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US Helicopter Downing in Afghanistan

By: David Hong

Shooter Taken Out

General John Allen, commander of the U.S. forces in Afghanistan, announced Wednesday that coalition forces have killed the Taliban insurgent responsible for the downing of a helicopter last Saturday that left 38 U.S. and Afghan personnel dead. A precision airstrike took out Mullah Monibullah – a Taliban leader who led a network of 12 fighters in the Tangi Valley – and the insurgent who fired the rocket-propelled grenade that supposedly brought down the helicopter, according to Allen. This F-16 strike took place on Monday in the Chak district of the Wardak province just west of Kabul. “After an exhaustive manhunt, Special Operations forces located Mullah Mohibullah and the shooter after receiving multiple intelligence leads and tips from local citizens,” the ISAF (NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan) statement said. “The two men were attempting to flee the country in order to avoid capture.” ISAF troops located and pursued the two into a wooded area, and after ensuring no civilians were around, called for the airstrike, the statement said.

Taliban Assault on US Helicopter

Last Saturday's attack stands out as the largest loss of American life in Afghanistan in a single incident since the beginning of the war in 2001. Among those killed in the helicopter were 30 American service members, including 17 Navy SEALs and 13 Air Force and Army troops, as well as seven Afghan special commandos and one Afghan civilian interpreter. The destroyed helicopter was a CH-47 Chinook, an American twin engine vehicle commonly used to transport troops and supplies. The Taliban immediately claimed responsibility and claims to have used a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) in the attack. Afghan President Hamid Karzai promptly sent his condolences to President Obama for the victims of the crash.

Names Released

Until the U.S. Department of Defence released the identities of those deceased, there was considerable controversy surrounding the SEALs on board. 15 of them were part of SEAL Team 6 (ST6), a highly elite unit that was involved in taking out Osama Bin Laden this past May. Anonymous CNN and AP sources have said that the military has run a check on the names, and none of the SEALs on the Chinook were on the ground during the raid that eliminated the leader of Al-Qaeda. Though the report is unconfirmed, it is not actively contested.

What Led to the Downing of the Helicopter?

Earlier accounts by CNN and later ones by Reuters differ regarding what the Chinook was doing late Friday night prior to attack that brought it down. According to CNN, an administration official confirmed that the Special Operations forces were on a mission to rescue other troops in the area pinned down in a fire fight. Those on the Chinook were acting as a “Quick Reaction Force” (QRF) and went down while attempting to aid coalition troops on the ground. More recent Reuters reports say that the vehicle was not on a rescue mission, but rather was in pursuit of Taliban forces that had broken away

from the main group and were fleeing from coalition forces on the ground.

An ISAF Special Operations Command (SOC) team, including at least some U.S. Rangers, began a night raid in the Tangi Valley late Friday targeting Mullah Mohibullah – the same Taliban leader who was later taken out by an F-16 airstrike the following Monday. “It was a capture operation, a standard night operations,” one senior ISAF official said. “The ground force was assaulting the objective and were in contact with the insurgents,” said another military official, adding that a small number of Taliban fighters soon broke away from the main group. At that point, very early Saturday, the SOC ground team called in a standby unit, known as an “Immediate Reaction Force” (IRF). An IRF is different from a QRF in that the latter is an emergency unit deployed for reinforcement or extraction in response to “spectacular” attacks by insurgents. This means that the extra unit called in to assist the ground team was not sent on a rescue mission. The IRF was called in when a group split and began fleeing from the SOC ground team. “That’s when the helicopter coming in got hit,” said the first official. “While it has not been determined if enemy fire was the sole reason for the helicopter crash, it did take fire from several insurgent locations on its approach,” ISAF said.

RPGs have an effective range of about 300 meters, although officials in Kabul say the shot that took down the Chinook would have to have been launched well within 100 meters of its target. General John Allen said he believed an RPG was at least partly to blame, but acknowledged small arms fire may also have played a role. “We don’t know with any certainty what hit (it),” he said. Allen defended the decision to send in the elite team, saying it was necessary to complete an ongoing operation that targeted Taliban leader Mullah Mohibullah. In Afghanistan, Zabihullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesperson, denied that the person responsible for shooting down the helicopter was killed by the ISAF. “The person who shot down the helicopter is alive and he is in another province operating against [foreign forces],” he told Reuters by telephone from an undisclosed location.

