghanistan until it was toppled in 2001 by the U.S.-led forces. In late 2009 he gave a written interview to Newsweek in which he denied that the Taliban Leadership Council was based in Pakistan and said that the

Mullah Baradar's Bio	
➤	Full name: Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar
➤	42 years old
➤	From Pashtun tribe of Popalzai
➤	Born in 1968 in Dehrawood district of Uruzgan
➤	Second in command after Mullah Mohammad Omar
➤	In charge of Taliban's military operations and financial affairs
➤	Member of the Taliban Leadership Council (Known as Quetta Shura)
➤	Former deputy defence minister for the Taliban Regime (1996-2001)

Source: Interpol, News Agencies

<sup>1</sup> "Taliban commander Mullah Baradar 'seized in Pakistan" *BBC/South Asia* February 16, 2010

<sup>2</sup> "Taliban commander Mullah Baradar 'seized in Pakistan" *BBC/South Asia* February 16, 2010

<sup>3</sup> "Taliban's top military commander captured" Yahoo News February 16, 2010

Taliban did not see any point in negotiations with the Afghan government and the United States stating that the Taliban's basic issue with the United States is that it has invaded their country. He added that the United States and the Afghan government offer overtures and they hope that the Taliban fighters would surrender to them but they do not know that the Taliban see no benefit for their country and religion in such negotiations.<sup>4</sup>

Some terrorism analysts in the region are of the view that Mullah Mohammad Omar would not publically announced replacement for Mullah Baradar. According to one Taliban commander who spoke on condition of anonymity Mullah Baradar's Deputy Abdul Qayum Zakir would probably be appointed to replace Mullah Baradar. Abdul Qayum is a battle and prison hardened person who is known to be a quick learner and flexible with his subordinates. He, believed to be in his 30s, was captured by the Northern Alliance forces in 2001 and then handed over to the U.S troops. He spent around six years in the U.S jails, including Guantanamo, after he was turned in to the Afghan authorities who later in 2007 released him for unknown reasons. Abdul Qayum Zakir rejoined the Taliban immediately after his release and made it to the rank of deputy of Mullah Baradar.<sup>5</sup>

Several theories surround Mullah Baradar's arrest. It has been suggested that he was the most approachable Taliban commander in terms of negotiations. He was reportedly an important part of peace talks on Afghanistan in Saudi Arabia. According to a news item on Channel 4 News, Mullah Baradar believed war with NATO in Afghanistan was inflicting unnecessary sufferings upon Afghan people and that the crisis should be resolved through negotiations. This led to straining of relationship between Mullah Mohammad Omar and Mullah Baradar to the point where Mullah Omar went as far as to appoint the Taliban governor for Kandahar province Mullah Hasan as his replacement.<sup>6</sup> All this might have triggered Mullah Baradar's arrest by turning him in to the U.S and Pakistani authorities. Another theory is that Mullah Baradar was getting closer to the Pakistani Taliban especially Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and it was noted by the Pakistani establishment. The Pakistani establishment seeing Mullah Baradar's allegedly close ties with Pakistani Taliban as an existential threat undertook this step to slap Mullah Baradar down.<sup>7</sup>

### **Significance of the Mullah Baradar's Capture**

The arrest of Mullah Baradar is certainly an important development in war against the Taliban forces in Afghanistan. Mullah Baradar is the most significant Taliban figure captured since the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001. He is reported to be in charge of all long-term strategic

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<sup>4</sup> ibid

<sup>5</sup> Why was Taliban big-shot Baradar arrested this week and who will replace him?" Ron Moreau and Sami Yousafzai *Newsweek* February 16, 2010

<sup>6</sup> "Did captured Taliban leader seek Afghan deal?" Nick Paton Walsh *Channel 4 News* February 16, 2010

<sup>7</sup> ibid

military planning for the Taliban in southern Afghanistan. His arrest would have a big effect on the Taliban's ability to conduct the insurgency and it would cripple their operations especially in southern region. Mullah Baradar is believed to be a skilled guerrilla commander. He would advise other field commanders of Taliban on their operations against the coalition troops and the Afghan National forces. For example, last year he instructed the Taliban commanders and foot soldiers not to confront the NATO troops on the battle field because they have superior firepower and airpower; he advised them to adopt guerrilla tactics. For instance, he is said to have introduced the Taliban commanders and fighters the tactic of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and roadside bombs against the coalition and Afghan forces.<sup>8</sup>

There is also possibility that Mullah Baradar's arrest might provide leads to Mullah Mohammad Omar and other high ranking Taliban commanders especially the members of the Taliban Leadership Council known as Quetta Shura. According to Wahid Muzhda a former Taliban official in Kabul, the Taliban Leadership Council has more than a dozen members who meet every two or three months to make strategies for their forces in Afghanistan. He also said that among all the members of Taliban Leadership Council after Mullah Mohammad Omar, the second most influential member is Mullah Baradar and that they have good relationship with each other.<sup>9</sup> Mullah Baradar's arrest could also exert considerable impact on the ongoing Taliban counteroffensive in Marja district of the Helmand province; it could lower the morale of the Taliban fighters engaged in the counteroffensive. His arrest could also cripple the Taliban's activities in southern region which comes directly under his leadership. Mullah Baradar oversees the Taliban's operations and other activities in southern region of Afghanistan, which is the most important region for the Taliban from operational and logistical point of view. Southern region is the biggest supply route for the Taliban due to its border with Quetta where the Taliban strategic body is based. It is also the stronghold of the Taliban insurgency and from there many Taliban commanders lead their operations in other parts of the country.

Furthermore, another important point that could be withdrawn from Mullah Baradar's arrest is an unusual policy shift in the Pakistani establishment towards the Afghan Taliban leaders based in Pakistan. Pakistan's spy agency ISI has been frequently accused of accommodating and protecting top Taliban leadership in its country, which has frustrated the U.S Administration. The United States placed Pakistani establishment under immense pressure to go after the Afghan Taliban based in FATA and Quetta. Even the United States warned that it would expand its drone attacks to Quetta if it finds solid intelligence on the Taliban bases. At face value the arrest signifies that Pakistani establishment is bowing to the pressure from the United States to crack down on the Afghan Taliban leaders in Pakistan and arresting Mullah Baradar could

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<sup>8</sup> "Taliban commander Mullah Baradar 'seized in Pakistan" *BBC/South Asia* February 16, 2010

<sup>9</sup> "Secret Joint Raid Captures Taliban's Top Commander" Mark Mazzetti and Dexter Filkins *The New York Times* February 15, 2010

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suggest that the Pakistani establishment has turned a new page in its policies towards the Taliban.

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