

# **Business and Politics in the Muslim World**

## **Afghanistan This Week**

Report Number: 115

Week 10-16 April 2010

April 17, 2010

**Mohammad Amin**

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## **Political Headlines Summakry**

### **Suicide bombers hit Afghan spy building in Kandahar**

KANDAHAR - A group of three suicide bombers attempted to seize the main intelligence building in Afghanistan's southern city of Kandahar on Monday in a brazen daylight raid, officials said.

### **Insurgency in Afghanistan claims over 170 lives in past week**

KABUL - Taliban-led insurgency in war-torn Afghanistan have claimed 176 lives over the past week.

### **NATO troops kill Afghan civilians, sparking protest**

Kandahar - AFGHAN President Hamid Karzai has condemned NATO troops for opening fire on a bus, following an incident in which four civilians were killed near the southern city of Kandahar.

### **US army chief begs Afghans to forgive**

A top US special forces commander visited a family in rural Afghanistan yesterday to plead for forgiveness after finally admitting that his troops killed five innocent people in a botched raid, which, Afghan officials said, the soldiers then tried to cover up.

### **Parliament demands Karzai fill Afghan cabinet posts**

KABUL – Afghanistan's parliament has given President Hamid Karzai ten days to name candidates to fill 11 cabinet vacancies, the latest sign of the once-docile body's increasing tendency to challenge the president.

### **US emphasizes Karzai is Afghan commander in chief**

KABUL – After days of discord, U.S. officials went one step farther in their new gentler approach to Afghan President Hamid Karzai, expressing sympathy Sunday for the pressure he faces and promoting him as commander in chief of the warring nation.

### **Holbrooke, Petraeus meet Karzai in Kabul**

KABUL – US envoy Richard Holbrooke and senior general David Petraeus on Sunday involvement in Afghanistan.

met President Hamid Karzai in Kabul at a conference reviewing US civilian and military

### **A Withdrawal Plan for Afghanistan**

Two key antiwar critics, Senator Russ Feingold and Representative Jim McGovern, are expected to introduce legislation as early as next week calling for a "flexible timetable"

for the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. The proposal, now in final stages of preparation, was confirmed by McGovern and by Feingold's office.

### **Italian aid workers arrested in Afghan assassination plot, humanitarian community baffled**

In the strangest recent story out of the war in Afghanistan, three Italian aid workers were arrested on Saturday and for allegedly plotting to kill a provincial governor.

### **Pakistani Prime Minister Says He Opposes Afghan Talks With Taliban**

Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said he opposes the Afghan government's efforts to engage Taliban leaders in talks to promote national reconciliation.

### **Shooting by U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan fuels Karzai's anger**

KABUL - Twelve days before President Hamid Karzai denounced the behavior of Western countries in Afghanistan, he met a 4-year-old boy at the Tarin Kowt civilian hospital in the south.

### **Three U.S. lawmakers sponsor Afghan pullout plan**

WASHINGTON – Three U.S. lawmakers introduced legislation on Wednesday that would require President Barack Obama to develop a detailed timetable to draw down U.S. forces from Afghanistan.

### **Cabinet choices to be nominated shortly**

KABUL - Eleven remaining cabinet picks would be introduced soon to lawmakers for approval, a presidential spokesman said on Tuesday.

### **Karzai brother mends ties with US**

KANDAHAR — He's the consummate symbol of Afghan cronyism — the president's wheeler-dealer half brother and main power broker in the Taliban-ridden south. With the American military facing a showdown with insurgents here, Ahmad Wali Karzai said Wednesday that he's mending fences with the U.S. and its international partners.

### **"UK has underground airport in Helmand"**

British forces have constructed underground airports, concrete wells and warehouses in Afghanistan's Helmand Province, an informed source says.

### **Mujaddedi calls for arming civilians**

KABUL - Meshrano Jirga (Senate) Chairman Sibghatullah Mujaddedi has accused foreign forces of disarming civilians and leaving them helpless in the face of armed militants.

## **Afghan MPs Criticize Ahmadinejad's letter to UN**

Afghan MPs said the silence of the Afghan government is controversial, and, following these comments, the Ministry of Interior Affairs reacted by saying that neighboring countries should respect the sovereignty of Afghanistan.

## **Warning signs in Afghanistan**

The story in this morning's Times was chock full of bad news about our involvement in Afghanistan. And I don't think it'll be the last of its kind.

## **Deaths of Afghan civilians double**

KABUL — Deaths of Afghan civilians by NATO troops have more than doubled this year, NATO statistics show, jeopardizing a U.S. campaign to win over the local population by protecting them against insurgent attacks.

## **Afghans 'abused at secret prison' at Bagram airbase**

Bagram - Afghan prisoners are being abused in a "secret jail" at Bagram airbase, according to nine witnesses whose stories the BBC has documented.

## **US Afghan commander: 'We have too many contractors'**

PARIS — The US commander in Afghanistan said Friday that the military is wasting money by employing too many private contractors to do jobs better done by soldiers or local Afghans.

# **Social Headlines Summary**

## **Farmers receive training in Samangan**

AIBAK - Almost 1,900 farmers in northern Samangan province completed a training course regarding new methods of growing and irrigating wheat crop, officials said on Wednesday.

## **Retaining wall constructed in Balkh**

MAZAR-I-SHARIF - A retaining wall, protecting thousands of acres of farming land from possible floods, has been constructed in Khulm district of northern Balkh province, officials said on Friday.

## **Senators grill information minister**

Kabul - Afghan senators, lashing out at Minister of Information and Culture Makhdoom Rahin, alleged on Sunday some television channels continued to air "immoral" programmes.

### **18 uplift projects completed in Wardak**

MAIDAN SHAHR - Eighteen development projects have been completed in the Syedabad district of central Maidan Wardak province, an official said on Monday.

### **15 schools reopened in south after years**

KABUL (PAN): After remaining closed for years, 15 schools have been reopened in southern Ghazni and Helmand provinces, officials and tribal elders said on Thursday.

## **Economic Headlines Summary**

### **\$52m agreements signed with World Bank**

KABUL - The Ministry of Finance and the World Bank Sunday signed two grant agreements worth \$52 million to support the Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Project (AREDP) and co-finance the ongoing Strengthening Health Activities for the Rural Poor (SHARP) plan.

### **Afghan bankers see growth despite insecurity**

KABUL - As the Western financial system buckled under the strain of the economic crisis in 2008, Afghan banker Noorkhan Haidari was wrapped-up in Afghanistan's own rescue deal for a bank on the verge of collapse.

## **Political Headlines**

### **Suicide bombers hit Afghan spy building in Kandahar**

Reuters  
04/12/2010

KANDAHAR - A group of three suicide bombers attempted to seize the main intelligence building in Afghanistan's southern city of Kandahar on Monday in a brazen daylight raid, officials said.

The attack was the second big strike in weeks in the city, birthplace of the Taliban and the planned target of a mass offensive by NATO forces in coming months.

"They were armed with guns, hand grenades and suicide vests," President Hamid Karzai's half-brother, Ahmad Wali Karzai, head of Kandahar's provincial council, told Reuters.

"One of them managed to blow himself up and the other two were gunned down. Two security officials were wounded," he said, adding the situation was under control after an exchange of fire between the security forces and the assailants.

The assailants threw a handgrenade at a school, wounding a teacher and another worker, he added.

People fled the streets in panic and scores of police and army soldiers poured onto key city streets, witnesses said.

The Taliban have staged a series of complex attacks, involving attackers and suicide bombers who attempt to seize government buildings, in several southern cities and the capital Kabul in recent months.

In the biggest attack so far this year, fighters and suicide bombers struck several targets in Kandahar last month, killing more than 30 people.

### **Insurgency in Afghanistan claims over 170 lives in past week**

Xinhua  
04/12/2010  
By Abdul Haleem



KABUL - Taliban-led insurgency in war-torn Afghanistan have claimed 176 lives over the past week.

"In 119 security incidents elsewhere in the country, 176 people including 135 Taliban insurgents, 29 civilians and 12 policemen have been killed over the past one week," Interior Ministry spokesman Zamarai Bashari told a press conference in Afghan capital Kabul.

In militancy-plagued Afghanistan, spring and summer are known as fighting seasons as clashes between government forces and militants intensify.

However, the spokesman gave no casualties of the Afghan army and NATO-led troops suffered over the past week.

In the latest wave of violence, a roadside bomb struck a vehicle in former Taliban stronghold Kandahar in south Afghanistan on Sunday morning killing four and injuring 14 others, almost all civilians, said doctor Mohammad Ibrahim at Kandahar Mir Wais hospital.

Furthermore, a soldier of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was killed by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) on Sunday in the troubled southern region where Taliban are active, said a press release issued by ISAF.

Fourteen ISAF soldiers, half of them Americans, have been killed since the start of April, according to media, compared with 14 deaths of foreign soldiers in April 2009.

The NATO-led coalition force has lost 153 service members since the beginning of 2010 in Afghanistan, compared with 92 in the same period last year.

