
Afghan Taliban's second in command captured in Karachi

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The Afghan Taliban's second in command, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, was captured last week in Karachi during a joint operation by Pakistan's intelligence service and the CIA, according to U.S. and Pakistani sources.

Deputy to Taliban leader Mohammad Omar, Baradar has been considered by many to be in de facto control of the insurgent organization in recent years. His capture is by far the most important detention since the beginning of the war in Afghanistan in 2001 and the first known capture of a top-ranking insurgent during the Obama administration.

The sources, who would speak only on condition of anonymity about the highly secret operation, said that the information had been tightly held to prevent word leaking to other senior Taliban commanders while Baradar was being interrogated. They said the interrogation was being conducted jointly by Pakistani and U.S. intelligence officials and is seen as a major step forward in cooperation between the two services, which has been rocky in the past.

CIA officials have charged that Pakistan's

Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate has maintained ties with senior Taliban figures and has not acted on U.S.-provided intelligence, and Pakistani officials have blamed the CIA for faulty cooperation.

Results of Baradar's questioning have been circulating in Washington since he was detained Wednesday. His capture was first reported Monday night on the New York Times's Web site.

The former deputy defense minister in the Taliban government in Afghanistan, Baradar has gradually taken control of the Taliban leadership council based in Quetta, Pakistan. "He makes the Taliban run," said Seth G. Jones, a senior political scientist at the Rand Corporation and Taliban expert who recently returned from an advisory position with the U.S.

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military command in Afghanistan.

Omar, Jones said, "tends to be fairly reclusive and unpolished. Baradar is the one who deals with the operational side."

Baradar ran many of the shuras, or conferences, involving senior Taliban commanders; controlled shadow governments in Afghanistan; and made many of the organization's day-to-day decisions. He is thought to have been responsible for a code of conduct distributed last year to field commanders, instructing them to use less brutal tactics in dealing with Afghan civilians in the Taliban's version of the "hearts and minds" campaign undertaken by the international military force there.

A member of the Popolzai tribe of Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Baradar was rumored last year to be involved in tentative reconciliation talks with the government, reports he denied in an e-mail interview with Newsweek magazine. "Not a single member of the Taliban is involved with talks," he said at the time.

"What would be the topic of the talks and what would be the result?" he said. "Our basic problem with the Americans is that they have attacked our country. They are offering talks, hoping that the mujahedin surrender before them." The basic condition for any dialogue, he said, "is the withdrawal of foreign forces from

Afghanistan."

Published accounts in Afghanistan in December cited reports of disagreements between Baradar and Omar, saying that the No. 2 had made decisions over the appointments of military commanders inside Afghanistan without consulting the Taliban head.

According to an Interpol notice on Baradar, he was born in 1968 in Uruzgan province in south-central Afghanistan. Baradar is one of a number of senior Taliban officials on a U.N. sanctions list.

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