

# Mullah Omar's Death: A Game Changer

*By Dr. Farhan Zahid*



**Center for  
Research &  
Security  
Studies**

---

*Rule of Law - Security - Governance*

## Mullah Omar's Death: A Game Change

**Dr. Farhan Zahid** is a senior officer of the Police Service of Pakistan and senior CRSS research fellow. He earned his Ph.D. in Terrorism Studies from University of Brussels, Belgium. Dr. Zahid has authored more than 50 research papers and articles, published in various national and international journals and magazines. He writes on counter-terrorism, al-Qaeda, Pakistani al-Qaeda-linked groups, Islamist violent non-state actors in Pakistan, jihadi ideologies and the Afghan Taliban.

He has also authored three books

***Roots of Islamic Violent Activism in South Asia***, published by Narratives (2014), ***The Al-Qaeda Network in Pakistan***, Published by Narratives (2015) and co-authored ***From Jihad to Al-Qaeda to Islamic State*** with Imtiaz Gul and Abbas Ahmad), published by Center for Research and Security Studies, Islamabad (2015).

The death of the Taliban supremo, Mullah Omar, has finally been confirmed by a spokesman for Afghanistan's security services last month in July, 2015, putting all speculations regarding his mysterious disappearance to rest.<sup>1</sup> However, contrary to the Afghan assertion that Mullah Omar died in a hospital in Pakistan in April 2013,<sup>2</sup> the Taliban spokesperson, Zahibullah Mujahid, in a statement to the Voice of America, clarified that the Taliban leader indeed died of an illness, however, he "did not leave Afghanistan since the US-Backed forces overthrew the group in 2001".<sup>3</sup>

Within days, the Taliban shura – central council – elected Mulla Akhtar Mansoor, as Omar's successor, a move that was instantly snubbed by Abdul Manan, the younger brother of Mulla Omar, for lack of transparency. The war of succession, it seems, is gradually intensifying, with Manan and his supporters calling for a grand meeting of the party to determine the new Supreme Leader.

Regardless of how this issue settles in the days and weeks to come, Mulla Omar's departure has dealt a severe blow to the Taliban movement. With the centre of gravity gone, the movement appears fractured and far from the cohesion that it has been known for. Mulla Omar's death and the ensuing challenge to Mansoor's leadership have interrupted – for all practical reasons – the peace talks that had begun on July 7 and at least eight Taliban commanders had landed in Islamabad on July 29 for the second round two.

<sup>1</sup> "Mullah Omar: Taliban leader 'died' in Pakistan in 2013", *BBC News*, July 29, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-33703097>

<sup>2</sup> Ayaz Gul, "Taliban Confirms Mullah Omar's Death; Peace Talks Postponed", *Voice of America*, July 30, 2015, <http://www.voanews.com/content/reported-death-of-mullah-omar-throws-afghan-peace-talks-in-doubt/2886550.html>

<sup>3</sup> Margherita Stancati and Saeed Shah, "Taliban confirms death of Mullah Omar", *The Wall Street Journal*, July 30, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/taliban-casts-doubt-on-peace-talks-in-wake-of-news-of-mullah-omars-death-1438252387>

## Mystery

The circumstances of Mullah Omar's death, and the cause and place may remain unanswered for at least some time. However, the Afghan government's claim that Omar died in a Karachi hospital once again put Pakistan in the hotspot since after the success of Operation Neptune Spear in May 2011.

"The Afghan government has received confirmed reports that Mullah Omar died nearly two years ago in Karachi... We are happy that now the foreign sources have also confirmed that Mullah Omar is no more alive... We still have a lot of questions how Mullah Omar died. We have been told that the Taliban leader died owing to an illness,"<sup>4</sup> read the statement by the spokesperson of the Afghan intelligence National Directorate of Security.

The Afghan government's official confirmation and reports by Afghan intelligence National Directorate of Security (NDS) were initially difficult to prove but a confirmation by the Taliban themselves put the matter to rest.