A statement of the Afghan Defence Ministry on Sunday confirmed that three soldiers with the Afghan National Army were killed and three others injured in northern Kunduz province in clash with militants on Saturday.

It also said that two militants were captured in Lashkar Gah, capital of southern Helmand province, on Saturday.

A helicopter of NATO-led troops crashed outside southern Zabul provincial capital Qalat city on Thursday, leaving four soldiers dead.

## **NATO troops kill Afghan civilians, sparking protest**

AFP  
04/12/2010

Kandahar - AFGHAN President Hamid Karzai has condemned NATO troops for opening fire on a bus, following an incident in which four civilians were killed near the southern city of Kandahar.

The president's office said he "strongly condemned" the shooting and added: "Opening fire on a passenger bus is against NATO's commitment to protecting civilians and is by no means justifiable."

Four civilians were killed and 18 wounded Monday when NATO troops fired on a bus in Afghanistan, sparking a furious protest and shouts of "death to America", officials and witnesses said.

Gunshots rang out after the shooting in the volatile southern province Kandahar, while witnesses reported hearing an explosion.

"In this incident four passengers were martyred and 18 others were injured," Afghan interior ministry said in a statement, adding that an investigation had been launched.

The provincial government in Kandahar said one woman and a child were among the four people killed.

NATO's US-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said it was "aware" of the incident resulting in civilian casualties and was looking into what happened, without giving further details.

The deaths are the latest in a series of civilian incidents involving foreign troops deployed in Afghanistan to help the Western-backed Afghan government defeat a nearly nine-year Taliban insurgency.

Civilian casualties are a source of anger among Afghans and often used by politicians and the Taliban to whip up public opposition to the 126,000 US and NATO forces based in the country.

Some 200 men took the streets in Kandahar, capital of a province considered the Taliban's spiritual stronghold, to protest against Monday's killings.

They burnt tyres and shouted "death to America, death to (Afghan President Hamid) Karzai, death to this government".

They also blocked the main road between the city and western Herat province, witnesses said.

Speaking by telephone, the driver of the bus, who gave his name as Esmate and escaped uninjured, said he was some 70 to 100 metres from a military convoy when the shooting started.

"They opened fire at us and I fell unconscious. The people who were killed were sitting in the seats just behind me," he said.

Another witness, Gul Mohammad, said he heard the firing and saw the bus skid on the road.

"When I arrived here I saw they (the troops) were taking out the wounded and a helicopter taking them somewhere," he said.

"The convoy was there. I think the distance was 70 to 80 metres and they opened fire for no reason."

Gunshots and an explosion were heard after the incident, an AFP reporter and an official said.

Despite the high-profile reporting of civilian deaths, the United Nations has said that the overwhelming majority of ordinary Afghans are killed by Taliban attacks, mostly crude bombings and suicide attacks.

Some 2412 civilians died last year, the UN said.

## **US army chief begs Afghans to forgive**

The Times

04/12/2010

By Jerome Starkey, Khataba, Gardez

A top US special forces commander visited a family in rural Afghanistan yesterday to plead for forgiveness after finally admitting that his troops killed five innocent people in a botched raid, which, Afghan officials said, the soldiers then tried to cover up.

Vice-Admiral William H. McRaven went to Paktia in eastern Afghanistan to the home of family head, Haji Sharabuddin, whose two sons were among those shot dead, and offered to enact the tribal ritual nanawate, in which a sheep is sacrificed at the door.

Two pregnant women, a teenage girl, and Haji Sharabuddin's sons — a policeman and a district prosecutor — were shot dead on February 12 when unidentified raiders stormed their home after an all-night family party to celebrate a newborn child.

Nato had claimed that the force discovered the women's bodies "tied up, gagged and killed" but later retracted those claims after a Times investigation proved them to be false. Afghan investigators have since accused US troops of digging their bullets out of the bodies and then lying to their superiors but Nato denies a cover-up. Admiral McRaven, commander of America's Joint Special Operations Command based in Fort

Bragg, North Carolina, told survivors yesterday that the deaths were a “terrible mistake”.

“I am the commander of the soldiers who accidentally killed your loved ones. I came here to send my condolences. I also came to ask your forgiveness for these terrible tragedies,” he said. It was the first official acknowledgement of US Special Forces involvement in the raid in Khataba, near Gardez. The family welcomed his supplication but insisted on justice.

Admiral McRaven was with US Brigadier-General Kurt Fuller, deputy commander of US troops in eastern Afghanistan, and almost 30 Afghan officers led by Major-General Abdul Khaliq, the 203 Corps commander.

They presented two sheep to the family. One was held down outside the house while an army mullah said a prayer. A soldier with a knife knelt ready to slit its throat and the generals waited for permission to come in.

Under the Pashtun honour code a ritual sacrifice at an adversary’s door is a way of asking for forgiveness. But the animal was spared death. Perhaps enough blood had been spilt at the home. Instead, on an elder’s command, the animals were led into the compound alive and Haji Sharabuddin welcomed the visitors into his guest room.

Admiral McRaven was clearly unimpressed to see The Times there. Afghan soldiers tried to stop us watching the proceedings or taking photographs, until the family intervened.

Admiral McRaven sat stony-faced at the end of a room crammed full of uniforms, relatives and local dignitaries, while an army mullah, Said Wafiqshah, acknowledged Haji Sharabuddin’s anguish. It was the same room where Commander Dawood, the policeman who was killed, danced and joked with his guests moments before he was shot.

“Sir, you and I are very different,” Admiral McRaven said, addressing Haji Sharabuddin directly. “You are a family man with many children and many friends. I am a soldier. I have spent most of my career overseas away from my family, but I have children as well and my heart grieves for you. But we have one thing in common. We have the same god. He is a god who shows great love and compassion. I pray for you today, sir, that in your grief he will show you love and compassion and ease your pain ... I also pray today that he will show mercy on me and my men for this awful tragedy.”

The Afghan generals then gave the family a wad of cash wrapped in a handkerchief. Relatives said there was almost \$30,000 (£19,000).

Haji Sharabuddin showed Admiral McRaven a 6in scar on his grandson Sediqullah’s stomach, where doctors operated to save his life. The 15-year-old was wounded by a ricochet when his father was hit.

“When people come to your gate and ask forgiveness, according to Afghan law, it’s

difficult to reject them,” Haji Sharabuddin said later. “I am happy they came.” But the family insists that it still wants justice. “I don’t care about the money,” Haji Sharabuddin said. He believes the troops attacked after faulty intelligence from one of his enemies — a spy. He wants the Americans to face international justice and the spy handed to Afghan authorities and punished. “When they surrender the spy, then I will make a decision. Maybe I will forgive them,” he said.

## **Parliament demands Karzai fill Afghan cabinet posts**

Reuters  
04/12/2010

KABUL – Afghanistan's parliament has given President Hamid Karzai ten days to name candidates to fill 11 cabinet vacancies, the latest sign of the once-docile body's increasing tendency to challenge the president.

Karzai has left acting ministers in charge of nearly half of his cabinet ministries since January, when parliament twice voted to reject large numbers of his nominees.

He has also had a stand-off with the body over election rules, which precipitated a confrontation with the West and a feud with the White House this month.

A resolution passed by the lower house on Saturday gives Karzai 10 days to name the missing ministers, 20 days to appoint a commission to interpret the constitution and a month to give an outline of state policy, a secretary for the body said on Sunday.

Lawmakers had acted in part in response to anti-Western comments made by Karzai in recent days, parliament secretary Mohammad Saleh Saljogi said.

"The policy outline will clarify our position with regard to foreigners and our neighbors and show us where we are heading. And one individual should not be able to take a historic decision without the approval of the people's delegates," he said.

A spokesman for Karzai said the government respected the house's decision and was trying its best to positively reply to the demands.

Karzai has taken steps in recent days to smooth over a feud with the White House that erupted at the start of this month when he accused the West of carrying out election fraud.

Karzai made those comments after parliament tried to overturn a presidential decree that would strip the United Nations of the power to name the majority of an election watchdog which threw out nearly a third of Karzai's votes in an election last year.

On Sunday, Karzai appeared at a meeting with elders alongside the commander of U.S. and NATO troops. The White House said on Friday it believed the quarrel with Karzai was over.

## **US emphasizes Karzai is Afghan commander in chief**

The Associated Press  
04/12/2010

KABUL – After days of discord, U.S. officials went one step farther in their new gentler approach to Afghan President Hamid Karzai, expressing sympathy Sunday for the pressure he faces and promoting him as commander in chief of the warring nation.

U.S.-Afghan relations grew tense earlier this month when Karzai, seeking to bolster his own political stature, lashed out against the U.N. and the international community, accusing them of perpetrating a "vast fraud" in last year's presidential polls as part of a conspiracy to deny him re-election or tarnish his victory — accusations the U.S. and the United Nations have denied.

Two days later, Karzai told a group of parliament members that if foreign interference in his government continued, the Taliban would become a legitimate resistance — one that he might even join, according to several lawmakers present.

