



# Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance

**Kenneth Katzman**  
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs

October 13, 2010

**Congressional Research Service**

7-5700

[www.crs.gov](http://www.crs.gov)

RS21922

## Summary

The weak performance and lack of transparency within the Afghan government are a growing factor in debate over the effectiveness of U.S. strategy in Afghanistan, although government capacity is significantly larger than it was when the Taliban regime fell in late 2001. In a December 1, 2009, policy statement on Afghanistan, which followed the second of two major Afghanistan strategy reviews in 2009, President Obama stated that “The days of providing a blank check [to the Afghan government] are over.” Since early 2010, the Administration has been pressing President Hamid Karzai to move more decisively to address corruption within his government, with apparently limited success. Karzai has agreed to cooperate with U.S.-led efforts to build the capacity of several emerging anti-corruption institutions, but these same institutions have sometimes targeted Karzai allies and undermined the U.S.-Karzai partnership. In part as a reaction, Karzai has strengthened his bonds to ethnic and political faction leaders who are often involved in illicit economic activity and who undermine rule of law. Some of the effects of corruption burst into public view in August 2010 when major losses were announced by the large Kabul Bank, in part due to large loans to major shareholders, many of whom are close to Karzai. While prodding Karzai on corruption—including some moves in Congress to link further U.S. aid to clear progress on this issue—another clear trend over the past two years has been to reduce sole reliance on the Afghan central government by strengthening local governing bodies. This is being implemented, in part, by expanding the presence of U.S. government civilians as advisers outside Kabul.

The disputes with Karzai over corruption compound continuing international concerns about Afghan democracy and Karzai’s legitimacy. In the August 20, 2009, presidential election, there were widespread charges of fraud, many substantiated by an Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). The ECC invalidated nearly one-third of President Karzai’s votes, although Karzai’s main challenger dropped out of a runoff and he was declared the winner, but he subsequently faced opposition to many of his cabinet nominees by the elected lower house of parliament. Seven ministerial posts remain unfilled. Many of the flaws that plagued the 2009 election appear to have recurred in the parliamentary elections held September 18, 2010, although apparently to a lesser extent. However, the fraud complaints in that election are still under investigation and the scope of any fraud committed is not yet clear. The security situation complicated campaigning and the voting, to some extent, but did not derail the election. Results are to be announced October 30.

Politically, there are some indications of ethnic and political fragmentation over the terms on which a settlement to the conflict in Afghanistan might be achieved. The main “opposition leader” and other leaders of minority communities boycotted a June 2-4, 2010, “consultative peace *jirga* (assembly)” in Kabul that endorsed Karzai’s plan to reintegrate into society insurgents willing to end their fight against the government. However, Karzai has named a Tajik leader as chair of the 68-member High Peace Council that is to structure settlement talks. Women, who have made substantial gains (including appointment to cabinet posts and governorships and election to parliament) fear their rights may be eroded under any “deal” that might end conflict with insurgent factions. For more information, see CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman, and CRS Report R40747, *United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan: Background and Policy Issues*, by Rhoda Margesson.

## Contents

Post-Taliban Transition and Political Landscape .....	1
Overview of Afghan Politics and Governance .....	1
Affiliations Based on Ethnicity, Tribal, and Personal Relations .....	2
The Ethnic Politics of the Security Sector/Security Issues .....	2
Politics: Karzai, His Allies, and His Opponents .....	4
Pro-Karzai Factions in Parliament .....	4
The Opposition: Dr. Abdullah and His Lower House Supporters.....	5
Lower House Independents .....	6
The Upper House .....	6
Enhancing Government Capacity and Performance .....	7
U.S.-Karzai Relations.....	7
Differences Among U.S. Officials Over Approaches Toward Karzai .....	8
The Influences of Regional Faction Leaders/“Warlords” .....	8
Vice President Muhammad Fahim .....	9
Northern Afghanistan/Jowzjan: Abdurrashid Dostam.....	9
Northern Afghanistan/Balkh Province: Atta Mohammad Noor.....	10
Western Afghanistan/Herat: Isma’ il Khan.....	10
Southern Afghanistan/Helmand Province: Sher Mohammad Akhundzadeh and “Koka” .....	11
Southern Afghanistan/Qandahar Province: Ahmad Wali Karzai .....	11
Eastern Afghanistan/Nangarhar: Ghul Agha Shirzai.....	12
Building Central Government Capacity .....	12
The Afghan Civil Service .....	13
Curbing Government Corruption and Promoting Rule of Law .....	14
Scope of the Problem .....	15
Karzai Responses .....	16
Rule of Law Efforts.....	19
Expanding Local Governance/U.S. Civilian “Uplift” .....	20
Provincial Governors and Provincial Councils.....	20
District-Level Governance .....	21
U.S. Local Governance Advisory Capacity.....	22
Promoting Human Rights .....	23
Media and Freedom of Expression/Social Freedoms .....	23
Harsh Punishments.....	24
Religious Freedom.....	24
Human Trafficking.....	25
Advancement of Women .....	26
Democracy, Governance, and Elections Funding Issues .....	28
Elections in 2009 and 2010 .....	29
2009 Presidential Election.....	30
Election Modalities and Processes.....	30
The Political Contest and Campaign.....	31
The Campaign.....	32
The Election Results .....	33
Post-Election Cabinet.....	36
September 18, 2010, Parliamentary Elections .....	38

Election Timing .....	38
Election Decree/Reform.....	39
Preparations and The Vote.....	40
Likely Outcomes.....	40
Implications for the United States of the Afghan Elections.....	41

## **Figures**

Figure 1. Map of Afghan Ethnicities.....	45
--	----

## **Tables**

Table 1. Afghanistan Political Transition Process.....	42
Table 2. Major Pashtun Tribal Confederations .....	43

## **Contacts**

Author Contact Information .....	46
Acknowledgments .....	46

## Post-Taliban Transition and Political Landscape

In implementing policy to stabilize Afghanistan, a U.S. policy priority has been to increase the capabilities of and extend the authority of Afghanistan's government. The policy was predicated on the observation that weak governance was causing some Afghans to acquiesce to, or even support, Taliban insurgents as providers of security and traditional justice. Since 2007, in line with the perception that weak and corrupt governance was contributing to insurgent gains, the U.S. and Afghan focus has been on reforming and reducing corruption within the central government, and on expanding local governance. Then-head of the U.N. Assistance Mission Afghanistan (UNAMA), Kai Eide, said in a departing news conference on March 4, 2010, that improving governance and political processes are "indispensable" for resolving the conflict in Afghanistan, and that U.S. and partner efforts have focused too much on military approaches. Eide was succeeded by Staffan de Mistura in March 2010; his substantive position on the issue is similar.

### Overview of Afghan Politics and Governance

Through differing regimes of widely varying ideologies, Afghanistan's governing structure has historically consisted of weak central government unwilling or unable to enforce significant financial or administrative mandates on the 80% of Afghans who live in rural areas. The tribal, clan, village, and district political structures that provided governance and security until the late 1970s were weakened by over 20 years of subsequent war. Some traditional local authority figures fled or were killed, and others were displaced by *mujahedin* commanders, militia leaders, and others. These local power brokers are widely accused of selectively applying Afghan law and have resisted ceding their influence to official local governing structures. In other cases, traditional tribal councils have remained intact, and continue to exercise their writ rather than accept the authority of local government. Still other community authorities prefer to accommodate local insurgent commanders (who are seen as wayward members of the community) rather than help the government secure their areas.

At the national level, Afghanistan had few, if any, Western-style democratic institutions prior to the international intervention that took place after the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. Karzai is the first directly elected president in Afghan history. There were parliamentary elections during the reign of King Zahir Shah (the last were in 1969, before his reign was ended in a 1973 military coup), but the parliament during that era was not the check on presidential power that the post-Taliban National Assembly has. The elected institutions and the 2004 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"),<sup>1</sup> after the Taliban had fallen. The political transition process is depicted in **Table 1**.

Some believe that the elements of Western style democracy introduced since 2001 are supported by traditional Afghan patterns of decision making that have some democratic and representative elements. On the other hand, some see the traditional patterns as competing mechanisms that resist change and modernization, generally minimize the role of women, and do not meet

---

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

international standards of democratic governance. At the national level, the convening of a *loya jirga*, or traditional Afghan assembly consisting of about 1,500 delegates from all over Afghanistan, has been used on several occasions. In the post-Taliban period, *Loya jirgas* have been convened to endorse Karzai's leadership, to adopt a constitution, and to back long-term defense relations with the United States. A major *peace jirga* was held on June 2-4, 2010, to review government plans to offer incentives for insurgent fighters to end their armed struggle and rejoin society. At the local level, *shuras*, or *jirgas* (consultative councils)<sup>2</sup> composed of local notables, are key mechanisms for making authoritative community decisions or dispensing justice. Some of these mechanisms are practiced by Taliban members in areas under their control.

### **Affiliations Based on Ethnicity, Tribal, and Personal Relations**

Patterns of political affiliation by family, clan, tribe, village, ethnicity, region, and other relationships remain. These patterns were evident in the August 20, 2009, presidential campaign in Afghanistan. Many presidential candidates, Karzai included, pursued campaign strategies designed primarily to assemble blocs of ethnic and geographic votes, rather than advance specific new ideas. These patterns were more pronounced in campaigns for the provincial councils, which were elected concurrently, and appear to have been evident again in the September 18, 2010, parliamentary election. In these cases, electorates (the eligible voters of a specific province) are small and candidates can easily appeal to clan and familial relationships.

While Afghans continue to follow traditional patterns of affiliation, there has been a sense among Afghans that their country now welcomes members of all political and ethnic groups and factions. There have been very few incidents of ethnic-based violence since the fall of the Taliban, but jealousies over relative economic and political positions of the different ethnic communities have sporadically manifested as clashes or political disputes.

Ethnic Pashtuns (sometimes referred to as Pathans—pronounced pah-TAHNS), as the largest single ethnicity, have historically asserted a right to rule. Pashtuns are about 42% of the population and, with few exceptions, have governed Afghanistan. The sentiment of the “right to lead” is particularly strong among Pashtuns of the Durrani tribal confederation, which predominates in the south and is a rival to the Ghilzai confederation, which predominates in the east. One recent exception was the 1992-1996 presidency of the *mujahedin* government of Burhanuddin Rabbani, a Tajik. Karzai is a Durrani Pashtun, and his cabinet and inner advisory circle has come to be progressively dominated by Pashtuns and to exclude members of the other communities. The Taliban government was and its insurgency is composed almost completely of Pashtuns, although there have been non-Pashtun rebel factions with given names such as “Tajik Taliban” to denote that they are working against the Karzai government. A table on major Pashtun clans is provided below (see **Table 2**), as is a map showing the distribution of Afghanistan's various ethnicities (see **Figure 1**).

### **The Ethnic Politics of the Security Sector/Security Issues**

Although they largely concede Pashtun rule, non-Pashtuns want to be and are represented at high levels of the central government. Non-Pashtuns also have achieved a large measure of control over how government programs are implemented in their geographic regions. The security organs

---

<sup>2</sup> *Shura* is the term used by non-Pashtuns to characterize the traditional assembly concept. *Jirga* is the Pashtun term.

are considered an arena where Pashtuns and Tajiks have worked together relatively well. The National Directorate for Security (NDS, the intelligence directorate) was headed by a non-Pashtun (Amrollah Saleh, a Tajik) during 2006-2010, although he was dismissed on June 6, 2010, by Karzai for disagreements over whether and how to engage insurgent leaders in political settlement negotiations. He was replaced by a Pashtun, Rehmat Nabil, who has no previous intelligence experience but is perceived as more consultative than was Saleh. Still, he inherited a service dominated by Tajiks (although some left when Saleh was ousted) and by a mix of personnel that served during the Soviet occupation era (the service was then called Khad), and in the *mujahedin* government of 1992-1996, as well as more recent recruits. During 2002-2007, the Central Intelligence Agency reportedly paid for all of the NDS budget.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps to restore the tradition of ethnic balance in the security sector of government, the chief of staff of the Afghan National Army, Bismillah Khan (a Tajik), was named interior minister on June 26, 2010. He replaced Mohammad Hanif Atmar, a Pashtun, who was fired the same day and on roughly the same grounds as Saleh. The security ministries tend to have key deputies who are of a different ethnicity than the minister or top official.

There is also a National Security Council that is located in the palace complex and advises Karzai. As of February 2010, it has been headed by former Foreign Minister Rangin Spanta, a Pashtun who was in the government during the Soviet occupation era and is said to retain leftwing views. The NSC is dominated by Pashtuns; two high officials trusted by Karzai there are Ibrahim Spinzadeh, first deputy NSC adviser, and Shaida Mohammad Abdali, the second deputy NSC adviser (both are Pashtuns).

Karzai's chief of staff is Mohammad Umar Daudzai, who is considered an Islamic conservative. During the anti-Soviet war, he fought in the Pashtun Islamist faction of Gulbuddin Hikmatyar. Daudzai is said to be a skeptic of Western/U.S. influence over Afghan decision making.

Some observers take a different view, asserting that Tajiks continue to control many of the command ranks of the Afghan security institutions, giving Pashtuns only a veneer of control of these organizations. U.S. commanders in Afghanistan say the composition of the national security forces—primarily the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police—has recently been brought more into line with the population, although Pashtuns from the south (Durrani) remain underrepresented.

Others believe that ethnic differences may be on the verge of erupting over a key security issue—Karzai's plan to try to induce both low-level and leading insurgent figures to end their fight and rejoin society (reintegration and reconciliation), perhaps even in prominent posts. Tajik leaders, in particular, as the most prominent group after the Pashtuns, fear that Karzai's plans will increase the Pashtun predominance in government and lead to marginalization of the Tajiks and other non-Pashtun minorities. They also assert—and ousted NDS chief Saleh has reportedly been giving speeches in Tajik areas making this point extensively—that Karzai is now willing to turn over Afghanistan to undue influence from Pakistan. In part to mollify this ethnic unrest on this issue, in September 2010 Karzai appointed a 68-member broad based High Peace Council that would oversee any negotiations with Taliban leaders. Former President Burhanuddin Rabbani, the most senior Tajik faction leader, was appointed Council chairman on October 10, 2010.

---

<sup>3</sup> Filkins, Dexter, and Mark Mazzetti. "Key Karzai Aide in Graft Inquiry is Linked to C.I.A." *New York Times*, August 26, 2010.

Pakistan supports Afghanistan's Pashtun community, and purportedly wants some insurgent factions to come into a post-settlement government. The growing rift over the reconciliation issue has alarmed Pakistan's rival India and, to a lesser extent, Iran, who traditionally support the Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara communities and see Afghanistan's Pashtuns as surrogates of Pakistan. (For more information on the topic of reconciliation talks with insurgent leaders, see CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.)

## **Politics: Karzai, His Allies, and His Opponents**

In post-Taliban Afghanistan, the National Assembly (parliament)—particularly the 249-seat elected lower house (*Wolesi Jirga*, House of the People)—has been the key institution for the non-Pashtuns and political independents to exert influence on Karzai. The process of confirming Karzai's second-term cabinet—in which many of Karzai's nominees were voted down in several nomination rounds—demonstrates that the Assembly is an increasingly strong institution that is pressing for honest, competent governance. These principles are advocated most stridently by the younger, more technocratic independent bloc in the lower house. These independents were key to the lower house vote on March 31, 2010, to reject an election decree that would structure the holding of September 18, 2010, National Assembly elections.

This institutional development has come despite the fact that about one-third of the seats in the lower house are held by personalities and factions prominent in Afghanistan's recent wars, many of whom are non-Pashtuns from the north and the west. Karzai and his allies were hoping that the September 18, 2010, parliamentary elections would produce an increase in pro-Karzai members. 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.

