



Afghanistan: Government Formation and Performance

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Summary

The central government's limited writ and perceived corruption are helping sustain a Taliban insurgency, and feeding pessimism about the Afghanistan stabilization effort. However, ethnic disputes remain confined largely to political debate and competition, enabling President Karzai to try to focus on accepting U.S. and international advice on how to improve governance, reversing security deterioration, and on winning re-election in presidential elections slated for August 20, 2009. Karzai is running for re-election, but he faces substantial loss of public confidence and fluid coalitions of potentially strong election opponents. Despite the government's widely noted shortcomings, many agree that the country has made substantial progress on personal and political freedoms since the fall of the Taliban regime.

At the same time, over the past year U.S. officials have been shifting away from reliance on building the central government and toward promoting local governing bodies and security initiatives as a complement to efforts to build central government capabilities. That trend is likely to continue, based on press reports of a pending review of U.S. strategy being conducted by the Obama Administration. See CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

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Post-Taliban Political Transition and Political Landscape

U.S. policy during 2001—2008 has been to extend the authority and encourage reform of Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai and his central government, predicated on the observation that weak and corrupt governance is causing some Afghans to acquiesce to Taliban insurgents as providers of security and credible justice. Karzai's is the first fully elected government in Afghan history, although there were parliamentary elections during the reign of King Zahir Shah (the last were in 1969). Presidential, parliamentary, and provincial elections, and adoption of a constitution were part of a post-Taliban transition roadmap established by a United Nations-sponsored agreement of major Afghan factions signed in Bonn, Germany on December 5, 2001, ("Bonn Agreement"),¹ after the Taliban had fallen. The political transition process is depicted in the table below. The United States provides about 20,000 forces to a 50,000 troop NATO-led peacekeeping coalition there; another 14,000 U.S. troops continue the original post-September 11 counter-terrorism mission in Afghanistan.

Since its formation in late 2001, Karzai's government has come to be progressively dominated by ethnic Pashtuns, who are about 42% of the population and traditionally have governed Afghanistan. However, the National Directorate for Security (NDS, the Intelligence directorate) continues to be headed by a non-Pashtun (Amrollah Saleh, a Tajik), and, adhering to a tacit consensus, the other security ministries (Defense, Interior) tend to have non-Pashtuns in key deputy or subordinate positions. One prominent example is the defense ministry, in which the chief of staff is a Tajik (Bismillah Khan), who reports to a Pashtun Defense Minister (Abdul Rahim Wardak).

It is the National Assembly (parliament), particularly the 249 seat elected lower house (*Wolesi Jirga*), that is the key institution for the ethnic minorities to exert influence. Many seats in the lower house are held by personalities and factions prominent in Afghanistan's recent wars. The lower house is divided into (mainly Pashtun) pro-Karzai, (mainly minority) opposition figures, and "independents" of varied ethnicities, not strictly organized according to Afghanistan's 90 registered political parties. Karzai has not formed his own party, but his core support in the *Wolesi Jirga* consists of former members of the hardline conservative Pashtun-based Hizb-e-Islam party; and supporters of Abd-i-Rab Rasul Sayyaf—a prominent Islamic conservative *mujahedin* party leader.

Another base of support for Karzai in the lower house has been the contingent from Qandahar (Karzai's home province), including several Karzai clan members, and, to a lesser extent, Helmand province. One clan member in the body is his cousin Jamil Karzai, and another is relative by marriage Aref Nurzai. Karzai's elder brother, Qayyum, was in the lower house representing Qandahar until his October 2008 resignation due to health reasons, although Qayyum continues to travel abroad and represent his brother informally, including at 2008 and 2009 meetings to explore negotiated settlements with Taliban figures. Also pro-Karzai are former Pashtun militia and Taliban leaders, including Hazrat Ali (Nangarhar Province), who had gained fame for leading the Afghan component of the failed assault on Osama bin Laden's purported

¹ For text, see <http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/afghan/afghan-agree.htm>.

redoubt at Tora Bora in December 2001; Pacha Khan Zadran (Paktia) who, by some accounts, helped Osama bin Laden escape Tora Bora; and Mullah Abdul Salam (“Mullah Rocketi”), from Zabol.

