

Afghanistan Factions To Form New Government

by Muriel Mirak-Weissbach

Amid great fanfare, it was announced in Bonn, Germany on Dec. 5, that a new provisional government had been put together, for the beleaguered nation of Afghanistan. Under the authority of the United Nations, represented by special representative Lakhdar Brahimi, and the German government of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, the agreement was reached after nine days of discussions among four Afghan political and ethnic factions: the Northern Alliance, the government of President Burhanuddin Rabbani, seated at the UN, but ousted by the insurgent Taliban in 1996; the Peshawar group, representing a large Pashtun opposition movement, based in exile in neighboring Pakistan; the Rome group, consisting of delegates of the former King Zahir Shah, who has been in exile in the Italian capital since 1973; and the Cyprus group, also an exile opposition formation, associated with warlord Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

The agreement establishes an interim administration, which is composed of an interim government, a special commission to convene a *Loya Jirga* (tribal assembly), and a supreme court. The *Loya Jirga*, which is to be convened within six months of the government's installation (foreseen for Dec. 22), will be opened by the former King. Its task will be to select an interim government which will rule until orderly elections can be held, within two years. Eighteen months after the installment of the interim administration, a second *Loya Jirga* is planned, to work out a new constitution for the country.

Future Dictated From Outside

Television cameras broadcast pictures of poverty-stricken Afghans listening to the news over dilapidated transistor radios, and interviewed young and old alike, expressing joy at the prospect of a government. But as some non-Western journalists returning from Afghanistan have reported privately, what is broadcast in the media has nothing to do with Afghan reality. People shown celebrating the news from Bonn, are doing so, in the mistaken belief that this means the war is over. Others, not chosen to be interviewed by CNN, are furious at the fact that the future of their country—once again—is being decided outside the country, and by forces who represent little or nothing inside the country.

Of the four groups present in Bonn, only one has been in Afghanistan over the recent years of the Taliban regime's rule, and that is the Northern Alliance, or United Front. The others have been living in exile for 5, 10, or (in the case of the former king) 30 years. During these years, the country was the battleground for a vicious war, first between the Soviets and the mujahideen (backed by the United States, Britain, Israel, and others); and then, after the Soviet withdrawal, by the mujahideen warlords among themselves; until the Taliban insurgency, backed by the United States, Britain, Israel, Pakistan, and others, imposed its brutal hegemony by capturing the capital in 1996. The credibility of those living in comfortable exile, during such bloody years that cost hundreds of thousands of lives, is not great.

As for the Northern Alliance, it represents a motley, pragmatic alliance among mutually hostile groups, who banded together against the Taliban. Made up ethnically of Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Hasaras, the Northern Alliance cannot be considered representative, given that the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan is Pashtun.

In the Bonn conference, great care was taken to establish "ethnic balance" in the interim arrangement. Of the 29 proposed ministers, five are Pashtuns, two are Hasaras, five are Tajiks, and three are Uzbeks. Three are listed as Shi'ites, designating their religious faction, and the rest are not ethnically identified. The designated President, Seyed Hamid Karzai, is a Pashtun, of the Durrani clan, which ruled Afghanistan for 250 years. His grandfather was head of the national assembly under the King. Karzai himself spent the 1980s in exile, and returned after the Soviet withdrawal, to become deputy foreign minister, until 1992. He was with the Taliban until 1996, and again went into exile.

As for the "political balance," the Northern Alliance reportedly received the lion's share of the posts: It will maintain control over the foreign, defense, and interior ministries, and will also head up ministries for planning, water and electricity, trade, mining and industry, artisans, telecommunications, labor and social affairs, martyrs and handicapped, higher education, rural development, urban development, refugees, agriculture, and justice.

The Rome group will control ministries for women, finances, information and culture, education, public works, reconstruction, airlines and tourism, and border issues. Two ministries, for pilgrimages and public health, will be held by independents. Two others, transportation and irrigation, are held by persons whose political affiliation is not given. Two of the ministers are women.