### **Pro-Karzai Factions in Parliament**

The major factions in the lower house are not strictly organized according to Afghanistan's 108 registered political parties. Because of the popular aversion to formal "parties" as historically tools of neighboring powers, Karzai has not formed his own party. However, his core supporters in the outgoing *Wolesi Jirga*, which he and his aides hoped to increase in the September 18, 2010, elections, have been about 50 former members of the conservative Pashtun-based Hizb-e-Islam party (the same party as that headed by insurgent leader Gulbuddin Hikmatyar); and supporters of Abd-i-Rab Rasul Sayyaf—a prominent Islamic conservative *mujahedin* era party leader.<sup>4</sup> Karzai's allies reportedly hope that they would win enough additional seats in the September 18 election to enable Sayyaf to become lower house Speaker, displacing Yunus Qanooni (Tajik); see below.

Another base of Karzai's support are figures from Qandahar (Karzai's home province) and Helmand provinces, including several Karzai clan members. One clan member in the parliament is his cousin Jamil Karzai, and another is relative by marriage Aref Nurzai, who was prominent in Karzai's 2009 election campaign. Karzai's elder brother, Qayyum, was in the lower house representing Qandahar until his October 2008 resignation, although he retains continued influence in Afghanistan. Other pro-Karzai Pashtuns in the outgoing parliament are former militia and

---

<sup>4</sup> Sayyaf led the *Ittihad Islami* (Islamic Union) *mujahedin* party during the war against the Soviet occupation.

Taliban leaders, including Hazrat Ali (Nangarhar Province), who led the Afghan component of the failed assault on Osama bin Laden's purported 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. (Salam ran unsuccessfully for president in 2009.)

### **The Opposition: Dr. Abdullah and His Lower House Supporters**

Although the political opposition to Karzai is fluid and often joins him on some issues, those who can be considered opposition (putting aside Taliban and other insurgents) are mainly ethnic minorities (Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara) who were in an anti-Taliban grouping called the "Northern Alliance." Leaders of these groups, and particularly Tajiks, view as a betrayal Karzai's firing of many of the non-Pashtuns from the cabinet and, as noted, are increasingly concerned about Karzai's outreach to Taliban figures and to Pakistan (including his meetings with Pakistan's military leader and the director of its intelligence service).

The overall "leader of the opposition" is former Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, who is about 49 years old and whose mother is Tajik. He was dismissed from that post by Karzai in 2006. He emerged as Afghanistan's opposition leader after his unsuccessful challenge against Karzai for president in the August 2009 election in which widespread fraud was demonstrated. He visited Washington, DC, one week after Karzai's May 10-14, 2010, visit, criticizing Karzai's governance strategy and implementation at various think tanks and in at least one meeting with the State Department. Dr. Abdullah subsequently turned down an invitation to the June 2-4, 2010, peace *jirga* in Kabul on the grounds that the 1,600 delegates were not representative of all Afghans, implying that it would be overwhelmingly run and dominated by Pashtuns. He announced in late May 2010 that he has begun laying groundwork to create a formal, national democratic opposition organization.

Dr. Abdullah's main base of support within the National Assembly is called the United Front (UF), although some accounts refer to it as the "National Front" or "United National Front." It was formed in April 2007 by *Wolesi Jirga* Speaker Yunus Qanooni (Karzai's main challenger in the 2004 presidential election) and former Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani (both, like Abdullah, are prominent ethnic Tajik Northern Alliance figures and former associates of the legendary *mujahedin* commander Ahmad Shah Masood). The United Front is broader than the Tajik-dominated "Northern Alliance" in that the Front includes some Pashtuns, such as prominent Soviet-occupation era security figures Sayed Muhammad Gulabzoi and Nur ul-Haq Ulumi, who has chaired the defense committee. Both of Karzai's then-vice presidents joined the UF when it was formed, although they subsequently continued to serve as vice presidents (one, Ahmad Zia Masoud, is no longer vice president following the 2009 presidential election). Even before the dispute over the terms of any settlement with the Taliban, the UF advocated 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. Such steps would ensure maximum autonomy from Kabul for non-Pashtun areas, and serve as a check and balance on Pashtun dominance of the central government. Running in the September 18, 2010, elections on a pro-Abdullah banner called the National Alliance for Change and Hope, this bloc sought to nearly double its numbers from about 50 in the outgoing parliament (lower house). The bloc seeks to hold a commanding position that would enable it to block Karzai initiatives and possibly even obtain passage of its own alternative proposals.

Even before the formation of the UF, the opposition in the *Wolesi Jirga* 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. 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. The proximate justification for the ouster was Shinwari's age, which was beyond the official retirement age of 65. (Shinwari later went on to head the Ulema Council, Afghanistan's highest religious body.) Parliament approved Karzai's new court choices in July 2006, all of whom are trained in modern jurisprudence.

### **Lower House Independents**

Karzai and the UF have often competed for the support of the "independents" in the lower house. Among them are several outspoken women, intellectuals, and business leaders, such as the 43-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. Others in this camp include Ms. Fauzia Gailani (Herat Province); Ms. Shukria Barekzai, editor of *Woman Mirror* magazine; and Mr. Ramazan Bashardost, a former Karzai minister who champions parliamentary powers and has established a "complaints tent" near the parliament building to highlight and combat official corruption. (He ran for president in the 2009 elections on an anti-corruption platform and drew an unexpectedly large amount of votes.) U.S.-based International Republican Institute (IRI) has helped train the independents; the National Democratic Institute (NDI) has assisted the more established factions.

### **The Upper House**

Karzai has relatively fewer critics in the 102-seat *Meshrano Jirga* (House of Elder, upper house), partly because of his bloc of 34 appointments (one-third of that body). He engineered the appointment of an ally as speaker: Sibghatullah Mojadeddi, a noted Islamic scholar and former *mujahedin* party leader who headed the post-Communist *mujahedin* government for one month (May 1992).<sup>5</sup> However, because it is composed of more elderly, established, notable Afghans who are traditionalist in their political outlook, the upper house has tended 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. As an example of the upper house's greater support for Karzai, it voted on April 3, 2010, not to act on the election decree that the lower house had rejected on March 31, 2010, meaning that the decree applied to the September 18 parliamentary election.

Karzai also has used his bloc of appointments to the upper house to co-opt potential antagonists or reward his friends. He appointed Northern Alliance military leader Muhammad Fahim to the upper body, perhaps to compensate for his removal as defense minister, although he resigned after a few months and later joined the UF. (He was Karzai's primary running mate in the 2009 elections and is now a vice president.) Karzai named a key ally, former Helmand governor Sher Mohammad Akhunzadeh, to the body. There is one Hindu, and 23 women; 17 are Karzai appointees and six were selected in their own right.

---

<sup>5</sup> The *mujahedin* party he headed during the anti-Soviet war was the Afghan National Liberation Front.

## Enhancing Government Capacity and Performance<sup>6</sup>

Since 2001, U.S. policy has been to help expand the capacity of Afghan institutions, which were nearly non-existent during Taliban rule. At the time of the fall of the Taliban, most Afghan government offices were minimally staffed, and virtually none had computer or other modern equipment, according to observers in Kabul at the time. Since 2007, but with particular focus during the Obama Administration, U.S. policy has been to push for reform of the Afghan central government and to build local governing and government oversight institutions. In two major Afghanistan policy addresses—March 27, 2009, and December 1, 2009—President Obama stressed that more needed to be done to promote the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Afghan government at both the Kabul and local levels. In the latter statement, he said: “The days of providing a blank check [to the Afghan government] are over.” That issue has burgeoned in 2010 with reports that President Karzai has sought to prevent vigorous anti-corruption investigations of his closest allies and supporters.

### U.S.-Karzai Relations

U.S. relations with President Hamid Karzai, and U.S. assessments of his performance, are key to U.S. efforts to implement its stabilization strategy. During 2010, Obama Administration criticism of the shortcomings of the Karzai government have caused substantial frictions in U.S.-Karzai relations. Yet, by all accounts, forging an Administration consensus over how publicly or vigorously to press Karzai on the corruption issue has been difficult.

Continuing U.S. concerns over Afghan governance prompted President Obama to make anti-corruption efforts a particular focus of his talks with President Karzai in Kabul on March 28, 2010. Karzai’s frustrations at what he sees as U.S. and international pressure on him to reform emerged in his comments on April 1, 2010, and April 4, 2010, both to groups of Afghans. On both occasions, and the latter of which was to National Assembly members, Karzai expressed frustration with what he claims was international meddling in the August 20, 2009, presidential election and, more generally, what he sees as his subordination to the decisions of Afghanistan’s international partners. The April 4, 2010, comments were more specifically critical of the United States and suggested that Western meddling in Afghanistan was fueling support for the Taliban as a legitimate resistance to foreign occupation. (An exact English translation of his April 4 comments, in which he purportedly said that even he might consider joining the Taliban if U.S. pressure on him continues, is not available.) White House spokesperson Robert Gibbs said on April 6, 2010, that the May 2010, Karzai visit to Washington, DC, might be called off if Karzai continued to make similar remarks.

Subsequently, top Obama Administration officials, including Secretary of Defense Gates, Secretary of State Clinton, and then CENTCOM commander (now top commander in Afghanistan) General David Petraeus, issued comments apparently designed to restore the relationship.<sup>7</sup> This reflected an apparent decision that public criticism of Karzai was counterproductive and that the May 10-14, 2010, visit should proceed. The visit took place, and

---

<sup>6</sup> Some information in this section is from the State Department reports on human rights in Afghanistan for 2009, March 11, 2010; for text, see <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/sca/136084.htm> and the International Religious Freedom Report, released October 26, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2009/127362.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Dreazen, Yochi, and Sarah Lynch. “U.S. Seeks to Repair Karzai Tie.” *Wall Street Journal*, April 12, 2010.

included several working group meetings between several Karzai ministers and their U.S. counterparts, and meetings and a joint press conference between Karzai and President Obama. President Karzai, other Afghan officials, and U.S. officials all called the visit highly productive, resulting in a decision to review, renew, and expand a 2005 “strategic partnership” that would reflect a long-term U.S. commitment to Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> Subsequently, Administration officials praised Karzai for holding the June 2-4, 2010, *loya jirga* on reintegration of insurgents and for recommitting to specific reform steps at the international conference in Kabul on July 20, 2010. Still, press reports in September 2010 say that differences remain within the Administration over whether to confront Karzai more forcefully to implement reform pledges.

### **Differences Among U.S. Officials Over Approaches Toward Karzai**

A perception has persisted that Karzai’s closest U.S. interlocutors are the top U.S. military representatives in Afghanistan (then-top commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley McChrystal, and now, General David Petraeus). (Karzai reiterated that he has had very good relations with these two top U.S. and NATO commanders in an interview with Larry King on October 11, 2010.) Karzai’s relations with the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (SRAP) Richard Holbrooke, and with Ambassador Eikenberry, are widely assessed as severely strained. This perception has been fed by numerous reports and comments by observers that said that Holbrooke and Eikenberry, reportedly backed by Vice President Biden and, to a certain extent, President Obama, believe in the efficacy of public U.S. pressure on Karzai. In public statements, General Petraeus has stressed that Karzai is president of a sovereign country and his support and partnership is required in order to successfully implement U.S. strategy. Despite Petraeus’s widely praised ability to work with U.S. civilian leaders, some believe that there may need to be further changes on the U.S. side in order to achieve better unity of effort.

### **The Influences of Regional Faction Leaders/“Warlords”**

A major international concern about Karzai’s governing style is his willingness to sometimes ally with unelected or well-armed faction leaders. Most of these leaders are from the north and west, where non-Pashtun ethnic minorities predominate, but there are some major Pashtun faction leaders that Karzai has aligned with. The Obama Administration’s March 27, 2009, and December 1, 2009, strategy statements did not outline new measures to sideline these strongmen, who are sometimes referred to by experts and others as “warlords.” General McChrystal’s August 2009 “initial assessment,” cited below, indicated that some of these faction leaders—most of whom the United States and its partners regularly deal with and have good working relations with—cause resentment among some sectors of the population and complicate U.S. stabilization strategy. A number of them are alleged to own or have equity in security or other Afghan firms that have won business from various U.S. and other donor agencies and fuel allegations of widespread corruption. On the other hand, some Afghans and outside experts believe that the international community’s strategy of dismantling local power structures, particularly in northern Afghanistan, and instead to empower the central government, has caused the security deterioration noted since 2006.

Some assert that the Obama Administration’s criticism of Karzai has caused him to become ever more reliant on these factional power brokers. Karzai’s position is that confronting faction leaders

---

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. CNN, May 30 2010.

outright would likely cause their followers—who usually belong to ethnic or regional minorities—to go into armed rebellion. Even before the Obama Administration came into office, Karzai argued that keeping the faction leaders on the government side is needed in order to keep the focus on fighting “unrepentant” Taliban insurgents (who are almost all ethnic Pashtuns). Perhaps taking umbrage to international criticism, some Soviet-era faction leaders did not attend the April 28, 2010, celebration in Kabul of the anniversary of the *mujahedin* victory over the pro-Soviet Communist government (1992).

In February 2007, both houses passed a law giving amnesty to faction leaders and others who committed abuses during Afghanistan’s past wars. 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. However, in November 2009, the Afghan government published the law in the official gazette (a process known as “gazetting”), giving it the force of law.

The following sections analyze some of the main faction leaders who often attract criticism and commentary from U.S. and international partners in Afghanistan.

### **Vice President Muhammad Fahim**

Karzai’s choice of Muhammad Fahim, a Tajik from the Panjshir Valley region who is military chief of the Northern Alliance/UF faction, as his first vice presidential running mate in the August 2009 elections might have been one manifestation of Karzai’s growing reliance on faction leaders. The Fahim choice was criticized by human rights and other groups because of Fahim’s long identity as a *mujahedin* commander/militia faction leader. However, the alliance was viewed as a major political coup for Karzai by splitting off a major figure from the UF bloc. A *New York Times* story of August 27, 2009, said that the Bush Administration continued to deal with Fahim when he was Defense Minister (2001-2004) despite reports that he was involved in facilitating narcotics trafficking in northern Afghanistan. Other allegations suggest he has engineered property confiscations and other benefits to feed his and his faction’s business interests. He also has reportedly withheld turning over some heavy weapons to U.N. disarmament officials who have been trying to reduce the influence of local strongmen such as Fahim. U.S. officials have not announced any limitations on dealings with Fahim now that he is vice president. In August 2010, NDS director Nabil appointed a Fahim relative to a senior NDS position. As of August 2010, Fahim has been undergoing treatment in Germany for a heart ailment. His ailment coincides with the accusations that his brother was a beneficiary of concessionary loans from Kabul Bank, a major bank that has faced major losses due to its lending practices and may need to be recapitalized.

### **Northern Afghanistan/Jowzjan: Abdurrashid Dostam**

Some observers cite Karzai’s handling of prominent Uzbek leader Abdurrashid Dostam as evidence of political weakness. Dostam commands numerous partisans in his redoubt in northern Afghanistan (Jowzjan, Faryab, Balkh, and Sar-I-Pol provinces), where he was widely accused of human rights abuses of political opponents. To try to separate him from his armed followers, 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 he attacked an ethnic 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 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 of any case against him.<sup>9</sup>

Dostam returned to Afghanistan on August 16, 2009, and subsequently held a large pro-Karzai election rally in his home city of Shebergan. Part of his intent in supporting Karzai has been to potentially oust a strong rival figure in the north, Balkh Province governor Atta Mohammad, see below. Mohammad is a Tajik but, under a 2005 compromise with Karzai, is in control of a province that is inhabited by many Uzbeks—a source of irritation for Dostam and other Uzbeks. Dostam's support apparently helped Karzai carry several provinces in the north, including Jowzjan, Sar-i-Pol, and Faryab, although Dr. Abdullah won Balkh and Samangan. Dostam was not nominated to the post-election cabinet, but two members of his “Junbush Melli” organization were—although they were voted down by the National Assembly because the Assembly insisted on competent officials rather than party loyalists in the new cabinet. Dostam returned to Afghanistan in January 2010 and was restored to his previous, primarily honorary, position of chief of staff of the armed forces.