The “opposition,” led by ethnic minorities (Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara) of the anti-Taliban “Northern Alliance,” view as a betrayal Karzai’s firing of many of the non-Pashtuns from the cabinet—such as former Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah Abdullah (dismissed in 2006). However, the bloc says its disputes with Karzai will remain political and peaceful. In April 2007, *Wolesi Jirga* Speaker Yunus Qanooni and former Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani, both prominent Northern Alliance figures (the 1994-2001 anti-Taliban alliance of ethnic minorities), organized a broader opposition bloc called the “United Front” (UF). The bloc includes both of Karzai’s vice presidents, and some Pashtuns prominent in the Soviet-occupation era such as Sayed Muhammad Gulabzoi (Khost Province) and Nur ul-Haq Ulumi, who chairs parliament’s defense committee. The UF advocates amending the constitution to give more power to parliament and to empower the elected provincial councils (instead of the President) to select governors and mayors. Fearing Pashtun consolidation, the UF has been generally opposed to Karzai’s overtures to Taliban fighters to end their fight and join government—an initiative that has begun to draw some backing from the U.S. and British governments as a means of ending or reducing the Taliban insurgency.

Even before the formation of the UF, the lower house opposition first showed its strength in March 2006, following the December 19, 2005 inauguration of parliament, by requiring Karzai’s cabinet to be approved individually, rather than *en bloc*, increasing opposition leverage. However, Karzai rallied his support and all but 5 of the 25 nominees were confirmed. One of those defeated was a female nominee for Minister of Women’s Affairs, leaving Afghanistan without any women ministers. (The post had been held by a female since it was established in 2002.) In May 2006, the opposition compelled Karzai to change the nine-member Supreme Court, the highest judicial body, including ousting 74-year-old Islamic conservative Fazl Hadi Shinwari as chief justice. Parliament approved his new Court choices in July 2006, all of whom are trained in modern jurisprudence.

In May 2007, the UF achieved a majority in parliament to oust Karzai ally Rangin Spanta as Foreign Minister. Karzai refused to replace him, instead seeking a Supreme Court ruling that Spanta should remain, on the grounds that his ouster was related to a refugee issue (Iran’s expulsion of 100,000 Afghan refugees), not a foreign policy issue. The Court has, to date, supported Karzai, and Spanta remains Foreign Minister, although the UF continues to challenge his “legitimacy” in that role.

Karzai and the UF often battle for the support of the many “independents” in the lower house. Among them are several outspoken women, intellectuals, and business leaders, such as the 38 year-old Malalai Joya (Farah Province), a leading critic of war-era faction leaders. In May 2007 the lower house voted to suspend her for this criticism for the duration of her term. She continues to legally challenge the expulsion but, to date, remains barred. Others in this camp include Ms. Fauzia Gailani (Herat Province); Ms. Shukria Barezai, editor of *Woman Mirror* magazine; and Mr. Ramazan Bashardost, a former Karzai minister who champions parliamentary powers. U.S.-based International Republican Institute (IRI) has helped train the independents; the National Democratic Institute (NDI) has assisted the more established factions.

Karzai has fewer critics in the *Meshrano Jirga*, partly because of his 34 appointments (one-third of that body). He engineered the appointment as Speaker an ally, Sibghatullah Mojadeddi, a noted

Islamic scholar and former *mujahedin* party leader who headed the post-Communist *mujahedin* government for one month (May 1992) and who has since 2003 headed an effort to reconcile with Taliban figures (Peace and Reconciliation Commission, or “PTSD” program). Karzai also appointed Northern Alliance military leader Muhammad Fahim, perhaps to compensate for his removal as Defense Minister, although he resigned after a few months and later joined the UF. There is one Hindu, and 23 women; 17 are Karzai appointees and 6 were selected in their own right.

