

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

Afghanistan This Week

Report Number: 126

Week 26 June-2 July 2010

July, 3, 2010

Mohammad Amin

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Political Headlines Summary

Karzai picks 7 nominees to fill cabinet

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NATO supply tankers, movie shop blown up

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Afghan drug benefits outsiders: Karzai

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Two tribal elders shot dead in Helmand

LASHKARGAH (PAN): Two tribal elders have been killed in two separate incidents of violence in southern Helmand province, officials said on Saturday.

'Two Afghan companies plead guilty to bribe'

WASHINGTON(PAN): Two Afghan transportation companies on Friday pleaded guilty before a US court of having bribed US officials to bag contract, agreeing to pay \$4.4 million fines.

Three NATO soldiers die in bombings

KABUL (PAN): Three NATO soldiers were killed in separate explosions in the increasingly volatile eastern and southern regions of Afghanistan, the alliance said Sunday.

Insurgents hit US vehicle with rocket in Parwan

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Denmark pledges \$60m for Afghan education boost

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US hands over Tarakhil power plant to Afghan govt

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U.S. lawmaker to withhold \$3.9 billion in Afghan aid over corruption problems

The chairman of a key House subcommittee said Monday that she would strip \$3.9 billion in aid for Afghanistan from next year's spending bill over concerns about rampant graft in the

country and alleged efforts by President Hamid Karzai's government to derail corruption probes.

Four Norwegians among five NATO soldiers killed

KABUL (PAN): Four Norwegians among five NATO soldiers were killed in two separate incidents in Afghanistan, NATO and the Norwegian govt said on Monday.

MPs approve Karzai's five cabinet picks

KABUL (PAN): The Lower House of the parliament on Monday approved five of the seven nominees of President Hamid Karzai for cabinet posts, allowing him to have a relatively functioning government ahead of July 20 Kabul Conference.

Help Afghanistan help itself to mine mineral resources

The recent discovery of nearly \$1 trillion in minerals in Afghanistan by the US Defence Department was neither "recent" nor a "discovery".

Afghan forces less capable than portrayed: US

WASHINGTON (PAN): The capabilities of the Afghan security forces is far less than that being portrayed by the Pentagon, an official audit report said Tuesday.

Death toll of NATO troops hits 100 in June

KABUL (PAN): The death of foreign troops has hit the record toll of 100 in June, the deadliest month since beginning of the war in Afghanistan, according to a tally.

AG says Eikenberry asked him to resign

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan's Attorney General, Muhammad Ishaq Alako, on Tuesday accused US ambassador Karl Eikenberry of threatening him to either arrest an Afghan official accused of embezzlement or resign.

US welcomes Chinese investment in Afghanistan

WASHINGTON (PAN): The US government on Tuesday said it has no objection to the Chinese investment in Afghanistan, adding it welcomes any private sector investment into this country which is trying to rebuild its economy.

Karzai appoints new army chief

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai has appointed Lt. Gen. Sher Muhammad Karimi as the Chief of Army Staff, a day after the parliament approved the former army chief as the Interior Minister, the Defence Ministry said on Wednesday.

Foreign firms stealing Afghan money: minister

KABUL (PAN): Finance Minister Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal on Wednesday alleged more than \$4.2 billion out of \$20 billion provided in foreign aid over the past three years has been illegally transferred out of Afghanistan.

ANA casualties rose by 75pc: official

KABUL (PAN): The defence ministry on Wednesday announced a 75 per cent increase in casualties inflicted on Afghan National Army soldiers over the past two months.

Pak asked for Farahi's safe recovery

KABUL (PAN): Afghan foreign minister has asked Pakistani authorities to ensure safe recovery of Afghan diplomat Abdul Khaliq Farahi, who was kidnapped by Pakistani Taliban in Peshawar in September 2008, an official said Wednesday.

UN concerned about Afghanistan

The UN secretary-general's special envoy to Afghanistan has expressed his deep concerns over deteriorating security situation in the war-torn country.

No agreement with Pakistan to train Afghan troops

KABUL (PAN): The Ministry of Defence (MoD) on Thursday rejected a report published in an influential US newspaper that said President Karzai has agreed to send a group of military officers to Pakistan for training.

Three foreigners among 11 die in Kunduz NGO attack

KUNDUZ CITY (PAN): six suicide bombers and three foreigners were among 11 killed as Taliban militants stormed an American NGO in the northern Afghan city of Kunduz on Friday, officials said.

Geo-Strategic Headlines Summary

Karzai meets Mullen; praises Obama's choice

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai, welcoming the appointment of David Petraeus as NATO top commander in Afghanistan, on Saturday hoped the security plans of international community would not be derailed by the change in leadership.

Kabul asked to ensure Afghan soil not used against Balochistan

ISLAMABAD (PAN): In an apparent reference to India's alleged role in fanning insurgency in Balochistan, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has asked Afghanistan to ensure that its territory is not used by any other country to destabilise Pakistan.

Reasons to be hopeful about U.S. strategy in Afghanistan

Defense Secretary Robert Gates warned on Sunday about a national rush to judgment that the Afghanistan war is somehow failing and that the overall narrative about the war has become too negative. That was practically an era ago regarding Afghanistan, but Gates is still right.

With the drama over Wednesday's change of command receding, it is time to refocus on policy.

Afghanistan's Dangerous New Wealth

Afghanistan has struck gold. And iron. And copper, cobalt, and lithium. A U.S. survey discovered almost \$1 trillion of mineral deposits there, reports The New York Times. But it may not be good news.

CIA chief warns of long road ahead in Afghanistan

WASHINGTON — The war in Afghanistan will be tougher and longer than expected despite a string of successes against Al-Qaeda that has weakened Osama bin Laden's terror network, the CIA chief warned Sunday.

Pakistan seeks to exploit U.S. command vacuum

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan is looking to exploit a shake-up in the U.S. command in Afghanistan to bolster its allies within the Taliban and increase its influence over a future Kabul government, analysts say.

'Exit plan means disappointment to the mission'

KABUL (PAN): The decisions of some ISAF nations to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan in the next five years indicate their despair in the stalemated NATO-led mission, Afghan analysts say.

A Winnable War

Success in Afghanistan is possible. The policy that President Obama announced in December and firmly reiterated last week is sound. So is the strategy that General Stanley McChrystal devised last summer and has been implementing this year. There have been setbacks and

'No change in Afghan war strategy'

Press TV: Newly appointed Afghan war commander General David Petraeus says there will be no change in the application of the rules of engagement in the US led war.

Who's driving the policy in Afghanistan?

From the beginning, the Obama administration has had too many chiefs running its war effort in Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan, and too many voices explaining it.

Bold move to save Afghanistan: Bring back a king

If the United States values stability more than democracy, it will recognize that restoring Afghanistan's constitutional monarchy is the only thing that will prevent Taliban rule and victory in the war.

Pentagon sees distrust between India, Pakistan on Afghanistan

WASHINGTON (PAN): A top Pentagon official on Thursday acknowledged there is distrust between India and Pakistan on Afghanistan because of historical reasons.

US strategy in Afghanistan 'not working'

Press TV: A renowned French Army general has called for a review of the US strategy in war-torn Afghanistan, saying the current strategy is 'not working.'

Social Headlines Summary

Private education key to pass university entrance test

KABUL (PAN): A number of students complain that only those of their colleagues were qualifying competitive examinations who attend private courses before the examination .

Rally demands Dari, Pashto treated equally in public sector

KABUL (PAN): A huge demonstration attended by more than one thousand people, mostly students, in Kabul on Monday asked the government to ensure that the two official languages, Pashto and Dari, are treated equally in the public sector.

Economical Headlines Summary

200 firms interested in Afghan mining sector

KABUL (PAN): Nearly 200 international firms have shown their interest to invest in Afghanistan's mines, especially in the Hajigak iron ore deposit, said the mines minister on Wednesday.

Afghanistan to tender biggest iron deposit

KABUL - Afghan minister for Mines Waheedullah Shahrani on Wednesday said that the government plans to tender its biggest iron deposit next September in efforts to attract foreign investments.

Political Headlines

Karzai picks 7 nominees to fill cabinet

Abasin Zaheer - Jun 26, 2010 - 20:04

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai on Saturday submitted a list of seven nominee ministers to fill his cabinet posts seven months after taking office last November.

The list of nominees, including two ministers who failed to gain the parliament's approval earlier this year, was submitted to the Lower House of parliament on Saturday for approval. Karzai picked up the Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Bismillah Muhammadi, as the Minister of Interior and a former election official, Daud Ali Najafi, who was accused of helping the president get reelected, as the minister of Transport and Aviation.

The nominee ministers are expected to show up in person in the parliament before the MPs decide to begin the voting process.

Karzai has still to announce five more nominees to have a functioning cabinet, including choices for the ministries of Public Health and Water and Energy, whose former nominee, Ismael Khan, Karzai's key ally, failed to get the lower house's approval.

The list of the nominees includes;

- 1- Gen. Bismullah Muhammdai, Nominee Minister of Interior
- 2- Sarwar Danish, Nominee Minister of Higher Education
- 3- Anwar al Haq Ahadi, Nominee Minister of Commerce and Industries
- 4- Daud Ali Najafi, Nominee Minister of Transport and Aviation
- 5- Abdul Qudus Hamidi, Nominee Minister of Public Works
- 6- Jamahir Anwari, Nominee Minister of Refugees
- 7- Asadullah Khalid, Nominee Minister of Borders and Tribal Affairs

NATO supply tankers, movie shop blown up

Abdul Moeed Hashmi - Jun 26, 2010 - 18:13

JALALABAD (PAN): Two NATO supplying fuel tankers were sat afire on Saturday, while a CD shop was blown up in the eastern province of Nangarhar, officials said.

Taliban fighters attacked the fuel tankers at 6:30am on Jalalabad-Torkham Highway in the Ghanikhel district, said Nangarhar governor's spokesman, Ahmad Zia Abulzai.

He said one tanker was ablaze in the attack; however an eyewitness, Abdullah, said two fuel tankers were torched.

Separately, explosive fitted near a CDs' shop was detonated Friday night in Talashi square in Jalalabad city, the provincial capital.

The shop was completely destroyed and nearby shops were partially damaged as the bomb went off at about 10pm, Abdulzai said.

"I closed my shop on the honour of Friday, but at 10pm I informed that my shop was blow up," owner of the shop, Safiullah, said.