Dostam's reputation is further clouded by his actions during the U.S.-backed war against the Taliban. On July 11, 2009, the *New York Times* reported that allegations that Dostam had caused the death of several hundred Taliban prisoners during the major combat phase of OEF (late 2001) were not investigated by the Bush Administration. In responding to assertions that there was no investigation of the “*Dasht-e-Laili*” massacre because Dostam was a U.S. ally,<sup>10</sup> President Obama said any allegations of violations of laws of war need to be investigated. Dostam responded to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (which carried the story) that only 200 Taliban prisoners died and primarily because of combat and disease, not intentional actions of his forces.

### **Northern Afghanistan/Balkh Province: Atta Mohammad Noor**

Atta Mohammad Noor, who is about 46 years old, has been the governor of Balkh Province, whose capital is the vibrant city of Mazar-e-Sharif, since 2005. He is an ethnic Tajik, former *mujahedin* commander, who openly endorsed Dr. Abdullah in the 2009 presidential election. However, Karzai has kept Noor in place because he has kept the province secure, allowing Mazar-e-Sharif to become a major trading hub, and because displacing him could cause ethnic unrest. Observers say that Noor exemplifies the local potentate, brokering local security and business arrangements that enrich Noor and his allies while ensuring stability and prosperity.<sup>11</sup>

### **Western Afghanistan/Herat: Isma'il Khan**

Another strongman that Karzai has sought to simultaneously engage and weaken is prominent Tajik political leader and former Herat governor Ismail Khan. In 2006, Karzai appointed him minister of energy and water, taking him away from his political base in the west. However, Khan remains influential there, and maintaining ties to Khan has won Karzai Khan's election support. Khan apparently was able to deliver potentially decisive Tajik votes in Herat Province that might otherwise have gone to Dr. Abdullah. Afghan certified results showed Karzai winning that province, indicating that the deal with Khan was helpful to Karzai.

---

<sup>9</sup> CRS e-mail conversation with National Security aide to President Karzai, December 2008.

<sup>10</sup> This is the name of the area where the Taliban prisoners purportedly died and were buried in a mass grave.

<sup>11</sup> Gall, Carlotta. “In Afghanistan's North, Ex-Warlord Offers Security.” *New York Times*, May 17, 2010.

Still, Khan is said to have several opponents in Herat, and a bombing there on September 26, 2009, narrowly missed his car, causing Khan to threaten to resign his ministry post. U.S. officials purportedly would prefer that Khan not be in the new cabinet because of his checkered record, even though some U.S. officials credit him with cooperating with the privatization of the power sector of Afghanistan. Karzai renominated Khan in his ministry post on December 19, 2009, causing purported disappointment by parliamentarians and western donor countries who want Khan and other faction leaders weakened. His renomination was voted down by the National Assembly and no new nominee for that post was presented on January 9, 2010. Khan remains as head of the ministry but in an acting capacity. Khan has been named to the High Peace Council that is to oversee negotiations with insurgent leaders.

### **Southern Afghanistan/Helmand Province: Sher Mohammad Akhundzadeh and “Koka”**

Karzai’s relationship with another Pashtun strongman, Sher Mohammad Akhundzadeh, demonstrates the dilemmas facing Karzai in governing Afghanistan. Akhundzadeh was a close associate of Karzai when they were in exile in Quetta, Pakistan, during Taliban rule. Karzai appointed him governor of Helmand after the fall of the Taliban, but in 2005, Britain demanded he be removed for his abuses and reputed facilitation of drug trafficking, as a condition of Britain taking security control of Helmand. Karzai reportedly wants to reappoint Akhundzadeh, who Karzai believes was more successful against militants in Helmand using his local militiamen than Britain has been with its more than 9,500 troops there. Akhundzadeh said in a November 2009 interview that many of his followers joined the Taliban insurgency after Britain insisted on his ouster. However, Britain and the United States have strongly urged Karzai to keep the existing governor, Ghulab Mangal, who is winning wide praise for his successes establishing effective governance in Helmand (discussed further under “Expanding Local Governance,” below) and for reducing poppy cultivation there. Akhundzadeh attempted to deliver large numbers of votes for Karzai in Helmand, although turnout in that province was very light partly due to Taliban intimidation of voters.

An Akhundzadeh ally, Abdul Wali Khan (nicknamed “Koka”), was similarly removed by British pressure in 2006 as police chief of Musa Qala district of Helmand. However, Koka was reinstated in 2008 when that district was retaken from Taliban control. The Afghan government insisted on his reinstatement and his militia followers subsequently became the core of the 220-person police force in the district. Koka is mentioned in a congressional report as accepting payments from security contractors who are working under the Defense Department’s “Host National Trucking” contract that secures U.S. equipment convoys. Koka allegedly agrees to secure the convoys in exchange for the payments.<sup>12</sup>

### **Southern Afghanistan/Qandahar Province: Ahmad Wali Karzai**

Governing Qandahar, a province of about 2 million, of whom about half live in Qandahar city, is a sensitive issue in Kabul because of President Karzai’s active interest in his home province. Qandahar governance is particularly crucial to an anticipated U.S. military-led operation to

---

<sup>12</sup> House of Representatives. Subcommittee on National Security and Foreign Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. “Warlord, Inc.: Extortion and Corruption Along the U.S. Supply Chain in Afghanistan.” Report of the Majority Staff, June 2010.

increase security in surrounding districts. In Qandahar, Ahmad Wali Karzai, Karzai's elder brother, is chair of the provincial council. He has always been more powerful than any appointed governor of Qandahar, and President Karzai has frequently rotated the governors of Qandahar to ensure that none of them will impinge on Ahmad Wali's authority. Perceiving him as the key power broker in the province, many constituents and interest groups meet him each day, requesting his interventions on their behalf. Numerous press stories have asserted that he has protected narcotics trafficking in the province, although some pieces say he is also a paid informant and helper for CIA and Special Forces operations in the province.<sup>13</sup> Some Afghans explain Ahmad Wali Karzai's activities as an effort to ensure that his constituents in Qandahar have financial means to sustain themselves, even if through narcotics trade, before there are viable alternative sources of livelihood. On October 11, 2010, President Karzai said (Larry King interview) Ahmad Wali's attorney had shown President Karzai a letter from the U.S. Department of Justice to the effect that no investigation of him was under way. Observers report that President Karzai has repeatedly rebuffed U.S. and other suggestions to try to convince his brother to step down as provincial council chairman for Qandahar, and U.S. officials reportedly have ceased making those suggestions.

Still, U.S. officials say that policy is to try to bolster the clout in Qandahar of the appointed governor, Tooryalai Wesa. The U.S. intent is to empower Wesa to the point where petitioners seek his help on their problems, not that of Ahmad Wali. Karzai appointed Wesa—a Canadian-Afghan academic—in December 2008, perhaps hoping that his ties to Canada would convince Canada to continue its mission in Qandahar beyond 2011. The United States and its partners are trying to assist Wesa with his efforts to equitably distribute development funds and build local governing structures out of the tribal councils he has been holding. U.S. officials reportedly have sought to keep Ahmad Wali from interfering in Wesa's efforts.<sup>14</sup>

### **Eastern Afghanistan/Nangarhar: Ghul Agha Shirzai**

A key gubernatorial appointment has been Ghul Agha Shirzai as governor of Nangarhar. He is a Pashtun from Qandahar, and is generally viewed in Nangarhar as an implant from the south. However, much as has Noor in Balkh, Shirzai has exercised effective leadership, particularly in curbing poppy cultivation there. At the same time, Shirzai is also widely accused of arbitrary action against political or other opponents, and he reportedly does not remit all the customs duties collected at the Khyber Pass/Torkham crossing to the central government. He purportedly uses the funds for the benefit of the province, not trusting that funds remitted to Kabul would be spent in the province. Shirzai had considered running against Karzai in 2009 but then opted not to run as part of a reported "deal" with Karzai that yielded unspecified political and other benefits for Shirzai.

### **Building Central Government Capacity**

In the nearly nine years of extensive international involvement in Afghanistan, Afghan ministries based in Kabul have been slowly but steadily increasing their staffs and technological capabilities

---

<sup>13</sup> Filkins, Dexter, Mark Mazetti and James Risen, "Brother of Afghan Leader Is Said to be on C.I.A. Payroll," *New York Times*, October 28, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Partlow, Joshua, "U.S. Seeks to Bolster Kandahar Governor, Upend Power Balance," *Washington Post*, April 29, 2010.

(many ministry offices now have modern computers and communications, for example), although the government still faces a relatively small recruitment pool of workers with sufficient skills. Afghan-led governmental reform and institution-building programs under way include instituting merit-based performance criteria, basing hiring on qualifications rather than kinship and ethnicity, and weeding out widespread governmental corruption. Corruption is fed, in part, by the fact that government workers receive very low salaries.

Some observers assert that the Afghan government is ineffective not necessarily because it is corrupt or understaffed, but because it lacks focus and organization, most notably in the presidential office. One idea that surfaced in 2009, and which some Afghans are again raising to help overcome administrative bottlenecks in the palace, was to prod Karzai to create a new position akin to a “chief administration officer.” Several potential officials reportedly negotiated with Karzai about playing that role, including one of Karzai’s 2009 election challengers, Ashaf Ghani. Karzai did not mention this issue in his second-term inaugural speech on November 19, 2009.<sup>15</sup> Ghani has been advising Karzai on government reform and institution building after reconciling with him in November 2009 (after the election was settled), and was part of Karzai’s advisory team during the January 28, 2010, London conference and the July 20, 2010, Kabul conference. Some observers say Ghani might be in line for a “special envoy” role abroad.

The Administration has developed about 45 different metrics to assess progress in building Afghan governance and security, as it was required to do (by September 23, 2009) under P.L. 111-32, an FY2009 supplemental appropriation.<sup>16</sup> To date, and under separate authorities such as provisions of supplemental appropriations and foreign aid appropriations, only small amounts of U.S. aid have been made conditional on Afghanistan’s performance on such metrics, and no U.S. aid has been permanently withheld.

## **The Afghan Civil Service**

The low level of Afghan bureaucratic capacity is being addressed in a number of ways, although slowly. The United States and its partners do not have in place a broad program to themselves train Afghan government officials, but instead fund Afghan institutions to conduct such training. Issues of standardizing job descriptions, salaries, bonuses, benefits and the like are being addressed by Afghanistan’s Civil Service Commission. According to the April 2010 version of a mandated Defense Department report on Afghanistan,<sup>17</sup> the commission has thus far redefined more than 80,000 civil servant job descriptions.

Under a program called the Civilian Technical Assistance Plan, the United States is providing technical assistance to Afghan ministries and to the commission. From January 2010 until early 2011, the United States is giving \$85 million to programs run by the commission to support the training and development of Afghan civil servants. The plan envisions training over 13,000 additional bureaucrats. One of the commission’s subordinate organizations is the Afghan Civil Service Institute, which has graduated 1,300 government employees as of July 2010.

---

<sup>15</sup> Text of unofficial translation of Karzai speech provided by the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Washington, DC.

<sup>16</sup> “Evaluating Progress in Afghanistan-Pakistan” Foreign Policy website, [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/09/16/evaluating\\_progress\\_in\\_afghanistan\\_pakistan](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/09/16/evaluating_progress_in_afghanistan_pakistan).

<sup>17</sup> Department of Defense. “Report on Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan.” April 2010. [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/report\\_final\\_secdef\\_04\\_26\\_10.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/pdfs/report_final_secdef_04_26_10.pdf).

Many Afghan civil service personnel have undergone training in India, building on growing relations between Afghanistan and India. Japan and Singapore also are training Afghan civil servants on good governance, anti-corruption, and civil aviation. Some of these programs are conducted in partnership with the German Federal Foreign Office and the Asia Foundation. In order to address the problem of international donors luring away Afghan talent with higher salaries, the July 20, 2010, Kabul conference included a pledge by the Afghan government to reach an understanding with donors, within six months, on a harmonized salary scale for donor-funded salaries of Afghan government personnel.

## **Curbing Government Corruption and Promoting Rule of Law**

As noted above, the Administration is said to still be debating the degree to which to press an anti-corruption agenda with the Karzai government. As noted throughout, there is a consensus within the Administration—and not disputed by Karzai—on the wide scope of the problem. However, there are differences between the United States and Afghanistan over how to implement anti-corruption steps. Press accounts in October 2010 suggest the Administration has decided to focus on reducing low-level corruption, and less so on investigations of high-level allies of Karzai. The anti-corruption effort has previously often come into conflict with other U.S. objectives, such as cultivating allies within the Afghan government who can help stabilize areas of the country. Some of these Afghans are said to be paid by the CIA for information and other support, and the National Security Council reportedly has issued guidance to U.S. agencies to review which Afghans are receiving any direct U.S. funding.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, U.S. officials believe that an anti-corruption effort must be pursued because corruption is contributing to a souring of Western publics on the mission as well as causing some Afghans to embrace Taliban insurgents. Official corruption was identified as a key problem in the August 30, 2009, assessment of the Afghanistan situation by General Stanley McChrystal, then overall commander of U.S. and international forces there. His successor in the post, General Petraeus, the top U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan, has said he is making anti-corruption a top priority to support his counter-insurgency strategy. In September 2010, he issued guidance throughout the theater for subordinate commanders to review their contracting strategies so as to enhance Afghan capacity and reduce the potential for corruption.

The Obama Administration's March 2009 and December 2009 strategy announcements highlighted the issue but did not specifically make U.S. forces or assistance contingent on progress on this issue. However, the December 2009 stipulation of July 2011 as the beginning of a "transition" process to Afghan leadership implied that U.S. support is not open-ended or unconditional. In the December 1, 2009, statement, the President said "We expect those [Afghan officials] who are ineffective or corrupt to be held accountable." As noted, pressing Karzai on corruption reportedly was a key component of President Obama's brief visit to Afghanistan on March 28, 2010. Attorney General Eric Holder visited Afghanistan during June 2010 to discuss anti-corruption efforts with his Afghan counterparts, including Afghan Attorney General Mohammad Ishaq Aloko.

---

<sup>18</sup> Chandrasekaran, Rajiv. "A Subtler Tak to Fight Afghan Corruption." *Washington Post*, September 13, 2010.

## **Scope of the Problem**

Partly because many Afghans view the central government as “predatory,” many Afghans and international donors have lost faith in Karzai’s leadership. A U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime report released in January 2010 said 59% of Afghans consider corruption as a bigger concern than the security situation and unemployment. NATO estimates that about \$2.5 billion in total bribes are paid by Afghans each year. Transparency International, a German organization that assesses governmental corruption worldwide, ranked Afghanistan in 2008 as 176<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries ranked in terms of government corruption.

At the upper levels of government, some observers have asserted that Karzai deliberately tolerates officials who are allegedly involved in the narcotics trade and other illicit activity, and supports their receipt of lucrative contracts from donor countries, in exchange for their support. Another of Karzai’s brother, Mahmoud Karzai, has apparently grown wealthy through real estate and auto sales ventures in Qandahar and Kabul, purportedly by fostering the impression he can influence his brother, President Karzai. Mahmoud Karzai held a press conference in Washington, DC, on April 16, 2009, denying allegations of corruption and, in mid-2010, he hired attorney Gerald Posner to counter corruption allegations against him by U.S. press articles. However, in October 2010 it was reported that a Justice Department investigation of Mahmoud Karzai’s dealings (he holds dual U.S.-Afghan citizenship) had begun. Mahmoud Karzai subsequently announced that he has determined that he does owe back taxes to the United States and would clear up the arrearage.

Several other high officials, despite very low official government salaries, have acquired ornate properties in west Kabul since 2002, according to Afghan observers. This raises the further question of the inadequacy of and possible corruption within Afghanistan’s land titling system. 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.