This body tends to be more Islamist conservative than the lower house, advocating a legal system that accords with Islamic law, and restrictions on press and Westernized media broadcasts. In late 2008, the body approved a resolution opposing a U.S.-Afghan plan to establish local security organs to help keep Taliban infiltrators out of Afghan communities. The plan, now termed the “Public Protection Force,” is being tested in provinces south of Kabul (see below).

On less contentious issues, the executive and the legislature have worked well. During 2008, parliament passed a labor law, a mines law, a law on economic cooperatives, and a convention on tobacco control. It also confirmed several Karzai nominees, including the final justice to fill out the Supreme Court. Both houses of parliament, whose budgets are controlled by the Ministry of Finance, are staffed by about 275 Afghans, reporting to a “secretariat.” There are 18 oversight committees, a research unit and a library.

Government Performance²

U.S. policy has been to help expand Afghan institutions and to urge reforms such as merit-based performance criteria and weeding out of the rampant official corruption. Afghan ministries are growing their staffs and technologically capabilities, although still suffering from a low resource and skill base. During the Bush Administration, U.S. officials generally refrained from publicly criticizing Karzai when, in the interests of political harmony, he has indulged faction leaders with appointments and tolerated corruption. However, President Obama and his senior aides, including the new envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, have been somewhat more publicly critical of Karzai’s shortcomings than were Bush Administration officials.

Karzai has marginalized several major regional strongmen but has been hesitant to confront them to the point where their followers go into armed rebellion. Karzai argues that compromises with faction leaders and tribes are needed to keep the government intact as he focuses on fighting “unrepentant” Taliban insurgents. In 2008, some observers cited Karzai’s handling of prominent Uzbek leader Abdurrashid Dostam as evidence of political weakness. Dostam is often referred to as a “warlord” because of his command of partisans in his redoubt in northern Afghanistan (Jowzjan and Balkh provinces), and he is widely accused of human rights abuses of political opponents in the north. To try to separate him from his militia, in 2005 Karzai appointed him to the post of chief of staff of the armed forces. On February 4, 2008, Afghan police surrounded Dostam’s villa in Kabul in response to reports that his followers attacked and beat an ethnic

² Some information in this section is from the State Department reports on human rights in Afghanistan for 2007. March 11, 2008 <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2007/100611.htm>; the International Religious Freedom Report, released September 19, 2008. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/2007/90225.htm>; and Defense Department “Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan.” June 2008

Turkmen rival, but Karzai did not order his arrest for fear of stirring unrest among Dostam's followers. To try to resolve the issue without stirring unrest, in early December 2008 Karzai purportedly reached an agreement with Dostam under which he resigned as chief of staff and went into exile in Turkey in exchange for the dropping any case against him.³

Karzai also has curbed prominent Tajik political leader, former Herat governor Ismail Khan, by appointing him Minister of Energy and Water. In February 2007, both houses passed a law giving amnesty to so-called "warlords"; Karzai altered the draft to give victims the right to seek justice for any abuses; Karzai did not sign a modified version in May 2007, leaving the status unclear.

Official Corruption

Partly as a result of what many Afghans view as a "predatory" central government, some Afghans are said to be losing faith in the government and in Karzai's leadership, to the point where his re-election appears increasingly uncertain. The issue of official corruption has become a key U.S. agenda item as Karzai's leadership image fades. Some observers, such as former Coordinator for Counter-Narcotics and Justice Reform Thomas Schweich, in a July 27, 2008 *New York Times* article, have gone so far as to assert that Karzai, to build political support, is deliberately tolerating officials in his government who are allegedly involved in the narcotics trade. The *New York Times* reported allegations (October 5, 2008) that another Karzai brother, Qandahar provincial council chief Ahmad Wali Karzai, has protected narcotics trafficking in the province. Press reports in January 2009 allege that government positions and mundane functions such as government processing of drivers licenses are "for sale" or routinely require bribes in exchange for action.⁴ Several high officials, despite very low official government salaries, have acquired ornate properties in west Kabul since 2002. Other observers who have served in Afghanistan say that Karzai has appointed some provincial governors to "reward them" and that these appointments have gone on to "prey" economically on the populations of that province. Transparency International, a German organization that assesses governmental corruption worldwide, ranked Afghanistan in 2008 as 176th out of 180 countries ranked in terms of government corruption.