Mullah Omar's fate had actually remained an issue of speculation much before his death in mysterious circumstances surfaced. His followers had not heard from him since as far back as 2001. The issue was first raised in May 2013 when some Taliban Shura members demanded for his voice recording. One Taliban commander remarked:

*"We are not asking Mullah Omar to show up and chair a Shura meeting, but he should meet with a select few Taliban leaders or at the least send a verifiable voice or video statement proving his existence and naming who is really speaking for him. We certainly have the technology to do that."*<sup>5</sup>

Another Shura member and former member of Taliban cabinet stated:

*"One credible voice message from Mullah Omar saying he is free and in charge would go a long way toward clearing up most of these lingering doubts and questions.... To save the Taliban, the shura has to produce Mullah Omar, if he is alive, in a convincing way, or else we should choose a new leader. Just as important we need new leadership that is more in line with the times and Afghan society. But I'm not very optimistic that will ever happen"*<sup>6</sup>.

While the real truth behind his death and mysterious disappearance may perhaps never come to public light; nonetheless, his personality cult, it seems, will always remain, and he will always be regarded as a revered former patron of jihad in Afghanistan.

---

<sup>4</sup> Tahir Khan, "[Taliban leader Mullah Omar died in a Karachi hospital in 2013, says Afghanistan](http://tribune.com.pk/story/928571/afghan-taliban-leader-mullah-omar-is-dead/)", *The Express Tribune*, July 29, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/928571/afghan-taliban-leader-mullah-omar-is-dead/>

<sup>5</sup> Ron Moreau, "Taliban Forces Desperate to Hear from their Absent Leader, Mullah Omar", *Daily Beast*, May 1, 2013, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/05/01/taliban-forces-desperate-to-hear-from-their-absent-leader-mullah-omar.html>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

Within two days of the confirmation of his death, on July 31, 2015, the Taliban leaders swore allegiance to Mullah Mansour, giving him the tag of 'Emir-ul-Momineen (leader of the faithful), one which had been used by Mullah Omar during his life. However, as anticipated by observers, Omar's death dealt a severe blow to the Taliban movement's cohesion, manifest in the controversy surrounding Mansoor's purported election. Despite score of Afghan Taliban commanders having sworn allegiance to Mullah Mansour,<sup>7</sup> cracks within the ranks have already become visible. Haji Manan, the brother of deceased Mullah Omar publicly showcased his reservations about the election of Mullah Mansour and refused to pledge allegiance to the new chief. In an audio message, which was also emailed to the Express Tribune, Haji Manan asserted:

"We have not pledged allegiance to anyone and will not do so because of differences over the new leader." Stating that his brother always kept the Taliban movement united and insisted on unity in all ranks of the Taliban, he said, "We want the Ulema to resolve the internal differences instead of taking sides or pledging allegiance to anyone."<sup>8</sup>

Since the Taliban are aware that thousands of foot soldiers and senior cadres have sympathies for the family of their former spiritual leader, the audio statement by Mullah Omar's brother on behalf of his family could be a serious blow to Mullah Mansoor's position as the new Taliban chief.

On August 3, 2015, Afghanistan's Chief Executive Abdullah Abdulla also picked up on Pakistan in a highly critical statement where he raised questions regarding the death of Mullah Omar on Pakistani soil. Mullah Omar's death, Abdullah Abdulla stated "has created lots of questions in Afghanistan and the world such as under which name the war is going on? And who do the Taliban represent in the peace talks." Certain Afghan government officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, revealed that it had been the Taliban that had broken the news of Omar's death on July 29 and the reason perhaps was due to an internal dispute that had broken out among the Taliban over who would have the final say with regards to peace talks. The news of the Taliban chief's death came only two days before the second round of peace talks were scheduled to take place in Pakistan. On July 30, the Taliban reportedly requested a postponement.<sup>9</sup>

The disclosure of the demise of Mullah Omar, two years after his death, may be a deliberate and calculated effort by Afghan government (and subsequent confirmation by Taliban) for a comprehensive and conclusive peace talks with Pakistani aegis and Chinese approval. His stay in Pakistan for years may put Pakistan in a *déjà vu* situation which arose after the

---

<sup>7</sup> Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Taliban leaders swear allegiance to Mullah Mansour", Dawn, August 1, 2015, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1197774>