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs described Karzai's remarks as "troubling," but the American tone quickly softened. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Defense Secretary Robert Gates blitzed Sunday morning news shows in the U.S. to call Karzai a reliable partner.

"I have to say that some of these outlandish claims that are being made and accusations that are being hurled are really unfortunate," Clinton told CBS' "Face the Nation" in an interview taped Friday and aired on Sunday.

"This is a leader who is under enormous pressure. And I wonder sometimes how anybody can cope with the kind of relentless stress that you face after having been in some military activity or war footing for 30 years, which is what the reality is in Afghanistan."

Gates stressed that Karzai deserved respect as the leader of a sovereign country and said he had a cooperative relationship with U.S. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the top commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan.

"This is a man who's, first of all, a political leader," Gates told ABC's "This Week." "He has domestic audiences as well as foreign audiences."

He said Karzai and McChrystal meet regularly and "have a very positive relationship."

Gates said the Afghans want their president to be treated with respect as the leader of a sovereign nation. Gates said it's only natural that when a political leader feels he or his nation is being pressured or disrespected, "he's going to react strongly," Gates said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Richard Holbrooke, special U.S. envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Gen. David Petraus, who oversees the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, echoed the comments Sunday in the Afghan capital.

"President Karzai is the commander in chief — he is the president of a sovereign country," Petraus told reporters. "Yes, there's a partnership, but he is the commander in chief."

Petraus praised Karzai for traveling to Marjah in Helmand province where thousands of U.S., NATO and Afghan troops pushed out the Taliban earlier this year, and to the Taliban's birthplace in neighboring Kandahar province. Kandahar is the site of a joint offensive ramping up to clear neighborhoods of insurgents and rush in new governance and aid to stall the Taliban's momentum.

NATO reported that another international service member was killed Sunday by a bomb in southern Afghanistan but gave no further details. But the Canadian command said a Canadian soldier was killed Sunday near Kandahar in the south.

On Sunday, Karzai traveled to northern Afghanistan where he urged insurgents to lay down their arms and air their grievances. Addressing a gathering in Kunduz province, he repeated his standing invitation to meet with any insurgent who renounces violence and terrorism and embraces the Afghan Constitution.

"Come and have your say, not by the gun," Karzai said.

"You say that 'foreigners are here.' As long as you fight, they won't leave," he said, referring to what the insurgents say is their main goal of driving foreign forces from the country.

Underscoring insecurity in the area, three rockets were fired toward Kunduz ahead of Karzai's arrival Sunday morning, but landed harmlessly in farm fields, provincial spokesman Ahmad Sami Yawar said. The president later pulled out of a visit to German troops stationed in the area due in part to what were described as safety concerns.

Security has been deteriorating in Kunduz for the past two years, particularly since a route through it opened early last year for supplies sent from Europe through Russia and down to the former Soviet republics of Central Asia.

Elsewhere, a bus carrying Afghans working for a U.S.-supported demining group was struck by a roadside bomb in Kandahar province, killing five workers and wounding 13

others.

Roadside bombs are a signature weapon of the Taliban. It wasn't clear if the blast was random or specifically targeted the demining agency, which receives more than half its funding from the U.S. State Department, according to its Web site.

The group clears mines across southern Afghanistan that are a legacy of 25 years of near-continuous warfare and continue to kill scores of Afghans each year.

## **Holbrooke, Petraeus meet Karzai in Kabul**

AFP

04/12/2010

KABUL – US envoy Richard Holbrooke and senior general David Petraeus on Sunday met President Hamid Karzai in Kabul at a conference reviewing US civilian and military involvement in Afghanistan.

The three men sat together at the start of a two-day conference to discuss what NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said were the "shared challenges and opportunities ahead" in the war-torn country.

The event, involving senior US and Afghan officials, plus key allied partners, comes after Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in January unveiled a long-term, non-military plan to stabilise Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Holbrooke, whose office produced the strategy, is Washington's special representative for both countries while Petraeus oversees US military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The plan envisages a "surge" of civilian experts who in Afghanistan would help rebuild the fractured farm sector, implement governance programmes and the reintegration of extremists into society.

Washington's ambassador to Kabul, Karl Eikenberry, on Saturday unveiled a 40-million-dollar US-funded programme to improve governance in southern and eastern areas most affected by the insurgency

The United States is expected to provide the bulk of additional troops for a planned offensive against the Taliban in the south to try to bring an end to the increasingly bloody eight-year war.

Holbrooke's visit had been in doubt after he underwent tests in New York this week for possible blocked arteries but doctors gave him the all-clear to travel.



It also comes as both Kabul and Washington seek to draw a line under a row sparked by Karzai's claims that foreign governments were behind the massive fraud in last year's elections that returned him to power.

## **A Withdrawal Plan for Afghanistan**

The Nation

04/12/2010

By Tom Hayden

Two key antiwar critics, Senator Russ Feingold and Representative Jim McGovern, are expected to introduce legislation as early as next week calling for a "flexible timetable" for the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. The proposal, now in final stages of preparation, was confirmed by McGovern and by Feingold's office.

The coordinated effort, the first of its kind during the Afghanistan war, is reminiscent of similar House-Senate proposals that eventually succeeded in winning majority support during the Vietnam War. During the Iraq War, resolutions calling for a timetable steadily advanced as well, until they became Obama's platform in 2008.

The new initiative will challenge the Obama administration and offer an organizing vehicle for the peace movement. The recent sixty-five votes for Representative Dennis Kucinich's antiwar resolution is not a true measure of antiwar sentiment in the Congress, McGovern told me, adding, "We haven't had our full debate on the war." Congressional restlessness is climbing over sacrificing American lives and dollars for a corrupt and recalcitrant Karzai government, he argues.

A Congressional letter from Feingold and McGovern questioning the current policy is expected shortly, to be followed by introduction of the legislation. McGovern also will introduce an updated version of last year's resolution requesting an exit plan from the administration. Last year's version had 100 House sponsors.

Congressional attention will soon turn to the Pentagon's requests for \$33 billion to fund the current Afghan escalation and \$159 billion for Iraq-Afghanistan war funding in fiscal year 2011. Obama has spoken against open-ended funding and pledged to "begin" troop withdrawals from Afghanistan by summer 2011. Yet he has refused to agree to a date by which all troops will be withdrawn as he did during the Iraq war in 2008.

The Feingold-McGovern proposal could challenge the president if it achieves debate and a substantial, though minority, vote in favor. But it also will reveal a lack of Democratic unity in both houses. According to one ranking insider, "the mood...seems to be granting the administration some additional time as the new troops deploy. It may not be the right strategy but it suits most people politically."

A troop withdrawal deadline is seen by peace advocates as an incentive to draw the Taliban into peace talks, directly and indirectly. There are behind-the-scenes debates already underway over providing safe-passage documents which would enable Taliban leaders to enter Kabul or a third country for political negotiations, which Karzai favors. Former United Nations envoy Kai Eide supports negotiating with the Taliban too, but the US State Department and Pentagon are so far opposed both to negotiations and safe-passage documents.

Meanwhile, some Congressional staff and peace advocates are evaluating a menu of demands to make as possible amendments fleshing out an exit strategy in the budget battles ahead, among them:

ending the Iraq War according to § agreements already supported by the Obama administration. Currently, existing Congressional budget language supports the timelines of (1) a US-imposed deadline of this August 3 for all US combat forces to be withdrawn, and (2) the US- Iraq pact's official December 31, 2011, deadline, when all remaining troops and contractors must leave Iraq, and bases shut down or handed over to the Iraqi government;

requiring all-party talks in Afghanistan leading to new § internationally supervised elections, including elements of the Taliban, as a condition of funding;

conditioning further humanitarian and § educational aid on protections for Afghan women's rights, and recognized human rights standards for detainees;

replacing ISAF troops in Afghanistan § with peacekeepers from non- aligned countries, particularly from Islamic-majority ones;

challenging drone attacks as pre-emptive § invasions of Pakistan's sovereignty to perform of secret extra-judicial killings, which result in large-scale civilian deaths and alienate the population.

The strongest peace movement argument would seem to be about budgetary impacts in a time of chronic recession. According to Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes, Iraq alone will become a three-trillion-dollar war. The Congressional Research Service says that the direct costs now reach \$1.08 trillion, including \$748 billion for Iraq, \$340 billion for Afghanistan and \$29 billion for "enhanced security."

As McGovern points out, "there is a price to be paid, in roads falling apart, emergency rooms closing down, finite resources that should be invested in putting people to work, but instead going to two wars."

That will be weighed against Democratic concerns about opposing the president during an election year.

But the measure floated by Representative Barbara Lee to cut funding for the escalation

may receive support from as few as fifty or sixty members. Spending taxpayers' money without end on unfunded wars of unknown duration doesn't sound like fiscal wisdom, but when it comes to the Long War, both parties are loaded with big spenders.

## **Italian aid workers arrested in Afghan assassination plot, humanitarian community baffled**

UN Dispatch

04/12/2010

By Una Moore

In the strangest recent story out of the war in Afghanistan, three Italian aid workers were arrested on Saturday and for allegedly plotting to kill a provincial governor.