He lost thousands of CDs and tape cassettes at a cost of 500,000 afghanis, he said. He had no enmity with anyone.

Afghan drug benefits outsiders: Karzai

Baseer Ahmad & Frozan Rahmani - Jun 26, 2010 - 21:59

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai on Saturday called on international community to show sincerity in fighting the menace of drug trafficking that benefited international drug

traffickers and dealers, who encouraged Afghans to grow poppy.

"Heftier profits are being generated from drug business outside of Afghanistan by international drug traffickers and dealers," Karzai told a gathering marking the World Anti-Narcotics Day in Kabul.

"The current situation Afghanistan is passing through is brought by outsiders, who are being benefited from its trade which earns a bad name to us," Karzai told participants of the programme arranged under the aegis of counter-narcotics ministry at the Ammani High School near the Presidential Palace.

The president said only three percent of Afghan smugglers benefited from the lucrative business, while the rest of the income amounting to billions of dollars received by smugglers outside the country. He said the only way to deal with the phenomenon was to stop other countries from their involvement in drug trade in Afghanistan.

"The Afghan government has been struggling to eradicate the poppy through launching poppy eradication campaigns on the cost of lives of our police, army and ordinary people," Karzai added.

"If we are unable to protect our borders, why other countries who blame us are not doing the same and if poppy is produced here how it is sold in your countries," Karzai said, without specifically naming a country.

The World Anti-Narcotics Day is being celebrated across the world on June 26 to fight with the menace of drug addiction and drug trafficking. For the last few years, drug addiction has emerged as a serious threat to the world.

"Although Afghanistan is on the top of countries producing poppy, a 50 percent decrease is recorded in produce of the illicit crop this year," said the Minister for Counter Narcotics, Zarar Ahmad Muqbil.

"Poppy crops were destroyed in 22 provinces and 3,500 drug smugglers were arrested this year, serving a big blow to the drug mafia in Afghanistan," he added.

Two tribal elders shot dead in Helmand

Zainullah Stanikzai - Jun 26, 2010 - 17:26

LASHKARGAH (PAN): Two tribal elders have been killed in two separate incidents of violence in southern Helmand province, officials said on Saturday.

Gunmen riding a motorcycle shot dead a tribal elder named Ibrahim Khan in the Grishk district, said police spokesman, Lt. Mahmud Norzai. Blaming the Taliban for killing the elder, Norzai said the elder was on his way home from a nearby mosque when the gunmen opened fire at him.

Separately, another tribal elder was killed on Friday evening in Nad Ali district.

The elder from the Norzai tribe, Haji Khair Muhammad, was killed by foreign soldiers during a clash with insurgents in the Gharbi area of the district, said a district community council member, Haji Anwar.

"There was gun a gun-battle between Taliban and NATO soldiers and as my father went out of home, he was shot dead by British soldiers," said the eldest son, Dost Muhammad.

NATO's media office in the south expressed their unawareness about the incident.

Three days ago, a tribal elder Abdul Aziz was killed in a bomb blast in Nad Ali district.

'Two Afghan companies plead guilty to bribe'

Lalit K Jha - Jun 26, 2010 - 15:06

WASHINGTON(PAN): Two Afghan transportation companies on Friday pleaded guilty before a US court of having bribed US officials to bag contract, agreeing to pay \$4.4 million fines.

In a plea agreement submitted before a Virginia court, the Afghan International Trucking (AIT) agreed to pay \$3.36 million in criminal fines, while the Afghan Trade Transportation (ATT) said it would pay \$1.04 million in criminal fines.

According to court documents, AIT made corrupt payments of more than \$120,000 to military officials in Afghanistan, including James Paul Clifton, Ana Chavez and a third, unnamed individual. ATT made corrupt payments totaling more than \$30,000 to Clifton . According to the statement of facts, employees for AIT started offering money to officials in the transportation office beginning in 2004. At one point, AIT paid Chavez with a candy box stuffed with \$70,000 .

According to court documents, in mid-2008, AIT was paying Clifton \$20,000 a month for preferable treatment. In May 2008, ATT entered into a similar illegal agreement with Clifton by which ATT paid bribes of \$15,000 a month in exchange for Clifton assigning ATT an additional day of trucking service a month.

Clifton pleaded guilty in August 2009 to one count of bribery for accepting bribes from AIT and ATT in exchange for providing them with preferential treatment. In October 2009, Chavez pleaded guilty to one count of bribery and one count of money laundering for her involvement in an identical scheme with AIT

Three NATO soldiers die in bombings

Pajhwok Report - Jun 27, 2010 - 16:36

KABUL (PAN): Three NATO soldiers were killed in separate explosions in the increasingly volatile eastern and southern regions of Afghanistan, the alliance said Sunday.

Two servicemembers were killed Saturday in two roadside bomb blasts in eastern Afghanistan, bordering Pakistan, NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said in statement.

The third soldier was killed in the same day in a similar incident in southern Afghanistan, a hotbed of Taliban-led insurgency, according to a different ISAF statement.

NATO forces neither disclosed the nationality of the soldiers nor the exact locations of the blasts in line with their policy.

Meanwhile, Canadian officials said two Canadian Army medics were killed in southern Kandahar province as their vehicle struck a roadside bomb on Saturday.

Taliban have stepped up the use of roadside bombs across the country. A UN report released recently indicted a 94 per cent increase in the use of homemade devices what military calls improvised explosives devices in the first quarter of this year in comparison to the same period last year.

Insurgents hit US vehicle with rocket in Parwan

Farid Tanha - Jun 27, 2010 - 16:26

CHARIKAR (PAN): Insurgents hit a US vehicle on patrol with a rocket in the central province of Parwan late Saturday night, officials said on Sunday.

The incident happened in the Kaji Haji Qodus village on the outskirts of Charikar, the provincial capital, 11:30pm, said police chief, Abdul Rahman Syedkheli. The vehicle caught fire after being hit by the rocket, but no one was killed or wounded, he added.

The spokesman for the governor, Naaz Sarwar Roshna Khalid, also confirmed the attack. Jan Aqa, a resident of the area, said there was a clash between the foreign troops and militants, who torched a vehicle of the troops. He said the clash lasted 30 minutes. The resident said people told him that three American soldiers had been killed in the attack. Another resident of the Dulan village said he was told by a policeman that three soldiers were killed.

NATO has issued no statement as yet about the incident that was claimed by both Hizb-i-Islami and Taliban.

Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said their fighters torched a vehicle of US troops and damaged three others. He also claimed three foreign soldiers were killed and four others were injured in the overnight attack.

However, a HIA spokesman, Qari Mansur, said they set ablaze two vehicles of foreign troops, killing all the soldiers aboard the vehicles.

Denmark pledges \$60m for Afghan education boost

Rahmatullah Afghan - Jun 27, 2010 - 21:59

KABUL (PAN): The Danish government pledged on Sunday to provide a major assistance of \$60 million to the Ministry of Education to boost the quality of education in the country. In an agreement signed between the Afghan Minister for Education Ghulam Farouq Wardak and Denmark's ambassador to Afghanistan Anders Carste Damsgaard, the Danish envoy the amount would be spent on purchase of school textbooks, publishing of books and improving the quality of education across the country.

Speaking to reporters, minister Wardak said Denmark would provide \$21 million in the first year, \$19.5 million in the second year and as much amount in the third phase of the three-year contract.

Denmark had donated \$150 million to the Afghan government to improve the education sector over the past seven years.

US hands over Tarakhil power plant to Afghan govt

Abdul Qadir Siddique - Jun 27, 2010 - 21:55

KABUL (PAN): The government of United States on Sunday officially handed over the 105-megawatt Tarakhil power plant to the Afghan government at a ceremony here on Sunday.

The ceremony was also attended by US Ambassador to Kabul Karl W. Eikenberry, USAID Mission Director Earl Gast, acting energy and water minister Muhammad Ismail Khan, and chief executive officer of Da Breshna Afghanistan Sherkat (DABS) Dr. Jalil Shams.

The first block of six generators at the Tarakhil was brought online August 5, 2009 and the facility was fully completed on May 31, 2010.

Tarakhil now has the capacity to provide electricity for up to 600,000 residents in Kabul connected to the North East Power System (NEPS).

I want to thank the international community, especially the United States, said Ismail Khan,

who recalled three years ago Kabul only had two or three hours of electricity a few nights a week. "But today we have electricity 24 hours per day, said Khan.

The US government is also coordinating with DABS, the Afghan national utility authority, to build a national load center and the Tarakhil Training Center on the grounds of the facility.

The load center will help regulate Kabuls electricity more efficiently, and the training center will be used to provide technical training to DABS employees.

We will continue this program to develop DABS staff abilities to manage, operate, and maintain this impressive plant, said Ambassador Eikenberry. During his speech, Eikenberry pointed to a group of DABS employees in the crowd exclaiming, Here is the future of Afghanistan. After the official signing and a ribbon cutting, Eikenberry and a large crowd toured powerhouse-III with DABS employees, who explained the intricate generator systems. The United States will continue to look for opportunities to invest with you in the power sector and in other areas that support social and economic growth, said Eikenberry. The opportunities are great, as is our commitment to Afghanistans development.

Ismail Khan told reporters that the electricity would be used during emergency situation in Kabul.

"We can use the electricity anytime we faced with shortage of electricity we import from foreign countries or produce inside the country," he said. However, he did not mention the tariff.

U.S. lawmaker to withhold \$3.9 billion in Afghan aid over corruption problems

The Washington Post

06/28/2010

By Greg Miller

The chairman of a key House subcommittee said Monday that she would strip \$3.9 billion in aid for Afghanistan from next year's spending bill over concerns about rampant graft in the country and alleged efforts by President Hamid Karzai's government to derail corruption probes.

Rep. Nita M. Lowey (D-N.Y.), chairman of the House appropriations subcommittee that oversees the State Department's budget, said the money would be withheld until she has "confidence that U.S. taxpayer money is not being abused to line the pockets of corrupt Afghan government officials, drug lords and terrorists."

Lowey also announced that the panel would begin holding hearings next month on corruption problems in Afghanistan.

Lowey was responding in part to a report in The Washington Post on Monday that senior officials in Afghanistan have repeatedly blocked corruption investigations of individuals with political connections to Karzai's administration.

In the report, U.S. officials said that Afghan prosecutors and investigators have in recent months been ordered to cross names off case files, prevent senior officials from being placed under arrest and disregard evidence against executives of a financial firm suspected of helping elite Afghans move vast sums of money to overseas accounts.