## ***Kabul Bank Difficulties***

Mahmoud Karzai is a major (7+%) shareholder in the large Kabul Bank, which is used to pay Afghan civil servants and police, and he reportedly received large loans from the bank to buy his position in it. That relationship was exposed in August and September 2010 when Kabul Bank reported large losses from shareholder investments in Dubai properties, prompting President Karzai to appoint a Central Bank official to run the Kabul Bank. However, the moves did not prevent large numbers of depositors from moving their money out of it. As of mid-October, the bank is still operating, but some doubt whether it can survive if depositors keep draining their money from it. U.S. officials have asserted that no U.S. funds will be used to recapitalize the bank, if that is needed. The Afghan government has said it has ample funds (about \$800 million in gold, among other assets) to recapitalize it, which may require several hundred million dollars.

## ***Lower Level Corruption***

Aside from the issue of high-level nepotism, observers who follow the issue say that most of the governmental corruption takes place in the course of performing mundane governmental

functions, such as government processing of official documents (ex. passports, drivers' licenses), in which processing services routinely require bribes in exchange for action.<sup>19</sup> Other forms of corruption include Afghan security officials' selling U.S./internationally provided vehicles, fuel, and equipment to supplement their salaries. In other cases, local police or border officials may siphon off customs revenues or demand extra payments to help guard the U.S. or other militaries' equipment shipments. Other examples include cases in which security commanders have placed "no show" persons on official payrolls in order to pocket their salaries. As noted, it is this low-level corruption that the Obama Administration reportedly has decided, as of October 2010, to focus on.

Because of corruption, only about 20% of U.S. aid is channeled through the Afghan government, although a target figure of 50% of total donor funds to be channeled through the government was endorsed by the July 20, 2010, Kabul conference. Currently, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Communications, the Ministry of Finance, and the World Bank-run Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund (which the U.S. contributes to for Afghan budget support) qualify to have U.S. funds channeled through them. The FY2011 Obama Administration aid request expressed the goal that six ministries would qualify for direct funding by the end of 2010. Among those potentially ready, according to criteria laid out by SRAP Holbrooke and USAID Director Shah on July 28, 2010, three others might be determined ready to receive direct funding: the Ministry of Education; the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, run by the widely praised Minister Asif Rahimi; and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), which runs the widely praised National Solidarity Program. That program awards local development grants for specific projects. The MRRD has developed a capability, widely praised by Britain and other observers, to account for large percentages of donated funds to ensure they are not siphoned off by corruption.

## **Karzai Responses**

Karzai has taken note of the growing U.S. criticism, and Obama Administration officials have credited him with taking several steps, tempered by congressional and some Administration criticism of slow implementation and allegations that he continues to shield his closest allies from investigation or prosecution. At the January 28, 2010, London conference, the Afghan government committed to 32 different steps to curb corruption; many of them were pledged again at the July 20, 2010, Kabul conference. Only a few of the pledges have been completed outright, others have had their deadlines extended or been modified. The following are measures pledged and the status of implementation, if any:

- *Assets Declarations and Verifications.* During December 15-17, 2009, Karzai held a conference in Kabul to combat corruption. It debated, among other ideas, requiring deputy ministers and others to declare their assets, not just those at the ministerial level. That requirement was imposed. Karzai himself earlier declared his assets on March 27, 2009. On June 26, 2010, Karzai urged anti-corruption officials to monitor the incomes of government officials and their families, including his, to ensure their monies are earned legally. The July 20, 2010, Kabul conference communiqué<sup>20</sup> included an Afghan pledge to verify and publish these declarations annually, beginning in 2010. This will presumably be accomplished

---

<sup>19</sup> Filkins, Dexter, "Bribes Corrode Afghan's Trust in Government," *New York Times*, January 2, 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Communiqué text at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/21/world/asia/21kabultext.html>.

- by a Joint Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, which, according to the Kabul conference communiqué, is to be established within three months of the conference.
- *Establishment of High Office of Oversight.* In August 2008 Karzai, with reported Bush Administration prodding, set up the “High Office of Oversight for the Implementation of Anti-Corruption Strategy” (commonly referred to as the High Office of Oversight, HOO) with the power to identify and refer corruption cases to state prosecutors, and to catalogue the overseas assets of Afghan officials. On March 18, 2010, Karzai, as promised during the January 28, 2010, international meeting on Afghanistan in London, issued a decree giving the High Office direct power to investigate corruption cases rather than just refer them to other offices. The United States gave the High Office about \$1 million in assistance during FY2009 and its performance was audited by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), in an audit released in December 2009.<sup>21</sup> USAID will provide the HOO \$30 million during FY2011-FY2013 to build capacity at the central and provincial level, according to USAID officials. USAID pays for salaries of 6 HOO senior staff and provides some information technology systems as well.
  - *Establishment of Additional Investigative Bodies: Major Crimes Task Force and Sensitive Investigations Unit.* Since 2008, several additional investigative bodies have been established under Ministry of Interior authority. The most prominent is the “Major Crimes Task Force,” tasked with investigating public corruption, organized crime, and kidnapping. A headquarters for the MCTF was inaugurated on February 25, 2010. According to the FBI press release that day, the MCTF is Afghan led, but it is funded and mentored by the FBI, the DEA, the U.S. Marshal Service, Britain’s Serious Crimes Organized Crime Agency, the Australian Federal Police, EUPOL (European police training unit in Afghanistan), and the U.S.-led training mission for Afghan forces. The MCTF currently has 169 investigators working on 36 cases, according to Ambassador Holbrooke’s July 28, 2010, testimony. A related body is the Sensitive Investigations Unit, run by several dozen Afghan police officers, vetted and trained by the DEA.<sup>22</sup> This body led the arrest in August 2010 of a Karzai NSC aide, Mohammad Zia Salehi, on charges of soliciting a bribe from the large New Ansari money trading firm in exchange for ending a money-laundering investigation of the firm. The middle-of-the-night arrest prompted Karzai, by his own acknowledgment on August 22, 2010, to obtain Salehi’s release (although he still faces prosecution) and to establish a commission to place the MCTF and SIU under more thorough Afghan government control. Following U.S. criticism that Karzai is protecting his aides (Salehi reportedly has been involved in bringing Taliban figures to Afghanistan for conflict settlement talks), Karzai pledged to visiting Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry on August 20, 2010, that the MCTF and SIU would be allowed to perform their work without political interference.

---

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.sigar.mil/reports/pdf/audits/SIGAR20Audit-10-2.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Nordland, Ron and Mark Mazzetti. “Graft Dispute in Afghanistan Is Test for U.S.” *New York Times*, August 24, 2010.

- *Anti-Corruption Unit,” and an “Anti-Corruption Tribunal.”* These investigative and prosecutory bodies have been established by decree. Eleven judges have been appointed to the tribunal. The tribunal, under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court, tries cases referred by an Anti-Corruption Unit of the Afghan Attorney General’s office. According to testimony before the House Appropriations Committee (State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee) by Ambassador Richard Holbrooke on July 28, 2010, the Anti-Corruption Tribunal has received 79 cases from the Anti-Corruption Unit and is achieving a conviction rate of 90%. President Obama said on September 10, 2010 that 86 Afghan judges have been indicted in 2010 for corruption, up from 11 four years ago. (The July 20, 2010, Kabul conference included a pledge by the Afghan government to establish a statutory basis for the Anti-Corruption Tribunal and the Major Crimes Task Force with laws to be passed by parliament and signed by July 20, 2011.)
- *Implementation: Prosecutions and Investigations of High-Level Officials.* Prosecutions of at least 17 senior officials have been undertaken. In November 2009, Attorney General Aloko announced that two ministers were under investigation for corruption, including the Minister of Mines Mohammad Ibrahim Adel, who reportedly accepted a \$30 million bribe to award a key mining project in Lowgar Province (Aynak Copper Mine) to China.<sup>23</sup> Neither was reappointed to the cabinet named December 19. However, former Minister of the Hajj Mohammad Siddiq Chakari, under investigation for accepting bribes to steer Hajj-related travel business to certain foreign tourist agencies, was able to flee Afghanistan to Britain. Karzai publicly criticized the December 2009 embezzlement conviction of then Kabul Mayor Abdul Ahad Sahibi. On December 13, 2009, the deputy Kabul mayor (Wahibuddin Sadat) was arrested at Kabul airport for alleged misuse of authority. The Salehi case was discussed above; he still faces prosecution even though Karzai’s intervention got him released from prison.
- *Salary Levels.* The government has tried to raise salaries of security forces in order to reduce their inclination to solicit bribes. In November 2009, the Afghan government also has announced an increase in police salaries (from \$180 per month to \$240 per month).
- *Bulk Cash Transfers.* At the July 2010 Kabul conference, the government pledged to adopt regulations and implement within one year policies to govern the bulk transfers of cash outside the country. This is intended to grapple with issues raised by reports, discussed below, of officials taking large amounts of cash out of Afghanistan (an estimated \$1 billion per year taken out). U.S. officials say that large movements of cash are inevitable in Afghanistan because only about 5% of the population use banks and 90% use informal cash transfers (“hawala” system). Ambassador Holbrooke testified on July 28, 2010 (cited earlier), that the Afghan Central Bank has begun trying to control hawala transfers; 475 hawalas have been licensed, to date. None were licensed as recently as three years ago. In June 2010, U.S. and Afghan officials announced establishment of a joint task force to

---

<sup>23</sup> Partlow, Joshua, “Afghanistan Investigating 5 Current and Former Cabinet Members,” *Washington Post*, November 24, 2009.

monitor the flow of money out of Afghanistan, including monitoring the flow of cash out of Kabul International Airport. On August 21, 2010, it was reported that Afghan and U.S. authorities would implement a plan to install U.S.-made currency counters at Kabul airport to track how officials had obtained their cash (and ensure it did not come from donor aid funds).<sup>24</sup>

- *Auditing Capabilities.* The U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) has assessed that the mandate of Afghanistan's Control and Audit Office is too narrow and lacks the independence needed to serve as an effective watch over the use of Afghan government funds.<sup>25</sup> At the Kabul conference, the government pledged to submit to parliament an Audit Law within six months, to strengthen the independence of the Control and Audit Office, and to authorize more auditing by the Ministry of Finance.
- *Legal Review.* The Kabul conference communiqué commits the government to establish a legal review committee, within six months, to review Afghan laws for compliance with the U.N. Convention Against Corruption. Afghanistan ratified the convention in August 2008.

### ***Moves to Penalize Lack of Progress on Corruption***

Several of the required U.S. "metrics" of progress, cited above, involve Afghan progress against corruption. A FY2009 supplemental appropriation (P.L. 111-32) mandated the withholding of 10% of about \$90 million in State Department counter-narcotics funding subject to a certification that the Afghan government is acting against officials who are corrupt or committing gross human rights violations. No U.S. funding for Afghanistan has been withheld because of this or any other legislative certification requirement. On the other hand, in FY2011 legislation, in June 2010, the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee deferred consideration of some of the nearly \$4 billion in civilian aid to Afghanistan requested for FY2011, pending the outcome of a Committee investigation of the issue. The Subcommittee's action came amid reports that Afghan leaders are impeding investigations by the Afghan justice system of some politically well-connected Afghans, and following reports that as much as \$3 billion in funds have been allegedly embezzled by Afghan officials over the past several years.<sup>26</sup> Others note that some of the funds might have been legal earnings from contracts or other work, and not represent U.S. aid funds.

### **Rule of Law Efforts**

U.S. efforts to curb corruption go hand-in-hand with efforts to promote rule of law. As of July 2010, the U.S. Embassy has an Ambassador rank official, Hans Klemm, as a rule of law coordinator. U.S. funding supports training and mentoring for Afghan justice officials, direct assistance to the Afghan government to expand efforts on judicial security, legal aid and public defense, gender justice and awareness, and expansion of justice in the provinces. At the July 20, 2010, Kabul conference, the Afghan government committed to:

---

<sup>24</sup> Miller, Greg and Joshua Partlow. "Afghans, U.S. Aim to Plug Cash Drain." *Washington Post*, August 21, 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Madhani, Aamer. "U.S. Reviews Afghan Watchdog Authority." *USA Today*, May 12, 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Rosenberg, Matthew. "Corruption Suspected in Airlift of Billions in Cash From Kabul." *Wall Street Journal*, June 28, 2010.

- Enact its draft Criminal Procedure Code into law within six months.
- Improve legal aid services within the next 12 months.
- Strengthen judicial capabilities to facilitate the return of illegally seized lands.
- Align strategy toward the informal justice sector (discussed below) with the National Justice Sector Strategy.
- Separate from the Kabul conference issues, USAID has provided \$56 million during FY2005-2009 to facilitate property registration. An additional \$140 million is being provided from FY2010-2014 to inform citizens of land processes and procedures, and to establish a legal and regulatory framework for land administration.

One concern is how deeply the international community should become involved in the informal justice sector. Afghans turn often to local, informal mechanisms (*shuras*, *jirgas*) to adjudicate disputes, particularly those involving local property, familial or local disputes, or personal status issues, rather than use the national court system. Some estimates say that 80% of cases are decided in the informal justice system. In the informal sector, Afghans can usually expect traditional practices of dispute resolution to prevail, including those practiced by Pashtuns. Some of these customs, including traditional forms of apology (“*nanawati*” and “*shamana*”) and compensation for wrongs done, are discussed at <http://www.khyber.org/articles/2004/JirgaRestorativeJustice.shtml>.

However, the informal justice system is dominated almost exclusively by males. Some informal justice *shuras* take place in Taliban-controlled territory, and some Afghans may prefer Taliban-run *shuras* when doing so means they will be judged by members of their own tribe or tribal confederation. The rule of law issue cuts across many different issues, including policing, security, the justice sector, and other functions, and some of these issues are covered in greater depth in CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman.

## **Expanding Local Governance/U.S. Civilian “Uplift”**

As U.S. concerns about corruption in the central government have increased since 2007, U.S. policy has increasingly emphasized building local governance. The U.S. shift in emphasis complements those of the Afghan government, which asserts that it has itself long sought to promote local governance as the next stage in Afghanistan’s political and economic development. A key indicator of the Afghan intent 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. As noted above, the IDLG is headed by Jelani Popal, a member of Karzai’s Popolzai tribe and a close ally. Some international officials say that Popal packed local agencies with Karzai supporters, where they were able to fraudulently produce votes for Karzai in the August 2009 presidential elections.

## **Provincial Governors and Provincial Councils**

Many believe that the key to effective local governance is the appointment of competent governors in all 34 Afghan provinces. U.N., U.S., and other international studies and reports all point to the beneficial effects (reduction in narcotics trafficking, economic growth, lower

violence) of some of the strong Afghan civilian appointments at the provincial level. However, many of the governors are considered weak, ineffective, or corrupt. Others, such as Ghul Agha Shirzai and Atta Mohammad Noor, discussed above in the section on faction leaders, are considered effective but also relatively independent of central authority.

One of the most widely praised gubernatorial appointments has been the March 2008 replacement of the weak and ineffective governor of Helmand with Gulab Mangal, who is from Laghman Province. The U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) praised Mangal in its September 2009 report for taking effective action to convince farmers to grow crops other than poppy. The UNODC report said his efforts account for the 33% reduction of cultivation in Helmand in 2009, as compared with 2008. Mangal has played a key role in convening tribal *shuras* and educating local leaders on the benefits of the U.S.-led offensive to remove Taliban insurgents from Marjah town and install new authorities there (“Operation Moshtarek,” which began in February 2010.)

### ***Provincial Councils***

One problem noted by governance experts is that the role of the elected provincial councils is unclear. The elections for the provincial councils in all 34 provinces were held on August 20, 2009, concurrent with the presidential elections. The previous provincial council elections were held concurrent with the parliamentary elections in September 2005. The 2009 election results for the provincial councils were certified on December 29, 2009. In most provinces, the provincial councils do not act as true legislatures, and they are considered weak compared to the power and influence of the provincial governors.

Still, the provincial councils play a major role in choosing the upper house of the National Assembly (*Meshrano Jirga*); in the absence of district councils (no elections held or scheduled), the provincial councils choose two-thirds of the 102-seat *Meshrano Jirga*. The councils elected in 2009 will select their portion of new *Meshrano Jirga* representatives when the upper body is selected again (after the final results of the September 18, 2010, parliamentary elections are certified).

