

Weekly Country Report

November 16th to November 23rd, 2009

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With a primary focus on Afghanistan and the region, CAPS works towards building local capacity to produce conflict and threat assessments. Our local experts track and store data on crucial developments in Afghanistan and the region. CAPS is committed to offering and facilitating first rate research, training and knowledge exchanges on conflicts, people and cultures, as well as violent groups in Afghanistan and region.

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President Karzai inaugural speech

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OVERVIEW OF THE LAST WEEK

On November 16th, President Hamid Karzai declared that Afghanistan will form a new anti-corruption unit to investigate high-level officials after widespread demands from Washington to root out corruption. The announcement came a day after U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned that President Hamid Karzai and his government to perform better. The new anti-corruption unit- part of the Attorney General's department- is supposed to prosecute public corruption cases involving high-level officials.¹

On November 17th, Afghanistan slipped three ranks to become the second most-corrupt country in the world according to an annual survey of perceived levels of corruption by Transparency International. Only lawless Somalia, whose weak U.N.-backed government controls just a few blocks of the capital, was perceived as more corrupt than Afghanistan in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index. Iraq saw some improvement, rising to 176 of 180 countries, up two places up from last year. Singapore, Denmark and New Zealand were seen as the least corrupt countries in the list based on surveys of businesses and experts.²

In another report on November 16th, Dr. Abdullah stated that Afghanistan will fall immediately into the hands of the Taliban if international forces withdraw. Abdullah's comments came a day after the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that her country was "not interested in staying in Afghanistan" and that America had "no long-term stake there."³

The Afghan Minister of Mines received \$30 million bribe to award the country's largest development project to a Chinese mining firm according to a U.S. official who is familiar with military intelligence reports. The allegation, if proved true, would mark one of the most brazen examples of corruption in the country. The question of whether Karzai can address his government's graft and cronyism loomed large as he was preparing for his inauguration on 19 November for a new term, and as President Obama completed a months-long strategy review

¹ Reuters- Afghanistan to form anti-graft unit as pressure grows- 16 November 2009

² Associated Press- Afghanistan slips in corruption index despite aid- 17 November 2009

³ AFP- Taliban takeover if troops leave Afghanistan: Abdullah – 16 November 2009

that would define the future of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan after eight years of war.⁴ The Afghan Ministry flatly denied the reports that Chinese firm got the contract for a big copper extraction project in Afghanistan after the agency took millions of dollars in bribe money.⁵

On November 19th, Afghan President Hamid Karzai promised to crack down on corruption after being sworn in for his second term. His stated promise to fill his cabinet with "professionals" may be what the US and other governments were most hoping to hear on the topic. President Karzai mentioned in his second inaugural speech that "the ministers of Afghanistan must possess integrity and be professionals, and those who spread corruption should be put on trial and prosecuted." His speech also outlined a goal for Afghan forces to "take the lead" in providing national security within five years, providing a rough timeline for a draw-down of the international forces.⁶

On November 20th, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) mentioned that Afghanistan, the war-ravaged state is the most dangerous place in the world for a child to be born, especially for girls. Afghanistan has the highest infant mortality rate in the world, 257 deaths per 1,000 births, and 70 percent of the population lacks access to clean water. As Taliban insurgents increase their presence across the country, growing insecurity is also making it hard to carry out vital vaccination campaigns against polio, a crippling disease still endemic in the country, and measles. Daniel Toole, UNICEF regional director for South Asia, told a news briefing in Geneva that "Afghanistan today is without a doubt the most dangerous place to be born."⁷

On the same date, a suicide bomber killed 16 people and wounded at least 23 others Friday in a busy city square in western Afghanistan. The attacks came a day after Afghan President Hamid Karzai took the oath of office for a second term amid escalating violence across the country. Karzai said that he has put national reconciliation with Taliban insurgents at the top of his agenda. In another incident near the capital Kabul, Lawmaker Abdul Rasul Sayyaf was targeted by a remote-controlled bomb hidden in an irrigation canal in the Paghman district, north of the

⁴ Washington post- Afghan minister accused of tackling bribe- 18 November 2009

⁵ CNN- Afghan ministry denies bribes reports- 18 November 2009

⁶ The Christian Science Monitor- Afghanistan President Karzai inaugural: promises of clean cabinet- 19 November 2009

⁷ Reuters- Afghanistan is the world's worst place to be born: U.N.