"The alleged shipment of billions in donor funds out of Afghanistan and allegations of Afghan government insiders impeding corruption investigations are outrageous," Lowey said in a written statement. She added that the government "must demonstrate that corruption is being aggressively investigated and prosecuted."

Lowey's move would block money used by the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development to fund projects, such as roads and power plants, designed to bolster Afghanistan's beleaguered economy and infrastructure.

The restriction would not affect money for military operations or humanitarian relief efforts, such as assistance to refugees.

The subcommittee is scheduled to meet Wednesday to discuss the spending plan for the coming year. The money could be reinserted before Oct. 1, when the new fiscal year begins.

Four Norwegians among five NATO soldiers killed

Javed Hamim Kakar - Jun 28, 2010 - 19:39

KABUL (PAN): Four Norwegians among five NATO soldiers were killed in two separate incidents in Afghanistan, NATO and the Norwegian govt said on Monday.

The Norwegian soldiers were killed Sunday as their vehicle struck a roadside bomb in the relatively stable northern Faryab province, bordering Turkmenistan, the Norwegian Defence Ministry said.

The fifth soldier was killed following an insurgent attack in the increasingly volatile southern Afghanistan, NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said in a statement. The ISAF statement neither disclosed the nationality of the soldier nor the exact location of the incident.

The attack on the Norwegian troops was the deadliest since beginning of the war. Norway, leading ISAF's Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Faryab province, has lost its five soldiers over the past eight years.

Nearly 500 Norwegian troops have been stationed in Afghanistan, most of them in the north. Homemade bombs the Taliban's weapon of choice account for most of casualties of foreign troops in the country. A recent UN report said the use of such bombs have increased by 94 per cent in the first quarter of 2010 in comparison to the same period last

MPs approve Karzai's five cabinet picks

Abasin Zaheer - Jun 28, 2010 - 10:33

KABUL (PAN): The Lower House of the parliament on Monday approved five of the seven nominees of President Hamid Karzai for cabinet posts, allowing him to have a relatively functioning government ahead of July 20 Kabul Conference.

Karzai still has to fill seven posts in his 25-member cabinet more than half a year after taking office.

Members of the Lower House approved Karzai's choice for the interior ministry, Gen Bismillah Muhammadi, his army chief and a former top anti-Taliban commander.

Prior to the vote of confidence, the Army Chief of Staff promised a parliament session to halt house searches by foreign troops and vowed reforms in the police force.

Two of the nominee ministers Karzai introduced in his third slate of cabinet nominees on Saturday, Sarwar Danish and Daud Ali Najafi both from one ethnicity were rejected. Danish, a former Justice Minister, who was picked up as the Minister of Higher Education, received 101 votes against his favour and 95 votes in favour.

Najafi, Karzai's choice for the Ministry of Transport and Aviation, was refused by nine votes, receiving 106 votes against his favour and 87 in favour. Najafi, a former top election official, was accused of helping the president get reelected in last year's disputed elections.

Other nominees who were approved include Abdul Qudus Hamidi as Minister for Public Works, who obtained 160 votes the highest number among the five nominees.

The MPs also granted the vote of trust to Jamahir Anwari for the slot of Minister for Refugees and Returnees, who got 140 votes. Asadullah Khalid, Karzai's choice for Ministry of Borders Tribal Affairs, secured his nomination with 120 votes. Anwar-ul Haq Ahdi, who was rejected earlier this year, was approved for the Ministry of Commerce and Industry with 147 votes.

President Karzai submitted the new list of his cabinet choices over the weekend after two time failure to meet deadlines set by lawmakers over the delay in forming a full cabinet.

Kabul will host a major international conference in July where the Afghan ministers would present their proposals for reconstruction projects to international donors.

In January, Karzai presented his initial slate of 24 nominees, but faced an overwhelming rejection by the Lower House, approving only seven of the two dozens. The lawmakers again refused 10 of 17 nominees of Karzai in his second attempt to seat his new cabinet two weeks after the first list.

Help Afghanistan help itself to mine mineral resources

The National

06/29/2010

By M Ashraf Haidari

The recent discovery of nearly \$1 trillion in minerals in Afghanistan by the US Defence Department was neither “recent” nor a “discovery”.

From the days of Afghan shepherds stumbling on gold, emeralds, lapis lazuli and other precious rocks and minerals to the first round of geological surveys of the country by the former Soviet Union, Afghans have known of our immense natural wealth. The disclosure of this wealth, though hardly new, helps Afghanistan attract much needed foreign investment and aid.

While rich in natural resources, it should not be forgotten that Afghanistan is rich in human resources, too. Unlike countries where the “youth bulge” may be a source of socio-economic instability, my generation of Afghans, which represent more than 70 per cent of the population, is at once resilient, enterprising, self-motivated, and eager to learn.

Unfortunately, decades of war have not given Afghanistan a chance to take advantage of both resources to build a productive economy and provide jobs for our energetic population. The result is that some Afghans have inevitably turned to the Taliban to eke out a living while others have joined factional militias merely for food and shelter. Still others have engaged in

opium poppy cultivation to ensure the survival of their families.

It should be remembered, however, that this represents less than 15 per cent of the Afghan people. Nearly 85 per cent work under very harsh conditions to make ends meet. These Afghans overwhelmingly support international presence in Afghanistan and hope that together with the international community, our country can gradually integrate into the global economy and speed Afghanistan's long-term development.

Moreover, President Hamid Karzai and the Afghan people firmly believe that Afghanistan's isolation, as experienced under the extremists' totalitarian rule in the 1990s, is no longer an alternative. Afghans seek a future with democracy and utterly reject extremism, which has no place in Afghan culture or Afghan Islam. This is spelled out in our progressive constitution.

The Afghan government is acutely aware of the daunting task it faces in attempting to meet the basic expectations of our people for peace, justice, and prosperity. We can address these demands only with the help of foreign aid and private investment. Our mineral wealth, as well as the infrastructure required to tap it, are promising ventures for both Afghans and foreign investors.

Next month, the government will host the first International Conference on Afghanistan in Kabul, at which the priorities of our national development strategy will be presented. It will focus on poverty reduction, job creation and sustainable development.

Key to achieving each of these objectives is the extraction and export of Afghanistan's minerals and other natural resources to global markets.

At next month's conference, Afghanistan's ministers of finance and mines will discuss the government's plans to ensure that the institutions and procedures handling foreign aid and investment are transparent and accountable.

Last week, Afghanistan's ministry of mines and industries hosted a gathering in London during which laws governing the natural-resources industry were discussed. In an interview with the BBC, Wahidullah Shahrani, Afghanistan's minister of mines and industries, addressed concerns that a massive influx of investment in Afghan minerals could lead to increased corruption.

"We have improved our legislation, the procedures have been upgraded and we have been getting a tremendous amount of support from our international partners," Mr Shahrani said, adding that all mining contracts will be disclosed to the public in full.

Although bureaucratic bottlenecks sometimes impede business in Afghanistan, investors enjoy one of the best investment climates in the region. China, for example, has won a \$3.5 billion bid to develop Afghanistan's giant Aynak copper mine, while India has invested \$1.3 billion in transportation, health care, education, hydroelectricity and electrical transmission.

Domestic and foreign corporations do not have to compete with government-owned and government-subsidised businesses and can maximise profits in a free and open market. The Afghan Investment Support Agency serves investors as a one-stop shop for licensing and corporate support across the country.

Foreign investors can and must play a major role in helping us tap our natural wealth so we can secure and rebuild our homeland. Afghans are proud of our historical tradition of commerce and cultural exchange, dating back 2000 years to the Silk Road. With each economic opportunity that is fulfilled, the people of Afghanistan move one step closer to reconnecting with our heritage and securing a bright future for our country.

M Ashraf Haidari is deputy chief of mission and political counsellor of the embassy of Afghanistan in Washington

Afghan forces less capable than portrayed: US

Lalit K Jha - Jun 29, 2010 - 16:16

WASHINGTON (PAN): The capabilities of the Afghan security forces is far less than that being portrayed by the Pentagon, an official audit report said Tuesday.

Such a report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) comes at a time when a strong Afghan security forces is considered as a key to the successful withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.

"The unfortunate reality is that there has been no accurate way to determine the operational competence of the Afghan Army and Police because the system used since 2005 to assess their capabilities was unreliable and inconsistent," said Special Inspector General Arnold Fields.

In its 55-page audit report, SIGAR said measurements used in the assessment system have overstated operational capabilities. While the top-rated ANSF units have not indicated a capability to sustain independent operations; ANSF capability reports have included outdated assessment data, it said.

SIGAR acknowledges that the development of self-sufficient Afghan National Security Forces capable of independently providing internal and external security for Afghanistan is central to President Obama's strategy in Afghanistan.

Notably the ISAF Joint Command did not challenge the report and instead acknowledged the flaws in the present system. NATO senior commander, Lt. General David Rodriguez, said the overall picture painted in the report "are accurate" from their perspective.

Meanwhile, General David Petraeus, Commander of the US Central Command, would testify before a Congressional Committee Tuesday morning for his confirmation hearing for top American commander in Afghanistan.

Senator Carl Levin, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, on Monday told reporters that he would press Petraeus on his support for the July 2011 US withdrawals. The latest audit report on real capabilities of Afghan forces is also expected to come up during the hearing.

SIGAR's review identified deficiencies that continue to undermine progress toward developing an independent Afghan security force, including logistics problems, personnel attrition, infrastructure deficiencies, corruption, drug abuse, and illiteracy

Death toll of NATO troops hits 100 in June

Pajhwok Report - Jun 29, 2010 - 18:23

KABUL (PAN): The death of foreign troops has hit the record toll of 100 in June, the deadliest month since beginning of the war in Afghanistan, according to a tally.

Most of the casualties were inflicted by a dramatic increase in use of homemade bombs, or improvised explosive devices (IEDs), by the Taliban. The roadside bombs are easy and deadly weapons largely used by the militant groups to target foreign and Afghan forces. A UN report released earlier this month said the use of IED had risen by 94 percent in the first quarter of this year, compared to the same period in 2009.

The overall number of casualties of foreign troops fighting a mounting Taliban-led insurgency has reached 320 in the first half of this year, according an independent website, icasualties.org. The toll for 2009 was 520.

More than 135,000 foreign troops are stationed in Afghanistan, most of them in the southern region, the hotbed of the nine-year long insurgency .