To try to address the criticism, in August 2008 Karzai, with reported U.S. prodding, set up the "High Office of Oversight for the Implementation of Anti-Corruption Strategy" with the power to investigate the police, courts, and the attorney general's office, and to catalogue the overseas assets of Afghan officials. Karzai said publicly in December 2008 that he believes that many high officials have bank accounts overseas, such as in Dubai. In October 2008, Karzai replaced the ministers of Interior, of Education, and of Agriculture with officials, particularly the new Interior Minister (former Soviet-era official Muhammad Hanif Atmar) believed to be dedicated to reform of their ministries and weeding out of official corruption. However, Atmar's appointment incurred further UF concern because Atmar, a Pashtun, replaced a Tajik (Zarrar Moqbel) in that post. In December 2008, the lower house voted Commerce Minister Amin Farhang out of office (nearly unanimous vote) for failing to bring down energy prices. In July 2008, Karzai fired Sabit on July 16, 2008, after Sabit declared his intention to run against Karzai in 2009, although some Afghans say Sabit himself owned property abroad and was corrupt. Some of these anti-corruption steps have been recommended in studies within the State Department, the Afghan government, and the

³ CRS e-mail conversation with National Security aide to President Karzai. December 2008.

⁴ Filkins, Dexter. "Bribes Corrode Afghan's Trust in Government." *New York Times*, January 2, 2009.

U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime which is responsible for assisting Afghanistan on counter-narcotics.

Karzai's popularity also is being undermined by civilian casualties resulting from U.S./NATO operations. Following an August 21, 2008, airstrike that some Afghans said killed 90 civilians (the incident is in dispute) near Herat city, the Afghan cabinet called for bringing foreign forces under Afghan law, replacing an 2001 interim "status of forces agreement" with the coalition. Afghanistan and the United States conducted a joint investigation of the incident. However, several similar but smaller incidents have occurred since, and Karzai has sharpened his criticism of the use of air strikes, and in January 2009 he demanded an Afghan role in operational decisions such as whether and when to use airpower.

Increasing Focus on Local Solutions and Governance

In part to address the flaws of the Afghan government, U.S. policy has shifted away from empowering the central government and instead promoting local security and governance solutions. The Afghan government asserts that it itself is promoting local governance as the next stage in Afghanistan's political and economic development. A key indicator of this shift came in August 2007 when Karzai placed the selection process for local leaders (provincial governors and down) in a new Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG)—and out of the Interior Ministry. The IDLG, with advice from India and other donors, has also developed plans to empower localities to decide on development priorities.

Many believe that the key to effective local governance is the appointment of competent governors. In March 2008 Karzai replaced the weak and ineffective governor of Helmand - Asadullah Wafa - with Gulab Mangal, who is from Laghman Province and who the U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) said in an August 2008 report is taking relatively effective action to convince farmers not to grow crops other than poppy. A subsequent UNODC report in February 2009 said his efforts are likely to result in a reduction of cultivation in Helmand in 2009. However, there are reports Karzai wants to replace him with the former governor, Sher Mohammad Akhundzadeh, who is accused of human rights abuses when he was governor during 2002-2005 but who remains powerful in the province. The UNODC report said that improving governance in some provinces had contributed to the increase to 18 "poppy free" provinces (out of 34), from 13 in the same report in 2007. Another four provinces might move into that category in 2009, according to UNODC.