Disagreements Already Abound

On paper, the arrangement might seem to satisfy demands for power-sharing along the lines of ethnic and political balance, but this is not the way it is seen in Afghanistan. No sooner had the news of the Bonn agreement been made public, than three leading Afghan personalities registered their dis-



Representatives of four Afghan political and ethnic factions meet to hammer out a new provisional government, in Bonn on Dec. 5.

agreement: warlord Hekmatyar, Peshawar group leader Pir Gailani, and Uzbek warlord General Dostum, who announced he would boycott the transitional administration's work. Given that Dostum is a major military factor in the Northern Alliance, who controls the city of Mazar-i-Sharif, this does not bode well.

The reactions of other groups in Afghanistan, which were not represented in Bonn, have not yet been made known. On Dec. 22, when the Rabbani government is scheduled to hand over power to the new administration, the world will see what chances the new government has of surviving.

Meanwhile, the war is far from over. Although the Northern Alliance and its allies, especially the United States, have "control" over the north of the country, there are continuing reliable reports, mainly from UN agencies, of widespread fighting. In Mazar-i-Sharif, fighting has broken out among rival factions within the Northern Alliance. A UN spokesman in Kabul said, "We have observed fighting in the city, but don't know who is fighting whom." Due to the lack of security there, the UN has suspended transport of aid to the city. A UNHCR spokesman reported rising public sentiment in the tribal areas, to avenge the killing of Taliban fighters in the prison there on Nov. 25.

In the south, U.S. aircraft have continued to bomb the Kandahar airport and targets in the mountains, as well as Jalalabad and Tora Bora, nearby. UN workers report that refugees arriving from Kandahar say the city has been almost deserted. Latest reports were that Taliban leader Mullah Omar was prepared to hand over control of Kandahar to other

Pashtun tribal leaders. Among the Pashtun tribes which populate the southern part of the country, and straddle the border with Pakistan, infighting has also broken out.

In neighboring Pakistan, the massive influx of refugees, about 2,000 a day from Kandahar in the last weeks alone, threatens to exacerbate an already explosive political situation. Well-informed Pakistani sources, such as former Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mirza Aslam Beg, have stressed, that just as Afghanistan has been de facto divided along tribal, ethnic, and religious lines by the war, now the danger is that Pakistan will also be split, as Pashtun tribes on both sides of the border, join to carve out a Pashtunistan.

The Pakistani government has taken extraordinary measures to establish law and order, including massing troops to patrol the borders, but it would have to deploy its entire army to seal its 1,400 kilometer border. In Afghanistan, it is

difficult to imagine how the force of 200 peacekeepers, which the Bonn conference discussed be deployed in the capital, is expected to establish security in the country.

In short, as Lyndon LaRouche had forewarned before the first bombs started falling on Afghanistan, the entire adventure has led to a mess. Now, going into the third month of the war, whatever was left of the major cities has been subjected to massive bombardment, and the refugee flows have reached historic proportions. Winter has arrived, women and children are exposed to freezing temperatures at night, without shelter, and the lack of security makes humanitarian aid deliveries precarious. Tensions have arisen between the aid organizations, eager to deploy forces to make humanitarian aid possible before disaster strikes, and the U.S. command, which maintains that the war effort takes priority.

Osama bin Laden, the ostensible war objective, has not been eliminated. Even the cover story put out, that bin Laden was responsible for the events of Sept. 11, thus justifying the war in the first place, has crumbled. The circulation of LaRouche's analysis, that those events constituted an attempted coup d'état against the U.S. government, organized from within the United States, has become hegemonic, and not only in the Arab and Islamic world. Some U.S. embassies have gone so far as to send dossiers—to personalities who have echoed LaRouche's analysis in major national media—purportedly "proving" the claim that "bin Laden did it." The dossiers in question turned out to be nothing but a speech by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, asserting bin Laden's guilt.