NATO expects further rise in casualties of its soldiers in the upcoming months as the alliance is stepping up military operations against the Taliban in their untouched strongholds.

AG says Eikenberry asked him to resign

Syed Abbas Sadat - Jun 29, 2010 - 14:04

KABUL (PAN): Afghanistan's Attorney General, Muhammad Ishaq Alako, on Tuesday accused US ambassador Karl Eikenberry of threatening him to either arrest an Afghan official accused of embezzlement or resign.

Speaking at a press conference in Kabul, Alako said Eikenberry asked him to arrest Rafiullah, a private bank official, an accused of massive embezzlement during the last Haj operations in connivance with former Haj and Auqaf minister Siddique Chakari.

"The ambassador has no authority to warn me," the AG said, adding Eikenberry's threat was against the diplomatic norms. The US embassy in Kabul in a statement said it was Eikenberry's personal opinion.

Alako also rejected a recent report published in Washington Post accusing the Attorney General's Office (AGO) of 'delaying investigation against high-ranking graft-tainted officials. The report said Alako receives dictations from President Hamid Karzai in conducting his job. The AG rejected the allegations as baseless, saying the AGO was an independent body and it exercised its activities without any interruption from anybody, including the president. He said the AGO had to follow rules and regulations which delayed the process of investigation into dossiers.

Alako said he had asked the Interpol again and again to arrest Chakari and former chief of Da Ariana Afghan Airlines, Nadir Artash, but no action had so far been taken in this regard.

US welcomes Chinese investment in Afghanistan

Lalit K Jha - Jun 30, 2010 - 10:34

WASHINGTON (PAN): The US government on Tuesday said it has no objection to the Chinese investment in Afghanistan, adding it welcomes any private sector investment into this country which is trying to rebuild its economy.

The US encourages international community to take an interest in economic development of Afghanistan, the State Department Acting Deputy Spokesman, Gordon Duguid, told reporters.

He said the US is trying to develop a viable market economy and bring in private investment in Afghanistan .

The comment comes after a US survey has shown that Afghanistan's mineral deposits worth 1 trillion dollars .

When specifically asked about the massive Chinese investment in the Afghanistans mining sector, the spokesperson said it was a good thing.

China's Metallurgical Group, a Chinese state-owned company, was awarded a \$ 3 billion contract in 2007 to exploit the Aynak copper mine in Logar province, north of Kabul.

"It can be a good thing. As a matter of fact, we encourage all of the international community to take an interest in the economic development of Afghanistan," he said.

Working with its coalition partners and other interested parties, the US is trying to establish a market economy, a viable market economy, in Afghanistan. "This is one way to wean people from illicit activities and also to fight the ideology of the terrorists," he observed.

"o investment in the private sector in Afghanistan is a good thing as long as it is done, of course, according with Afghan laws and free and fair competition rules that much of the world respects," Duguid said.

Karzai appoints new army chief

Khwaja Basir Ahmad - Jun 30, 2010 - 20:45

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai has appointed Lt. Gen. Sher Muhammad Karimi as the Chief of Army Staff, a day after the parliament approved the former army chief as the Interior Minister, the Defence Ministry said on Wednesday.

In a presidential decree, Lt. Gen. Mohammad Ikram, has been appointed as deputy to the Chief of Staff, the statement noted.

Karzai also picked up Anayatullah Nazari, former minister of refugees, as the first deputy to the Minister of Defence and Maj. Gen. Murad Ali Murad, Army Corp Commander in northern Afghanistan, as the commander of Ground Force of Afghan National Army (ANA), the Defence Ministry said.

The reshuffling in the leadership of the army and defence ministry occurs after former Chief of Army Staff, Gen Bismillah Muhammadi, was approved as the ministry of interior by the Lower House of the parliament.

Foreign firms stealing Afghan money: minister

Zainab Muhammadi - Jun 30, 2010 - 11:41

KABUL (PAN): Finance Minister Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal on Wednesday alleged more than \$4.2 billion out of \$20 billion provided in foreign aid over the past three years has been illegally transferred out of Afghanistan.

Speaking at a press conference in this capital city, he said roughly \$20 billion were provided to Afghanistan over the past three years for development.

He said the Afghan government spent one billion out of the total amount and the rest spent by donor agencies and international firms themselves. "So, how much do you think Afghanistan can steal from that amount," he told reporters.

Zakhiwal said the 'stolen money' was transferred back to the donor countries and organisations through Kabul airport.

"This amount of money is moved out of the country only through Kabul airport, we dont know how much is smuggled via land or other airports."

International companies that have directly taken projects from international donors had only spent 30 percent of the projects money in Afghanistans construction, he said.

He asked the international community to launch an enquiry into the money spent both by Afghan government and the international firms.

"What really disappoints is that some western media outlets and politicians accuse Afghan government of corruption and label us one of the most corrupt nations," Zakhilwal remarked. "The money, international community wastes here, is also blamed on Afghan government," he said.

About the US Congresswoman Nita Lowey's decision of blocking US civilian aid to Afghanistan, the finance minister said he was not agree with her opinion.

"How much you think Afghanistan government can steal from the one billion dollars it spent over the past three years," Zakhilwal asked Lowey.

Announcing oversight hearings on corruption in Afghanistan, Lowey said she is removing funding for Afghanistan beyond humanitarian aid from her 2011 bill scheduled for markup this week

The finance minister blamed the loss of money on contracts granted to big international contractors by donor countries and organisations. He said the Afghan government was not taken into account in granting the contracts.

He said most of the contracts were about procurement of security firms which are exempted from tax to the Afghan government based on an agreement with NATO since 2002.

"The agreement is unfair and there should changes to it," Zakhilwal said, but gave no further details.

ANA casualties rose by 75pc: official

Pajhwok Report - Jun 30, 2010 - 21:06

KABUL (PAN): The defence ministry on Wednesday announced a 75 per cent increase in casualties inflicted on Afghan National Army soldiers over the past two months.

Talking to journalists, General Zahir Azimi, the ministry spokesman, said most of the casualties were caused by the increasing roadside bomb explosions, a device widely used by the Taliban.

He said 37 ANA soldiers had been killed and 122 others wounded in the past two months.

ISAF spokesman, Josef Blonz said 83 insurgents have been killed in an operation in the Panjwae district of southern Kandahar province. However, he did not say when the operation was launched.

Meanwhile, six suspects allegedly involved in planning suicide attacks in southeastern Khost province have been arrested, the intelligence service said.

In a statement, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), said the group was also responsible for several criminal activities in the province. The arrested men had confessed to their crimes, the statement concluded, without mentioning the time of the arrest.

Pak asked for Farahi's safe recovery

Sayed Abbas Sadat - Jun 30, 2010 - 22:24

KABUL (PAN): Afghan foreign minister has asked Pakistani authorities to ensure safe recovery of Afghan diplomat Abdul Khaliq Farahi, who was kidnapped by Pakistani Taliban in Peshawar in September 2008, an official said Wednesday.

The call was made by Dr Zalmay Rassoul who had returned from a two-day official visit to

the neighbouring country.

During his visit, Rassoul met with high ranking Pakistani officials including President Asif Ali Zardari, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and his Pakistani counterpart Shah Mehmood Qureshi.

The foreign minister demanded Pakistani officials to intensify their efforts for the release of Farahi, said a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ahmad Zahir Faqiri.

Speaking at a press conference here on Wednesday, Faqiri said Pakistan voiced its continued support to the peace efforts initiated by the Afghan government and called the peace advisory jirga a giant stride towards achieving peace in Afghanistan.

Both the sides agreed to work together to ward off the existing misunderstandings between the two neighbouring countries.

He said Pakistan has clarified that Islamabad would not interfere in Kabul's internal issues and would lend all support to the Afghan reconciliation efforts.

He said both the countries agreed to work together to further strengthen cooperation in the fields of intelligence sharing, defence, trade, economic development, education and culture.

Pakistan offered to train the Afghan National Army, National Police and civil bureaucracy. Faqiri said they noted significant progress on the finalisation of the draft for New Transit Trade Agreement.

Abdul Khaliq Farahi was kidnapped in Peshawar in September 2008 before he was due to take up his post as ambassador to Islamabad.

UN concerned about Afghanistan

Thu, 01 Jul 2010 13:29:13 GMT

The UN secretary-general's special envoy to Afghanistan has expressed his deep concerns over deteriorating security situation in the war-torn country.

Staffan de Mistura, the head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), told the UN Security Council that the situation in Afghanistan remains fragile.

"This is indeed a crucial year in Afghanistan," de Mistura said.

The UN envoy noted that insecurity remained a major challenge for Afghans in the coming months.

"It is a year in which we are all trying, together with the Afghan authorities and the Afghan people, to reach a form of stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan," he added.

Mistura's remarks come as senior US officials have warned of a tough fight in the coming months in the war-weary country.

He laid three immediate objectives for the international community to improve situation in Afghanistan.

Preparation for the upcoming parliamentary elections, internal dialogue among Afghan parties and regional engagement in order to find the solution to the conflict, a Press TV correspondent reported from the UN headquarters in New York.

The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) chief, Leon Panetta, recently admitted that the Afghan war has proven to be much harder and longer than anticipated. He also alluded to serious problems in the US-led war, acknowledging that the Taliban are gaining an upper hand in the battle.

The US-led invasion of Afghanistan was launched with the official objective of curbing militancy and bringing peace and stability to the country. Nine years on, however, US and Afghan officials admit the country remains unstable as civilians continue to pay the heaviest price.

No agreement with Pakistan to train Afghan troops

Haseeb Noori - Jul 1, 2010 - 16:52

KABUL (PAN): The Ministry of Defence (MoD) on Thursday rejected a report published in an influential US newspaper that said President Karzai has agreed to send a group of military officers to Pakistan for training.

"There has been no agreement with Pakistan to train Afghan officers," a statement issued from the MoD quoted General Zahir Azimi, the ministry spokesman, as saying.

The Washington Post in its report said the move was a victory for Pakistan, which seeks a major role in Afghanistan as officials in both countries become increasingly convinced that the US war effort there is faltering.

Quoting unnamed Afghan officials, the paper said that Karzai has begun to see Pakistan as a necessary ally in ending the war through negotiation with the Taliban or on the battlefield. The previously unpublicised training would involve only a small group of officers, variously described as between a handful and a few dozen, but it has enormous symbolic importance as the first tangible outcome of talks between Karzai and Pakistan's military and intelligence chiefs that began in May, it reported.

