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November 24, 2009

For: Hillary
From: Sid
Re: Afghanistan

Bill Murray, former CIA station chief in Pakistan, one member of the small group that ran the war against the Soviets, has sent me a new memo based on a recent conversation we had. He reiterates some of the ideas I've already told you, but also has one big new idea of how to explain the US policy to the Afghans—holding a series of *loya jirgas* in Pashtun areas. I also like the “ask” in the last paragraph.

Memo for Sidney
Thoughts on Afghanistan
From: Bill Murray
Date: 24 November 2009

I did not want to send this to you over the international open circuits so I waited to write it after I got back last night. Unexpectedly, the day after I spoke with you I spoke to the British Prime Minister's adviser on Afghanistan. The introduction was made by a retired British Vice Admiral at a speech we were both attending. The Vice Admiral told the other officer, whose name I never properly heard, about my background and involvement in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Coincidentally, former President Musharraf of Pakistan was at the same event and spent some time with us both. The British are going through the same process our government is going through and the officer said they have been paying the Taliban for some time and know they are going to have to pay more. He asked me what I thought and I said paying them is just rent and there is going to have to be some kind of political agreement. I suggested a series of *loya jirga* in each of the areas the British are working in, just as I am suggesting it to you below.

You already know my thoughts on much of this:

A very simple and clearly enunciated policy such as we came here to stop further attacks on the US.

We will leave when we have located and retrieved those who attacked us, Usama Bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahiri, and received assurances that Afghanistan will not again be a safe haven for those who want to attack us.

I believe that the message needs to be short, clear and perfectly understandable to the Pathan/Pushtun ethnic group that makes up 40% of the population and that is currently fighting

us. I also believe that the best way to get the point across is to have a series of tribally based *loya jirga* in the Pathan/Pushtun areas. Forget about a big national level meeting in Kabul. That will just be seen as an attempt by the US to consolidate the power of Hamid Karzai or to create some kind of national strong central structure these people will never accept. They have and can live with a weak central government and powerful regional governments. They have never had or accepted any attempt to establish a strong central government. The Pathans are divided between a northern and southern group (hence the 2 different ways the word is written and pronounced) and further divided along tribal lines. They will not agree as a unified group because there is no unity among them, but they can be dealt with tribe by tribe and region by region. We will inevitably have to pardon leaders who are currently shooting at us, and we just need to get used to the idea.

Not long ago I listened to a US military briefer describing political groups such as the Hizbi Islami, as terrorist organizations. I am sure he had no idea that there is more than one Hizbi Islami (literally Party of Islam) or that the US aided both of them during the struggle against the Soviet Union. We cannot win, or extricate ourselves from, this kind of war with this level of ignorance. We need to get down to where the Afghans are and deal with them in terms they understand. We also cannot get anywhere by sending out as our representatives people who cannot even attempt to pronounce their names. I heard the same briefer try to pronounce Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's name then give up and say "we just call him Gubdin." We need to create a small group of diplomats, intelligence officers and military – teams led by the diplomats not the military – who really have some area and cultural knowledge and then use them to deal with the Afghans. The *loya jirga* is not pretty nor is it efficient but it is, in its own way, democratic and it is the Afghan way to make arrive at group consensus.

I also believe that we should demand that Bin Ladin and al-Zawahiri be turned over to us. If we try to leave without getting these guys we will be seen as weak and irresolute and our word on other issues will not be trusted. Despite what they say about not believing that these guys were behind 9-11 the Afghan leaders know the truth. They will also say they cannot violate their own code of honor under which the Arabs were offered sanctuary. Anything and everything is for sale in Afghanistan if we can just fix the price. The al-Qaida leaders violated the sanctuary given to them by bringing their war to Afghanistan. Any obligations the Afghans felt toward them have run out.