<sup>8</sup> <http://tribune.com.pk/story/931266/fissures-emerge-mullah-omars-family-rejects-new-taliban-supremo/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/20725-mullah-omars-death-raises-many-questions-abdullah>

targeting of Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad in 2011. Interestingly, a senior Afghan government official revealed to Afgha TOLONews on August 2, 2015, that Mullah Omar's death two years ago was not a secret but had been known by both the CIA and the NDS.<sup>10</sup>

### **Who was Mullah Omar? - A Retrospective View on the Emergence of Afghan Taliban**

Mullah Mohammad Omar Hotak, aka Mullah Omar Mujahid, originally hailed from Kandahar province in South-eastern Afghanistan but later shifted to Deh-Rawud district of Uruzgan province after the death of his father Molvi Ghulam Nabi, a village Mullah, settled there.

Very few details are available about his family background but what is known is that he was born in 1960 and belonged to Hotak Ghilzai tribe. His family resided in Chah-e-Himmat village near Kahkrez district while according to some sources, at Noday village near Dand district in Kandahar province. There, he is reported to have studied in a Madrasah for a while only to drop himself out to join jihad against the Soviet occupation forces following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Omar joined jihad after receiving training at one of the Mujahedeen camps established near Pakistan-Afghanistan border and later fought Soviet and Afghan Communist regime forces under the command of Younas Khalis, the leader of Hizb-e-Islami (Khalis Faction). According to some sources he fought alongside Harkat-e-Inqilab-e-Islami of Nabi Mohammadi in Uruzgan province. He was wounded four times and lost his right eye in one of the operations against the Soviets.<sup>11</sup>

After the withdrawal of Soviet forces a bloody civil war broke out among Afghan Mujahedeen groups and a disillusioned Mullah Omar settled back in his village in Kandahar in 1989.<sup>12</sup>

The next phase of his life, according to legends, began in 1992 when he gathered a group of former Mujahedeen and fought against warlords. He observed how his country was descending into chaos due to warlords, marauders and militias that were committing heinous crimes and making the whole Afghan nation suffer due to them. The small band of 'brothers', who had all been former Mujahedeen and students of different Madrasahs (religious seminaries), managed to defeat the much larger, well trained and well-armed forces of the local warlord who had been involved in pillaging the villagers and kidnapping their women. The ranks of small group of Taliban started to swell at an exponential rate and managed to capture district after district. The Taliban were able to conquer Kandahar and, finally in September 1996, Kabul fell to the forces of Taliban. A grand council of Ulema from all over Afghanistan selected Mullah Omar as Emir ul Momineen in a dramatic fashion

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/20725-mullah-omars-death-raises-many-questions-abdullah>

<sup>11</sup> For more details please see: "Commemorating the nineteenth anniversary of the historical gathering and selection of Ameer-ul-Momineen on 16<sup>th</sup> Aries 1375 AH (solar) i.e. 4<sup>th</sup> April 1996 in Kandahar", Biography of Mullah Omar, released by Official Afghan Taliban Media

The biography of the leader of Islamic Emirate Ameer-ul-Momineen, Mullah Mohammad Umar 'Mujahid'

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

where he emerged in the gathering wearing the sacred cloak of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) which has been preserved in a shrine in Kandahar for centuries. Omar ruled most of Afghanistan with an iron hand from 1996-2001, except areas which remained under the control of the leader of Northern Alliance, Ahmed Shah Masoud, in the Northern Afghanistan.

Following the 9/11 attacks, Omar, known for being a zealous Pashtun and Islamist, refused to hand over Osama Bin Laden to the Americans which ultimately led to the fall of his government in October 2001 when the US invaded Afghanistan in its Global War on Terror (GWOT). With Northern Alliance Forces, which were backed by US forces, were on the outskirts of Kandahar and the city was about to fall, Mullah Omar is reported to have fled on a motorcycle with his confidant Qari Saifullah Akhter, a leader of Pakistani jihadi organization Harkat ul Jihad-e-Islami. That was the last time he was ever seen.