### **District-Level Governance**

District governors are appointed by the president, at the recommendation of the IDLG. Only about half of all district governors (there are 364 districts) have any staff or vehicles. Efforts to expand village local governance have been hampered by corruption and limited availability of skilled Afghans. In some districts of Helmand that had fallen under virtual Taliban control until the July 2009 U.S.-led offensives in the province, there were no district governors in place at all. Some of the district governors, including in Nawa and Now Zad district, returned after the U.S.-led expulsion of Taliban militants.

The ISAF campaign plan to retake the Marjah area of Helmand (Operation Moshtarak), which began on February 14, 2010, and succeeded in ousting Taliban control of the town by February 25, 2010, included recruiting, in advance, civilian Afghan officials who would govern the district once military forces had expelled Taliban fighters from it. Haji Zahir, a businessman who was in exile in Germany during Taliban rule, took up his position to become the chief executive in Marjah (which is to become its own district). He held meetings with Marjah residents, one of which included hosting a visit to Marjah by President Karzai (March 7, 2010). He had planned to expand his staff to facilitate the “build phase” of the ISAF counter-insurgency plan for the area.

However, the expansion of that staff—and the building of governance in Marjah more generally—has been slow and some officials assigned to the city refused to serve in it for fear of Taliban assassination. As an example of the difficulties in building up local governance, Zahir was replaced in early July 2010, apparently because of his inability to obtain cooperation from Marjah tribal leaders. However, British civilian representatives in Marjah reported in October 2010 that many central government ministries now have personnel in place in Marjah and they live there and are showing up daily.

As far as the relationship between local representatives of the central government ministries and district governments, some difficulties have been noted. Local officials sometimes disagree on priorities or on implementation mechanisms. As is the case with the staffing of district government offices, the presence of Kabul representatives throughout Afghanistan is expanding very slowly and unevenly throughout the country.

### *District Councils and Municipal and Village Level Authority*

No elections for district councils have been held due to boundary and logistical difficulties. However, in his November 19, 2009, inaugural speech, Karzai said the goal of the government is to hold these elections along with the 2010 parliamentary elections. However, subsequently, Afghan officials have said that there will not be district elections in May 2010 when the parliamentary elections are to be held.

As are district governors, mayors of large municipalities are appointed. There are about 42 mayors nationwide, many with deputy mayors. Karzai pledged in his November 2009 inaugural that “mayoral” elections would be held “for the purpose of better city management.” However, no municipal elections have been held and none is scheduled.

The IDLG, with advice from India and other donors, is also in the process of empowering localities to decide on development priorities by forming Community Development Councils (CDC’s). Thus far, there are about 30,000 CDC’s established, and they are eventually to all be elected.

### **U.S. Local Governance Advisory Capacity**

As a consequence of the March 2009 Obama Administration review, to help build local governing capacity, the Administration recruited about 500 U.S. civilian personnel from the State Department, USAID, the Department of Agriculture, and several other agencies—and many additional civilians from partner countries will join them—to advise Afghan ministries, and provincial and district administrations. That effort raised the number of U.S. civilians in Afghanistan to about 975 by early 2010. Of these, nearly 350 are serving outside Kabul, up from 67 in early 2009. USAID Director Rajiv Shah testified on July 28, 2010, that 55% of USAID’s 420 personnel in Afghanistan are serving outside Kabul. A strategy document released by the office of Ambassador Holbrook in January 2010 said that the number of U.S. civilians is slated to grow by another 30% in 2010.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> For text, see <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/135728.pdf>.

### ***Senior Civilian Representative Program***

The Administration also has instituted appointments of “Senior Civilian Representatives” (SCR),<sup>28</sup> who are counterparts to the military commanders of each NATO/ISAF regional command (there are currently five of them). Each Senior Civilian Representative is to have 10-30 personnel on their team. For example, Ambassador Frank Ruggiero, who is serving in Qandahar as the SCR for Regional Command South, is based at Qandahar airfield and interacts closely with the military command of the southern sector. He testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on May 6, 2010. USAID official Dawn Liberi is SCR for Regional Command East (RC-E), which is U.S.-run. She was mentioned specifically by President Obama in his address to U.S. forces at Bagram Airfield (headquarters of RC-E) on March 28, 2010.

### **Promoting Human Rights**

None of the Obama Administration strategy reviews in 2009 specifically changed U.S. policy on Afghanistan’s human rights practices. U.S. policy has been to build capacity in human rights institutions in Afghanistan and to promote civil society and political participation. 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 2009 (issued March 11, 2010).<sup>29</sup> The latest State Department report was similar in tone and substance to that of previous years, citing Afghan security forces and local faction leaders for abuses, including torture and abuse of detainees.

One of the institutional human rights developments since the fall of the Taliban has been the establishment of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC). It is headed by a woman, Sima Simar, a Hazara Shiite from Ghazni Province. It acts as an oversight body but has what some consider to be too cozy relations with Karzai’s office and is not as aggressive as some had hoped. The July 20, 2010, Kabul conference communiqué contained a pledge by the Afghan government to begin discussions with the AIHRC, within six months, to stabilize its budgetary status. USAID has given the AIHRC about \$10 million per year since the fall of the Taliban.

### **Media and Freedom of Expression/Social Freedoms**

Afghanistan’s conservative traditions have caused some backsliding in recent years on media freedoms, which were hailed during 2002-2008 as a major benefit of the U.S. effort in Afghanistan. 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. Backed by Islamic conservatives in parliament, such as Sayyaf (referenced above), and Shiite clerics such as Ayatollah Asif Mohseni, 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, according to the State

---

<sup>28</sup> For more information, see the Defense Department report on Afghanistan stability, April 2010, cited earlier. pp. 19-20.

<sup>29</sup> Department of State. 2009 Human Rights Report: Afghanistan, March 11, 2010.

Department there has been a growing number of arrests or intimidation of journalists who criticize the central government or local leaders.

### ***Ulema Council***

Press reports in September 2010 note that the Ulema Council, a network of 3,000 clerics throughout Afghanistan, has increasingly taken conservative positions more generally. Each cleric in the council is paid about \$100 per month and, in return, is expected to promote the government line. However, in August 2010, 350 members of the Council voted to demand that Islamic law (Sharia) be implemented. If the government were inclined to adopt that recommendation, either on its own or as part of a peace agreement with major Taliban leaders, it is likely that doing so would require amending the Afghan constitution, which does not implement Sharia. Some believe the Ulema Council is drifting out of government control in part because of the incapacity of its chairman, former Supreme Court chief justice Fazl Hadi Shinwari, who has been in a coma in India for several months. No replacement for him has been named by the government. In September 2010, some Ulema Council figures organized protests against plans by a Florida pastor to burn Qurans on the anniversary of the September 11 attacks; plans which were abandoned. As another example of the growing power of harder line Islamists, alcohol is increasingly difficult to obtain in restaurants and stores, although it is not banned for sale to non-Muslims. There were reports in April 2010 that Afghan police had raided some restaurants and prevented them from selling alcoholic beverages at all.

### **Harsh Punishments**

In October 2007, Afghanistan resumed enforcing the death penalty after a four-year moratorium, executing 15 criminals. In August 2010, the issue of stoning to death as a punishment arose when Taliban insurgents ordered a young couple who had eloped stoned to death in a Taliban-controlled area of Konduz Province. Although the punishment was not meted out by the government, it was reported that many residents of the couple's village supported the punishment. The stoning also followed one week after the national Council of Ulema (a supreme religious council) issued a statement (August 10, 2010), following a meeting with government religious officials, calling for more application of Shariah punishments (including such punishments as stoning, amputations, and lashings) in order to better prevent crime.

### **Religious Freedom**

The October 2009 International Religious Freedom report (released October 26, 2009) says the Afghan government took limited steps during the year to increase religious freedom, but that "serious problems remain." 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. Northeastern provinces have a substantial population of Islamailis, a Shiite Muslim sect often called "Seveners" (believers in the Seventh Imam as the true Imam). Many Ismailis follow the Agha Khan IV (Prince Qarim al-Husseini), who chairs the large Agha Khan Foundation that has invested heavily in Afghanistan.

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, a judgment upheld by another court in March 2009. He was pardoned by Karzai and released on September 7, 2009.

A 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 Hazaras are also advancing themselves socially and politically through education in such fields as information technology.<sup>30</sup> The former Minister of Justice, Sarwar Danesh, is a Hazara Shiite, the first of that community to hold that post. He studied in Qom, Iran, a center of Shiite theology. (Danesh was voted down by the parliament for reappointment on January 2, 2010, and again on June 28 when nominated for Minister of Higher Education.) The Justice Minister who was approved on January 16, 2010, Habibullah Ghalib, is part of Dr. Abdullah's faction, but not a Shiite Muslim. Ghaleb previously (2006) was not approved by the *Wolesi Jirga* for a spot on the Supreme Court. There was unrest among some Shiite leaders in late May 2009 when they learned that the Afghan government had dumped 2,000 Iranian-supplied religious texts into a river when an Afghan official complained that the books insulted the Sunni majority.

A previous religious freedom case earned congressional attention in March 2006. An Afghan man, Abd al-Rahman, who had converted to Christianity 16 years ago while working for a Christian aid group in Pakistan, was imprisoned and faced a potential death penalty trial for apostasy—his refusal to convert back to Islam. Facing international pressure, Karzai prevailed on Kabul court authorities to release him (March 29, 2006). His release came the same day the House passed H.Res. 736 calling on protections for Afghan converts. In May 2010, the Afghan government suspended the operations of two Christian-affiliated international relief groups claiming the groups were attempting to promote Christianity among Afghans—an assertion denied by the groups (Church World Service and Norwegian Church Aid).

## **Human Trafficking**

Afghanistan was placed in Tier 2: Watch List in the State Department report on human trafficking issued on June 14, 2010 (Trafficking in Persons Report for 2010, released June 14, 2010). The placement was a downgrade from the Tier 2 placement of the 2009 report. The Afghan government is assessed in the report as not complying with minimum standards for eliminating trafficking, but making significant efforts to do so. However, the downgrade was attributed to the fact that the government did not prosecute any human traffickers under a 2008 law. The State Department report says that women from China, some countries in Africa, Iran, and some countries in Central Asia are being trafficked into Afghanistan for sexual exploitation. Other reports say some are brought to work in night clubs purportedly frequented by members of many international NGOs. In an effort to also increase protections for Afghan women, in August 2008 the Interior Ministry announced a crackdown on sexual assault—an effort to publicly air a taboo subject. The United States has spent about \$500,000 to eliminate human trafficking in Afghanistan since FY2001.

---

<sup>30</sup> Oppel, Richard Jr. and Abdul Waheed Wafa, "Hazara Minority Hustles to Head of the Class in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, January 4, 2010.

## **Advancement of Women**

Freedoms for women have greatly expanded since the fall of the Taliban with their elections to the parliament and their service at many levels of government. According to the State Department human rights report for 2009, numerous abuses, such as denial of educational and employment opportunities, continue primarily because of Afghanistan's conservative traditions. Other institutions, such as Human Rights Watch, report backsliding due in part to the lack of security.<sup>31</sup> Many Afghan women are concerned that the efforts by Karzai and the international community to persuade insurgents to end their fight and rejoin the political process ("reintegration and reconciliation" process) could result in backsliding on women's rights. Most insurgents are highly conservative Islamists who oppose the advancement of women that has occurred. They are perceived as likely to demand some reversals of that trend if they are allowed, as part of any deal, to control territory, assume high-level government positions, or achieve changes to the Afghan constitution. Karzai has said that these concessions are not envisioned, but skepticism remains, and some Afghan officials close to Karzai do not rule out the possibility of amending the constitution to accommodate some Taliban demands. Women have been a target of attacks by Taliban supporters, including attacks on girls' schools and athletic facilities.

A major development in post-Taliban Afghanistan was the formation of a Ministry of Women's Affairs dedicated to improving women's rights, although numerous accounts say the ministry's influence is limited. It promotes the involvement of women in business ventures, and it plays a key role in trying to protect women from domestic abuse by running a growing number of women's shelters across Afghanistan. Husn Banu Ghazanfar remains minister in an acting capacity, having been voted down by the lower house for reappointment.

The Afghan government tried to accommodate Shiite leaders' demands in 2009 by enacting (passage by the National Assembly and signature by Karzai in March 2009) a "Shiite Personal Status Law," at the request of Shiite leaders. The law was intended to provide a legal framework for members of the Shiite minority in family law issues. However, the issue turned controversial when international human rights groups and governments—and Afghan women in a demonstration in Kabul—complained about provisions that would appear to sanction marital rape and which would allow males to control the ability of females in their family to go outside the home. President Obama publicly called these provisions "abhorrent." In early April 2009, taking into account the outcry, Karzai sent the law back to the Justice Ministry for review, saying it would be altered if it were found to conflict with the Afghan constitution. On April 19, 2009, Karzai said on CNN that his government's review of specific provisions of the law, which was long and highly detailed, had been inadequate, and Karzai reiterated during his U.S. visit in May 2009 that the controversial provisions would be removed. The offending clauses were substantially revised by the Justice Ministry in July 2009, requiring that wives "perform housework," but also apparently giving the husband the right to deny a wife food if she refuses sex. The revised law was passed by the National Assembly in late July 2009, signed by Karzai, and published in the official gazette on July 27, 2009, although it remains unsatisfactory to many human rights and women's rights groups.

On August 6, 2009, perhaps in an effort to address some of the criticisms of the Shiite law, Karzai issued, as a decree, the "Elimination of Violence Against Women" law. Minister of Women's

---

<sup>31</sup> "We Have the Promises of the World: Women's Rights in Afghanistan," Human Rights Watch, December 2009, [http://www.wluml.org/sites/wluml.org/files/hrw\\_report\\_2009.pdf](http://www.wluml.org/sites/wluml.org/files/hrw_report_2009.pdf).

Affairs Ghazanfar told CRS in October 2009 that the bill was long contemplated and not related to the Shiite status law.<sup>32</sup> However, it is subject to review and passage by the National Assembly, where some Islamic conservatives, such as Sayyaf (cited above) have been blocking final approval. Sayyaf and others reportedly object to the provisions of the law criminalizing child marriages.

### *Women in Key Positions*

Despite conservative attitudes, women have moved into prominent positions in all areas of Afghan governance, although with periodic setbacks. Three female ministers were in the 2004-2006 cabinet: former presidential candidate Masooda Jalal (Ministry of Women's Affairs), Sediqa Balkhi (Ministry for Martyrs and the Disabled), and Amina Afzali (Ministry of Youth). Karzai nominated Soraya Sobhrang as minister of women's affairs in the 2006 cabinet, but she was voted down by Islamist conservatives in parliament. He eventually appointed another female, Husn Banu Ghazanfar, as minister. Ghazanfar, who is a Russian-speaking Uzbek from northern Afghanistan, has been the only woman in the cabinet for several years. She was renominated on December 19, 2009, but was voted down on January 2, 2010. Karzai subsequently named three women in new selections presented on January 9, 2010, including Afzali (to Labor and Social Affairs). Of the three, however, only Afzali was confirmed on January 16, 2009; the other two may have been opposed by Islamic conservatives. In March 2005, Karzai appointed a former minister of women's affairs, Habiba Sohrabi, as governor of Bamiyan province, inhabited mostly by Hazaras. (She hosted then First Lady Laura Bush in Bamiyan in June 2008.)

The constitution reserves for women at least 17 of the 102 seats in the upper house and 62 of the 249 seats in the lower house of parliament. There are 68 women in the outgoing lower house, meaning 6 were elected without the quota. That ratio is ensured by reserving seats in each province (an average of two per province, with Kabul province reserving 9 female seats). There are 23 serving in the outgoing upper house, 6 more than Karzai's mandated bloc of 17 female appointees. Two women ran for President for the August 20, 2009, election, as discussed below, although each received less than one-half of 1%. Some NGOs and other groups believe that the women elected by the quota system are not viewed as equally legitimate parliamentarians.