Emergency, the NGO the three Italians work for, provides medical relief in Helmand, one of Afghanistan's embattled southern provinces. Afghan authorities claim to have found explosives and hidden in boxes of medicine at the organization's hospital in the city of Lashkar Gah. Six Afghans were also arrested.

Gino Strada, Emergency's director thinks his employees were set up by parties seeking to "get rid of a troublesome witness" to the conflict's toll on civilians.

Speaking from Milan, Strada told reporters, "Someone has organized this set-up because they want Emergency to leave Afghanistan."

Strada believes Afghan authorities or NATO forces –or both-- planted the evidence and orchestrated the raid. NATO denies any of its troops were present when the Italians were arrested.

After the arrests, residents of Lashkar Gah demonstrated against Emergency, which has drawn controversy for its policy of treating injured from all sides of Afghanistan's conflict, including wounded Taliban fighters.

Afghan investigators' described a cross-border plot to kill Helmand's governor.

Investigators believe the suspects were linked to the Taliban insurgency and that the plan had been hatched at a meeting in the Pakistan city of Quetta, said the governor's spokesman, Daud Ahmadi. He said the plotters planned to carry out a suicide bombing in Lashkar Gah, then wait until the governor came to the hospital to visit the injured. When he did, they planned to attack with grenades, pistols and explosives, Ahmadi said.

I see three possibilities here, all of them ugly. In scenario one, aid workers unknowingly allowed terrorists to stash explosives in their hospital and were unfairly implicated in the plot. In scenario two, Afghan authorities and/or NATO forces decided the best way to

eliminate humanitarian witnesses from Lashkar Gah was to stage an elaborate set-up to make it appear that aid workers were involved in an international assassination plot. The third and most disturbing possibility is that the Italians and their six Afghan colleagues really were planning to bomb their own hospital, murdering the patients whose care they were entrusted with, to kill the governor of Helmand.

Emergency firmly dismisses the possibility that its employees were involved in anything nefarious.

"Who with a grain of salt in his head could think that an Italian doctor would go to Afghanistan to blow up the governor of a province?" Strada asked reporters on Sunday.

It's a good question, and this case has Afghanistan humanitarian community asking "What the ...?"

## **Pakistani Prime Minister Says He Opposes Afghan Talks With Taliban**

Bloomberg  
04/13/2010

Pakistani Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said he opposes the Afghan government's efforts to engage Taliban leaders in talks to promote national reconciliation.

"Militants just want to destabilize the system," Gilani told reporters at a lunch in Washington yesterday.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has campaigned for inviting Taliban leaders to negotiations to broker an end to an almost nine-year conflict that has 89,000 U.S. troops and 44,000 allied forces stationed in Afghanistan. The U.S. hasn't endorsed such talks, advocating instead for job creation for low-level fighters rather than reconciliation with top militants.

Gilani's government itself negotiated cease-fires or peace deals with the Pakistani branch of the Taliban in 2008 and 2009, pacts that later fell apart. Starting in May of last year, Pakistan launched sustained military offensives in Swat and Waziristan, territories in its northwestern region that border Afghanistan. The campaigns won praise from U.S. officials.

"Pakistan's strategy is to fight militants who challenge the government and this policy has paid off," said Imtiaz Gul, a director at the Islamabad-based Center for Research & Security Studies. "But they are not totally opposed to talks because they're ready to talk to those who surrender."

Gilani also said socio-economic investments to address the root causes of the insurgency

are as essential as military action. Militant violence and suicide bombings have spurred the “flight of capital and there is no investment in Pakistan,” he said, calling for international capital to return.

### Nuclear Summit

Gilani is attending President Barack Obama’s two-day nuclear security summit that brought leaders and senior representatives from 47 nations to Washington.

The prime minister said he told Obama April 11 that Pakistan wants access to U.S. technology for nuclear power generation, in a deal similar to the 2008 agreement that allowed for U.S.-India civil-nuclear cooperation. Both India and Pakistan conducted nuclear tests in 1998, making them subject to U.S. sanctions that were lifted by President George W. Bush’s administration in 2001.

Gilani said he is confident his country has adequate safeguards to prevent atomic material from being trafficked or falling into the hands of terrorists. He said Pakistan is following all United Nations regulations and that its continued enrichment of uranium to weapons grade is necessary to maintain “minimum deterrence” against India.

### Energy Crisis

Pakistan is a “responsible nuclear state” that is suffering its “worst-ever energy crisis with serious implications for our national economy,” he said. “Civil nuclear power generation, hence, is an essential requirement of our national energy strategy.”

In India, Asia’s third-biggest economy, GE Hitachi Nuclear Energy, a subsidiary of Fairfield, Connecticut-based General Electric Co., and Monroeville, Pennsylvania-based Westinghouse Electric Co., a subsidiary of Tokyo’s Toshiba Corp., would be among the companies bidding for nuclear energy contracts worth at least \$10 billion. More than 30 U.S. nuclear-industry suppliers have expressed interest.

Gilani said Obama expressed his interest in improved relations between India and Pakistan, neighbors and rivals who have fought three wars since their partition and independence in 1947. He didn’t say how the two countries might resolve the conflict over the disputed territory of Kashmir.

### Domestic Groups

India blames Pakistan for aiding and sheltering domestic terror groups that Indian and U.S. intelligence agencies have linked to attacks on India, including the November 2008 attack in Mumbai that claimed 166 lives.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, also in town for the nuclear summit, urged Obama in their meeting April 11 to pressure Gilani to rein in the banned Pakistani terror group Lashkar-e-Taiba, whose name means “Army of the Pure,” according to Indian

Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao.

If there's more evidence provided by India of the involvement of the group, "they'll be brought to justice," Gilani said. The Indian and Pakistani leaders, who two months ago reopened stalled dialogue for the first time since the Mumbai attacks, have no plans to meet in Washington, Gilani said.

Asked whether Obama had sought Pakistan's help in pressuring Iran to halt its suspected pursuit of nuclear weapons, Gilani said the issue hadn't come up. There should be no fear in the U.S. that Pakistani nuclear technology or materials might be diverted to Iran, he said.

Pakistan is a "very responsible nuclear state; how can they even think that?" he said.

Khan Network

The U.S. State Department blames an illicit nuclear technology network run by Abdul Qadeer Khan, a Pakistani nuclear scientist who takes credit for building his country's nuclear program, for having "lasting implications for international security."

Khan admitted responsibility for selling nuclear bomb technology to Iran, North Korea and Libya, among other countries, after the International Atomic Energy Agency presented evidence of the sales in 2004. Then-President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan pardoned Khan and placed him under house arrest. His house arrest was lifted by a Pakistani court last year.

U.S. investigators have long sought access to Khan, a former head of Pakistan's nuclear and missile programs. Asked why his government wasn't making Khan available, Gilani said "that chapter is closed," and insisted Khan "is being regulated."

The Pakistani leader said he told Obama that the "biggest mistake of the U.S." after its military campaign that ousted the Taliban from power in Afghanistan in 2001 was to leave "a vacuum" that allowed militants to return.

## **Shooting by U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan fuels Karzai's anger**

The Washington Post

04/13/2010

By Joshua Partlow

KABUL - Twelve days before President Hamid Karzai denounced the behavior of Western countries in Afghanistan, he met a 4-year-old boy at the Tarin Kowt civilian hospital in the south.

The boy had lost his legs in a February airstrike by U.S. Special Operations forces helicopters that killed more than 20 civilians. Karzai scooped him up from his mattress and walked out to the hospital courtyard, according to three witnesses. "Who injured you?" the president asked as helicopters passed overhead. The boy, crying alongside his relatives, pointed at the sky.

The tears and rage Karzai encountered in that hospital in Uruzgan province lingered with him, according to several aides. It was one provocation amid a string of recent political disappointments that they said has helped fuel the president's emotional outpouring against the West and prompted a brief crisis in his relations with the United States. It was also a reminder that civilian casualties in Afghanistan have political reverberations far beyond the sites of the killings.

Before dawn Monday, American soldiers strafed a passenger bus that approached their convoy outside Kandahar City, killing at least four Afghans, including a woman, and wounding 18 others in another incident that Afghan officials warn could hurt the U.S. military effort. The city, which spawned the Taliban movement, has become the focal point of American military efforts for the next few months. Of the 30,000 additional U.S. troops President Obama ordered to Afghanistan, 13,000 have arrived, and thousands more are headed to Kandahar in preparation for a summer offensive intended to roll back the insurgency.

But Karzai told a gathering in Kandahar last week that he would not permit an American offensive there unless the people supported it. After Monday's shooting, residents blocked a road, denounced the American presence and demanded justice.

"This is a savage action. They have committed a great crime," said Bismillah Afghanmal, a member of Kandahar's provincial council. "They knew that this was the public transportation way. . . . Buses always use that road."

Tooryalai Wesa, the governor of Kandahar, condemned the shooting and called it "very irresponsible."

