Gul Agha Sherzai

Sherzai was the Pashtun governor of Kandahar province, Afghanistan from December 2001 to August 16, 2003.

He ruled Kandahar prior to the Taliban rise, and the corruption and feuding of his regime strengthened his Taliban opposition. Sherzai's officials were notorious for bribery, extortion and widespread theft. He was a governor in name only during the anarchic reign in the mujahideen period. After the Taliban took control in 1994, he was forced into exile in Quetta, Pakistan until the end of 2001, when he aligned himself with US forces after September 11 and the subsequent ouster of the Taliban government. Sherzai, who had enjoyed a close relationship with Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) agency since the time of the Soviet occupation according to Newsline magazine, had been contacted by the Americans and asked to raise his forces for the defeat of the Taliban. Within hours of the Northern Alliance's seizure of Kabul, Gul Agha led a force numbering between 200 and 1,000 men across the Pakistani border from Quetta towards Kandahar. Accompanied by his tribesmen and hundreds of Afghan refugees recruited from camps driving trucks stocked with weapons, Sherzai left Quetta for the Chaman border and entered Afghanistan through Shin Narai, following Hamid Karzai's lead. Capturing Takht-e-Pul in the wake of an air bombardment, Sherzai's forces managed to cut off the road between Kandahar and Spin Boldak.

He reclaimed his position as Governor of Kandahar when he surged into the area with his private army and took control of government offices. Taliban leaders agreed to vacate the former Taliban stronghold of Kandahar following negotiations with Hamid Karzai. Under the deal, Gul Agha Sherzai was reappointed governor. He was to be assisted by Mullah Naqibullah, the man to whom the Taliban formally surrendered, who would now oversee the province's administrative affairs. But tensions between the different groups, particularly between Gul Agha's men and Naqibullah's supporters, threatened prospects for peace and security after the departure of the Taliban.

Mullah Naqibullah, who was in his late sixties, eventually declined to accept the post, ostensibly on the grounds of advanced age. It was believed that he was disinclined to work under Sherzai. He declared that he would nevertheless nominate someone else from within his tribe for the slot. Differences between the two remain and behind-the-scenes maneuverings are in full swing with Engineer Yousaf Pashtun and Khalid Pashtun, Sherzai's cousins, taking advantage of their tribe's cosy relationship with the Americans at present, attempting to oust Mullah Naquib from the power game altogether by labelling him Mullah Omar's close associate.

Sherzai has consistently supported the interim administration of Hamid Karzai and is likely to back him in his bid to become the new President of Afghanistan in upcoming national elections. Like Rashid Dostum in the north, Ismail Khan in the west and Haji Qadir in the east, Sherzai has re-emerged as one of the most prominent political and military figures in the country.

He has been crucial to ongoing poppy eradication efforts in Kandahar, a region that once produced more than 50 percent of the country's opium under the Taliban. While the Karzai regime introduced a token ban on production in January 2002, it lacks the effective means of enforcing its decrees, thereby enforcing the ban only selectively and relying on the influence of a formerly drug-tainted warlord like Sherzai.


http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/afghanistan/sherzai.htm