Governing Qandahar is a sensitive issue in Kabul because of Karzai's active interest in his home province. The governor of Qandahar was changed (to former General Rahmatullah Raufi, replacing Asadullah Khalid) after the August 7, 2008 Taliban assault on the Qandahar prison that led to the freeing of several hundred Taliban fighters incarcerated there. Karzai changed that governorship again in December 2008, naming Canadian-Afghan academic Tooryalai Wesa as governor, perhaps hoping that his ties to Canada would assuage Canadian reticence to continuing its mission in Qandahar beyond 2011.

The IDLG is also the chief implementer of the recently-launched "Social Outreach Program" which provides financial support (about \$125 per month) and other benefits to tribal and local leaders in exchange for their cooperation with U.S./NATO led forces against the Taliban insurgency. The civilian aspects of the program are funded partly by USAID. The more controversial security aspect of the program is the Public Protection Force, referred to above. Afghan officials say it is not a resurrection of the traditional tribal militias ("*arbokai*") that

provided local security before Afghanistan's recent wars, but that the program is under the authority of the Interior Ministry. U.S. commanders say U.S. weapons will not be provided to the militias, only training, but some weapons may come from the Afghan government. The security components of the program are partially funded with DoD funds (the Commanders Emergency Response Program or CERP). The program has been launched in Wardak province and will also be implemented in Kapisa, Ghazni, and Lowgar in early 2009. Some see the shift toward new local militias as a reversal of the 2001-2007 programs to disarm militias nationwide.

Overall Human Rights Issues

On human rights issues, the overall State Department judgment is that the country's human rights record remains poor, according to the Department's report for 2008 (issued February 25, 2009). The security forces are widely cited for abuses and corruption, including torture and abuse of detainees. There has been some backsliding in recent years on media freedoms. A press law was passed in September 2008 that gives some independence to the official media outlet, but also contains a number of content restrictions, and requires that new newspapers and electronic media be licensed by the government. Prior to the new law, Afghanistan's conservative Council of Ulema (Islamic scholars) has been ascendant. With the Council's backing, in April 2008 the Ministry of Information and Culture banned five Indian-produced soap operas on the grounds that they are too risqué, although the programs were restored in August 2008 under a compromise that also brought in some Islamic-oriented programs from Turkey. At the same time, there have been a growing numbers of arrests or intimidation of journalists who criticize the central government or local leaders. On the other hand, freedoms for women have greatly expanded since the fall of the Taliban with their elections to the parliament (numbers in the table below), their service at many levels of government, including a governorship (Bamiyan Province), and their growing presence in the judiciary (67 female judges), the press, and the private sector. Wearing the *burqa* (head-toe covering) is no longer required but many women still wear it.

The September 2008 International Religious Freedom report says the Afghan government took limited steps during the year to increase religious freedom. Still, members of minority religions, including Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, and Baha'i's, often face discrimination; the Supreme Court declared the Baha'i faith to be a form of blasphemy in May 2007. In October 2007, Afghanistan resumed enforcing the death penalty after a four-year moratorium, executing 15 criminals. One major case incurring international criticism has been the January 2008 death sentence, imposed in a quick trial, against 23-year-old journalist Sayed Kambaksh for allegedly distributing material critical of Islam. On October 21, 2008, a Kabul appeals court changed his sentence to 20 years in prison; he remains in jail but has several avenues of appeal remaining. Afghanistan was again placed in Tier 2 in the State Department's June 4, 2008, Trafficking in Persons report for 2008 on the grounds that it does not fully comply with minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons. However, the report says it is making significant efforts to do so, including by establishing anti-trafficking offices in the offices of the Attorney General in all 34 provinces. One positive development is that Afghanistan's Shiite minority, mostly from the Hazara tribes of central Afghanistan (Bamiyan and Dai Kundi provinces) can celebrate their holidays openly, a development unknown before the fall of the Taliban. Some Afghan Shiites follow Iran's clerical leaders politically, but Afghan Shiites tend to be less religious and more socially open than their co-religionists in Iran. The Minister of Justice is a Shiite, the first of that sect to hold that post.