### **The Omar Factor**

How did, once an ordinary foot soldier who lived an obscure life and had never been a known Mujahedeen commander during the whole Afghan War (1979-89) period, rise to such prominence? Indeed Omar might have remained unknown had there not been a leadership vacuum in Afghanistan which would allow him such space. Moreover, at the time, the former Mujahideen commanders of Peshawar Seven parties were all divided and had developed serious rifts following the withdrawal of the Soviet forces in 1989. The Afghan Communist government also did not last long and collapsed like a house of cards after the new President of Russian Federation Boris Yelstin cut all supplies to an already dilapidated Afghan government. The Mujahedeen groups neither had the will nor the capacity to rule over a collapsed state. Some groups had long standing disputes which then resulted in fierce battles causing tremendous civilian loss of lives and property. Some Mujahideen groups were favorites of Pakistan while others had affiliations with Iran, India, Russia, and Saudi Arabia. The Pakistani establishment backed Taliban only after realizing their potential. Islamabad played a pivotal role in convincing Riyadh to abandon their favorite Mujahideen group, Itihad-e-Islami, which was led by Abdul Rab Rasul Sayaf in exchange for Pakistan abandoning their favorite Hizb-e-Islami, which was led by Gulbaden Hekmatyar. Both Sayaf and Hekmatyar had failed to achieve any of the desired results for their backers. The Taliban under Omar came into prominence after they started receiving support emanating from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia after which they did wonders in a short span of time. In a planned and calibrated manner, Mullah Omar's personality, his character, religious piety and holy warrior-like demeanor was propagated in the international Islamist arena, aimed particularly at the masses of Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The proclamation of Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan was another step with Mullah Omar as the Emir ul Momineen. The importance of Mullah Omar kept growing as Al-Qaeda apparatus moved to Afghanistan just before the Taliban takeover of Kabul. Pakistani Deobandi jihadi organization taking advantage of the same ideological school of thought

also shifted to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Moreover, scores of other international jihadi outfits from Indonesia to Morocco shifted to Afghanistan under Al-Qaeda's tutelage. The Omar factor was of key importance as all of these organizations made Afghanistan their new home but also pledged allegiance to Mullah Omar. Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden also pledged oath of allegiance to Omar in 1999, technically losing his organization a Taliban auxiliary. Bin Laden later confirmed his pledge of allegiance,

"My pledge of allegiance to the Emir of the Believers [Mullah Omar] is the great pledge of allegiance, which is mentioned in the chapters of the Koran and the stories of the Sunnah....Every Muslim should set his mind and heart and pledge allegiance to the Emir of the Believers Mullah Muhammad Omar for this is the great pledge<sup>13</sup>."

The relationship is mutual, as Bill Roggio editor of *The Long War Journal* explains:

"Evidence of this relationship is seen in the small number of Osama bin Laden's documents that have been released to the public. Bin Laden and his general manager, Atiyah Abd al Rahman, frequently discussed the Movement of the Taliban in Pakistan. While the al Qaeda leaders often express frustration over the Taliban's attacks that kill civilians and other issues, it is clear that al Qaeda exercises a degree of control over the group<sup>14</sup>."

On the emergence of Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS), the new Amir of Al-Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri, renewed his organization's ties with the Afghan Taliban Mullah Omar.<sup>15</sup>

Though there are some ideological gaps between the two. For example, the Taliban adhere to Deobandi brand of Islam whereas Al-Qaeda to the Wahabi version of Islam. However, the political ambitions of the two remain the same and with common enemies, the two appear to continue to work together. As slain Al-Qaeda leader Abu Mustafa al-Yazid said:

"We participate with our brothers in the Islamic Emirate in all fields; this had a big positive effect on the (Taliban) self-esteem in Afghanistan<sup>16</sup>."

Pakistani Taliban group Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) had also considered Mullah Omar as its chief patron and Emir ul Momineen, as TTP spokesman on the surfacing of ISIS said:

---

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Joscelyn, "Al-Qaeda renews its oath of allegiance to Taliban leader Mullah Omar", *The Long War Journal*, July 21, 2014, available at: [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/07/al\\_qaeda\\_renews\\_its.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2014/07/al_qaeda_renews_its.php)

<sup>14</sup> Bill Roggio, "Pakistani Taliban praises slain Al-Qaeda leaders", *The Long War Journal*, April 15, 2015, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/04/pakistani-taliban-praises-slain-al-qaeda-leaders.php>

<sup>15</sup> "Al-Qaeda announces India wing, renews loyalty to Taliban chief", *The Express Tribune*, September 4, 2014, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/757736/al-qaeda-announces-india-wing-renews-loyalty-to-taliban-chief/>