Afghan capital, Kabul. The explosion destroyed one car in the convoy and killed five of Sayyaf's bodyguards. Sayyaf himself was not injured.⁸

In another report on November 20th, US Senator John McCain predicted that the allies would win in Afghanistan in one year to 18 months if sufficient troops are sent, as the White House mulls sending tens of thousands of reinforcements to Afghanistan. Mr. McCain added that the timeline is threatened by US President Barack Obama's delay in rolling out a new Afghanistan strategy. Talking to reporters at the international defense summit in easternmost Canada, Mr. McCain stated: "I am absolutely convinced and totally confident that with sufficient resources we can turn the situation around, and I even am bold enough to predict that in a year to 18 months you will see success if the effort is sufficiently resourced and if there is a commitment to get the job done before setting a date to leave the region."⁹

On November 21st, a rocket landed just outside the heavily guarded Serena Hotel, which regularly houses visiting diplomats, officials and international workers in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul. The rocket injured two people. Serena has been the target of attacks before, most recently in late October when a rocket slammed into its courtyard.¹⁰

⁸ Associate Press- Suicide bomber kills 16 in western Afghanistan – 20 November 2009

⁹ AFP- McCain predicts success in Afghanistan in 12-18 months- 20 November 2009

¹⁰ AP- Rocket hits outside luxury hotel in Afghan capital- 21 November 2009



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KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- **President Karzai's second term: Legacy or Bust?**
- **A Special Court to fight corruption, and an "Afghan FBI": Will it work?**
- **Afghanistan Parliament Supports Hamid Karzai**
- **Brown plans to draw leaders together to discuss Afghanistan**

ANALYSIS OF THE KEY DEVELOPMENTS

President Karzai's second term: Legacy or Bust?

On November 19th, President Hamed Karzai took an oath of office for the second five-year term. Sitting in the audience with much anxiety were dignitaries and diplomats from across the world including President Asif Ali Zardari, President of Pakistan, Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State of the United States and David Miliband, Foreign Minister of the United Kingdom. All appeared curious and perhaps concerned, about what President Karzai might have to say. All in all, it appeared that the President's speech was being judged as the litmus test of his commitment towards reform.

Challenges:

In the last eight years, there has been significant progress in Afghanistan, especially in areas of education, health and establishment of civil and political institutions. However, the key challenges remain, which the government must tackle immediately.

Security: Afghanistan faces a ruthless insurgency made of several different militant groups. While at the outset, the violence stemming from the insurgency was confined to the Southern and Eastern part of the country, now there are signs that Northern Afghanistan is slowly becoming unstable. Tactics to deal with the insurgency has led to a serious clash between President Karzai and his western allies, most specifically, the United States.

Governance: providing good governance and the basic delivery of service to the Afghan populace remains a major obstacle for the Afghan government. In this regard, impediments range from incompetent officials to useless government bureaucracies -- from dishonest police officers to corrupt judiciary. At times, it appears that corruption has become the adjective that defines the Afghan government.

Regional Interference: Afghans strongly believe that regional powerbrokers still meddle in the affairs of the Afghanistan. In some instances, there is direct involvement of the state, and in others, there is passive support. In the case of Pakistan, no one may be convinced that the

civilian government has tamed the ISI or the Pakistani military infrastructure. So, foreign policy is still dictated by the military. Iran continues to play its game of influence through 'soft power' by investing in education and information.

Relationship with the United States: the Afghan government came into existence with the support of the U.S. but it now appears that U.S. has become its biggest critic. Many believe that the rift emerged when President Karzai started criticizing the U.S. for conducting air operations, which has led to civilian casualties. Allegedly, the U.S. has tried on several levels to find a person that could replace President Karzai but no success.