Under Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, NATO forces have made reducing civilian casualties a top priority. McChrystal has restricted night raids, home searches and the close air support that troops often request during firefights, all in an effort to mitigate collateral damage to Afghan civilians. The U.S.-led NATO force issued a statement Monday saying it "deeply regrets the tragic loss of life" in Kandahar.

But high-profile civilian killings continue to attract wide attention in Afghanistan. A Feb. 12 nighttime raid by U.S. Special Operations forces near Gardez, in the southeast, that killed five people, including two pregnant women, is being investigated after Afghan officials alleged that U.S. troops tampered with evidence at the scene.

After the Feb. 22 Uruzgan airstrike -- on a bus mistakenly thought to be carrying insurgents -- killed more than 20 people, Canadian and American forces patrolling far from the scene in Kandahar City reported a sudden deterioration in residents' attitudes toward them. In some cases, residents threw rocks and spit at troops, according to U.S. military officials.

"We have to calm people. You have to give them some satisfaction as to whether this will continue or not," Shaida M. Abdali, the deputy national security adviser, said in an interview last week.

Abdali praised McChrystal's efforts to reduce civilian casualties and said the commander "has always been quick to apologize," but he said the Afghan government thinks more needs to change.

"We want night raids to be stopped entirely. We want house searches to be stopped. We want civilian casualties to be minimized," he said.

Monday's shooting occurred as the bus was passing through the Zhari district of Kandahar province. The NATO statement said the incident began when a large vehicle approached a slow-moving NATO convoy from behind at "a high rate of speed." The convoy, sweeping the road for bombs, could not get out of the way of the oncoming vehicle because of a steep embankment, the statement said.

NATO said the troops in the convoy followed procedure, using a flashlight, three flares and hand signals to warn the vehicle to stop. When none of that worked, they opened fire. "Once engaged, the vehicle then stopped," the statement said. "Upon inspection, ISAF forces discovered the vehicle to be a passenger bus."

But Abdul Ghani, an Afghan man who told The Washington Post in a telephone interview that he was the driver of the bus, said the soldiers "didn't give me any kind of signal. . . . They just opened fire. No signal at all."

Ghani's account could not be independently confirmed, and other news organizations quoted a different person who said he was the driver. But Ghani, 35, related to The Post specific details about the bus and the incident that suggest he knew what had occurred.

He said the green and white 1984 German vehicle left a Kandahar city bus depot at 4:30 a.m., bound for Nimruz province, seven hours away. Half an hour into the trip, the bus drove up behind the U.S. convoy. The gunfire erupted when the bus was 80 to 100 meters behind the convoy, he said.

The bullets tore into the passenger side of the windshield and struck several rows. The American soldiers walked around the bus after the shooting stopped, Ghani said, then climbed on board without speaking to him. "They saw the people who were killed and left them there. And then they took the injured ones and started doing first aid immediately."



Ghani said he was eventually was able to drive the bus back to the city. "Why we are being killed by these people?" he said. "They are here to protect us, not to kill us."

Special correspondent Javed Hamdard in Kabul and a special correspondent in Kandahar City contributed to this report.

## **Three U.S. lawmakers sponsor Afghan pullout plan**

Reuters

04/14/2010

By Sue Fleming

WASHINGTON – Three U.S. lawmakers introduced legislation on Wednesday that would require President Barack Obama to develop a detailed timetable to draw down U.S. forces from Afghanistan.

While the legislation has a very slim chance of passing Congress, it underscores impatience over the eight-year war in Afghanistan, where the United States has more than 80,000 troops and tens of thousands more on the way.

Wisconsin Democrat Senator Russ Feingold said people "across the political spectrum" were asking why the United States had such a big military presence in Afghanistan.

He argued an open-ended presence was counterproductive in the global fight against the militant group al Qaeda, blamed for the September 11, 2001, attacks against the United States.

"Rather than pour resources into a nation-building strategy in a country that isn't even al Qaeda's base, we should develop a timetable to end our massive presence in Afghanistan, so we are better able to go after al Qaeda's global network," said Feingold, one of the sponsors of the legislation.

"We need to be as agile as al Qaeda and we can't do that if we are bogged down in Afghanistan," he added.

The legislation, which did not set a specific withdrawal date, would require Obama to provide a detailed plan for drawing down forces and identify variables that could require changes to that timetable.

It also demanded greater oversight of work done by private contractors paid with U.S. taxpayer funds.

"The American people deserve accountability in terms of how and when our troops will be returned to their families and in terms of how taxpayer dollars are being spent," said Democratic Representative James McGovern of South Carolina, another sponsor of the legislation.

Under Obama's new strategy for Afghanistan unveiled last December, he set a goal of July 2011 for U.S. forces to start leaving as long as conditions were right.

Many in Congress argue that giving a more detailed timetable would send a message that the United States was wavering in its support for the war effort.

"One of the real concerns both in Afghanistan and Pakistan is that we have left there twice," said Delaware Senator Ted Kaufman, who has just returned from a trip to the region. In addition, current strategy would be re-examined in December.

Rhode Island Senator Jack Reed, a Democrat, agreed, saying a detailed month-by-month plan would amount to "micromanagement."

But the lawmakers who back the legislation, including Representative Walter Jones, a North Carolina Republican, wrote to Obama last week outlining concerns over U.S. strategy in Afghanistan.

They complained of U.S. reliance on what they said was an "unreliable partner" in Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

They said recent anti-Western statements by Karzai raised questions about his willingness to tackle corruption and the security conditions on which current U.S. strategy depended.

"We urge you to set a flexible timetable for removing U.S. troops from Afghanistan and transition to a sustainable counter-terrorism strategy for the region," they wrote.

## **Cabinet choices to be nominated shortly**

Pajhwok

04/14/2010

By Abdul Qadir Siddiqui

KABUL - Eleven remaining cabinet picks would be introduced soon to lawmakers for approval, a presidential spokesman said on Tuesday.

Addressing a press conference in Kabul, Waheed Omar the cabinet nominees would appear before the Wolesi Jirga for a vote of confidence within a 10-day timeframe set by

the legislators.

On January 16, the parliament rejected most of President Hamid Karzai's second list of cabinet choices. Lawmakers refused to endorse 10 nominees for cabinet posts and approved only seven.

The rejected choices included two women nominated for the posts of women's affairs and public health as well as the presidential nominees for the ministries of higher education, commerce, transportation, public works, refugee and border and tribal affairs.

Karzai had to submit the new picks after the lower house spurned 17 of his 24 nominees, including a powerful warlord, on February 1. Candidates seen as the president's political cronies were denied trust vote.

On Tuesday, Karzai's spokesman told journalists the remaining nominees would be submitted to MPs shortly. Under the Constitution, the president has to refer cabinet choices to the parliament two weeks after being sworn in.

## **Karzai brother mends ties with US**

The Associated Press

04/14/2010

By Kathy Gannon

"Since 2003 these things have been said about me and every time I ask for proof no one gives me any." - Wali Karzai

KANDAHAR — He's the consummate symbol of Afghan cronyism — the president's wheeler-dealer half brother and main power broker in the Taliban-ridden south. With the American military facing a showdown with insurgents here, Ahmad Wali Karzai said Wednesday that he's mending fences with the U.S. and its international partners.

The Americans, for their part, are now taking a softer approach in dealing with both President Hamid Karzai and his influential half brother to try to win their support for the coming offensive in Kandahar, the birthplace of the Taliban, and to build an effective local government to keep the Taliban from returning.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Karzai offered a different vision of good government than one espoused by the U.S. and its partners. He favors relying on traditional tribal councils rather than officials selected in Western-style elections or appointed by the central government.

"We have to go back to the tribal system," said the stocky, gray-bearded Karzai as he

relaxed in the upstairs living room of his heavily guarded mansion. "You can't corrupt 50 elders but you can easily corrupt one judge. ... Seventy percent of the problems can be solved by the elders."

NATO has said the Kandahar operation, expected to accelerate this summer, cannot succeed without the support of local leaders and influence peddlers, including Ahmad Wali Karzai. Where once they were openly critical of him, U.S. officials now shy away from speaking publicly against the man known as "AWK," except to acknowledge his influence in Kandahar, the biggest city in the south.

As the offensive approaches, Karzai, chairman of the local provincial council, said he had been meeting frequently with U.S. and NATO representatives to sort out "misunderstandings" between "me and my friends, the Americans."

"We have been having good discussions, trying to work out the negative points," he told the AP without giving details. "There is a lot of misinformation going on about me."

Karzai has long been a lightning rod for criticism of the way his half brother has run the country since the Taliban were ousted from power in the 2001 U.S.-led invasion. He was alleged to have used his family connections to line his pockets. He also has been accused of links to the drug mafia — although U.S. officials have acknowledged they have no compelling evidence to back up the allegation.

Nevertheless, Karzai became such a figure of controversy that Sen. John McCain, the ranking Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, suggested last year that he should leave Afghanistan for the good of the country — a suggestion Karzai told AP was offensive and smacked of imperialism.

But with the president sticking by his younger half brother, U.S. and NATO officials have concluded they have little choice but to work with Ahmad Wali Karzai if they are to build community support for the operation against the Taliban.