Funding Issues

USAID has spent about \$440 million (FY2002-2007) to build democracy and rule of law, and assist the elections. A FY2008 supplemental funding request included \$100 million to assist with the presidential elections in 2009. For FY2009, \$707 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF) was requested which will be used in part to enable the Karzai government to “extend the reach of good governance....” Some of the aid for FY2009 is being extended to the IDLG for its operations and to support the Social Outreach Program discussed above. In FY 2009, according to a September 25, 2008 State Department fact sheet, USAID is providing \$8.5 million to support the IDLG and to fund the Social Outreach Program and a separate “Governor’s Performance Fund” intended to promote good governance. Another \$95 million is going to the IDLG to help it construct new district centers and rehabilitate fifty provincial and district offices. For comprehensive tables on U.S. aid to Afghanistan, by fiscal year and by category and type of aid, see CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

2009 Elections

The next major political milestone in Afghanistan is the 2009 presidential and provincial elections. In February 2009, Afghanistan’s Independent Election Commission (IEC) set August 20, 2009 as the election date. This caused the UF bloc—which had wanted the elections by April 21, 2009 in accordance with a strict interpretation of the constitution that stipulates that Karzai’s term ends on May 22, 2009—to say it would not “recognize” Karzai’s presidency after May 22.⁵ The IEC, which issued a statement on its election date determination on February 3, 2009, says that the constitution (Article 31) allows for a later date than May 22 if security and other conditions preclude the holding of “universal, fair, and transparent” elections by the earlier date. The IEC, in its statement, gave several justifications for its decision to move the elections to late August, including the difficulties in registering voters, printing ballots, training staff, making the public aware of the elections, and the dependence on international donations to fund the elections, in addition to the security questions.⁶ It is also possible that the grave security situation could still derail the elections entirely, in which case a *loya jirga* would convene to select a president.

In response to the UF criticism that he seeks to prolong his term, Karzai said in late February 2009 that he will run for re-election no matter when the IEC sets the election—even if the body moves the election to the April 21, 2009 date. To reinforce that assertion, on February 28, 2009, Karzai issued a presidential decree directing the IEC to set the elections in accordance with all provisions of the constitution. That was widely read as a call for the IEC to hold them by April 21, 2009, as demanded by the UF and other opposition figures. However, observers say Karzai’s decree was largely political because it is widely recognized that Afghan authorities would not be ready to hold elections by that earlier date, and that the IEC is likely to fall back on the Article 33 requirement that the election date must be set to provide for universal access to the vote. The Obama Administration publicly came out still favoring the August 20 date to allow time for the U.S.-led coalition to secure the election. Karzai’s decree was viewed as an attempt to defuse the

⁵ According to Article 61 of the constitution, the elections are to take place 30-60 days before the May 22 expiration of the presidential term.

⁶ Statement of the Independent Election Commission Secretariat. February 3, 2009, provided to CRS by a Karzai national security aide.

UF's call for him to step down on May 22 and allow the elections to be run by a caretaker government—Karzai now argues he offered to submit to the public will before the constitutional end of his term and he cannot be accused of trying to remain in power unconstitutionally.

Politically, Karzai had first preferred the August 2009 date because it gives him more time to restore his popularity and gives more time for the infusion of U.S. troops (about 17,000 additional due by August 2009) to secure the Pashtun areas which will be the source of many Karzai votes. The UF sensed vulnerability on the part of Karzai and the April 2009 date appeared to suit that faction politically. However, as 2009 has progressed, the opposition had largely changed its position on the election date because April is too early to field a candidate that might defeat Karzai. Candidates have until 75 days prior to the election to declare, although there would likely be some allowance in that deadline if the elections were, indeed, held on April 21, 2009.