Tangi Valley

The Tangi Valley where the Chinook went down spreads across the border between Wardak and Logar Province, an area where security has worsened over the past two years, bringing the insurgency closer to the capital, Kabul. The valley has become a Taliban stronghold according to operations and intelligence officers who patrol the area. The vast majority of the insurgents are local residents who resent both the NATO presence and the Afghan government. Last month, foreign troops began the first phase of a gradual process to hand security control to Afghan soldiers and police. That process is scheduled to end with the last foreign combat troops leaving late 2014. On 8 August, President Obama stated that the U.S. and its allies will continue “the hard work of transitioning to a strong Afghan government and ensuring that Afghanistan is not a safe haven for terrorists. “We will press on and we will succeed,” he added. However, within days of the transition last month, the Taliban raised their flag near the outpost. Afghan National Security Forces remain in the valley area but without NATO forces, they are no match for the Taliban there. Last Saturday’s incident not only highlights the danger coalition forces face with reduced numbers in areas like Tangi Valley, but also raises questions about whether Afghan forces will be equipped to hold their ground in a few years time when the transition process is complete.

Further Reading: [Ramazan's Lost Chance for an Afghan Truce](#), [Downing Raises US Concerns](#), [US Kill Taliban Behind Downing](#), [An Arms Trade Treaty Makes Sense for US Interests](#), [Deadly Crash of Popular Interest](#)

Timoshenko’s Arrest Jeopardizes EU Partnership

By: Kavita Bapat

Hundreds of opponents and supporters of Ukraine’s ex-Prime Minister Yulia Timoshenko congregated around the state courthouse in Kiev as the Timoshenko trial goes into its seventh week. On the 20th of December 2010 Ukrainian state prosecution charged ex-Prime Minister Yulia Timoshenko with abuse of office. Timoshenko has been indicted on the basis of having ended a gas deal with Moscow in early 2009, hot on the heels of an interruption of Russian gas supplies, leading to crisis conditions in various parts of the EU. The prosecutor’s technical argument has been that Mrs. Timoshenko exceeded her authority in pushing the gas deal through without consulting her government, thereby committing a fundamental procedural error. However, critics have pointed to flaws in the indictment, stating that charges on abuse of office in committing to a gas deal with Russia merit more precise concerns than simply allegations on going over-budget and various other former internal-political concerns.

The trial, which had its official beginning on June 27th 2011, has been plagued with controversy from the start. This is perhaps due to the fact that Mrs. Timoshenko is hardly an ordinary defendant. Timoshenko was a key player in Ukraine's 2004 Orange Revolution, against massive corruption, voter intimidation, and electoral fraud in the country. Furthermore she has served two successful terms as Ukraine's Prime Minister and has proven to be Ukraine's most prominent opposition leader. In fact, it was just last year that she just barely lost a tight presidential election to Viktor Yanukovich, formerly a mechanic who was prevented from reaching higher political echelons due to the Orange Revolution. In his first presidential year Mr. Yanukovich has primarily focused on cementing his own power domestically though he has attempted, somewhat unsuccessfully, to repair the Ukraine-Russia dynamic. Mr. Yanukovich's administration has framed the case as a fraction of its new anti-corruption initiative, maintaining that the trial is not motivated by revenge for past political slights. The government also staunchly denies claims that the indictment is an effort to topple Mrs. Timoshenko's prospects of competing in next year's parliamentary election or in Ukraine's 2015 presidential vote. However, critics claim that Mrs. Timoshenko's charges are seemingly based more on her managerial competence and political record than abuse of authority.

Mrs. Timoshenko has unsuccessfully filed a series of appeals at the domestic, regional and international levels. Most recently, Ms. Timoshenko has requested the European Court of Human Rights to decide if the charges are politically motivated, as presently Ukraine holds the position of chairman-in-office of the Council of Europe. Both the European Union (EU) and the United States have expressed concerns about the political motivation behind these charges. In fact the leader of the Christian Democrat faction of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly recently declared that the, "politically motivated prosecution of the opposition, particularly Timoshenko, is not consistent with European standards." Due to such concerns, on June 9th, 2011, the European Parliament adopted a resolution for the case of Yulia Timoshenko and other significant former Ukrainian government officials expressing concern about "the increased selective prosecution of figures from the political opposition in Ukraine."