For the September 18, 2010, parliamentary elections, about 400 women are running (about 16% of all candidates). About 350 women were delegates to the 1,600-person "*peace jirga*" that was held during June 2-4, 2010, which endorsed an Afghan plan to reintegrate insurgents who want to end their fight. The High Peace Council to oversee the reconciliation process, which met for the first time on October 10, 2010, has eight women out of 68 members.

More generally, women are performing jobs that were rarely held by women even before the Taliban came to power in 1996, including in the new police force. There are over 200 female judges and 447 female journalists working nationwide. The most senior Afghan woman in the police force was assassinated in Qandahar in September 2008. Press reports say Afghan women are increasingly learning how to drive. Under the new government, the wearing of the full body covering called the *burqa* is no longer obligatory, and fewer women are wearing it than was the case a few years ago.

---

<sup>32</sup> CRS meeting with the Minister of Women's Affairs, October 13, 2009.

## ***U.S. and International Posture on Women's Rights***

U.S. officials have had some influence in persuading the government to codify women's rights. After the Karzai government took office, the United States and the new Afghan government set up a U.S.-Afghan Women's Council to coordinate the allocation of resources to Afghan women. Some believe that, in recent years, the U.S. government has dropped women's issues as a priority for Afghanistan. Some criticized President Obama's speech on December 1, 2009, for its absence of virtually any mention of women's rights. Promoting women's rights was discussed at the January 28, 2010, London conference but primarily in the context of the reintegration issue.

Specific earmarks for use of U.S. funds for women's and girls' programs in Afghanistan are contained in recent annual appropriations, and these earmarks have grown steadily. The United States provided \$153 million to programs for Afghan women in FY2009, and expects to provide \$175 million for FY2010, in line with these earmarks.<sup>33</sup> According to State Department reports on U.S. aid to women and girls, covering FY2001-2008, and then FY2008-2009, the United States has numerous, multi-faceted projects directly in support of Afghan women, including women's empowerment, maternal and child health and nutrition, funding the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and micro-finance projects. Some programs focus on training female police officers.<sup>34</sup> Some donors, particularly those of Canada, have financed specific projects for Afghan women farmers.

The Afghanistan Freedom Support Act of 2002 (AFSA, P.L. 107-327) authorized \$15 million per year (FY2003-FY2006) for the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Those monies are donated to the Ministry from Economic Support Funds (ESF) accounts controlled by USAID. S. 229, the Afghan Women Empowerment Act of 2009, introduced in the 111<sup>th</sup> Congress, would authorize \$45 million per year in FY2010-FY2012 for grants to Afghan women, for the ministry of Women's Affairs (\$5 million), and for the AIHRC (\$10 million).

## **Democracy, Governance, and Elections Funding Issues**

U.S. funding for democracy, governance, and rule of law programs has grown, in line with the Obama Administration strategy for Afghanistan. During FY2002-FY2008, a total of \$1.8 billion was spent on democracy, governance, rule of law and human rights, and elections support. Of these, by far the largest category was "good governance," which, in large part, are grant awards to provinces that make progress against narcotics.

The following was spent in FY2009:

- \$881 million for all of democracy and governance, including
  - \$283 million for good governance;
  - \$150 million for National Solidarity Program and direct budget support to Afghan government;
  - \$174 million for election support;

---

<sup>33</sup> For prior years, see CRS Report RL30588, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy*, by Kenneth Katzman, in the section on aid to Afghanistan, year by year.

<sup>34</sup> Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development, "Report on U.S. Government Activities 2008-2009 For Women and Girls in Afghanistan," October 20, 2009.

- \$50 million for strategic program development; and
- \$212 million for rule of law, funded by both USAID and State Department Bureau of International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE).

Planned for FY2010 (regular appropriation and FY2010 supplemental request):

- \$1.7 billion for all democracy and governance, including
  - \$1.15 billion for “good governance”;
  - \$411 million for rule of law and human rights (ESF funds controlled by USAID and INCLE funds);
  - \$113 million for “civil society” building programs; and
  - \$25 million for political competition and consensus building (elections).

Key Components of FY2011 request:

- \$1.388 billion for all democracy and governance funds, including:
  - \$1.01 billion for good governance. This program is used to build the financial and management oversight capability of the central government.
  - \$248 million for rule of law and human rights;
  - \$80 million for civil society building; and
  - \$50 million for political competition and consensus building.

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.

## **Elections in 2009 and 2010**

As noted throughout, the 2009 presidential and provincial elections were anticipated to be a major step in Afghanistan’s political development. They were the first post-Taliban elections run by the Afghan government itself in the form of the Afghanistan Independent Electoral Commission. Donors, including the United States, invested almost \$500 million in 2009 to improve the capacity of the Afghan government to conduct the elections.<sup>35</sup>

Nonetheless, there were assertions of a lack of credibility of the IEC, because most of its commissioners, including then-Chairman Azizullah Ludin, were selected by and politically close to Karzai. As a check and balance to ensure electoral credibility, there was also a U.N.-appointed Elections Complaints Commission (ECC) that reviews fraud complaints. Under the 2005 election law, there were three seats for foreign nationals, appointed by the Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary General/head of U.N. Assistance Mission–Afghanistan, UNAMA. The two

---

<sup>35</sup> Report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). September 9, 2010.

Afghans on the ECC governing council<sup>36</sup> were appointed by the Supreme Court and Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, respectively.

## **2009 Presidential Election**

Special Representative Holbrooke said at a public forum on August 12, 2009, that the August 20, 2009, presidential elections were key to legitimizing the Afghan government, no matter who won. Yet, because of the widespread fraud identified by Afghanistan's U.N.-appointed "Elections Complaints Commission (ECC)" in the first round of the elections, the process did not produce full legitimacy. The marred elections process was a major factor in a September-November 2009 high-level U.S. strategy reevaluation because of the centrality of a credible, legitimate partner Afghan government to U.S. strategy.<sup>37</sup>

Problems with the election began in late 2008 with a dispute over the election date. On February 3, 2009, Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission (IEC) set August 20, 2009, as the election date (a change from a date mandated by Article 61 of the Constitution as April 21, 2009, in order to allow at least 30 days before Karzai's term expired on May 22, 2009). The IEC decision on the latter date cited Article 33 of the Constitution as mandating universal accessibility to the voting—and saying that the April 21 date was precluded by difficulties in registering voters, printing ballots, training staff, advertising the elections, and the dependence on international donor funding, in addition to the security questions.<sup>38</sup>

In response to U.S. insistence that Karzai's presidency ended May 22, and that a caretaker government should run Afghanistan until elections, Karzai issued a February 28, 2009, decree directing the IEC to set the elections in accordance with all provisions of the constitution. The IEC reaffirmed on March 4, 2009, that the election would be held on August 20, 2009. Karzai argued against his stepping down, saying that the Constitution does not provide for any transfer of power other than in case of election or death of a President. The Afghan Supreme Court backed that decision on March 28, 2009, and the Obama Administration publicly backed these rulings.

## **Election Modalities and Processes**

Despite the political dispute between Karzai and his opponents, enthusiasm among the public appeared high in the run-up to the election. Registration, which updated 2005 voter rolls, began in October 2008 and was completed as of the beginning of March 2009. About 4.5 million new voters registered, and about 17 million total Afghans were registered. However, there were widespread reports of registration fraud (possibly half of all new registrants), with some voters registering on behalf of women who do not, by custom, show up at registration sites. U.S. and other election observers found instances of fraudulent registration cards and evidence that cards had been offered for sale. U.S./NATO military operations in some areas, including in Helmand in January 2009, were conducted to secure registration centers; however, some election observers noted that there was insufficient international assistance to the IEC, which ran the election, to ensure an untainted registration process.

---

<sup>36</sup> ECC website, <http://www.ecc.org.af/en/>.

<sup>37</sup> Fidler, Stephen and John W. Miller, "U.S. Allies Await Afghan Review," *Wall Street Journal*, September 25, 2009.

<sup>38</sup> Statement of the Independent Election Commission Secretariat, February 3, 2009, provided to CRS by a Karzai national security aide.

Candidates filed to run during April 24-May 8, 2009. A total of 44 registered to run for president, of which three were disqualified for various reasons, leaving a field of 41 (later reduced to 32 after several dropped out).

In the provincial elections, 3,200 persons competed for 420 seats nationwide. Those elections were conducted on a “Single Non-Transferable Vote” (SNTV) system, in which each voter votes for one candidate in a multi-member constituency. That system encourages many candidacies and is considered to discourage the participation of political parties. Although about 80% of the provincial council candidates ran as independents, some of Afghanistan’s parties, including Hezb-i-Islam, which is a prominent grouping in the National Assembly, fielded multiple candidates in several different provinces.

The provincial elections component of the election received little attention, in part because the role of these councils is unclear. Of the seats up for election, about 200 women competed for the 124 seats reserved for women (29%) on the provincial councils, although in two provinces (Qandahar and Uruzgan) there were fewer women candidates than reserved seats. In Kabul Province, 524 candidates competed for the 29 seats of the council.

The European Union, supported by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) sent a few hundred observers, and the International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute sent observers as well. About 8,000 Afghans assisted the observation missions, according to the U.N. Nations Development Program. Because much of Afghanistan is inaccessible by road, ballots were distributed (and were brought for counting) by animals in addition to vehicles and fixed and rotary aircraft.

Security was a major issue for all the international actors supporting the Afghan elections process, amid open Taliban threats against Afghans who vote. In the first round, about 7,000 polling centers were to be established (with each center having multiple polling places, totaling about 29,000), but, of those, about 800 were deemed too unsafe to open, most of them in restive Helmand and Qandahar provinces. A total of about 6,200 polling centers opened on election day.

The total cost of the Afghan elections in 2009 were about \$300 million. Other international donors contributing funds to close the gap left by the U.S. contribution of about \$175 million.

## **The Political Contest and Campaign**

The presidential competition took shape in May 2009. In the election-related political deal-making,<sup>39</sup> Karzai obtained an agreement from Fahim to run as his first vice presidential running mate. Karzai, Fahim, and incumbent second Vice President Karim Khalili (a Hazara) registered their ticket on May 4, 2009, just before Karzai left to visit the United States for the latest round of three-way strategic talks (U.S.-Pakistan-Afghanistan).

Karzai convinced several prominent Pashtuns not to run. Ghul Agha Shirzai, a member of the powerful Barakzai clan, reportedly reached an arrangement with Karzai the week of the registration period that headed off his candidacy. Anwar al-Haq Ahady, the former finance

---

<sup>39</sup> Some of the information in this section obtained in CRS interviews with a Karzai national security aide, December 2008.

minister and Central Bank governor, did not run. (He did receive a cabinet nomination in the December 19 ministry list but was voted down by the parliament.)

Anti-Karzai Pashtuns did not coalesce around one challenger. Former Interior Minister Ali Jalali (who resigned in 2005 over Karzai's compromises with faction leaders), and former Finance Minister (2002-2004) and Karzai critic Ashraf Ghani did not reach agreement to forge a single ticket. In the end, Ghani, the 56-year-old former World Bank official, registered his candidacy, but without Jalali or prominent representation from other ethnicities in his vice presidential slots.

The UF had difficulty forging a united challenge to Karzai. Burhanuddin Rabbani (Afghanistan President during 1992-1996), the elder statesman of the UF bloc, reportedly insisted that an ethnic Tajik (the ethnic core of the UF) head the UF ticket. Former Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, the 50-year-old former ophthalmologist and foreign envoy of the legendary Tajik *mujahedin* leader Ahmad Shah Masoud, registered to run with UF backing. His running mates were Dr. Cheragh Ali Cheragh, a Hazara who did poorly in the 2004 election, and a little known Pashtun, Homayoun Wasefi. However, the presence of a key Tajik, Fahim, on Karzai's ticket showed the UF to be split. Another problem for the UF was that Ahmad Zia Massoud (a vice president) did not win support of the bloc to head its ticket. Massoud is the brother of Ahmad Shah Masoud (see above), who was killed purportedly by Al Qaeda two days before the September 11 attacks on the United States.

## **The Campaign**

Karzai went into the election as a clear favorite, but the key question was whether he would win in the first round (more than 50% of the vote). IRI and other pre-election polls showed him with about 45% support. Dr. Abdullah polled about 25% and emerged as the main challenger. The conventional wisdom has always been that the two-round format favors a Pashtun candidate.

Although Karzai's public support was harmed by perceptions of ineffectiveness and corruption, although many Afghan voters apparently see many of Afghanistan's problems as beyond Karzai's control. He used some U.S. policy setbacks to bolster his electoral prospects, for example by railing against civilian casualties resulting from U.S./NATO operations, and by proposing new curbs on international military operations in Afghanistan. Karzai said he would hold a *loya jirga*, if elected, including Taliban figures, to try to reach a settlement with the insurgency. He restated that intent in his November 19, 2009, inaugural speech and has moved on that front, as noted.

Karzai was criticized for a campaign that relied on personal ties to ethnic faction leaders rather than a retail campaign based on public appearances. Karzai agreed to public debates with rivals, although he backed out of a scheduled July 23 debate with Abdullah and Ghani (on the private Tolo Television network) on the grounds that the event was scheduled on short notice and was limited to only those three. Abdullah and Ghani debated without Karzai, generating additional criticism of Karzai. Karzai did attend the next debate (on state-run Radio-Television Afghanistan) on August 16, debating Ghani and Bashardost, but without Abdullah. Karzai was said to benefit from his ready access to media attention, which focuses on his daily schedule as president.

Dr. Abdullah stressed his background of mixed ethnicity (one parent is Pashtun and one is Tajik) to appeal to Pashtuns, but his experience and background has been with other Tajik leaders and he campaigned extensively in the north and west, which are populated mainly by Tajiks. However, he also campaigned in Qandahar, in Pashtun heartland. Both Karzai and Abdullah held large rallies in Kabul and elsewhere.

Ghani polled at about 6% just before the election, according to surveys. Ghani appeared frequently in U.S. and Afghan media broadcasts criticizing Karzai for failing to establish democratic and effective institutions, but he has previously spent much time in the United States and Europe and many average Afghans viewed him as out of touch with day-to-day problems in Afghanistan. Ghani made extensive use of the Internet for advertising and fundraising, and he hired political consultant James Carville to advise his campaign.<sup>40</sup>

Another candidate who polled unexpectedly well was 54-year-old anti-corruption parliamentarian Ramazan Bashardost, an ethnic Hazara. He was polling close to 10% just before the election. He ran a low-budget campaign with low-paid personnel and volunteers, but attracted a lot of media. This suggests that, despite most Hazara ethnic leaders, such as Mohammad Mohaqiq, endorsing Karzai, Bashardost would do well among Hazaras, particularly those who are the most educated. Some believe the Shiite personal status law, discussed above, was an effort by Karzai to win Hazara Shiite votes. According to the preliminary results, Bashardost carried several Hazara provinces, including Ghazni and Dai Kondi, but Mohaqiq's backing apparently helped Karzai carry the Hazara heartland of Bamiyan province. Other significant candidates are shown below.

#### **Other Candidates**

**Abd al-Salam Rocketi** ("Mullah Rocketi"). A Pashtun, reconciled Taliban figure, member of the lower house of parliament. Was expected to do well if Taliban sympathizers participated, but received less than 1% (preliminary totals), putting him in 9<sup>th</sup> place out of 32.

**Hedayat Amin Arsala.** A Pashtun, was a vice president during 2001-2004. He was Foreign Minister in the 1992-96 Rabbani-led *mujahedin* government. He is a prominent economist and perceived as close to the former royal family. Finished 30<sup>th</sup> out of 32.

**Abd al Jabbar Sabit.** A Pashtun, was fired by Karzai in 2007 for considering a run against Karzai in the election. Finished in 19<sup>th</sup> place.

**Shahnawaz Tanai.** A Pashtun. Served as defense minister in the Communist government of Najibullah (which was left in place after the Soviets withdrew in 1989) but led a failed coup against Najibullah in April 1990. Finished an unexpectedly strong sixth place and did well in several Pashtun provinces.