In his inauguration speech President Karzai set out six key priorities to be accomplished by the end of his second term: 1. Peace and Reconciliation, 2. Security, 3. Good Governance. 4. Economic Development, 5. Regional Cooperation, and 6. Foreign Policy and Affairs.

Moving ahead, what streamlines the priorities into an integrated and focused roadmap is a simple rule of thumb: good governance or rule of law. The main function of the government is bringing rule of law – which is the *prerequisite* to security, economic development, regional and foreign policy affairs. That is to say, without rule of law, there can be no security. Without security, there can be no economic development.

Opportunities Ahead:

President Karzai has yet another window of opportunity to set the record straight and leave office in 2013, not as a failed leader or purported puppet, but as the founder of a model Afghanistan in peace with itself, its neighbors and the global community.

Although serious questions will linger regarding his legitimacy at home, President Karzai still enjoys, however conditional, the support and confidence of the international community, the Afghan parliament and key community leaders inside Afghanistan.

Moving forward, it shall not be mere speeches, but deeds in actual practice, on the ministerial, provincial, district, and village levels that will ultimately settle the legitimacy question for good.



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If President Karzai's new administration backs up the speech by deed, it can be certain of winning unquestionable internal and external legitimacy in the short term and a lofty place in the history of Afghanistan and the world in the long term.

A Special Court to fight corruption, and an “Afghan FBI”: Will it work?

In the aftermath of being declared the winner of the presidential elections in Afghanistan on 2 November, Mr. Karzai has remained under immense pressure from the international community to reform his government and tackle corruption. Leading international figures, including the British Prime minister Gordon Brown and the US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton have made it clear that if Karzai does not make visible steps to improve governance, it will affect the flow of international aid to the country.

Mr. Karzai is facing a formidable task in his coming five years of presidency. According to the Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, Afghanistan is now the second most corrupt country in the world, only surpassed by Somalia. Afghanistan has slipped three places on the ranking compared to last year, despite billions in foreign aid to Karzai's government.¹¹

It appears that Karzai's government is now starting to take measures to counter these grim statistics. On 14 November, Afghanistan's Attorney General Ishaq Alako announced the establishment of a special court to try corrupt government officials who, under the constitution, cannot be tried by the regular judicial system. Two days later on 16 November, President Karzai announced that he would set up an anti-corruption unit and major crime fighting force. The force would consist of investigators from Interior Ministry and National Security Directorate, and will be tasked with investigating “kidnappings, public and administration corruption, as well as organized crimes,” according to Afghan Interior Minister Mohammad Hanif Atmar.¹² The American FBI and Britain's Serious Organized Crime Agency will assist the new agency, which was subsequently dubbed the “Afghan FBI” by the British newspaper *The Guardian*.¹³

Karzai's announcement of the major crime fighting force came a day after US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, said in a strong-worded statement that the U.S. would not provide any civilian help to Afghanistan without a way to hold ministries accountable for how funds are used. "We are not going to be providing any civilian aid to Afghanistan unless we have certification

¹¹ AP - Afghanistan slips in corruption index despite aid – 17 Nov 2009.

¹² People's Daily - Will Kabul's new anti-corruption task force establish itself as Afghan FBI – 17 Nov 2009.

¹³ Ibid.

that if it goes into the Afghan government in any form, that we are going to have ministries that we can hold accountable," Clinton said in an interview with ABC television.¹⁴

The question is whether the recent announcements by the Karzai administration are merely words to curb the recent Western criticism. If the Karzai administration wants to fight corruption sincerely, it is not enough to establish these institutions. Measures will also have to be taken to make them work more effectively than similar initiatives initiated by the Karzai administration in the past.