<sup>16</sup> "Al-Qaeda's third in command killed", NBC News, June 1, 2010, [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/37440747/ns/world\\_news-south\\_and\\_central\\_asia/t/islamic-site-al-qaidas-third-command-killed/](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/37440747/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/t/islamic-site-al-qaidas-third-command-killed/)

“We are loyal to Ameer-ul-Momineen (Mullah Omar) and question does not arise to withdraw from his allegiance... We had only praised the Islamic State and advised them to set aside differences and show unity.”<sup>17</sup>

The Omar factor was important as his personality was considered as undisputed whether it was the Pakistani Taliban, the Afghan Taliban or Deobandi Punjabi Islamist militant groups (aka the Punjabi Taliban) from mainland Pakistan such as Indian Kashmir centric Islamist Harkat ul Jihad-e-Islami (HuJI), Harkat ul Mujahedeen (HuM), Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), and anti-Shia sectarian Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ). All considered Mullah Omar as their Emir. Now that his death has been confirmed, the situation would be likely to get volatile if either a new Afghan Taliban leader takes Omar’s place and demands renewing the oath of allegiance from these Islamist militant organizations or in case the whole jihadi network directly or indirectly associated with Mullah Omar’s Taliban phenomenon takes a new shape. He was indeed a larger than life figure in the jihadi world, a leader respected unanimously by all jihadi, whether Pakistani, Afghan or Arabs, as one Taliban leader remarked,

“If on a sunny day Mullah Omar said it was dark outside everyone would have to agree and not argue.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Effects on Islamist Networks in Pakistan and Afghanistan**

Mullah Omar’s demise would definitely affect the whole Islamist network in South Asia.

- Al-Qaeda which is technically part of Taliban network because of Bin Laden’s and, after his death, Ayman al-Zawahiri’s oath of allegiance to Omar. ISIS may be likely to capitalize and attempt to lure in at least some of Al-Qaeda high profile leaders.
- Pakistani Taliban or the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) may also feel the heat in their allegiance to Mullah Omar Mujahid and continue his Islamist mission which has always remained part of the TTP propaganda drive. Traditionally, every TTP Emir used to get a green signal from Omar. In case of current TTP Emir Mullah Fazalullah’s appointment (a controversial one), Mullah Omar prevailed, according to sources,

“The appointment of Mullah Fazlullah as new chief of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) couldn’t have been possible if he wouldn’t have got a green signal from Afghan Taliban chief Mullah Mohammad Omar.....The deadlock was however broken by

---

<sup>17</sup> Tahir Khan, “Pakistani Taliban only loyal to Mullah Omar, says TTP spokesperson”, *The Express Tribune*, October 6, 2014, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/772040/pakistani-taliban-only-loyal-to-mullah-omar-says-ttp-spokesperson/>

<sup>18</sup> Ron Moreau, “Taliban Forces Desperate to Hear from their Absent Leader, Mullah Omar”, *Daily Beast*, May 1, 2013, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/05/01/taliban-forces-desperate-to-hear-from-their-absent-leader-mullah-omar.html>



Mullah Omar, considered “Ameer-ul-Momineen” by the TTP, who stepped in and named Fazlullah as the man for the job.”<sup>19</sup>

Mullah Omar at times used his influence to convince TTP commanders to halt their activities inside Pakistan and directed Siraj Haqqani of Haqqani Network to mediate between Taliban groups. According to one TTP statement

“We have received a message from Ameer-ul-Momineen that there should be an end to our activities inside Pakistan ... He wants us to make peace with the government and focus on Afghanistan against infidels.”<sup>20</sup>