However, the Afghan defence ministry said no Afghan soldiers or officers had so far been sent to Pakistan over the last few years for training.

At a news conference on Wednesday, Azimi said the numbers of Afghan National Army soldiers have reached 134,000 and it is expected the numbers would be increased to 240,000 next year.

Three foreigners among 11 die in Kunduz NGO attack

Wahidullah - Jul 2, 2010 - 16:02

KUNDUZ CITY (PAN): six suicide bombers and three foreigners were among 11 killed as Taliban militants stormed an American NGO in the northern Afghan city of Kunduz on Friday, officials said.

The bombers launched a predawn militant operation on the US Development Alternatives Inc (DAI) office in heart of the city, Kunduz Governor Mohammad Omar told Pajhwok Afghan News.

One bomber detonated his explosive-laden vehicle at the gate of the NGO in an attempt to pave the way for other fighters, equipped with light and heavy weapons, to infiltrate the compound, Omar added.

Two Afghan security guards and three foreign civilians were also killed in the gunfire, according to the governor.

At least 20 people, including women and children, have been injured in the explosion and gunfire. The wounded people were taken to hospitals. Some of the injured men, including foreign nationals, were evacuated to the German-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in the province, said a doctor at Kunduz Public Hospital.

NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops were called for support as the militants were fighting the security guards in the DAI compound.

A purported Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said a group of suicide bombers attacked a base of US Special Forces in Kunduz, adding to have killed a number of American soldiers, a claim which could not be immediately verified.

The attack comes a day after a similar militant operation on Jalalabad airport in eastern Afghanistan.

The Taliban have intensified the use of such complicated attacks on foreign and Afghan troops across the country as a part of a nationwide spring offensive.

Geo-Strategic Headlines

Karzai meets Mullen; praises Obama's choice

Rahmatullah Afghan - Jun 26, 2010 - 14:05

KABUL (PAN): President Hamid Karzai, welcoming the appointment of David Petraeus as NATO top commander in Afghanistan, on Saturday hoped the security plans of international community would not be derailed by the change in leadership.

US Central Command Chief David Petraeus on Wednesday was named by US President Barack Obama to replace sacked Gen. Stanley McChrystal as the top US commander in Afghanistan.

At a meeting with US military Chief Adm. Mike Mullen, who arrived here on Saturday, Karzai praised the services of McChrystal, calling him a very good military commander, who helped reduced civilians casualties by strictly banning nighttime raids during his mission. Karzai said McChrystal had increased cooperation between Afghan and foreign soldiers and played a key role in strengthening and training Afghan security forces to enable them to take lead in operations.

The Afghan leader hailing his US counterpart's choice said Petraeus was an experienced commander with good information on Afghanistan.

For his part, Mullen assured the change in military leadership would have no effect on the US strategy in Afghanistan.

Karzai and Mullen also insisted counterinsurgency efforts should be intensified to secure a lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan, a country devastated by decades of strife.

They agreed that there was a great need of taking strong and realistic steps for increased coordination between the Afghan government and the international community to achieve the goal of peace and stability.

Later Saturday, Mullen flew to Islamabad to meet with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari. Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, Pakistan's army chief, and US Ambassador to Pakistan Anne W. Patterson also attended the meeting, which dealt with bilateral relations, the fight against militants, and regional security, a Pakistani government press release said.

Kabul asked to ensure Afghan soil not used against Balochistan

Pakhtun Khan Shinwari - Jun 26, 2010 - 14:04

ISLAMABAD (PAN): In an apparent reference to India's alleged role in fanning insurgency in Balochistan, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani has asked Afghanistan to ensure that its territory is not used by any other country to destabilise Pakistan.

Talking to Afghan foreign minister Dr Zalmay Rassoul at the Prime Minister House, in Islamabad, Gilani said both countries must work together to ward off the existing misunderstandings between the two neighbouring countries.

During his two-day visit, Rassoul also met President Asif Ali Zardari, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Pakistan's army chief Gen. Ashfaq Pervez Kayani.

While clarifying that Islamabad would not interfere in Kabul's internal issues, Gilani said he would lend all support to the Afghan reconciliation efforts.

Gilani expressed satisfaction on the outcome of foreign ministerial level meetings between Pakistan and Afghanistan, his office said in a statement. The PM reaffirmed his governments

position of strict neutrality and non-interference in Afghanistans internal affairs, it said. Pakistan has consistently supported the Afghan-led process of reconciliation and integration as its neighbour, sharing culture, values and traditions, Gilani said.

The Prime Minister said Pakistan has been consistently calling for installation of Biometric System and increase in the number of posts to check cross border movement of undesirable elements from either side. He hoped the Afghan government will be able to give this proposal due consideration.

The Prime Minister underscored the need for both countries to work together to further strengthen cooperation in the fields of intelligence sharing, defence, trade, economic development, education and culture.

He reiterated Pakistans offer of training the Afghan National Army, National Police and civil bureaucracy and recalled that Pakistan had doubled the number of scholarships for the Afghan students from this year.

He also mentioned the US\$ 1.5 billion Pakistan-Afghanistan bilateral trade and called for concerted efforts for meeting the target of raising trade volume to US\$ 5 billion by year 2015. He noted that the two countries had made significant progress on finalization of the draft for New Transit Trade Agreement and hoped that Afghanistans Finance Minister will soon undertake visit to Islamabad for the resolution of remaining issues in this regard.

The Prime Minister reiterated Pakistans desire for construction of road link from Chitral to Tajikistan and import of electricity from Tajikistan to Pakistan on the Central Asia South Asia (CASA) Project and sought Afghan Governments assistance for implementation of both projects.

Zalmai Rassoul spoke on importance of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, saying without close cooperation of Pakistan, the Afghan government cannot succeed in restoration of peace. Afghanistan also needs Pakistans support, he said, in the implementation of its strategy of reconciliation and reintegration in the country.

He assured the Prime Minister that the government of Afghanistan would never allow any country to use its territory against Pakistan.

The Afghan government is in the process of finalising its water policy and intended to have close interaction and coordination with Pakistani authorities to avoid any misgivings and misperceptions and assured that Pakistans interests are fully protected, Rasoul assured.

On Prime Ministers proposal on Chitral to Tajikistan road link, CASAs 1000 MW project of importing electricity from Tajikistan and installation of Biometric System, Dr Zalmai Rassoul promised that these matters would be brought to the attention of concerned authorities in Afghanistan and would be positively considered.

Minister for Interior Senator A. Rehman Malik, Minister of State for EAD and Finance Mrs Hina Rabbani Khar, Senator Syeda Sughra Imam, Secretaries of Defence and Foreign Affairs, Pakistans Ambassador to Afghanistan and other senior officers attended the meeting.

Rassoul also met President Asif Ali Zardari, who stressed the need for a durable peace in Afghanistan. Zardari said peace in neighbouring country was in the interest of Pakistan and all other countries, the president's office in a statement.

The statement said Zalmay Rassoul praised the efforts undertaken by Pakistan in the fight against terrorism. He also urged the need for resolution of all problems, including the water dispute, between the two countries through negotiations. He said the two countries should join hands to defeat terrorism and radicalism in the region.

Kabul ambassador to Islamabad Majnoon Gulab told Pajhwok Afghan News the recent visit of the Afghan foreign minister would further improve ties between the two countries.

He said the foreign minister discussed economic, commercial and defence ties during his meetings with President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani.

Reasons to be hopeful about U.S. strategy in Afghanistan

The Washington Post

06/26/2010

By Michael O'Hanlon

Defense Secretary Robert Gates warned on Sunday about a national rush to judgment that the Afghanistan war is somehow failing and that the overall narrative about the war has become too negative. That was practically an era ago regarding Afghanistan, but Gates is still right. With the drama over Wednesday's change of command receding, it is time to refocus on policy.

Several recent critiques paint only part of the picture, and they are often more wrong than right unless they are presented with greater nuance. Consider:

-- The "Kandahar offensive" is delayed. This complaint is strange: The U.S. troop buildup remains slightly ahead of schedule (95,000 soldiers are in Afghanistan, an increase of nearly 30,000 this year), and a major offensive in the classic sense was never promised in Kandahar. Some tactical operations there may be rescheduled this summer as U.S. reinforcements arrive -- but there is no fundamental deviation from the plan, which is to create a "rising tide of security" in Gen. Stanley McChrystal's still-relevant words.

-- Marja is a mess. The U.S. military erred in raising expectations about its big February operation in Marja, a midsize town in Helmand province where violence remains too high and Afghan governance too weak. But the trend in Helmand, where we have added a number of forces since 2009, is encouraging. Even Marja is slowly progressing. The military needs to do a better job documenting this progress. The province is in better shape than a year ago in terms of the return of commerce and agriculture and the reduction in violence against citizens.

-- There aren't enough trainers for Afghan security forces. Our allies have not quite met their promises, or our expectations, for additional trainers. But allies have deployed more than 5,000 additional combat troops this year, exceeding the pace expected. The number of U.S. trainers has risen, and the number of Afghan officers graduating from training has more than doubled since last year. Growth trajectories for the Afghan army and police remain on schedule. Perhaps most important, nearly 85 percent of Afghan army units are "partnered" with coalition units -- meaning that they plan, patrol, train and fight together. This is one of Gen. McChrystal's many positive legacies. In southern and eastern Afghanistan last month I saw many signs of the Afghan army's willingness to fight. The number of key districts where security conditions are at least tolerable, if not yet good, is up modestly.

-- Directives to restrict the use of firepower when civilians may be present increase risk to our troops. George F. Will has raised this concern ["Futility in Afghanistan," June 20]; the infamous Rolling Stone article did as well, quoting troops in the field. But evidence suggests it's not true. Roadside bombs, against which firepower is tactically irrelevant, overwhelmingly remain the most frequent cause of casualties to coalition troops. The percent of casualties from firefights is up, but modestly -- and in any event McChrystal favored allowing troops in danger to call in supporting firepower. Meanwhile, the policies have reduced civilian casualties from coalition forces, an important step toward winning greater

support from Afghans.

-- Firing two cabinet ministers reflects poorly on the Afghan president. The dismissals of Interior Minister Hanif Atmar and national security/intelligence director Amrullah Saleh were regrettable on balance. But there were mitigating circumstances; for example, Saleh's hard-line anti-Taliban views conflicted with President Hamid Karzai's hope of enticing some insurgents to negotiate.