The recent promises to fight corruption are not new. In fact, as mentioned by President Karzai in his inauguration speech on 19 November, Afghanistan has already had an anti-corruption unit for over a year. The High Office of Oversight for Anti-Corruption, headed by Mohammad Yusin Osmani, was established by President Karzai in June 2008. Its establishment followed repeated calls from the international community to fight corruption across all government institutions. Since then, Mr. Osmani's office has indeed undertaken a number of measures to fight corruption: among other things it has "installed public hotlines and complaints boxes, drafted anticorruption plans with various ministries, and instigated one high-profile takedown of customs agents at the airport."¹⁵ But so far the group's work has only led to a "handful of arrests." According to Mr. Osmani, the group is not able to function effectively due to a lack of staff and mandate to investigate and prosecute cases on its own. When a case is forwarded to the attorney general's office it is often stuck for months. Although there is plenty of evidence of corruption, somewhere along the way the Government is failing to prosecute and punish the suspected individuals. The question is whether all this is due to lack of proper institutions, or simply a lack of will?

The establishment of a Special Court to deal with government officials will hopefully solve some of the legal and technical hurdles of this process. But only time will show whether there is actually the will within the government to take such a bold step. Afghanistan does not lack candidates to be tried in this new court, but the problem is that some of these individuals also constitute important supporters and allies of the President. Ultimately, the effectiveness of the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Christian Science Monitor - The man leading Afghanistan's anti-corruption fight – 16 Nov 2009.



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new institutions will depend on the professionalism and integrity of its staff – at all levels of government.

Afghanistan Parliament Supports Hamid Karzai

Mr. Younus Qanoni the head of the Afghan parliament along with fellow MPs expressed their support for the oath ceremony of President Hamid Karzai held on Nov 19, 2009¹⁶.

Qanoni urged that a new gate has been opened to democracy and prosperity in Afghanistan as he expressed his support for 'the historical day'. Parliament expects Hamid Karzai to work towards promoting stability and peace throughout the country.

Although some parliament members failed to show up in the oath ceremony, Mr. Qanoni's announcement signifies the support that President Karzai's administration enjoys in the parliament. Importantly, the participation and approval of the oath ceremony by the Afghan MPs, including Mr. Qanoni, is also an indication that President Karzai's second term is recognized as legitimate by the overwhelming majority in the elected parliament of Afghanistan. This is a new window of opportunity for Mr. Karzai to work together with the parliament in order to accomplish his stated goals of rooting out corruption and establishing rule of law in Afghanistan over the next five years.

Yet, caution should be exercised not to read too much into Mr. Qanoni's statements. Qanoni's support to the oath ceremony can be a balancing political tactic. Mr. Qanoni may have positioned himself to retain his position in the parliament while working with his former Northern alliance colleagues, particularly Dr. Abdullah, the main challenger to President Karzai during the August 20th election, in order to ensure a balance of power in the upcoming administration. Mr. Qanoni and Abdullah are not likely to put up determinative political resistance against President Karzai's new administration through mainstream channels, as they know that it will be ineffective for the new administration enjoys international support. At the same, they are not likely to remain neutral either - particularly once Mr. Karzai's new cabinet starts dealing with hard facts on the ground.

The Afghan parliament has 249-seats that is made up of political parties as well as individuals, primarily, of the former Mujahideen leaders, tribal elders, mullahs and a few members from former Dr. Najibullah's communist regime.

¹⁶ Afghan Parliament Supported Hamid Karzai Oath Ceremony Radio Azadi Pashtu Nov 19, 2009

Brown plans to draw leaders together to discuss Afghanistan

Addressing a group of people attending the annual Lord Mayor's speech in London British Prime Minister Gordon Brown stated that he would like to host a summit next year for decisions to be made on handing over Afghan security to the Karzai government¹⁷. Mr. Brown offered London as a venue for an international conference next year to work on the international community's next steps in Afghanistan, with an eye to the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan. He said a strong political framework in Afghanistan should embrace internal political reform and ensure that the representative government is working for all Afghan citizens.

The British prime minister stated that he hoped the conference would result in concrete actions for handing over security operations in parts of Afghanistan back to the Afghan government. He added that, if possible, the timetable should see the transfer of districts back to Afghan control starting in 2010. Yet, according to Mr. Brown, it is necessary that British forces stay in Afghanistan because otherwise terrorists in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan would attack Britain.

