



Written by on May 19, 2009

Afghans Deny Zalmay Khalilzad to Have Top Kabul Post

The article also quoted a senior Obama administration official, who said the position would allow Khalilzad to serve as "a prime minister, except not [be] prime minister because he wouldn't be responsible to a parliamentary system."

Government officials have tended to be somewhat coy concerning the prospect of Khalilzad accepting an Afghan government position, because although the former ambassador was born in Afghanistan, he is a U.S. citizen. The *Times* quoted American and British officials who — speaking on the condition of anonymity — expressed concern that if the Afghan people believed that the West was behind the plan to install Khalilzad, it would harm its acceptance within Afghanistan. The officials insisted that it was Karzai who had sought out Mr. Khalilzad, not vice versa.



However, a Reuters news report released later on May 19 quoted an Afghan government spokesman as stating that Karzai has no plan to install Khalilzad as "chief executive" of his country. Siyamak Herawi, a spokesman for Karzai, said the report was false. "We are not aware of this. We cannot confirm this. There is no truth in it," said Herawi.

An Afghan diplomat based in Kabul, also speaking on condition of anonymity, told Reuters that he believed it was unlikely that Khalilzad would be appointed to such a post.

"Karzai has never liked sharing power with anyone and Khalilzad is not Karzai's cup of tea these days," said the diplomat.

Karzai has headed the Afghan government since a 2001 election, following the removal of the Taliban. Reuters reported that during his tenure as U.S. ambassador in Afghanistan from 2003-05, Khalilzad had unusually strong influence in Afghan politics. Many Afghans reportedly referred to him as the "emir of Kabul" and "Karzai's boss."

In addition to his position as ambassador to Afghanistan, Khalilzad also served the Bush administration as ambassador to Iraq and the United Nations.

The prevalence of anonymous sources cited in these reports is an indication of the delicate diplomacy involved and the reluctance on the part of both U.S. and Afghan leaders to give the people of Afghanistan an obvious indication that the United States has undue influence in the nation's government, especially as the U.S. military is in the process of sending in 17,000 additional troops that will bring total U.S. troop strength in Afghanistan up to around 55,000.

But there is another prevailing theme related to U.S. involvement in Afghanistan that harkens back to



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the Vietnam era, however, and that is the top-heavy concentration of members of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) among U.S. movers and shakers in the region.

Starting with Zalmay Khalilzad, the Afghan native received his Ph.D. at the University of Chicago, where he studied closely with the late Dr. Albert Wohlstetter, an influential force among those working to deter the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Wohlstetter was often credited with influencing a number of prominent members of the neoconservative movement. Wohlstetter's late wife, Roberta, was a CFR member who — like her husband — spent part of her career working for the RAND Corporation, an establishment think tank. In 1984 Khalilzad accepted a one-year Council on Foreign Relations fellowship to join the State Department, where he worked for CFR member Paul Wolfowitz. Wolfowitz later became secretary of defense (when he was described in *The New Yorker* of November 1, 2004 by Peter J. Boyer as "a major architect of President Bush's Iraq policy and, within the Administration, its most passionate and compelling advocate.") and president of the World Bank.

In short, Khalilzad is no rug merchant from a Kabul bazaar, but very much a well-trained student and practitioner of CFR-style international diplomacy.

Another key player recently offered a top position in Afghanistan is Lt. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, also a CFR member. McChrystal has been selected to replace Gen. David McKiernan as commander of U.S. forces in Afghanistan, an appointment that requires Senate confirmation. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates (also CFR), along with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen, announced the leadership change at a May 11 Pentagon briefing.

The *Navy Times* reported that Gates and Mullen said they felt "new leadership," "new approaches" and "fresh eyes" are needed to improve the situation in Afghanistan. The naval newspaper also reported: "Gates said only himself, Mullen and U.S. Central Command chief Gen. David Petraeus were involved in the decision to remove McKiernan earlier than the routine 18- to 24-month tour for such a post." General Petraeus is *also* a CFR member.

Adding his explanation for the change, the *U.S. News & World Report* for May 18 noted:

McKiernan was reportedly slow in agreeing with Gen. David Petraeus, head of Central Command, that the war should be viewed as primarily a battle to win allies rather than simply to defeat enemies. And by taking the dramatic step of removing McKiernan only 11 months into his 24-month tour, Gates, who emphasized that he made the move with President Obama's blessing, showed he wanted to shake things up. "Our mission there requires new thinking and new approaches from our military leaders," he said at the Pentagon news conference announcing the move. And analysts see McChrystal as fitting with the new approach. "McKiernan's removal confirms that it's now Petraeus's army. The conventional warriors are being washed out of the system. The unconventional warriors are in the saddle," said Andrew Bacevich, a military and international relations expert at Boston University. [Bacevich is also a CFR member.]

The heavy concentration of CFR members involved in U.S. diplomatic and military operations in Afghanistan is not unlike the situation that existed during the Vietnam War. Though the date when the undeclared war started is subject to dispute, in 1959 President Dwight D. Eisenhower committed the United States to maintaining South Vietnam's independence and two U.S. advisors became the first Americans killed in a guerrilla attack 20 miles north of Saigon. The end of U.S. involvement is more clear, as the U.S. Embassy in Saigon was abandoned on April 29, 1975. During that time period, U.S. ambassadors to South Vietnam included Elbridge Durbrow, Frederick Nolting, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.,



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Maxwell D. Taylor, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., again, Ellsworth Bunker, and Graham A. Martin. All but the first and last, Durbrow and Martin, were CFR members.

As in Afghanistan, the CFR presence in the U.S. military assigned to Vietnam was considerable. A sore point among members of the military who wanted to win the war was the insane "rules of engagement" that tied the hands of America's brave warriors. *The New American* magazine's publisher, John McManus, has named CFR members Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara as the architects of these rules of engagement in Vietnam, and Lyman Lemnitzer, Maxwell Taylor, William Westmoreland, and Andrew Goodpaster (all CFR members) as the generals who accepted them.

The New York-based elite, internationalist organization is even tied to creating the conditions whereby the war in Vietnam could be pursued. Writing in the *New York Times* for March 2, 1966, C. L. Sulzberger (a *Times* editorialist and CFR member) observed that "[Secretary of State John Foster] Dulles fathered SEATO [Southeast Asia Treaty Organization] with the deliberate purpose, as he explained to me, of providing the U.S. President with legal authority to intervene in Indochina. When Congress approved SEATO it signed the first of a series of blank checks yielding authority over Vietnam policy." Dulles was not only a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, he was also one of its *founders*.

Though it has often been said that history repeats itself, each historic event is unique. Only a prophet could predict the future of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan. But just as when Barnum & Bailey comes to town, you can expect the greatest show on Earth, when the CFR runs a war, you can expect a well-engineered fiasco.

Photo of Zalmay Khalilzad: U.S. State Department



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