-- Karzai is too anxious to cut a deal with the enemy. Some wonder if Karzai's May peace conference, or jirga, reflected a weakening of will to win the war. But at that jirga -- which included no representatives of the Taliban or the Haqqani network, the two most lethal parts of the insurgency -- Karzai made no offer to suspend the constitution, resign or expel NATO troops. He followed the jirga with a trip to Kandahar, where he asked local leaders for patience and sacrifice in the coming difficult times. Karzai's performance is mixed, and his half brother still plays a big role in the corruption in Kandahar, but the president is not about to cut a deal with the enemy that amounts to a negotiated surrender.

-- The July 2011 "deadline" is too vague. Some worry that President Obama's ambiguity about the timetable hurts the war effort. I opposed that deadline and the president's lack of clarity about its meaning. But there is still a logic to the vagueness: It keeps pressure on Afghan officials to deliver, it reminds Americans that this war will not last forever and it sustains the president's flexibility to adjust the war plan to conditions. Even relative optimists can understand why such flexibility is valuable. If the strategy is bearing fruit by next summer, the U.S. drawdown is likely to be gradual, and the president should keep saying so.

There are indeed weaknesses in U.S. strategy, including problems with the Afghan police and an inadequate plan to fight corruption. Gen. David Petraeus and military and civilian leaders should focus on these and other matters. But on balance, we have many assets and strengths in Afghanistan -- and better-than-even odds of leaving behind a reasonably stable place if we persevere.

Michael O'Hanlon, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, is co-author of Brookings's Afghanistan Index and co-author with Hassina Sherjan of "Toughing It Out in Afghanistan."

Afghanistan's Dangerous New Wealth

Newsweek
06/27/2010
By Ravi Somaiya

There is a depressing precedent for unstable countries that strike it rich. Can Afghanistan beat the curse?

Afghanistan has struck gold. And iron. And copper, cobalt, and lithium. A U.S. survey discovered almost \$1 trillion of mineral deposits there, reports The New York Times. But it may not be good news.

The report, by James Risen, describes an internal Pentagon memo that states Afghanistan

could become the "Saudi Arabia of lithium." Officials are hopeful that the wealth will help stabilize the country.

Afghanistan, it hardly needs be said, is war-torn, has little infrastructure and has an economy dominated by the cultivation and export of opium poppies. The US (which will soon have 100,000 troops on the ground as part of a surge to bring peace to the country) and a shaky and corrupt central government battle with canny Taliban guerillas who have fought insurgent campaigns since they could walk. A patchwork of loosely affiliated warlords complicate matters further.

Meanwhile America is just one of many nations caught in a torrent of geopolitical interests. Already vertigo-inducing relations with Pakistan, Russia and China on the country will not get any easier now the four nations are tacitly competing for trillions in untapped wealth. Indeed, the Times article points out that last year "Afghanistan's minister of mines was accused by American officials of accepting a \$30 million bribe to award China the rights to develop its copper mine."

In such circumstances, the mineral wealth could be a curse. The Times is understated on the matter. "Instead of bringing peace, the newfound mineral wealth could lead the Taliban to battle even more fiercely to regain control of the country," says Risen.

The analogues are not promising. As lottery winners and rap stars will tell you, mo' money often means mo' problems. Saudi Arabia itself, though currently somewhat stable, has not been politically transformed since oil was first discovered there in the 1930s. As recently as 2008 the country was described as an "authoritarian regime," in The Economist's Democracy Index, which it placed 161st of 167 countries.

It is not alone. At a conservative estimate, 13 of the top 50 countries by oil reserves are unstable, and many of those—like Yemen, Equatorial Guinea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo—are among the most oppressive, dangerous and violent places in the world.

The latter was the birthplace for the phrase 'blood diamond'. We sincerely hope there is no gruesome prefix added to Afghan lithium in the near future.

CIA chief warns of long road ahead in Afghanistan

AFP

06/27/2010

By Michael Mathes

WASHINGTON — The war in Afghanistan will be tougher and longer than expected despite a string of successes against Al-Qaeda that has weakened Osama bin Laden's terror network, the CIA chief warned Sunday.

After a week in which US President Barack Obama sacked his top Afghan war commander and troop deaths soared to a new high since the 2001 invasion, spy chief Leon Panetta conceded there were "serious problems."

"We're dealing with a tribal society. We're dealing with a country that has problems with governance, problems with corruption, problems with narcotics trafficking, problems with a Taliban insurgency," Panetta told ABC's "This Week."

Emboldened perhaps by divisions in the US war effort exposed by the sacking of Afghan commander General Stanley McChrystal, Taliban attacks are on the rise -- a fact Panetta did not attempt to hide.

"I think the Taliban obviously is engaged in greater violence right now. They're doing more on IEDs (improvised explosive devices). They're going after our troops. There's no question about that.

"We are making progress. It's harder, it's slower than I think anyone anticipated."

But Panetta, installed by Obama last year to head the Central Intelligence Agency, stressed the president had made it clear that going after Al-Qaeda was the "fundamental purpose" of the military mission in Afghanistan.

He was eager to point to good news, saying Al-Qaeda's leadership was now apparently in a weaker state than ever before, with as few as 50 members of the terror group left in Afghanistan while US forces worked hard to "flush out" Bin Laden.

"We've got to disrupt and dismantle Al-Qaeda and their militant allies so they never attack this country again," Panetta said.

"I think at most, we're looking at maybe 50 to 100 (Al-Qaeda members), maybe less" in Afghanistan, he said, while admitting most were in Pakistan's lawless tribal areas that lie along the border with Afghanistan.

Obama, speaking in Toronto, Canada at the conclusion of the G20 summit of leading economies also talked about a "weakened" Al-Qaeda.

"It is true that Al-Qaeda right now is in Pakistan and you'll often hear, why are we in Afghanistan when the terrorists are in Pakistan."

"Well, Al-Qaeda is pinned down and has been weakened in part because they don't have the run of the territory. We would be less secure if you return to a situation that existed prior to 9/11 in which... a government was friendly and willing to house their operations."

Panetta said the pressure was beginning to tell on Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda number two Ayman al-Zawahiri.

US-led operations have brought the Al-Qaeda leadership to its "weakest point since 9/11 and their escape from Afghanistan into Pakistan," he said.

"If we keep that pressure on, we think ultimately we can flush out Bin Laden and Zawahiri and get after them."

Although hard data on the world's most-wanted fugitive has been scarce since the 2001 attacks on the United States, at least half of Al-Qaeda's leaders have now been captured or

killed, according to Panetta.

"We continue to disrupt them. We continue to impact on their command and control. We continue to impact on their ability to plan attacks in this country," he added, noting last month's killing of Al-Qaeda number three Mustafa Abu al-Yazid.

Bin Laden remains "in very deep hiding," surrounded by tremendous security in a tribal area in Pakistan, a terrain the head of the CIA dubbed "the most difficult in the world."

Panetta insisted Obama's surge strategy -- to bring to 150,000 the number of international troops on the ground by the end of August -- is the right one, and said the Afghans needed to step up.

"I think the fundamental key, the key to success or failure is whether the Afghans accept responsibility, are able to deploy an effective army and police force to maintain stability," he added.

"If they can do that, then I think we're going to be able to achieve the kind of progress and the kind of stability that the president is after."

The CIA is also hunting radical cleric Anwar al-Awlaqi, a US-born Yemeni who recently urged all Muslims serving in the US military to kill their comrades and who has been linked to several previous attacks.

"Awlaqi is a terrorist and yes, he's a US citizen, but he is first and foremost a terrorist and we're going to treat him like a terrorist," Panetta said.

"We don't have an assassination list, but I can tell you this. We have a terrorist list and he's on it."

Pakistan seeks to exploit U.S. command vacuum

Reuters
06/28/2010
By Chris Allbritton

ISLAMABAD - Pakistan is looking to exploit a shake-up in the U.S. command in Afghanistan to bolster its allies within the Taliban and increase its influence over a future Kabul government, analysts say.

The strategy, however, relies on bringing the brutal and independent-minded Haqqani network to heel, something many believe is impossible.

The incoming U.S. commander, General David Petraeus, "does not have a good relationship" with Pakistani Chief of Army Staff Asfaq Kayani, said Ahmed Rashid, a political analyst, journalist and expert on the Taliban.

"The army does not trust him and they don't like him," Rashid said. "This hiatus is going to

be used by both the Afghan government and the Pakistani government to see if they can get something going."

In essence, Pakistan is hoping the American command vacuum proves a window of opportunity for Islamabad to deal more directly with Kabul in forcing an accommodation with its militant allies, such as the Haqqani network.

This is currently opposed by the United States, but it would grant Pakistan a large measure of influence in Afghanistan, which before the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks was firmly within its sphere of influence and an asset in its old rivalry with India.

General Stanley McChrystal was forced to resign last week after an article was published in which he and his aides disparaged President Obama and his civilian leadership team. Obama replaced him with Petraeus, the head of the U.S. Central Command. At the time, the Pakistani military declined to comment on the change in command.

Now, Pakistan is hoping to establish a "reality on the ground" before Petraeus fully takes over, said Rashid.

"I think there will be a review of U.S. policy very quickly as soon as Petraeus arrives and I think these efforts are being made to try and influence that review and put Pakistan in the driving seat," he said.

And the Haqqani network and the Taliban is one of the main levers for Pakistan to exert influence.

"Pakistan is not just prepared but very eager to play a role in bringing peace in Afghanistan," said Rahimullah Yousafzai, a expert on Taliban militancy and Pakistan-Afghanistan affairs. "And they definitely have an influence over the Taliban. But if someone believes they're in their hands, that is incorrect."

RESISTANCE VETERAN

Run by Jalaluddin Haqqani, an elderly veteran resistance leader against Soviet troops in the 1980s, the Haqqani network operates near Afghanistan's border with Pakistan.

Leadership of the group has largely passed from the ailing Haqqani to his son, Sirajuddin, seen by U.S. officials as more radical than his father.

The group maintains a powerbase in the Pakistani tribal region of North Waziristan, across the border from Khost.

Sirajuddin told Reuters in March his group was under the overall command of Taliban leader Mullah Omar. But U.S. officials believe the movement does not always accept Taliban authority and often acts independently.

Yousafzai and Rashid both think it would very difficult to convince the Haqqanis to lay down their arms.