Meanwhile, David Miliband, the British foreign Secretary offered a somewhat different account of the presence of the international forces in Afghanistan and the future of the Afghan government. "The Afghan government would quickly be overthrown" Miliband said, if NATO troops were to pull out of the country now. Mr. Miliband added that "if the international forces leave, you can choose a time -- five minutes, 24 hours or seven days -- but the insurgent forces will overrun those forces that are prepared to put up resistance and we would be back to square one¹⁸".

Mr. Brown's and Miliband's assertions raise many questions, the main one being whether the international community has a plan B for Afghanistan. Other questions concern the various scenarios that can unfold in the wake of the withdrawal of the international forces from Afghanistan including the consequent unleashing of urban chaos, massive looting and the cost

¹⁷ Brown plan to draw leaders together to discuss Afghanistan, Afghanistan News.Net Tuesday 17th November, 2009

¹⁸ Afghan government would fall if NATO withdraws: UK minister Guardian newspaper November 21, 2009

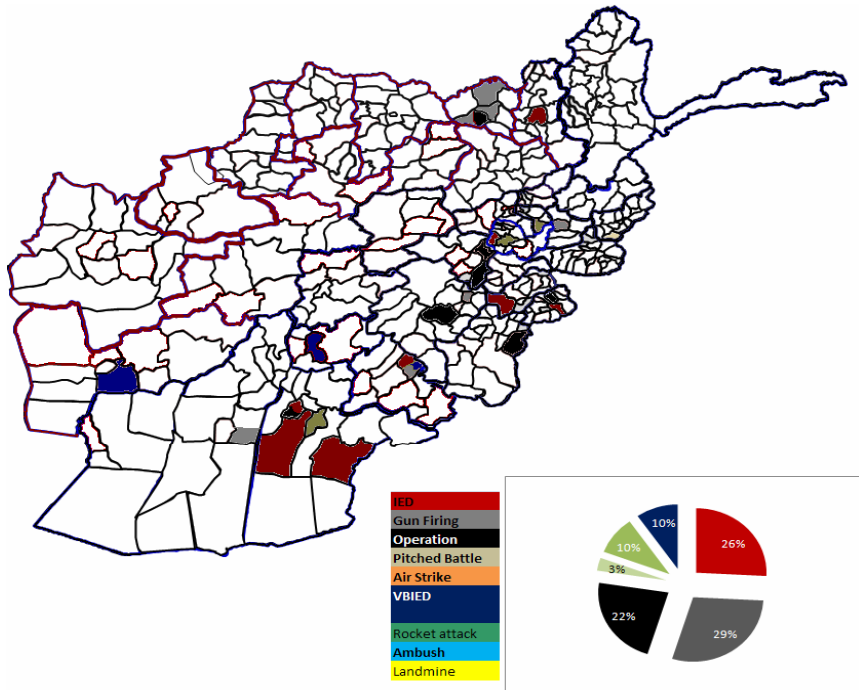


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of bringing the situation under control. Another possible and hopeful scenario may be a drastic reduction in insurgency, if the bulk of insurgency is indeed driven by the presence of International forces in Afghanistan in the first place, as some theories suggest.

Regardless, it is clear that the international forces cannot remain in Afghanistan forever and that the Afghan government has no choice but to develop a strategy for post-withdrawal Afghanistan for it has to take over the security responsibility of the country someday. The withdrawal of the international forces from Afghanistan will be premature at any point in time, unless the Afghan government is confident of establishing the rule of law and security in most of the Afghan provinces in the least.

INSURGENCY



The third week of November was one of the violent weeks in Afghanistan as the NATO-led Coalition forces and Afghan national security forces clashed with the Taliban in southern, northern, northeastern, eastern, southeastern and western provinces of Afghanistan. The clashes coincided with President Hamid Karzai’s inauguration on Thursday wherein he was sworn into office for a second five-year term. In his opening speech, President Karzai promised to tackle the issue of corruption and form a “professional” cabinet, something the Obama Administration and others have been pushing for. His speech also outlined the leading role which the Afghan Security Forces will play in providing national security within the next five years, giving a rough timeline for a draw-down of the international forces from Afghanistan.