Despite the political dispute between Karzai and his opponents, enthusiasm among the public appears to be high, and pre-election maneuvering is advancing, according to observers. Registration (updating of 2005 voter rolls) began in October 2008 and has been completed as of the beginning of March 2009. However, there were also reports of some registration fraud, with some voters registering on behalf of women who do not, by custom, show up at registration sites. U.S./NATO military operations in some areas, including in Helmand in January 2009, were conducted to secure registration centers. Still, registration percentages in restive areas were lower than in more secure areas.

Outlines of the Contest

In the election-related political jockeying,⁷ it has long been assumed Karzai would run for re-election. The conventional wisdom among observers is that the two-round election virtually assures victory by a Pashtun. Anti-Karzai Pashtuns have been attempting, unsuccessfully, to coalesce around one challenger, possibly former Interior Minister Ali Jalali (who resigned in 2005 over Karzai's compromises with faction leaders), or former Finance Minister (2002-2004) and Karzai critic Ashraf Ghani. In December 2008, Ghani, a member of the prominent Ahmedzai clan, returned to Afghanistan to a welcoming ceremony in which he was "nominated" for president by "32 political parties," according to Afghan media. He has since appeared on U.S. media broadcasts saying Karzai has failed to establish legitimate and successful governance. On February 28, 2009, he declared on Afghan television that he would run. Also declaring that day was another perceived strong Pashtun candidate, the 48 year old deputy speaker of the lower house of parliament Mirwais Yasini.

There has apparently been discussion of an agreement under which a Pashtun might head a UF ticket—a move that would be intended to win votes from both Pashtuns and minorities. Observers at first said that talks were under way for Jalali to head the UF slate, but accounts circulating in January 2009 said the ticket might be headed by Pir Gaylani, a Pashtun leader of a moderate, pro-monarchy *mujahedin* faction during the anti-Soviet war. The Gaylani family is prominent in Afghanistan including several family members serving in both houses of the National Assembly. Gaylani's son-in-law is Anwar al-Haq Ahady, the former Finance Minister and Central Bank governor, who appears on the verge of declaring his candidacy as well and is said to be a strong candidate.

⁷ Some of the information in this paragraph obtained in CRS interviews with a Karzai national security aide. December 2008.

However, it does not appear Ahady, or Gaylani, will head a UF slate. Burhanuddin Rabbani (Afghanistan president during 1992-1996) as the elder statesman of the UF bloc, is reportedly insisting that he or another Tajik head the ticket—an insistence that purportedly held up a deal for Gaylani or Jalali to head the UF slate. If Rabbani does not head the UF ticket, another name widely mentioned is former Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah (a Tajik). The UF slate is likely to include Ahmad Zia Massoud, the brother of *mujahedin* commander Ahmad Shah Masoud, killed purportedly by Al Qaeda two days before the September 11 attacks on the United States.

Some observers say that Karzai’s main opponents—particularly Ghani and Jalali—spend most of their time outside Afghanistan, and are basing their election strategy on creating the impression that the Obama Administration prefers that Karzai not be re-elected. It is not certain that, even if this impression took hold, that Afghan voters would cast their ballots on this basis. However, both are relatively well known inside Afghanistan for their past service and their large clan and official affiliations.

Other potential contenders include Hazara leader Mohammad Mohaqqeq; Ramazan Bashardost (another Hazara); Sabit (Pashtun, mentioned above); and Pashtun figure Hedayat Arsala Amin. Bashardost is running on an avowed “anti-corruption” platform based on his public role as a whistle-blower against specific alleged government abuses. Rumors have recently abated that Bush Administration U.S. Ambassador to U.N., Afghan-born Zalmay Khalilzad, might himself run.