"He (Sirajuddin) is very committed to international jihad. Part of his network includes al

Qaeda, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, other central Asian groups, Chechen groups. He's been very protective of all these groups and they form his strength right now," Rashid said.

"Secondly, they have never, never issued any kind of statement even remotely discussing the issue of reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan."

This weekend, Al Jazeera reported that Sirajuddin recently met with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Kayani and the head of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Ahmad Pasha to discuss a peace deal.

But official sources in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as Taliban spokespeople speaking for Haqqani, strenuously denied any such meeting.

"The Haqqani group isn't a separate entity. It's fully part of the Taliban movement," said Yousafzai. "Jalaluddin is a member of the supreme Taliban shura. He has been loyal to the Taliban.

"I think it's impossible that Jalaluddin Haqqani or his son will strike a separate deal with Kabul and won't inform the Taliban. If there's any deal, it will be done jointly."

The United States doubts that any deal can be made until the Haqqanis and other Taliban militants feel they are on the defensive in Afghanistan.

A senior intelligence official in Islamabad said that while Pakistan would like a "friendly" Afghanistan -- which many analysts believe a Taliban-dominated government might provide -- Pakistan would settle for peaceful.

"We can deal with a hostile Afghanistan as long as it is peaceful," he said.

The official was referring to Afghanistan's growing relations with India, Pakistan's long-time rival on the sub-continent. It considers Indian influence in Afghanistan as a threat to its Western border.

Rashid scoffed at the idea of Pakistan wanting only a peaceful Afghanistan as "propaganda".

"We have very clear and distinct interests of what we want out of this process," Rashid said. "And it's not just having a peaceful Afghanistan. It's more than that, certainly. Otherwise we wouldn't be trying so hard."

'Exit plan means disappointment to the mission'

Amanullah Eman - Jun 28, 2010 - 13:03

KABUL (PAN): The decisions of some ISAF nations to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan in the next five years indicate their despair in the stalemated NATO-led mission, Afghan analysts say.

Recently, Australia announced that it would pull out its forces from the Afghanistan in three years following the death of its three soldiers in central Uruzgan province.

Polish and British officials have also set timetables to leave the Afghan war. British Prime Minister David Cameron hoped the nearly 10,000 UK troops would be withdrawn from Afghanistan in the next five years.

The comments come as NATO-led forces suffer their deadliest month since beginning of the war. Nearly 100 foreign troops, most of the American and British soldiers, have been killed in June.

In an exclusive interview with Pajhwok Afghan News, political analyst Waheed Muzhda said the NATO mission has failed to achieve its objectives in Afghanistan.

"A rift has been created between the US and other NATO contributing nations which might have led some countries to set a withdrawal timetable," Muzhda said.

Some NATO countries, according Muzhda, have lost hope to win the Afghan war as their casualties have dramatically increased recently.

A political expert, Haroon Mir, said NATO troops are engaged in a tough fighting in Afghanistan as some NATO countries had only joined the coalition for a peace-keeping mission.

The mounting Taliban-led insurgency have been pushing ISAF coalition to step back, Mir concluded.

A Winnable War

The Weekly Standard

06/29/2010

By Frederick W. Kagan, Kimberly Kagan

Success in Afghanistan is possible. The policy that President Obama announced in December and firmly reiterated last week is sound. So is the strategy that General Stanley McChrystal devised last summer and has been implementing this year. There have been setbacks and disappointments during this campaign, and adjustments will likely be necessary. These are inescapable in war. Success is not by any means inevitable. Enemies adapt and spoilers spoil. But both panic and despair are premature. The coalition has made significant military progress against the Taliban, and will make more progress as the last surge forces arrive in August. Although military progress is insufficient by itself to resolve the conflict, it is a vital precondition. As the New York Times editors recently noted, "Until the insurgents are genuinely bloodied, they will keep insisting on a full restoration of their repressive power." General David Petraeus knows how to bloody insurgents--and he also knows how to support and encourage political development and conflict resolution. He takes over the mission with the renewed support of the White House.

Neither the recent setbacks nor the manner of McChrystal's departure should be allowed to obscure the enormous progress he has made in setting conditions for successful campaigns over the next two years. The internal, structural changes he made have revolutionized the ability of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to conduct counterinsurgency operations. He oversaw the establishment of a three-star NATO training command that has accelerated both the expansion and the qualitative improvement of the Afghan National Security Forces in less than a year. He introduced a program of partnering ISAF units and headquarters with Afghan forces that had worked wonders in Iraq--and he improved on it. He oversaw the introduction of a three-star operational headquarters to develop and coordinate countrywide campaign plans. He has managed the massive planning and logistical burden of

receiving the influx of surge forces and putting them immediately to use in a country with little infrastructure.

While undertaking these enormous tasks of internal reorganization, he has also taken the fight to the enemy. The controversies about his restrictions on the operations of Special Forces and rules of engagement that limit the use of destructive force in inhabited areas have obscured the fact that both Special Forces and conventional forces have been fighting harder than ever before and disrupting and seriously damaging enemy networks and strongholds. Targeted operations against Taliban networks have increased significantly during McChrystal's tenure, and the Taliban's ability to operate comfortably in Afghanistan has been greatly reduced. ISAF forces have killed, captured, or driven off numerous Taliban shadow governors and military commanders. They have pushed into areas the Taliban had controlled and eliminated safe-havens.

The story of Marjah is particularly illustrative. Before this year, Marjah was a Taliban sanctuary, command-and-control node, and staging area. Taliban fighters based there had been able to support operations against ISAF and coalition forces throughout Helmand Province. Lasting progress in Helmand was simply not possible without clearing Marjah. McChrystal cleared it. The Taliban naturally are trying to regain control of it. ISAF and the ANSF are trying to prevent them.

The attempt to import "governance" rapidly into the area is faltering, which is not surprising considering the haste with which the operation was conducted (driven at least partly by the perceived pressure of the president's July 2011 timeline). The attempt was also ill-conceived. Governance plans for Marjah emphasized extending the influence of the central government to an area that supported insurgents precisely because it saw the central government as threatening and predatory. Although ISAF persuaded President Hamid Karzai to remove the most notorious malign actor in the area from power, Karzai allowed him to remain in the background, stoking fears among the people that he would inevitably return. The incapacity of the Afghan government to deliver either justice or basic services to its people naturally led to disappointment as well, partly because ISAF's own rhetoric had raised expectations to unrealistic levels.

The biggest problem with the Marjah operation, however, is that it was justified and explained on the wrong basis. Marjah is not a vitally important area in principle, even in Helmand. It is important because of its role as a Taliban base camp. It was so thoroughly controlled by the insurgents that the prospects for the rapid reestablishment of governance were always dim. It was fundamentally a military objective rather than a political one, and McChrystal made a mistake by offering Marjah as a test case of ISAF's ability to improve Afghan governance. What matters about Marjah is that the enemy can no longer use it as a sanctuary and headquarters. ISAF's military success there has allowed the coalition to launch subsequent operations in the Upper Helmand River Valley, particularly the more strategically important contested area around Sangin. The Marjah operation has so far succeeded in what it should have been intended to do. The aspects that are faltering should not have been priorities in that location.

Kandahar differs from Marjah in almost all respects. Kandahar City is not now a Taliban stronghold, although the Taliban are present in some force in its western districts and can stage attacks throughout the city. The Taliban had controlled the vital neighboring district of Arghandab until newly arrived American forces began contesting it in September 2009. The

insurgents remain very strong in Zhari, Panjwayi, and Maiwand Districts to the west and south of Kandahar City, but they do not control any of those areas as completely as they controlled Marjah.

An even greater difference is that Kandahar City and the surrounding districts are strategically important terrain. It is much too strong to say "as Kandahar goes, so goes Afghanistan"--the coalition could succeed in Kandahar and still lose the war. But it is very hard to imagine winning the war without winning in Kandahar. It is the most populous city in Afghanistan's Pashtun belt, the historical base of the Pashtun dynasties that formed and ruled Afghanistan for most of the last 250 years, and the birthplace of the Taliban itself, as well as the home of the Karzai family. It is also geographically important as the major city at the southwestern tip of the Hindu Kush and the junction of the roads from Herat, Kabul, and Quetta (in Pakistan). For all of these reasons, enduring stability in Kandahar underwritten by acceptable and effective governance is an essential precondition for success in Afghanistan in a way that stability in Marjah simply is not.

The Marjah operation nevertheless offers important lessons about how to approach Kandahar. McChrystal had already rightly abandoned the idea of parachuting government officials into cleared areas around Kandahar before his departure. He was focusing instead on trying to get the government officials already in place to build local support for the operation. That effort, manifested by several jirgas and shuras (gatherings of officials and elders) over the past few months, has been faltering. McChrystal had recognized the problem before his departure, which is one reason he had announced a delay in the planned clearing operations around Kandahar. Petraeus now has the opportunity to revisit this approach to building local support for the operation and correct it. It is too soon to say which of the various alternative approaches Petraeus will adopt or whether it will succeed. Learning, adapting, and trying different approaches are not the same as failing or losing. On the contrary, these are an essential part of success. American forces in Iraq experimented with a variety of approaches over years throughout the country before hitting on the right set of solutions. Under McChrystal's command, ISAF was moving through similar phases in Afghanistan much more rapidly. Since Petraeus has already shown his ability to explore alternatives until he finds one that works, there is reason to have some confidence that he will do so in Kandahar and in Afghanistan more generally.

Recent news reports have exposed what those who know Kandahar have long understood--that the predominance of Ahmad Wali Karzai, the president's half-brother, alienates a significant portion of the population and is itself a major driver of instability and insurgency. Excellent reporting by Dexter Filkins of the New York Times and others has revealed the degree to which U.S. and ISAF contracting practices have reinforced this predominance and thus contributed to the problem. Does Ahmad Wali's kinship with the president make this problem intractable--thus rendering the entire effort hopeless? Here the example of Iraq may be illuminating.

Between 2003 and 2005 it appeared that the largest problem in Iraq was the Sunni insurgency and the al Qaeda organization with which it interacted symbiotically. In 2006 it became apparent that the problem was larger than that. Shiite militias had been systematically cleansing Baghdad and other mixed areas of their Sunni populations, fueling the insurgency and deepening the hold of al Qaeda, which seemed to offer the Sunni communities under assault their most reliable protection. Individuals within the Iraqi government actively supported the Shiite militias. The deputy health minister allowed them to use ambulances to

drive death squads around Baghdad. The Iraqi National Police were badly infiltrated and committed horrendous atrocities at the orders of officials within the government. The minister of finance had brought into the National Police the infamous Wolf Brigade of the Badr Corps that set the standard for sectarian brutality. Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki tolerated this behavior and protected some of those who were engaged in it.