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, the US secretary of state Hillary Clinton and Foreign Ministers of Britain, France and Turkey were the prominent leaders among others who attended the ceremony.

The first major incident happened in Tagab district of Kapisa province in the northeast of Kabul on 16th November when Insurgents fired two rockets into a crowded market as the head of French forces in Afghanistan was holding a meeting with tribal elders in the area. According to the media reports the attack killed 12 Afghan civilians and wounded at least another 38. French officers said there were no NATO troops amongst the wounded. Immediately following the attack, one French Caracal and three U.S. Blackhawk helicopters evacuated the wounded from the area. Lt. Col. Lionel, who could only be identified by his first name in accordance with French military policy, said that the target appeared to be the meeting place of Brig. Gen. Marcel Druart, the head of French forces in Afghanistan with the tribal elders, as they were discussing a major French offensive into the Tagab Valley. Druart told The Associated Press that the attack “shows clearly that the insurgents don't care about the lives of the civilian Afghan population.” French forces in the area immediately retaliated with artillery shelling over the rockets' launching site. Sporadic firings could be heard throughout the afternoon, as attack helicopters hovered overhead. France has more than 3,000 troops in Afghanistan, a large number of which is stationed mainly northeastern areas of Kabul, in Kapisa and Surobi.

The second incident took place on 20th November in the provincial capital of the southwestern province of Farah. According to Rohul Amin, the provincial governor of Farah, a suicide bomber on a motorcycle detonated his explosives in a crowded area of Farah City, killing 17 people and wounding 29. The target of the attack was a senior police official, who was killed along with two of his bodyguards according to the provincial Police Chief of Farah, Faqir Mohammad Askar. The Taliban spokesman Qari Yousuf Ahmadi denied the involvement of his groups although the governor of Farah was categorical in his identification of the Taliban with the attack. The governor said, “whenever there are civilian casualties, the Taliban deny responsibility,” adding that “this attack was definitely carried out by the Taliban.” the security situation in the southwestern province of Farah, has deteriorated significantly over the recent months as the Taliban have become more active in the districts of Bakwa, Bala Baluk, Gulistan and Pusht Rud.



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The third incident took place in the Afghan capital Kabul when Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf, an Afghan parliamentarian and former mujahedeen commander, narrowly escaped a roadside bomb blast on the outskirts of Kabul. Five of his bodyguards were killed in the attack, according to a police official's statement on Friday 20th of November who nevertheless declined to be named. The attack took place as Mr. Sayyaf was driving around his native Paghman district just outside of Kabul city when his accompanying convoy was hit by a bomb placed under a bridge. The latest attack came a day after President Hamid Karzai was sworn in for his second five-year term. Presently allied to the president, Mr. Sayyaf supported the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance between 1996 and 2001. Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf is currently a member of the Afghan parliament and chairman of *Ittehad-e-Islami* (Islamic Unity) political party. He was a prominent anti-Soviet fighter during the Soviet occupation

Clashes between the Taliban and the coalition forces were not limited to the provinces mentioned above. Separate conflicts were reported from various districts of Ghazni, Paktika, Zabul, Wardak, Kunduz, Kapisa, Kandahar, Khost, Farah, Kabul, Laghman, Paktia, Uruzgan, Helmand, Takhar, and Kunar.

In a related development, two senior U.S. intelligence officials and one former senior CIA officer reported that the leader of the Taliban Mullah Omar is currently hiding in Karachi city of Pakistan. These officials have told The Washington Times that Mullah Omar traveled to Karachi last month after the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. They added that Mullah Omar inaugurated a new senior leadership council in Karachi, a city that so far has escaped U.S. and Pakistani counterterrorism campaigns. Mullah Omar, who hosted Osama bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders when they plotted the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, had been residing in Quetta, where the Afghan Taliban Shura (Council) had moved from Kandahar after the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.