Table I. Afghanistan Political Transition Process

Interim Administration	Formed by Bonn Agreement. Headed by Hamid Karzai, an ethnic Pashtun, but key security positions dominated by mostly minority "Northern Alliance." Karzai reaffirmed as leader by June 2002 "emergency loya jirga." (A jirga is a traditional Afghan assembly).
Constitution	Approved by January 2004 "Constitutional Loya Jirga" (CLJ). Set up strong presidency, a rebuke to Northern Alliance that wanted prime ministership to balance presidential power, but gave parliament significant powers to compensate. Gives men and women equal rights under the law, allows for political parties as long as they are not "un-Islamic"; allows for court rulings according to Hanafi (Sunni) Islam (Chapter 7, Article 15). Set out electoral roadmap for simultaneous (if possible) presidential, provincial, and district elections by June 2004. Named ex-King Zahir Shah to non-hereditary position of "Father of the Nation;" he died July 23, 2007.
Presidential Election	Elections for President and two vice presidents, for 5-year term, held Oct. 9, 2004. Turnout was 80% of 10.5 million registered. Karzai and running mates (Ahmad Zia Masud, a Tajik and brother of legendary mujahedin commander Ahmad Shah Masud, who was assassinated by Al Qaeda two days before the Sept. 11 attacks, and Karim Khalili, a Hazara) elected with 55% against 16 opponents. Second highest vote getter, Northern Alliance figure (and Education Minister) Yunus Qanooni (16%). One female ran, got about 1%. Hazara leader Mohammad Mohaqiq got 11.7%; and Dostam won 10%. Funded with \$90 million in international aid, including \$40 million from U.S. (FY2004 supplemental, P.L. 108-106).
Parliamentary Elections	Elections held Sept. 18, 2005 on Single Non-Transferable Vote" System; candidates stood as individuals, not part of party list. Parliament consists of a 249 elected lower house (Wolesi Jirga, House of the People) and a selected 102 seat upper house (Meshrano Jirga, House of Elder). Voting was for one candidate only, although number of representatives varied by province, ranging from 2 (Panjshir Province) to 33 (Kabul Province). Herat has 17; Nangahar, 14; Qandahar, Balkh, and Ghazni, 11 seats each. The body is 28% female (68 persons), in line with the legal minimum of 68 women - two per each of the 34 provinces. Upper house appointed by Karzai (34 seats, half of which are to be women), by the provincial councils (34 seats), and district councils (remaining 34 seats). There are 23 women in it, above the 17 required by the constitution. Because district elections (400 district councils) were not held, provincial councils selected 68 on interim basis. 2,815 candidates for Wolesi Jirga, including 347 women. Turnout was 57% (6.8 million voters) of 12.5 million registered. Funded by \$160 million in international aid, including \$45 million from U.S. (FY2005 supplemental appropriation, P.L. 109-13).
Provincial Elections/ District Elections	Provincial elections held Sept. 18, 2005, simultaneous with parliamentary elections. Exact powers vague, but now taking lead in deciding local reconstruction Provincial council sizes range from 9 to the 29 seats on the Kabul provincial council. Total seats are 420, of which 121 held by women. 13,185 candidates, including 279 women. Some criticize the provincial election system as disproportionately weighted toward large districts within each province. District elections not held due to complexity and potential tensions of drawing district boundaries.
Cabinet	Full-term 27 seat cabinet named by Karzai in December 2004. Heavily weighted toward Pashtuns, and created new Ministry of Counter-Narcotics. Rahim Wardak named Defense Minister, replacing Northern Alliance military leader Mohammad Fahim. Qanooni not in cabinet, subsequently was selected <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> Speaker. Northern Alliance figure Dr. Abdullah replaced as Foreign Minister in March 2006. Cabinet reshuffle in October 2008 including appointment of Atmar as Interior Minister.
Next Elections	Presidential and provincial elections to be held Aug. 20, 2009, although the date is currently under review. Parliamentary, district, and municipal elections in 2010. Each election to cost \$100 million. Elections also to be held for 23,000 "Community Development Councils" (CDC's) nationwide that decide development priorities.

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