A senior NATO military official, briefing reporters on condition his name and nationality not be published, described Ahmad Wali Karzai as "not the only problem" in Kandahar but someone with whom international representatives must have "a tremendous amount of dialogue" in order to "change his behavior." He did not elaborate.

Without naming Karzai, the official said some businessmen in Kandahar have been linked to corruption — wealthy entrepreneurs who use their government connections to control access to public jobs, favoring their own friends and tribes.

During the interview, Karzai denied any impropriety, saying he doesn't even own property in Kandahar city, a claim echoed by Mayor Ghulam Haider Hamidi, who rents a house to Karzai.

He has in the past denied published allegations that he has been on the CIA payroll for

years and insisted Wednesday that he has never used his influence to win lucrative contracts for U.S.-funded projects.

"I swear on the head of my four children I have not taken one dollar from the Americans" in the nearly nine years they have been in Afghanistan, he said. "Since 2003 these things have been said about me and every time I ask for proof no one gives me any."

Karzai acknowledged that his family connection is more important in the Afghan power equation than his chairmanship of the Kandahar provincial council.

"Everyone wants to see me because I am the president's brother," he said. "I have dinner with him. They know I meet him. I can talk to him about things over dinner."

Karzai maintained that what the West sees as wheeling and dealing reflects deeply entrenched traditions among the ethnic Pashtuns of southern Afghanistan, the community that produced most of the insurgents. He said Pashtun tradition requires him to meet anyone who comes knocking at his door, regardless of character and social status.

"I am even called upon to divide up family wealth," Karzai said. "Another family that we knew when we lived in Quetta came from Pakistan and wanted 2 million rupees. They said they needed the money and because I am the president's brother and because they knew me, I should give them the money. I didn't, but these are our traditions."

He said the U.S. and its international partners want to move Afghanistan into the 21st century but "we are in the 18th century."

"You want us to achieve in eight years what you achieved in 100 years," he said.

Karzai argued that the U.S. military's rotation system, which limits most assignments to one year, deprives the Americans of a genuine understanding of Afghan society.

"If the general who was here in 2002 was still here today, there would be a better understanding of Afghanistan," he said.

Karzai also said the president's administration had lost the propaganda war to the Taliban in the south.

"Our public relations is very weak. The government doesn't get credit for what it does. How many roads are paved and clinics built and schools?" he asked. "It is a tremendous achievement."

## **"UK has underground airport in Helmand"**

Press TV, Islamic Republic of Iran  
04/14/2010

British forces have constructed underground airports, concrete wells and warehouses in Afghanistan's Helmand Province, an informed source says.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the Afghan source who has worked in Helmand for four years claimed British troops have dug 60-meter deep wells, reinforcing them with concrete, Fars News Agency reported.

He added that there is currently no war in Helmand and accused foreign troops stationed there of portraying a wrong image of the southwestern Afghan province.

According to the unnamed source, the military buildup by the UK and US in Helmand Province shows they have no immediate pull out plans from Afghanistan and that they are pursuing objectives other than fighting the Taliban such as concentrating on Iran.

The US and UK have said unrealistic things about Taliban brutality in Helmand Province in order to terrify and prevent reporters from visiting that province, the source added.

The source claimed to have witnessed military airplanes coming out from beneath a British airbase in Helmand Province where 60,000 people work.

Commenting on the death of an Afghan correspondent named Ajmal Naqshbandi, the Afghan source alleged that the reporter had been murdered by the Taliban after attending a secret meeting between the Taliban and British forces in Helmand Province.

Helmand Province is located in southwestern Afghanistan along the border with Iran.

## **Mujaddedi calls for arming civilians**

Pajhwok  
04/15/2010  
By Abaseen Zaheer

KABUL - Meshrano Jirga (Senate) Chairman Sibghatullah Mujaddedi has accused foreign forces of disarming civilians and leaving them helpless in the face of armed militants.

Addressing Tuesday's session of the upper house, he urged the international community to provide arms to residents to ensure peace in the country, where militant-linked violence has recently escalated.

He said if the United States and its supporters were really interested in bringing peace to Afghanistan, they should provide arms to civilians to protect themselves against insurgent attacks.

"I will see who can dare disturb peace once arms are provided to the common people," said the elderly politician who also served as interim president of the country during the mujahideen period.

Mujaddedi accused the Pakistani intelligence agency (ISI) of involvement in most of terrorist attacks in Afghanistan. He said the global fraternity should stop Pakistan from supporting terrorists.

He also assailed the international community of trying to foment instability in the war-ravaged country to promote their interests. A major role in destabilising Afghanistan was being played by Pakistan, he alleged.

A senator from central Bamyan province, Hidayatullah Rihayee, blasted Afghanistan's neighbours for fuelling instability in the country.

He believed Islamabad would continue to interfere in Afghanistan as long as Kabul did not recognise the Durand Line as an international border.

## **Afghan MPs Criticize Ahmadinejad's letter to UN**

Quqnoos  
04/15/2010

Afghan MPs said the silence of the Afghan government is controversial, and, following these comments, the Ministry of Interior Affairs reacted by saying that neighboring countries should respect the sovereignty of Afghanistan.

The Afghan government should have reacted to the letter, added the Afghan MPs.

"This is not the competency of Iran's president, because foreign troops came to Afghanistan in 2001 based on the ratification of the UN Security Council which Iran also supported," said MP Shokria Barekzai.

The remarks come as Ahmadinejad's letter to Ki-moon said that Afghanistan is occupied and the presence of foreign troops has caused a boost in insurgent activities in the region.

The Afghan Ministry of Foreign affairs suggests that the foreign countries should officially acknowledge Afghanistan's sovereignty.

“The Afghan government at no cost does not intervene with other countries’ affairs, and this is our ambition that other countries should respect Afghanistan’s sovereignty,” said a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ahmad Zaher Faqiri.

Iran’s president urged the UN chief to appoint an independent fact-finding team who is trusted by the regional countries to launch an investigation into the intentions of the NATO military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq.

## **Warning signs in Afghanistan**

City NewsPaper

04/15/2010

By Mary Anna Towler

The story in this morning's Times was chock full of bad news about our involvement in Afghanistan. And I don't think it'll be the last of its kind.

US troops are pulling out of an Afghan region known as the Valley of Death - not because of any mission accomplished but because, in reporter Alissa Rubin's words, our involvement there "did more to spawn insurgents than defeat them."

The region, the Korangal Valley, is a remote area of Afghanistan, with few people, and the pullout is consistent with General Stanley McChrystal's strategy of focusing attention on more densely populated places. But I don't have much hope that we'll win more hearts and minds in those places than in the Korangal Valley.

Rubin's story is full of quotes from soldiers who said that we didn't understand the people in the region, that our offers of aid were rebuffed, that we often literally drove the Korangal people "into the arms of the insurgents."

Do we understand the people of the Afghan cities better? By concentrating our aid and military efforts there, do we stand a better chance at success? Will we be able to do enough good in the cities that residents will side with us rather than with the Taliban?

We'll find out.

But as we do, we'll lose lives - far more, no doubt, than we lost in the remote area of Afghanistan known as the Valley of Death.



## Deaths of Afghan civilians double

USA Today  
04/16/2010  
By Paul Wiseman

KABUL — Deaths of Afghan civilians by NATO troops have more than doubled this year, NATO statistics show, jeopardizing a U.S. campaign to win over the local population by protecting them against insurgent attacks.

NATO troops accidentally killed 72 civilians in the first three months of 2010, up from 29 in the same period in 2009, according to figures the International Security Assistance Force gave USA TODAY. The numbers were released after Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, issued measures to protect ordinary Afghans.

A Red Cross report out Thursday said the number of civilians killed and wounded by Taliban roadside bombs has soared in Kandahar, where NATO and Afghan forces are preparing for a major offensive against the insurgent stronghold.

Some Afghans say the rise in civilian deaths may help the enemy. "If (it) continues, people will abandon the government and join the Taliban," says Malalai Ishaqzai, a member of parliament.

McChrystal has limited the use of airstrikes and raids on households that put civilians at risk. The emphasis on protecting non-combatants is part of a strategy to win the public's support.

It appeared to be working: Civilian deaths at the hands of U.S.-led troops dropped 28% in 2009 to 596, according to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

"The pace of operations this year is considerably higher than last," leading to a 75% increase in "significant events" such as firefights and weapons seizures, says NATO spokesman Lt. Cmdr. Iain Baxter of the British navy.

NATO forces have reduced airstrikes, which accounted for 61% of the civilians killed by NATO and Afghan forces last year, according to the U.N. mission. Even so, civilians continue to be endangered.

Four people were killed by NATO troops Monday when their bus driver ignored warnings to stop or slow down as he overtook a NATO convoy. The incident prompted an anti-American protest.

"No system is 100% guaranteed, and regrettably in a very small number of incidents, the warnings are ignored and lethal force is used," Baxter says.