The ramifications of this case may increase on an international and European level over the next six months as the trial mirrors an important EU-Ukraine political agenda. The EU plans to host a prestigious Eastern Partnership Summit at the end of September, in which Ukraine is likely to be the most significant partner state due to its political significance and size. Additionally Ukraine and the EU wish to establish a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Association Agreement (DCFTA) and have set December as the targeted time frame to ratify this document. However, it is pertinent to note that in order for the EU to ratify any such treaty, it must be agreed upon by all 27 national parliaments as well as the European Parliament. Furthermore, any pan-European agreement now also requires a 'human rights clause,' which enshrines the EU legislation of "respect for democratic principles and fundamental human rights" as an essential element of the agreement. Meaning that if the clause is violated, there is basis for a severe response, such as suspension of the agreement altogether. At present, some members of the Ukrainian political elite are expressing their annoyance at international and regional 'interference' in home affairs. For example deputy chairman of the party of the Regions' faction of the Ukrainian parliament, Vadym Kolesnichenko, published a press release on July 20th, 2011 protesting double standards in this regard in light of several cases of high-ranking public figures being subject to prosecutions in the past, such as; Dominick Strauss Kahn, Silvio Berlusconi, Jacques Chirac etc.

However current Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich has publicly stated the country's desires for further integration with the EU, which necessarily includes more 'interference,' at least at the regional level, as the EU's member states have become increasingly familiar with. Internationally the case has been condemned by various Western nations such as the US, in which Department of State Spokesman Mark Toner said, "(Timoshenko's) arrest raises doubts as to Ukraine's legal norms and continues to strengthen the opinion that the Ukrainian authorities' accusations are politically motivated." However, Mr. Yanukovich must tread softly, as his government's credibility and commitment to democracy are being severely threatened by this case. If, at trial's end, Mr. Yanukovich is perceived to have utilized the judiciary to settle personal political scores, his support for democracy will seem disingenuous. Ironically, the very trial that some critics claim has been initiated to enhance Mr. Yanukovich's authority, risks undermining it altogether. In fact, even if Mrs. Timoshenko were to be incarcerated (facing a maximum sentence of 10 years), she is expected to emerge a political martyr. In this case, Mr. Yanukovich would be left with the reputation he has diligently worked to shake off; that of a neo-Soviet tyrant.

It is likely that this case will continue to evolve in the Ukrainian justice sector with possible involvement of the European Court of Human Rights if a case of relevance to its legislation must be made. With the involvement of the EU, the government and judiciary in Kiev will likely find themselves under increasing pressure to ensure that legal proceedings are both politically just and legally correct. If equitably managed, there is time for Ukraine to resolve the matter before its various meetings with the EU between September and December. In fact, much of the Ukraine's political future hangs upon this case, most significantly the Yanukovich administration's international reputation. Most notably, the European Parliament will be following

the case closely, and its resolution will largely determine whether the EU will or will not ratify the proposed Association Agreement (DCFTA). Theoretically, the Parliament is legally entitled to stop the Agreement from entering into force at any time and under any circumstances, if criticisms of the Timoshenko case increase in credibility and volume. Thus, it is in the best interest of Ukraine to ensure that the controversy does not escalate to the point at which this becomes a prospect.

Further Readings: [Timoshenko Suing Ukraine](#), [Kiev Court Resumes Proceeding of Timoshenko's Case](#), [Democracy on Trial](#), [Timoshenko to Become Only Leader of Opposition](#)

Food Security: A Problem We Can Solve

There is no doubt that the Horn of Africa is suffering the most severe complex development, humanitarian, and security crisis in decades. Over 12 million people are without access to food and in desperate need of emergency assistance. International aid agencies are overwhelmed with the constant flood of refugees attempting to pack themselves into overcrowded camps in Kenya and Ethiopia, in addition to the loss of food assistance to corruption. International development and humanitarian agencies have been criticized for their lack of coordinated effort and sluggish response, in addition to ongoing criticisms that governments have contributed to the severity of the crisis from the lack of committed funds to existing food security initiatives and agencies. Although the regional crisis worsens, focus has shifted from immediate humanitarian response, to questions concerning long-term food security.