**Mirwais Yasini.** Another strong Pashtun candidate, was viewed as a dark horse possible winner. 48-year-old deputy speaker of the lower house of parliament, but also without well-known non-Pashtun running mates. Finished fifth.

**Frozan Fana and Shahla Ata.** The two women candidates in the race. Fana is the wife of the first post-Taliban aviation minister, who was killed during an altercation at Kabul airport in 2002. These two candidates are widely given almost no chance of winning, but attracted substantial media attention as trail-blazers. Fana finished seventh but Ata finished in 14<sup>th</sup> place.

## **The Election Results**

Taliban intimidation and voter apathy appears to have suppressed the total turnout to about 5.8 million votes cast, or about a 35% turnout, far lower than expected. Twenty-seven Afghans, mostly security forces personnel, were killed in election-day violence. Turnout was said by observers and U.S. and other military personnel based there to have been very low in Helmand Province, despite the fact that Helmand was the focus of a U.S. military-led offensive.

<sup>40</sup> Mulrine, Anna, "Afghan Presidential Candidate Takes a Page From Obama's Playbook," *U.S. News and World Report*, June 25, 2009.

Some observers said that turnout among women nationwide was primarily because there were not sufficient numbers of female poll workers recruited by the IEC to make women feel comfortable enough to vote. In general, however, election observers reported that poll workers were generally attentive and well trained, and the voting process appeared orderly.

In normally secure Kabul, turnout was said to be far lighter than in the 2004 presidential election. Turnout might have been dampened by a suicide bombing on August 15, 2009, outside NATO/ISAF military headquarters and intended to intimidate voters not to participate. In addition, several dozen provincial council candidates, and some workers on the presidential campaigns, were killed in election-related violence. A convoy carrying Fahim (Karzai vice presidential running mate, see below) was bombed, although Fahim was unharmed.

Clouding the election substantially were the widespread fraud allegations coming from all sides. Dr. Abdullah held several news conferences after the election, purporting to show evidence of systematic election fraud by the Karzai camp. Karzai's camp made similar allegations against Abdullah as applied to his presumed strongholds in northern Afghanistan. The ECC, in statements, stated its belief that there was substantial fraud likely committed, and mostly by Karzai supporters. However, the low turnout in the presumed Karzai strongholds in southern Afghanistan led Karzai and many Pashtuns to question the election's fairness as well, on the grounds that Pashtuns were intimidated from voting in greater proportions than were others.

The IEC released vote results slowly. Preliminary results were to be announced by September 3. However, the final, uncertified total was released on September 16, 2009. It showed Karzai at 54.6% and Dr. Abdullah at 27.7%. Bashardost and Ghani received single-digit vote counts (9% and 3% respectively), with trace amounts for the remainder of the field.

### *Vote Certified/Runoff Mandated*

The constitution required that a second-round runoff, if needed, be held two weeks after the results of the first round are certified. Following the release of the vote count, the complaints evaluation period began which, upon completed, would yield a "certified" vote result. On September 8, 2009, the ECC ordered a recount of 10% of polling stations (accounting for as many as 25% total votes) as part of its investigations of fraud. Polling stations were considered "suspect" if: the total number of votes exceeded 600, which was the maximum number allotted to each polling station; or where any candidate received 95% or more of the total valid votes cast at that station (assuming more than 100 votes were cast there). Perhaps reflecting political sensitivities, the recount consisted of a sampling of actual votes.<sup>41</sup> Throughout the investigation period (September 16-October 20), the ECC said it was not "in a rush" to finish.

On October 20, 2009, the ECC determined, based on its investigation, that about 1 million Karzai votes, and about 200,000 Abdullah votes, were considered fraudulent and were deducted from their totals. The final, certified, results of the first round were as follows: Karzai—49.67% (according to the IEC; with a slightly lower total of about 48% according to the ECC determination); Abdullah—30.59%; Bashardost—10.46%; Ghani—2.94%, Yasini—1.03%, and lower figures for the remaining field.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> "Afghan Panel to Use Sampling in Recount," *USA Today*, September 22, 2009.

<sup>42</sup> See IEC website for final certified tallies, <http://www.iec.org.af/results>.

During October 16-20, 2009, U.S. and international officials, including visiting Senator John Kerry, met repeatedly with Karzai to attempt to persuade him to acknowledge that his vote total did not legitimately exceed the 50%+ threshold to claim a first-round victory. On October 21, 2009, the IEC accepted the ECC findings and Karzai conceded the need for a runoff election. A date was set as November 7, 2009. Abdullah initially accepted.

In an attempt to produce a fair second round, UNAMA, which provided advice and assistance to the IEC, requested that about 200 district-level election commissioners be replaced. In addition, it recommended there be fewer polling stations—about 5,800, compared to 6,200 previously—to eliminate polling stations where very few votes are expected to be cast. Still, there were concerns that some voters may be disenfranchised because snow had set in some locations. Insurgents were expected to resume their campaign to intimidate voters from casting ballots.

After a runoff was declared, no major faction leader switched support of either candidate, making it difficult to envision an Abdullah victory. Prior to the ECC vote certification, Dr. Abdullah told CRS at a meeting in Kabul on October 15, 2009, that he might be willing to negotiate with Karzai on a “Joint Program” of reforms—such as direct election of governors and reduced presidential powers—to avoid a runoff. Abdullah told CRS he himself would not be willing to enter the cabinet, although presumably such a deal would involve his allies doing so. However, some said the constitution does not provide for a negotiated settlement and that the runoff must proceed. Others said that a deal between the two, in which Abdullah dropped his candidacy, could have led the third-place finisher, Ramazan Bashardost, to assert that he must face Karzai in a runoff. Still others say the issue could have necessitated resolution by Afghanistan’s Supreme Court.

### *Election Conclusion*

The various pre-runoff scenarios were mooted on November 1, 2009, when Dr. Abdullah refused to participate in the runoff on the grounds that the problems that plagued the first round were likely to recur. He asserted that Karzai, in negotiations during October 2009, was refusing to replace the IEC head, Azizullah Ludin, to fire several cabinet ministers purportedly campaigning for Karzai, or to address several other election-related complaints. The IEC refused to follow a UNAMA recommendation to reduce the number of polling stations. Some believe Abdullah pulled out because of his belief that he would not prevail in the second round.

On November 2, 2009, the IEC issued a statement saying that, by consensus, the body had determined that Karzai, being the only candidate remaining in a two-person runoff, should be declared the winner and the second round not held. The Obama Administration accepted the outcome as “within Afghanistan’s constitution,” on the grounds that the fraud had been investigated. On that basis, the United States, as well as U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki Moon (visiting Kabul), and several governments, congratulated Karzai on the victory. U.S. officials, including Secretary of State Clinton, praised Dr. Abdullah for his relatively moderate speech announcing his pullout, in particular his refusal to call for demonstrations or violence. Dr. Abdullah denied that his pullout was part of any “deal” with Karzai for a role for his supporters in the next government. Amid U.S. and international calls for Karzai to choose his next cabinet based on competence, merit, and dedication to curbing corruption, Karzai was inaugurated on November 19, 2009, with Secretary of State Clinton in attendance.

As noted above, the election for the provincial council members were not certified until December 29, 2009. The council members have taken office.

### ***Fallout for UNAMA***

The political fallout for UNAMA was significant. During the complaint period, a dispute between UNAMA head Kai Eide and the American deputy, Ambassador Peter Galbraith, broke out over how vigorously to press for investigation of the fraud. This led to the September 29, 2009, dismissal by Secretary General Ban Ki Moon of Galbraith, who had openly accused UNAMA head Kai Eide of soft-pedaling on the fraud charges and siding with Karzai. Galbraith appealed his dismissal, amid press reports that he had discussed a plan with some U.S. officials to replace Karzai with an interim government, if the second round could not be held until after the winter. In December 2009, Eide announced he would not seek to renew his two year agreement to serve as UNAMA chief. The replacement named at the January 28, 2010, London conference was Staffan de Mistura, who previously played a similar U.N. role in Iraq. He arrived in Kabul in mid-March 2010.

### **Post-Election Cabinet**

U.S. officials stated they would scrutinize the post-election cabinet for indications that Karzai would professionalize his government and eliminate corruption. Complicating Karzai's efforts to obtain confirmation of a full cabinet was the need to present his choices as technically competent while also maintaining a customary and expected balance of ethnic and political factions. In the parliamentary confirmation process that has unfolded, National Assembly members, particularly the well-educated independents, have objected to many of his nominees as "unknowns," as having minimal qualifications, or as loyal to faction leaders who backed Karzai in the 2009 election. Karzai's original list of 24 ministerial nominees (presented December 19) was generally praised by the United States for retaining the highly praised economic team (and most of that team was confirmed). However, overall, only 7 of the first 24 nominees were confirmed (January 2, 2010), and only 7 of the 17 replacement nominees were confirmed (January 16, 2010), after which the Assembly went into winter recess. Another five (out of seven nominees) were confirmed on June 28, 2010, although one was a replacement for the ousted Interior Minister Atmar. Seven permanent posts remain unfilled. Although then UNAMA head Kai Eide called the vetoing of many nominees a "setback" to Afghan governance, Pentagon Press Secretary Geoff Morrell said on January 6, 2010, that the vetoing by parliament reflected a "healthy give and take" among Afghanistan's branches of government. Outside experts have said the confirmation process—and the later parliamentary review of a 2010 election decree, discussed below—reflects the growing institutional strength of the parliament and the functioning of checks and balances in the Afghan government. Of the major specific developments in the cabinet selection process to date (and with seven ministries remaining unfilled by permanent appointees, as of September 2010):

The main security ministers—Defense Minister Abdal Rahim Wardak and Interior Minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar—were renominated by Karzai and confirmed on January 2, 2010. They work closely with the U.S. military to expand and improve the Afghan national security forces. (Atmar was later dismissed, as discussed below.)

- Three key economic/civilian sector officials who work very closely with USAID and U.S. Embassy Kabul—Finance Minister Omar Zakhwal, Agriculture Minister Mohammad Rahimi, and Education Minister Ghulam Faruq Wardak—were renominated and also were confirmed on January 2. The highly praised Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (Ehsan Zia), who runs the widely touted and effective National Solidarity Program, was not renominated, to

- the chagrin of U.S. officials. His named replacement (Wais Barmak, a Fahim and Dr. Abdullah ally) was voted down. The second replacement, Jarullah Mansoori, was confirmed on January 16.
- The U.S.-praised Commerce Minister Wahidollah Sharani was selected to move over to take control of the Mines Ministry from the former minister, who is under investigation for corruption. Sharani was confirmed on January 2. Also confirmed that day was Minister of Culture Seyyed Makhdum Raheen. He had been serving as Ambassador to India.
  - The clan of former moderate *mujahedin* party leader Pir Gaylani rose to prominence in the December 19 list. Gaylani son-in-law Anwar al Haq Al Ahady (see above) was named as economy minister and Hamid Gaylani (Pir Gaylani's son) was named as minister of border and tribal affairs. However, neither was confirmed and neither was renominated.
  - Ismail Khan was renominated as minister of energy and water on December 19, disappointing U.S. officials and many Afghans who see him as a faction leader (Tajik leader/*mujahedin* era commander, Herat Province) with no technical expertise. He was voted down and no new replacement nominee has been submitted by Karzai, likely indicating that Khan will ultimately leave the cabinet.
  - Karzai initially did not nominate a permanent foreign minister, leaving Spanta in place as a caretaker. However, in the second nomination round, Karzai selected his close ally Zalmay Rassoul, who has been national security adviser since 2004, to the post. Rassoul was confirmed on January 16.
  - Minister of Women's Affairs Ghazanfar was renominated to remain the only female minister, but was voted down (January 2). In the cabinet renominations, Karzai named three women—Suraiya Dalil to Public Health, Palwasha Hassan to Women's Affairs, and Amina Afzali (minister of youth in an earlier Karzai cabinet) to Labor and Social Affairs. Of those, only Afzali was confirmed on January 16. Ghazanfar and Dalil are heading those ministries in an acting capacity. In the December 16, 2009, list, Karzai proposed a woman to head a new Ministry of Literacy, but parliament did not vote on this nomination because it had not yet acted to approve formation of the ministry
  - Of the other nominees confirmed on January 16, at least one has previously served in high positions. The Assembly confirmed that day: Zarar Moqbel (who previously was interior minister) as counternarcotics minister; Economy Minister Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal, who belongs to the party linked with pro-Taliban insurgent leader Gulbuddin Hikmatyar (although the faction in the parliament and the government has broken with Hikmatyar and rejects violence against the government); Yousaf Niazi, minister of hajj and waqf (religious endowments) affairs; and Habibullah Ghalib, minister of justice.
  - The following 10 were voted down on January 16: (1) Palwasha Hassan, nominated to head the Ministry of Women's Affairs; (2) Dalil, Public Health, now acting minister, mentioned above; (3) Muhammad Zubair Waheed, minister of commerce; (4) Muhammad Elahi, minister of higher education; (5) Muhammad Laali, Public Works; (6) Abdul Rahim, who was telecommunications minister in the first Karzai cabinet, as minister of refugee affairs (acting); (7) Arsala Jamal, formerly the governor of Khost Province who was widely praised

- in that role by Secretary Gates, as minister of border and tribal affairs (and now is acting minister); (8) Abdul Qadus Hamidi, minister of communications; (9) Abdur Rahim Oraz, minister of transport and aviation; and (10) Sultan Hussein Hesari, minister of urban development (acting).
- On June 28, 2010, Karzai obtained parliamentary approval for five positions out of seven nominees. Approved were Bismillah Khan as interior minister (replacing Atmar, who was fired on June 6); Al Ahady (see above) as commerce minister; former Qandahar governor Asadullah Khalid as minister of border and tribal affairs; Hamidi (see above) as minister of public works; and Jamahir Anwari as minister of refugees and repatriation. Voted down were two Hazara Shiites: Sarwar Danesh as minister of higher education, and former IEC chief Daud Ali Najafi as minister of transportation. Their rejection caused Hazara members in the Assembly to demonstrate their disapproval of the vote, and Karzai called for Hazaras to be approved in the future to ensure all-ethnic participation in government.

## **September 18, 2010, Parliamentary Elections**

Some, including the referenced report by the SIGAR, feared that the difficulties that plagued the 2009 presidential election were not adequately addressed to ensure that the September 18, 2010, parliamentary elections are free and fair. A dispute over a new election decree that governed the election, and which weakened the international voice on the ECC, is discussed below. The July 20, 2010, Kabul conference final communiqué included an Afghan government pledge to initiate, within six months, a strategy for long-term electoral reform.

### **Election Timing**

On January 2, 2010, the IEC had initially set National Assembly elections for May 22, 2010. The IEC view was that this date was in line with a constitutional requirement for a new election to be held well prior to the expiry of the current Assembly's term. However, U.S., ECC, UNAMA, and officials of donor countries argued that Afghanistan's flawed institutions would not be able to hold free and fair elections under this timetable. Among the difficulties noted were that the IEC lacks sufficient staff, given that some were fired after the 2009 election; that the IEC lacks funds to hold the election under that timetable; that the U.S. military buildup will be consumed with securing still restive areas at election time; and that the ECC's term expired at the end of January 2010. A functioning ECC was needed to evaluate complaints against registered parliamentary candidates because there are provisions in the election law to invalidate the candidacies of those who have previously violated Afghan law or committed human rights abuses.

The international community pressed for a delay of all of these elections until August 2010 or, according to some donors, mid-2011.<sup>43</sup> Bowing to funding and the wide range of other considerations mentioned, on January 24, 2010, the IEC announced that the parliamentary elections would be postponed until September 18, 2010. Other experts said that the security

---

<sup>43</sup> Trofimov, Yaroslav, "West Urges Afghanistan to Delay Election," *Wall Street Journal*, December 11, 2009.

issues, and the lack of faith in Afghanistan's election institutions, necessitated further postponement.<sup>44</sup>

About \$120 million was budgeted by the IEC for the parliamentary elections, of which at least \$50 million came from donor countries, giving donors leverage over when the election might take place. The remaining \$70 million was funds left over from the 2009 elections. Donors had held back the needed funds, possibly in an effort to pressure the IEC to demonstrate that it is correcting the flaws identified in the various "after-action" reports on the 2009 election. With the compromises and Karzai announcements below, those funds were released as of April 2010.