Night raids are another risk, says Ahmad Nader Nadery, a member of the Afghanistan

Independent Human Rights Commission. On Feb. 12, NATO and Afghan troops searching for a Taliban member killed five civilians in a night raid. In response, McChrystal ordered troops last month to avoid night raids on homes when possible.

Civilian deaths undermine NATO efforts to win Afghan loyalty, says Seth Jones, a counterinsurgency specialist at RAND Corp., a think tank. However, he says the Taliban is to blame for most civilian deaths (67% last year, the U.N. mission says) and the United States should emphasize that fact.

The Red Cross said the Mirwais Hospital in Kandahar admitted up to 40% more patients wounded by Taliban bombs in the first two months of the year compared with the same period last year.

## **Afghans 'abused at secret prison' at Bagram airbase**

BBC

04/16/2010

By Hilary Andersson

Bagram - Afghan prisoners are being abused in a "secret jail" at Bagram airbase, according to nine witnesses whose stories the BBC has documented.

The abuses are all said to have taken place since US President Barack Obama was elected, promising to end torture.

The US military has denied the existence of a secret detention site and promised to look into allegations.

Bagram was the site of a controversial jail holding hundreds of inmates, who have now been moved to another complex.

The old prison was notorious for allegations of prisoner torture and abuse.

But witnesses told the BBC in interviews or written testimony that abuses continue in a hidden facility.

Sleep deprivation

"They call it the Black Hole," said Sher Agha who spent six days in the facility last autumn.

"When they released us they told us we should not tell our stories to outsiders because that will harm us."

Sher Agha and others we interviewed complained their cells were very cold.

"When I wanted to sleep and started shivering with cold I started reciting the holy Koran," he said.

But sleep, according to the prisoners interviewed, is deliberately prevented in this detention site.

"I could not sleep, nobody could sleep because there was a machine that was making noise," said Mirwais, who said he was held in the secret jail for 24 days.

"There was a small camera in my cell, and if you were sleeping they'd come in and disturb you," he added.

The prisoners, who were interviewed separately, all told very similar stories. Most of them said they had been beaten by American soldiers at the point of arrest before being taken to the prison.

Mirwais had half a row of teeth missing, which he said was from being struck with the butt of a gun by an American soldier.

No-one said they were visited by the International Committee of the Red Cross during their detention at the site, and they all said that their families did not know where they were.

In the small concrete cells, the prisoners said, a light was on all the time. They said they could not tell if it was night or day and described this as very disturbing.

Mirwais said he was made to dance to music by American soldiers every time he wanted to use the toilet.

The ex-prisoners said they were imprisoned at the secret jail before being taken to the main detention centre at the Bagram airbase, a new complex called The Detention Facility in Parwan.

Bagram's prisoners were moved to the Parwan complex from the old notorious Bagram prison site on the airbase earlier this year.

In 2002, two prisoners were killed in the Bagram prison while in US custody after being suspended from the ceilings of their cells and brutally beaten.

New jail

The BBC was allowed into the new Bagram prison for an hour.

This was one of the first opportunities any outsider has had to set eyes on Bagram's

interned prisoners since a jail was first established at Bagram soon after 9/11.

In the new jail, prisoners were being moved around in wheelchairs with goggles and headphones on.

The goggles were blacked out, and the purpose of the headphones was to block out all sound. Each prisoner was handcuffed and had their legs shackled.

Prisoners are kept in 56 cells, which the prisoners refer to as "cages". The front of the cells are made of mesh, the ceiling is clear, and the other three walls are solid.

Guards can see down into the cells above.

The BBC was told by the military to wear protective eye glasses whilst walking past the mesh cells as prisoners sometimes throw excrement or semen at the guards.

Prisoner accounts we logged painted a much better picture of the Parwan Detention Facility.

The US military itself has admitted that about 80% of those at Bagram are probably not hardened terrorists. It is the process of giving every detainee an internal military trial of sorts, called a Detainee Review Board.

The prisoners are represented by soldiers who are not lawyers.

"To this date, no prisoner has ever seen a lawyer in Bagram", said Tina Foster, who represents several of Bagram's prisoners in cases she has filed in on their behalf in the US. Guantanamo Bay's prisoners are able to see their lawyers.

About 100 prisoners have been released through this process, but due to an increased intake, the number of prisoners at Parwan is now 800, up from about 650 in September 2009.

The BBC put the allegations of ongoing abuses as a secret site on the airbase to the US military at Bagram. The military categorically denied the existence of a secret detention site.

"I've never heard of it. This is the only detention facility in Afghanistan" said Vice Admiral Robert Harward who is in charge of the Detention Facility in Parwan.

The US military promised to investigate any allegations of abuse.

## **US Afghan commander: 'We have too many contractors'**

Agence France-Presse  
04/16/2010

PARIS — The US commander in Afghanistan said Friday that the military is wasting money by employing too many private contractors to do jobs better done by soldiers or local Afghans.

"We have created in ourselves a dependency on contractors that is greater than it ought to be," General Stanley McChrystal told an audience of French officers and military experts at France's defence university in Paris.

"I think we've gone too far. I think that the use of contractors was done with good intentions so that we could limit the number of military. I think in some cases we thought it would save money. I think it doesn't save money."

The US operation in Afghanistan employs more civilian contractors than soldiers, carrying out jobs ranging from catering and logistics to -- more controversially -- armed escort duties and intelligence gathering.

According to a US Congressional report, citing figures from US Central Command, in September last year there were 104,100 Department of Defense contractors assigned to Afghanistan compared to only 63,950 troops.

Since then the United States has begun to pour in an additional 30,000 troops, but the report noted that last year the number of contractors was increasing faster than the number of troops.

The Pentagon's use of contractors exploded during the Iraq war, and the programme has proved controversial both in terms of corruption scandals and alleged atrocities by private gunmen working alongside the military.

McChrystal said the numbers were too high and that more could be done to draw in Afghans and give them a bigger stake in the operation.

"I think it would be better to reduce the number of contractors involved, increase the number of military if necessary and, where we have contractors, in many cases, I believe we should stop using foreign contractors and use a greater number of Afghan contractors," he said.

Last month, McChrystal reduced the number of civilians in military camps in at least one area, ordering the closure of western style burger joints and pizza parlours on US bases in Afghanistan.

## Social Headlines

### Farmers receive training in Samangan

Pajhwok  
04/12/2010  
By Barat

AIBAK - Almost 1,900 farmers in northern Samangan province completed a training course regarding new methods of growing and irrigating wheat crop, officials said on Wednesday.

Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the training started two months ago by the International Relief & Development (IRD) in coordination with Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock Directorate was completed today.

IRD provincial coordinator, Eng. Mohammad Din Momand, told Pajhwok Afghan News farmers from provincial capital, Aibak, Hazrat Sultan and Khuram Salarbagh districts learnt techniques for soil preparations, the use of chemical and animal manure and seed selection during the two months training. "We want the farmers to be self-sufficient in growing wheat with a professional way," he added.

According to Momand, 22,000 other farmers were trained by the organisation in northern Balkh, Jawzjan, Sar-i-Pul and Faryab provinces.

One of the farmers from Aibak, Mohammad Ishaq, said he cultivated one acre of land with wheat crop and hoped for increased yield after the training. He demanded of the agriculture directorate to train the farmers on how to deal with insects and other pests.

Another resident of Sofi Qala area, Jura, said earlier he did not know professional way of sowing and his wheat crops often fell at the booting stage. He added their crops would have never fallen if they were properly sowed and irrigated with the techniques they learnt at the training.

Deputy Agriculture Director, Noor Mohammad, said that last year they distributed 1360 tonnes of improved quality wheat seeds and chemical fertiliser to 6685 farmers of the province.

According to Noor Mohammad, the training courses were categorised into three phases. The first phase of the training was completed today and the second and third phases included training for struggling against pests, plant diseases and about marketing for agricultural products in future.

## **Retaining wall constructed in Balkh**

Pajhwok

04/12/2010

By Zabihullah Ihsas

MAZAR-I-SHARIF - A retaining wall, protecting thousands of acres of farming land from possible floods, has been constructed in Khulm district of northern Balkh province, officials said on Friday.

The 975-metre supportive wall was constructed with financial support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The project would protect 1250 acres of agriculture land from flood, said district chief Mohammad Ibrahim Yaqubi.

He told Pajhwok Afghan News the scheme, providing employment to 14600 people, was implemented during five months.

Manager of the project, Engineer Noor, said the wall was constructed in Darya Khana area along the river at a cost of \$170, 000.

A farmer of the area, Haji Musa, said he lost his four acre of pomegranate orchard last year due to flash floods.

## **Senators grill information minister**

Pajhwok

04/14/2010

By Frozan Rahmani

Kabul - Afghan senators, lashing out at Minister of Information and Culture Makhdoom Rahin, alleged on Sunday some television channels continued to air "immoral" programmes.

The Upper House of Parliament questioned the minister over the implementation of a new media law, banning un-Islamic telecasts and preparations for a 2013 ceremony marking Ghazni City as the cultural capital of the Muslim world.