- Another loser would be Al-Qaeda. The surfacing of Islamic State and proclamation of Caliphate by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi would now place ISIS in a position to legitimize its caliphate in the eyes of Islamist jihadis. There have been issues between Taliban and ISIS after the announcement of Caliphate under Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (aka Caliph Ibrahim) where Taliban and associated groups have refused to accept Baghdadi as their Caliph in presence of the Amir ul Momineen. Baghdadi was definitely challenging and undermining the once unopposed authority of Mullah Omar. The ISIS bête noire Al-Qaeda may lose because of the death of first Bin Laden, the Emir of Al-Qaeda and now death the death of Bin Laden’s Amir ul Momineen, apparently a second setback for the Islamist militant group. Hence, the death of Mullah Omar has strengthened the claims of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his Islamic State.
- The Pakistani Islamist jihadi network would also be a loser. Al-Qaeda, because of its killing and maiming of thousands of Pakistanis during the last 12 years in collusion with TTP, may not enjoy good reputation among Pakistani masses but Mullah Omar’s persona is widely respected among the Pakistani Islamists and he used to enjoy massive popularity in the Islamist network which comprised of Islamist jihadi organizations, Islamist charity organizations, and Islamist parties.
- The Punjabi Taliban<sup>21</sup> groups would definitely face a catch 22 situation. The Punjabi Taliban drew heavy influence from Omar-led Afghan Taliban. Thousands of Punjabi Taliban fought alongside Afghan Taliban against Northern Alliance forces and during the US invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001.

---

<sup>19</sup> “Mullah Omar gave green signal to Fazalullah as TTP chief”, *The News International*, November 11, 2013, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-26599-Mullah-Omar-gave-green-signal-to-Fazlullah-as-TTP-chief>

<sup>20</sup> Zia Khan, “Mullah Omar is pushing TTP to reconcile with government”, *The Express Tribune*, November 6, 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/297912/mullah-omar-is-pushing-ttp-to-reconcile-with-govt/>

<sup>21</sup> Members of Harkat ul Jihad-e-Islami, Harkat ul Mujahedeen, Jaish-e-Mohammad and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi received training at Al-Qaeda-run training camps during Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. Their source of inspiration Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan with Mullah Omar the role model

## Future of Taliban

The future of Afghan Taliban insurgency now appears bleak. Potential heirs of Omar are Mullah Akhtar Mohammad Masour, the Taliban shadow governor of Kandahar province and Mullah Omar's young son Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob. According to latest news, Afghan Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid confirmed the succession of Mullah Akhter Mansour as the new leader of the movement.<sup>22</sup> Mansour may reinvigorate the lost morale of the Taliban movement after the death news of Omar. He also presided over the Quetta Shura, the primary Afghan Taliban war council, comprising of shadow governors of south-eastern Afghan provinces. Mullah Mansour appears to be a hardliner as he called off talks with the Afghan government, and once again peace seems distant in Afghanistan as he said in his audio message,

“This is the enemy's propaganda to call it ‘peace process’ and ‘dialogue process’. The enemy's propaganda has increased. They are using the media, money and puppet religious scholars to weaken our Jihad and to create rifts in our ranks. I want to tell you, do not pay any attention to such reports. The Islamic Emirate could use negotiation along with Jihad to achieve its objectives.”<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

Rangers Operation in Karachi, the killing of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Chief Malik Ishaq in an ‘encounter’ in Muzafargarh, Punjab, intensification of the military operation against the Baluch separatists in disturbed districts of Baluchistan and now the breaking of the news of Mullah Omar's demise appear to be the beginning of the implementation of a new game changing security policy. The 3000 km long and \$46 bn Pakistan-China Economic Corridor (PCEC) may be the reason. Islamabad seems not to be losing the opportunity which will require addressing Chinese' security concerns. PCEC may be the primary reason but apparently the involvement of the Chinese seems quite novel in peace talks with Afghan Taliban and the strategic importance of PCEC in the implementation of Chinese security policy. The PCEC project could provide the cash-starved Pakistan economy much needed infrastructure and open up new trade routes for China to tap the resource of the oil-rich Middle Eastern countries. Apparently the Pakistani policy makers, enviously observing a booming Indian economy, are in no mood to lose this opportunity.

---

<sup>22</sup> Masoud Popalzai, Laura Smith-Spark and Elliott C. McLaughlin, “Taliban confirm Mullah Omar's death, name new leader”, *CNN International*, July 31, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/07/30/asia/afghanistan-mullah-omar/>

<sup>23</sup> Tahir Khan, “Mullah Omar's successor casts doubts on talks”, *The Express Tribune*, August 2, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/930788/first-audio-message-mullah-omars-successor-casts-doubts-on-talks/>