Food security is vital to economic and social development. The emergency in the Horn of Africa is a “complex problem of infrastructure, governance, markets, and education,” that has the potential to negatively impact the regions political, economic, and social development over the long-term. Last week, U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton announced additional monetary commitments to the international food security initiative *Feed the Future*, an American extension of the 2009 G8 L’Aquila Food Security Initiative that provides an “analytical approach to accelerate progress toward the Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and suffering from hunger by 2015.” The complex humanitarian emergency in Somalia is a combination of several contributing factors ranging from below average rain falls, increasingly volatile food pricing, and an ongoing civil conflict, contributing to political dysfunction and a continuing refugee crisis. While this seems to suggest a combination of factors unique to the region, some would argue that there are deeply rooted systemic issues that have contributed to this crisis and are not being given adequate attention; issues concerning real development and poverty reduction, and free trade.

The first issue is directly associated with poverty and underdevelopment and the region’s economic dependence on agriculture. Rain has continued to evade the Horn of Africa and has led to drought affected areas. Overall, food production has not kept up with the growth of the region’s population, in addition to increasingly volatile food pricing, resulting in widespread food shortages across the region. With a large portion of the population dependent on agriculture for food production and income, very little state protection exists for farmers. Additionally, countries are increasingly “selling off of farmland to foreign interests that use it to grow food for their own countries. Both Ethiopia and Kenya have sold or leased agricultural land to agri-businesses from China, Saudi Arabia, India and other countries with cash reserves.” The combination of these factors has led to the increased price of cereals and grains in the region and the growth in absolute poverty, “[t]oday, it is estimated that more than 50 percent of the people in the region survive on less than US\$1 per person per day,” leaving farmers unable to afford food for purchase if crops fail. “Food prices spiked in 2008 and falling income due to the financial crisis further worsened the situation,” since then, the price of food and unemployment has remained high.

Existing food security initiatives focus on providing rural farmers with drought resistant seeds, building small irrigation systems, and storage facilities, making crops and farmers less susceptible to climate shocks. These initiatives aim to ensure consistent access to food, but do not address the region’s long-term economic dependence on agriculture and primary resource exports. Countries that rely heavily on the “production of primary commodities ... are predominantly [more] vulnerable to climate variability and change.” Developing the financial sector, improving the policy environment, and building capacities for entrepreneurship and small market economy development will create a more welcoming environment for investment. Agriculture when couples with health, education, and investment infrastructure and market diversification, can help individuals escape the poverty trap, thus providing more economic opportunity to individuals making them less reliant on agriculture for subsistence.

The second major issue is the failure of the Doha Development Round trade negotiations. Agriculture has become a point of contention in the development talks, specifically the United States' and Europe's use of agricultural subsidies that allows farmers to sell agricultural products at two to three times world prices making real competition impossible. The Doha development talks were established to help facilitate and increase global trade through lowered trade barriers, including tariffs and non-tariff barriers that result in trade distortion and increasing price volatility. The trade negotiations hoped to address: the opening agricultural markets, farming subsidies, lowering import taxes, the "elimination of export subsidies, and substantially increas[ing] market access for agricultural products." Trade which disproportionately benefits one trading partner over the other is not free trade, and the opening up of markets could further contribute to domestic market failure, thus placing developing nations at a greater disadvantage.

A growing number of organizations with the mandate to enhance the agricultural sector and decrease farmer reliance on food aid have emerged, enabling communities to supply themselves with food. Hunger is both a cause and a consequence of underdevelopment and is a direct result of underfunded and inconsistent funding of emergency relief systems, on the part of governments and sponsors. Safety nets and development initiatives are already in place, but ineffective due to their lack of consistent financial support.

Since 2007-2008, we have seen an unprecedented increase in food pricing. Hillary Clinton's speech stressed the need for open markets in order to prevent future crises. Proponents of underdevelopment and dependency theory argue that opening the agricultural markets now would further result in the emergence of continued dependence on food security initiatives and emergency aid. Arguing that grandiose gestures of public support to food security and development will not lead to long-term economic sustainability if issues concerning fair trade and the real reduction of non-tariff trade barriers in the form agricultural subsidies are not addressed. In the words of Hillary Clinton, "[t]hese are things we can shape and strengthen. So that means this is a problem that we can solve if we have the will."

Further Readings: [Millennium Development Goals Report 2010](#), [Global trade talks collapse over agricultural subsidies](#), [Remarks on the Food Crisis in the Horn of Africa](#), [The Global Commitment to Food Security](#), [MSF: No more delays or restrictions for Somalis needing aid and refuge](#)



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