A lawmaker from Balkh province, Maulvi Danishju, said he had seen no change in what he called "naked dances" shown by the various TV channels. But Minister Raheen spoke of progress in this regard following a meeting with representatives of Afghan TV

channels.

In response to a question regarding the media law, Rahin insisted it was enforced two months ago. Of the 70 un-Islamic websites detected by the ministry, four have been closed. They were allegedly encouraging prostitution, drugs and gambling.

The minister informed legislators a committee had been formed to implement nearly 40 projects in the southern city of Ghazni City in the build-up to the festival.

The projects required 200 million dollars, the minister said, adding his ministry had less than three per cent of the funds needed.

## **18 uplift projects completed in Wardak**

Pajhwok

04/15/2010

By Hakim Basharat

MAIDAN SHAHR - Eighteen development projects have been completed in the Syedabad district of central Maidan Wardak province, an official said on Monday.

Governor's spokesman, Shahidullah Shahid, told Pajhwok Afghan News the projects, benefitting 1,848 families, were executed under the National Solidarity Programme at a cost of 12 million afghanis.

The schemes included the construction of retaining walls, asphaltting roads, digging wells, establishing a diesel-run power plant and cleaning an irrigation system in the district, added the spokesman.

A dweller of the Borharkhil area, Haji Naqibullah, expressed pleasure over the projects, saying they previously had no electricity. The power scheme had resolved their problem, he concluded.

## **15 schools reopened in south after years**

Pajhwok

04/16/2010

By Mirwais Himmat & Stanikzai

KABUL (PAN): After remaining closed for years, 15 schools have been reopened in southern Ghazni and Helmand provinces, officials and tribal elders said on Thursday.



More than a dozen schools were reopened in the Gero district of Ghazni in cooperation with tribal elders and religious scholars, said provincial education director, Husaini Mubarak Azizi.

He said the schools remained shut for at least five years in the restive district, located about 70 kilometres south of provincial capital, Ghazni City.

District chief, Fazal Rahman Nazarwal, said 11 of the 13 reopened schools needed teaching staff and reconstruction of their buildings.

District education officer, Anayatullah Azimi, said the schools restarted in cooperation with tribal elders and local Taliban.

He added the schools lacked teachers and other materials like chairs, tables and buildings.

The education official said they had discussed the problems with the authorities concerned. Nearly 5,600 students had been enrolled in these schools, but there was no book available for the students.

The reopening came as Taliban eased their stance allowing the students to go to the schools after repeated calls from the area people, said a member of provincial council, Nadar Khan Girwal. The resident hoped that schools in other nearby districts would also be reopened.

In volatile Helmand province, three schools were re-opened in Marja district, where a major joint offensive was conducted in February. After remaining closed for two years, the schools restarted this week in the Fathano village, where 230 students resumed their study, said deputy education director, Mohammad Wali.

More schools were likely to be re-opened in the district, hoped Wali, who added work on some schools' buildings would be launched soon.

A 12 year-old student demanded of the Taliban to avoid closing schools in the district as the practice was destroying their future.

A teacher, Mullah Naqibullah, said there were four teachers in their school for around 100 students. He demanded of the government to construct a building for their school as soon as possible.

Education officials say only 104 schools out of 300 in the province were functional, depriving 60,000 students of education.

# **Economic Headlines**

## **\$52m agreements signed with World Bank**

Pajhwok  
04/14/2010

KABUL - The Ministry of Finance and the World Bank Sunday signed two grant agreements worth \$52 million to support the Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Project (AREDP) and co-finance the ongoing Strengthening Health Activities for the Rural Poor (SHARP) plan.

Under one of the agreement, the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) will provide \$30 million grant assistance to AREDP, a new government initiative designed to boost employment and incomes for people living in rural areas.

By the same token, the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) will provide \$22 million to co-finance the SHARP project that is delivering the government's basic package of health services in 11 provinces. Opening this ARTF window creates space for pooled funding for the health sector in the future.

Speaking on the occasion, Minister of Finance Dr. Omar Zakhilwal said: Reviving the rural economy and improving access to basic health care services are key elements for growth and improving the lives of Afghans. To this end, we appreciate the ARTF donors' contribution to the health sector and the World Bank's support to improving rural livelihoods."

The AREDP is aimed at enhancing the participation of the rural poor in economic activities by providing business development services, improving their access to finance, and strengthening market linkages and value chains.

Minister of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) Jarullah Mansoori explained: "This programme has been designed to respond to the immense demand for employment and livelihood opportunities by rural communities of Afghanistan and to capitalise on previous investments in rural development by this ministry."

As part of the AREDP, 13,000 Savings Groups, 6,500 Enterprise Groups (EGs) and 1,300 Village and Savings Loan Associations will be established. The EGs will help maximise the economic potential of rural entrepreneurs by improving market access, delivering technical knowledge, raising basic business skills and leveraging economies of scale to increase the value of their sales.

The SHARP supports Afghanistan's Health and Nutrition Sector Strategy, the government's roadmap to ensure improved access to basic health care in the period 2008-

2013.

"Our achievements over the past several years were indeed because of the international community's continued support to the health sector," remarked Dr. Suraya Dalil, acting minister of public health.

## **Afghan bankers see growth despite insecurity**

Reuters

04/14/2010

By Golnar Motevalli

KABUL - As the Western financial system buckled under the strain of the economic crisis in 2008, Afghan banker Noorkhan Haidari was wrapped-up in Afghanistan's own rescue deal for a bank on the verge of collapse.

With angry customers forming lines outside branches and the specter of bankruptcy looming, the Development Bank of Afghanistan (DBA), a private bank, needed a rescue package and 34-year-old Haidari, who worked at Afghanistan's Central Bank at the time, helped restructure it.

Now he heads Afghanistan's second-largest private bank, Azizi Bank, and hopes that in 2010 the bank will turn a profit for the first time in its four-year history.

Afghanistan's economy is largely dependent on aid and there is little domestic industry. The commercial banking sector, which grew after the Taliban fell in 2001, is still in its infancy and a lack of regulation has meant many private banks have failed.

Azizi bank has about 250,000 customers, most are ordinary Afghans or foreign and Afghan companies. Altogether the bank manages \$370 million. The sum is peanuts for big global banks, but for war-ravaged Afghanistan, it is a crucial source of funding which lubricates private enterprise in a country desperate for jobs.

While Haidari hopes the bank will make a modest profit of \$3.5 million to \$4 million this year, his optimism is tamed by the fact that last year loan sales were the slowest ever.

"We get very few businesses asking for loans, compared to two years ago. We can't sanction loans for them because they are not qualified," Haidari told Reuters.

"The major obstacle to the economy of Afghanistan is security. We have very limited business in the country. The rate of growth is slowing and it definitely affects the financial sector," he said, adding that low literacy levels and a lack of understanding of basic finance prevents people from qualifying.

Azizi Bank recently opened a mansion-like, multi-storey white marble headquarters in Kabul about one km from where the Taliban attacked a shopping center in January. Extra armed guards and a new concrete wall have been added in the past month.

Among Azizi Bank's most popular products is the "Qismat" account, which complies with Islamic banking laws by not paying interest and instead rewards customers with generous lottery prizes such as cars, property or cash.

Haidari plans to introduce credit cards and wants Azizi bank to be the first Afghan bank to issue its own credit cards from Kabul in the next two to three months. He also plans to start selling mortgages and to open 15 new branches across the country.

## CONFLICT PROS AND CONS

While insecurity because of the conflict in Afghanistan is still the biggest barrier to healthy profits for private banks, it does also bring opportunity, in the form of foreign companies and organizations running aid programs and contracts.

Seventeen banks now operate in Afghanistan, but the only major global bank with a permanent office there is Standard Chartered Bank (SCB). It primarily caters for foreign companies and international aid organizations.

For Standard Chartered, being in Afghanistan, with all the high level security and financial risk it entails, is an opportunity to develop the country's banking system and meet the demands of a growing number of foreign organizations.

"We play a key role in the re-development of the nation. Our strong relationship with leading international aid agencies and multi-lateral funding agencies globally enables us to play a more meaningful role in Afghanistan," Ammar Husain, head of Standard Chartered's office in Kabul said.

So far SCB makes a modest profit in Afghanistan, although Husain would not say how much or give forecasts for next year. It has a pool of about 16,000 customers, including Afghan nationals via payroll accounts for foreign companies and organizations.

Despite insecurity, Husain is upbeat about the growth of domestic banks such as Azizi Bank.

"We have seen a strong move toward achieving capital adequacy, liquidity and prudential norms of management, quite comparable with international standards."

Azizi bank's Haidari laments that foreigners are still reluctant to entrust large sums to Afghan banks.

"It is a pity Western organizations which send huge sums to their agents in Afghanistan do not use Afghan banks to deposit the money ... it could create so many jobs," Haidari

said, referring to Western government aid providers.

"There is no risk involved in putting your money in an American or global bank -- but there is also little reward," he said, adding that large lump deposits would enable his bank to provide bigger loans to qualified Afghan businessmen, who will in turn create jobs for Afghans.