### **Election Decree/Reform**

With the dispute between the Karzai government and international donors continuing over how to ensure a free and fair election, the Afghan government drafted an election decree that would supersede the 2005 election law and govern the 2010 parliamentary election.<sup>45</sup> Karzai signed the decree in February 2010. The Afghan government argues that the decree supersedes the constitutional clause that any new election law not be adopted less than one year prior to the election to which that law will apply.

Substantively, some of the provisions of the election decree—particularly the proposal to make the ECC an all-Afghan body—caused alarm in the international community. Another controversial element was the registration requirements of a financial deposit (equivalent of about \$650), and that candidates obtain signatures of at least 1,000 voters. On March 14, 2010, after discussions with outgoing UNAMA head Kai Eide, Karzai reportedly agreed to cede to UNAMA two "international seats" on the ECC, rather than to insist that all five ECC members be Afghans. Still, the majority of the ECC seats were Afghans.

The election decree became an issue for Karzai opponents and others in the National Assembly who seek to assert parliamentary authority. On March 31, the *Wolesi Jirga* voted to reject the election decree, leaving its status unclear. However, on April 3, 2010, the *Meshrano Jirga* decided not to act on the election decree, meaning that it was not rejected by the Assembly as a whole and will likely stand to govern the September 18, 2010, National Assembly elections. Karzai upheld his pledge to implement the March 2010 compromise with then UNAMA head Eide by allowing UNAMA to appoint two ECC members and for decisions to require that at least one non-Afghan ECC member concur.

Among other steps to correct the mistakes of the 2009 election, the Afghan Interior Ministry planned instituted a national identity card system to curb voter registration fraud. However, observers say that registration fraud still occurred. On April 17, 2010, Karzai appointed a new IEC head, Fazel Ahmed Manawi, who drew praise from many factions (including "opposition leader" Dr. Abdullah) for impartiality. The IEC also barred 6,000 poll workers who served in the 2009 election from working the 2010 election.

---

<sup>44</sup> Rondeaux, Candace. "Why Afghanistan's September Elections Ought to Be Postponed." *Washington Post*, July 11, 2010.

<sup>45</sup> Partlow, Joshua, "Afghanistan's Government Seeks More Control Over Elections," *Washington Post*, February 15, 2010.

## **Preparations and The Vote**

Preparations for the September 18 election have gone relatively smoothly, according to reports by the IEC. Candidates registered during April 20-May 6, 2010. A list of candidates was circulated on May 13, 2010, including 2,477 candidates for the 249 seats.<sup>46</sup> These figures included 226 candidates who registered but whose documentation was not totally in order; and appeal restored about 180 of them. On May 30, 2010, in a preliminary ruling, 85 candidates others were disqualified as members of illegal armed groups. However, appeals and negotiations restored all but 36 in this latter category. A final list of candidates, after all appeals and decisions on the various disqualifications, was issued June 22. The final list included 2,577 candidates, including 406 women. Since then, 62 candidates were invalidated by the ECC, mostly because they did not resign their government positions, as required.

Voter registration was conducted June 12-August 12. According to the IEC, over 375,000 new voters were registered. Campaigning began June 23. Many candidates, particularly those who are women, said that security difficulties have prevented them from conducting active campaigning. At least three candidates and 13 candidate supporters were killed by insurgent violence.

On August 24, 2010, the IEC announced that the Afghan security forces say they would only be able to secure 5,897 of the planned 6,835 polling centers. To prevent so-called “ghost polling stations” (stations open but where no voters can go, thus allowing for ballot-stuffing), the 938 stations considered not secure were not opened. The IEC announcement stated that further security evaluation could lead to the closing of still more stations and, on election day, a total of 5,355 centers opened, 304 of those slated to open did not, and for 157 centers there was no information available. In part to compensate, the IEC opened extra polling stations in centers in secure areas near to those that were closed.

On election day, about 3.6 million votes were cast out of about 17 million eligible voters. Turnout was therefore less than 25%, a relative disappointment. A major issue was security. At first, it appeared as though election-day violence was lower than in the 2009 presidential election. However, on September 24, NATO/ISAF announced that there were about 380 total attacks, about 100 more than in 2009. However, voting was generally reported as orderly and the attacks did not derail the election.

As far as fraud, the ECC has prioritized complaints filed. The ECC has categorized 2,142 as possibly affecting the election, 1,056 as unable to affect the result, and 600 where there will be no investigation.

## **Likely Outcomes**

Results are expected to be announced October 30, 2010. As of October 10, 2010, results in about 22 (of the 34) provinces have been counted, and counting is more than half complete in another 11. No count is yet reported for Nuristan.

---

<sup>46</sup> The seat allocation per province is the same as it was in the 2005 parliamentary election—33 seats up for election in Kabul; 17 in Herat province; 14 in Nangarhar, 11 each in Qandahar, Balkh, and Ghazni; 9 in Badakhshan, Konduz, and Faryab, 8 in Helmand, and 2 to 6 in the remaining provinces. Ten are reserved for Kuchis (nomads).

There were no clear national issue-based themes in the parliamentary election. The contest was generally seen as a struggle between Dr. Abdullah's allies and Karzai's allies for dominance of the next lower house. Should Karzai's allies prevail, as noted, they might seek to replace Qanooni as speaker with Sayyaf.

This overarching power struggle aside, it is likely that the next parliament will again be diverse and heavily populated by local notables or candidates backed by local power brokers. Because seats are allocated by province, it is not clear how factions or persons who seek to achieve a national trend through fraud would accomplish that. Some believe that there may be voter sentiment in favor of candidates who are vocal critics of governmental corruption and of Karzai personally, but few believe that the traditional patterns of affiliation-based voting were broken in the election.

## **Implications for the United States of the Afghan Elections**

U.S. officials express clear U.S. neutrality in all Afghan elections. However, in the 2009 presidential election, Karzai reportedly believed the United States was hoping strong candidates might emerge to replace him. This perception was a function of the strained relations between Karzai and some Obama Administration officials, particularly Ambassadors Holbrooke and Eikenberry. Ambassador Timothy Carney was appointed to head the 2009 U.S. election support effort at U.S. Embassy Kabul, tasked to ensure that the United States was even-handed.

The legitimacy of the Afghan partner of the United States was a major factor in the Administration's consideration of the McChrystal initial assessment of August 2009,<sup>47</sup> which recommended pursuing a classic counterinsurgency strategy to protect the Afghan population. If there is no legitimate Afghan partner available, then some might argue that the recommended strategy might not succeed because U.S. forces are not authorized or able to reform the Afghan government. According to the DOD report of April 2010, cited earlier, the strategy is focused on 120 restive districts (of the 364 total Afghan districts). Administration officials clarified that any July 2011 deadline to begin transitioning to Afghan security leadership would be subject to evaluation of conditions that would be determined in a December 2010 review. That review is likely to take into account an assessment of the credibility of the September 18, 2010, parliamentary elections, particularly the public perception of whether the problems of the 2009 presidential election were corrected. A provision of an FY2010 supplemental appropriation (P.L. 111-212) makes U.S. aid to the IEC and ECC contingent on certification by the Secretary of State that those Afghan officials who committed fraud in the 2009 presidential election are not involved in the September 2010 parliamentary election.

---

<sup>47</sup> Commander NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan, and U.S. Forces, Afghanistan. "Commander's Initial Assessment," August 30, 2009, available at [http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment\\_Redacted\\_092109.pdf?](http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/Assessment_Redacted_092109.pdf?).

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 <i>loya jirga</i> .” (A <i>jirga</i> is a traditional Afghan assembly).
Constitution	Approved by January 2004 “Constitutional <i>Loya Jirga</i> ” (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 <i>mujahedin</i> 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).
First 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 ( <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> , House of the People) and a selected 102 seat upper house ( <i>Meshrano Jirga</i> , House of Elders). 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 <i>Wolesi Jirga</i> , 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).
First 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.
Second Presidential and Provincial Elections	Presidential and provincial elections were held Aug. 20, 2009, but required a runoff because no candidate received over 50% in certified results issued October 20. Second round not held because challenger, Dr. Abdullah, pulled out of a second-round runoff vote. Election costs about \$300 million.
Parliamentary Elections	Originally set for May 22, 2010; held September 18, 2010.

**Table 2. Major Pashtun Tribal Confederations**

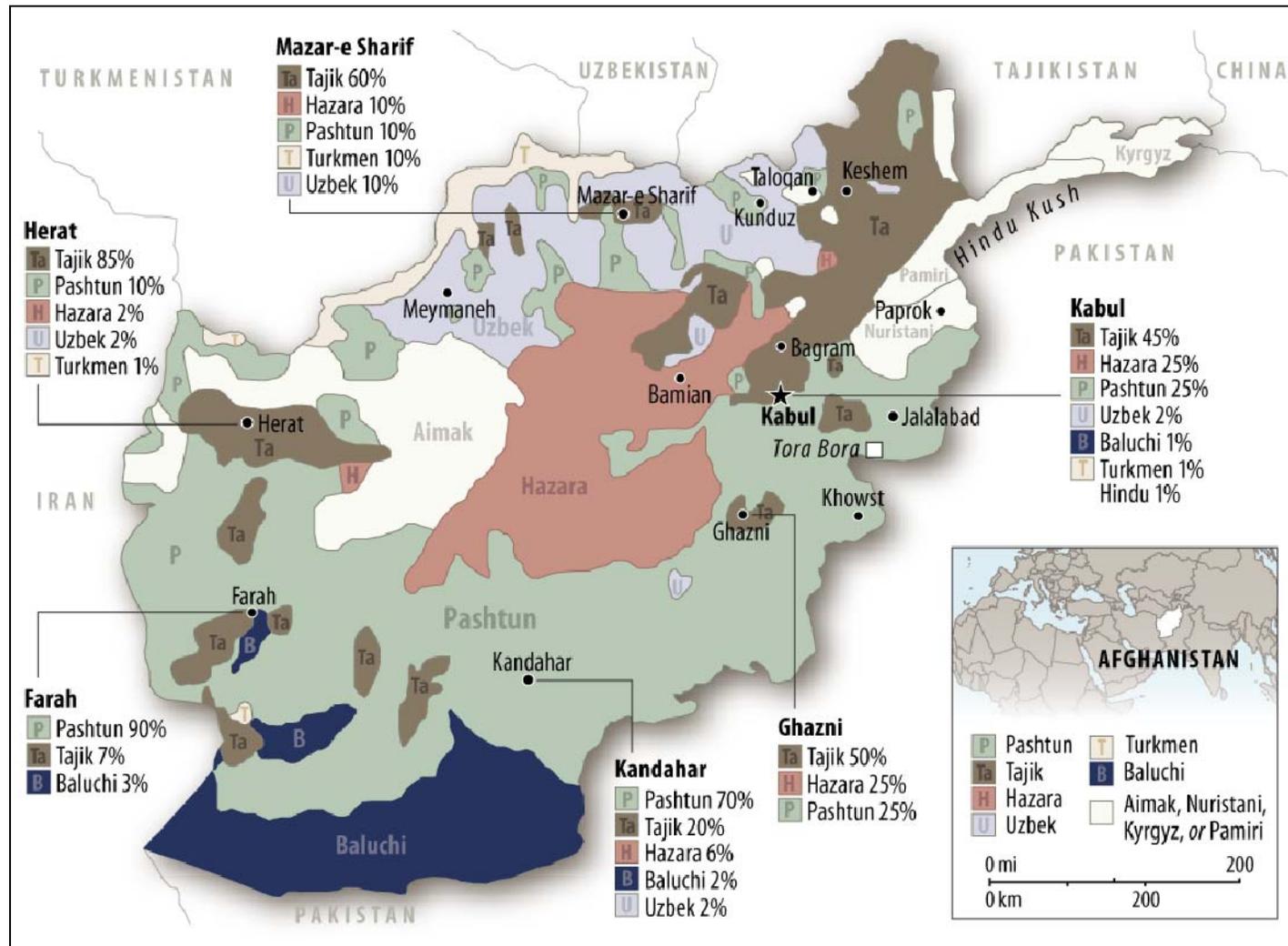
Clan/Tribal Confederations	Location	Example
<b>Durrani</b>	Mainly southern Afghanistan: Qandahar, Helmand, Zabol, Uruzgan, Nimruz	
Popalzai (Zirak branch of Durrani Pashtun)	Qandahar	Hamid Karzai, President of Afghanistan; Jelani Popal, head of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance; Mullah Bradar, the top aide to Mullah Umar, captured in Pakistan in Feb. 2010. Two-thirds of Qandahar's provincial government posts held by Zirak Durrani Pashtuns
Alikozai	Qandahar	Mullah Naqibullah (deceased, former anti-Taliban faction leader in Qandahar)
Barakzai	Qandahar, Helmand	Ghul Agha Shirzai (Governor, Nangarhar Province)
Achakzai	Qandahar, Helmand	Abdul Razziq, Chief of Staff, Border Police, Qandahar Province
Alozai	Helmand (Musa Qala district)	Sher Mohammad Akhunzadeh (former Helmand governor); Hajji Zahir, former governor of Marjah
Noorzai	Qandahar	Noorzai brothers, briefly in charge of Qandahar after the fall of the Taliban in November 2001
<b>Ghilzai</b>	Eastern Afghanistan: Paktia, Paktika, Khost, Nangarhar, Kunar	
Ahmadzai		Mohammed Najibullah (pres. 1986-1992); Ashraf Ghani, Karzai adviser, Finance Minister 2002-2004
Hotak		Mullah Umar, but hails from Uruzgan, which is dominated by Durranis
Taraki		Nur Mohammed Taraki (leader 1978-1979)
Kharoti		Hafizullah Amin (leader September-December 1979); Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, founder of Hezb-e-Islami (Gulbuddin), former <i>mujahedin</i> party leader now anti-Karzai insurgent.
Zadran	Paktia, Khost	Pacha Khan Zadran; Insurgent leader Jalaluddin Haqqani
<b>Kodai</b>		
Mangal	Paktia, Khost	Ghulab Mangal (Governor of Helmand Province)
Orkazai		
<b>Shinwari</b>	Nangarhar province	Fasl Ahmed Shinwari, former Supreme Court Chief Justice
Mandezai		
Sangu Khel		
Sipah		
<b>Wardak</b> (Pashtu-speaking non-Pashtun)	Wardak Province	Abdul Rahim Wardak (Defense Minister)

<b>Clan/Tribal Confederations</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Afridis</b>	Tirah, Khyber Pass, Kohat	
	Zaka khel	
	Jawaki	
	Adam khel	
	Malikdin, etc	
<b>Yusufzais</b>	Khursan, Swat, Kabul	
	Akozais	
	Malizais	
	Loezais	
<b>Khattaks</b>	Kohat, Peshawar, Bangash	
	Akora	
	Terai	
<b>Mohmands</b>	Near Khazan, Peshawar	
	Baizai	
	Alimzai	
	Uthmanzais	
	Khawazais	
<b>Wazirs</b>	Mainly in Waziristan	
	Darwesh khel	
	Bannu	

**Source:** This table was prepared by Hussein Hassan, Information Research Specialist, CRS.

**Note:** N/A indicates no example is available.

Figure I. Map of Afghan Ethnicities



Source: 2003 National Geographic Society, <http://www.afghan-network.net/maps/Afghanistan-Map.pdf>. Adapted by Amber Wilhelm, CRS

Notes: This map is intended to be illustrative of the approximate demographic distribution by region of Afghanistan. CRS has no way to confirm exact population distributions.

## **Author Contact Information**

Kenneth Katzman  
Specialist in Middle Eastern Affairs  
kkatzman@crs.loc.gov, 7-7612

## **Acknowledgments**

The table of major Pashtun tribes was prepared by Hussein Hassan, Information Research Specialist, CRS.