Maliki is still prime minister (for now). The sectarian deputy health minister (who escaped trial by intimidating the judges) has been elected to the new parliament. The Badr Corps finance minister remained in position, as did many others engaged in sectarian activities that were fuelling the insurgencies. But the Shiite death squads have stopped cleansing. The National Police are now welcomed in Sunni districts they once terrorized. Maliki himself led military operations against the strongholds of the most dangerous Shiite militias, in Basra and Sadr City, in 2008. Some of the worst offenders were removed from power, but many were not. What is both remarkable and promising is that even those who remained were persuaded to stop engaging in the activities that were driving Iraq toward unlimited sectarian civil war by the end of 2006. The cessation of malign behaviors can be as important as the removal of malign actors, in Afghanistan as well as in Iraq.

Iraqi sectarian actors did not suddenly see the light and embrace diversity. They changed their behavior in response to a wide array of pressures brought on them and their patrons by the entire American team, from General Petraeus and Ambassador Ryan Crocker down to soldiers in the streets. Petraeus and Crocker in particular adopted a highly nuanced approach to the problem. When they had strong information (not necessarily legal evidence) that particular leaders were behaving badly, they confronted the prime minister with that information as a policy matter rather than a legal one. Lower level commanders did the same thing with their counterparts within the Iraqi Security Forces. In some cases, American units simply partnered with misbehaving Iraqi units so closely that the Iraqis could not engage in malign behavior.

As these efforts were going on, Petraeus and Crocker inserted American forces into contested neighborhoods and effectively took control of the ground. Their presence changed the equation--local people reported on the misbehavior of Iraqi officials; American forces took notice and, when appropriate, took action. By simultaneously taking the fight into the safe-havens and strongholds of the Sunni insurgents and Al Qaeda in Iraq, U.S. forces reduced the capability of those terrorists and began to bring down the violence. As the overall level fell, Shiite militia violence, which had been to some extent concealed by the spectacular attacks of al Qaeda, became more prominent, reinforcing the pressure on malign Shiite actors to take a knee. The fact that American forces then remained in the neighborhoods for a couple of years permitted the emergence of a political process based on new calculations and facilitated the restoration of the most basic confidence among Sunnis that the government was not committed to their annihilation.

The problem in Afghanistan is similar. Power-brokers are not engaged so much in tribal cleansing or death squads, but they do use their own private security companies to enforce order, sometimes at the expense of marginalized groups who fuel the insurgency. Ahmad Wali Karzai is the most prominent example of such a powerbroker, but he is far from unique. A sound ISAF strategy would attempt to remove malign actors where necessary and possible, but also work to shape them and the environment in which they operate in ways that persuade or prevent them from engaging in the malign behavior that is fueling the insurgency and preventing stable governance from taking hold. Improving the way ISAF contracts with local

companies--a process that has already begun--is part of the solution, but only part. ISAF will have to refocus its efforts at every level away from a binary choice between removing and empowering the malign actors, and toward the kind of nuanced approach that was successful in Iraq, appropriately modified.

There are never any guarantees in war. But the fact that efforts now will be led by General David Petraeus, with his record of judgment and creativity, is grounds for confidence that we can succeed.

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'No change in Afghan war strategy'

Thu, 01 Jul 2010 16:03:01 GMT

Press TV: Newly appointed Afghan war commander General David Petraeus says there will be no change in the application of the rules of engagement in the US led war.

Petraeus made the remarks in Brussels on Thursday during a briefing to NATO officials about the war in Afghanistan

The remarks come as there are fears among some NATO countries that Petraeus would make changes in the current rules of engagement, which put restrictions on coalition attacks to limit civilian casualties.

The top US commander insisted that he had no plans to make it easier for NATO troops to use lethal force in operations in populated areas.

He said keeping civilian casualties to an "absolute minimum" would remain a key objective.

Petraeus also insisted that the foreign forces must achieve unity in order to meet their objectives in Afghanistan.

His visit came just one day after the US Senate confirmed him as the new top commander.

US President Barack Obama picked Petraeus to take charge of the 140,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan after he fired General Stanley McChrystal for publicly criticizing White House officials.

Petraeus predicts the war in Afghanistan may get more intense over the next few months. He has also warned that it could take a number of years before Afghan security forces can take over from the US-led troops.

The rising foreign casualties have sparked anger among the public in the countries allied with the US in Afghanistan.

In addition to the foreign troops' casualties, thousands of civilians have also lost their lives either in US-led raids or in the Taliban-led militancy across the violence-wracked country.

According to official figures, more than 2,500 civilians were killed in NATO operations last year, undermining support for the presence of US-led forces in the country.

Who's driving the policy in Afghanistan?

Los Angeles Times
06/29/2010
By Doyle McManus

From the beginning, the Obama administration has had too many chiefs running its war effort in Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan, and too many voices explaining it.

When I visited Kabul this spring, a diplomat from a country that has sent thousands of troops to the American war there asked a simple question that was actually an indictment. "Tell me," he said, "who's in charge of US policy on Afghanistan?"

The same question came up in Washington last week as officials sorted through the impact of President Barack Obama's decision to replace his commander in Afghanistan, General Stanley A. McChrystal, with General David H. Petraeus.

"We still have one problem," one official told me. "Who's running the show?"

From the beginning, the Obama administration has had too many chiefs running its war effort in Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan, and too many voices explaining it. The president and his aides hoped to end the dissension by settling on an 18-month surge of troops in December, but different players interpreted the policy in different ways: Vice-President Joe Biden said it guaranteed a significant withdrawal of US troops in July 2011, but Defence Secretary Robert M. Gates said the policy meant no such thing.

The US ambassador in Afghanistan, retired Army Lieutenant General Karl W. Eikenberry, is brilliant and ferociously hardworking, but he has collided repeatedly with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, with McChrystal and with his own State Department staff. Obama's super-envoy for the region, Richard C. Holbrooke, is brilliant and ferociously hardworking, but he has collided repeatedly with Karzai, with Eikenberry and even with the White House. Who's in charge here? Nobody's sure.

In order for Petraeus, the nation's savviest 'political general', to succeed militarily, he will have to help the president answer that nonmilitary question. He's fixed a similar problem before — in Iraq, where he served as US military commander from 2007 to 2008.

Before Petraeus arrived in Baghdad, the US command and the US Embassy frequently clashed. But Petraeus and a new US ambassador appointed at the same time, Ryan Crocker, ended the chaos by working deliberately on a seamless partnership — in adjoining offices.

In Afghanistan, Petraeus actually faces three nonmilitary problems: First, he must help repair

the military command's relationship with the White House, which was frayed by the disclosures of disrespect and dissension on McChrystal's staff.

Second, he must persuade Obama to fix the unhappy military-civilian partnership in Kabul. That probably means replacing Ambassador Eikenberry, whose relationship with Petraeus has not been notably close in the past.

Seasoned negotiator

Should Holbrooke be pushed out too? Insiders are divided on that question. But the special envoy is the State Department's most accomplished negotiator — and if negotiations with the Taliban are coming up, there's an argument for keeping him in his job as long as the lines of authority can be made clearer.

And finally, Petraeus' third nonmilitary job: Get more out of Karzai. When Petraeus was in Iraq, officials said, he relentlessly nudged Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki to do what the United States wanted by offering favours if he helped and withdrawing them if he didn't. That task would be easier in Afghanistan if Obama sends a new ambassador to Kabul, given Eikenberry's rocky relationship with Karzai.

One of Petraeus' first actions last Wednesday, the day he was nominated, was to telephone Crocker, now dean of the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. Neither Petraeus nor Crocker would talk about their conversation, although Crocker told me emphatically that he has no interest in becoming the US ambassador in Kabul.

But Crocker did spell out the problem. In Baghdad, the Iraqis needed to know that "they couldn't game one of us against the other. Working together is a necessary condition for success — but not a sufficient one", he said. "We are not going to win the big fight if we spend our time on little fights with each other."

Last week, Obama said that he had confidence in his current team, and aides said that meant no immediate changes were planned. Yet the president surely knows that by naming Petraeus, he has solved only one part of his problem. He filled the unexpected opening in the job of military commander, but he didn't end the confusion over who is running the policy as a whole.

If Petraeus can help him find an answer to that question, he will deserve the job other officers think he wants: not president of the United States, but chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. That post comes open in September 2011 — shortly after Obama's Afghanistan decision point of July 2011.

Bold move to save Afghanistan: Bring back a king

The Christian Science Monitor

07/01/2010

By Shireen K. Burki

If the United States values stability more than democracy, it will recognize that restoring Afghanistan's constitutional monarchy is the only thing that will prevent Taliban rule and victory in the war.

Stafford, VA - US forces in Afghanistan just got another competent military commander in Gen. David Petraeus. However, the current US strategy that General Petraeus must enforce only guarantees mission failure in the long run because it bolsters an unpopular Afghan government. This, in turn, ensures increased support for the insurgency led by the Taliban, who love to boast that they have Allah and time on their side.

It's time that Western leaders answer a politically incorrect but vital question: Do they care more about establishing democracy than stability? Because if the mission is still about ensuring that Afghanistan – as a relatively cohesive state – remains free from Taliban and Al Qaeda, then the West should be willing to consider a dramatic step: reinstatement of a constitutional monarchy.

Pushing for a constitutional monarchy runs counter to America's traditional antipathy toward monarchies as a form of governance, but in the case of Afghanistan, it's probably now the only alternative to the Taliban rule that seems almost inevitable once NATO forces withdraw.

After weathering nine years of war, the Taliban have grown stronger, not weaker. Fueled by money and support from Pakistan and the Arab Khaleej states, they are getting more brazen in their attacks. Girls increasingly resist going to school, terrified that their classes might be bombed, or acid thrown in their faces, as they walk home. Shopkeepers have stopped selling videos and other “un-Islamic” items.

Meanwhile, the Karzai government, which won reelection amid wide reports of ballot fraud, continues to lose popular support. Corruption is rife. The drug and smuggling mafias are back and many are closely affiliated with the Afghan government.

In this environment, Afghans are hedging their bets. They don't want the Taliban to return to power, but they understand that survival means siding with the winner.

It didn't have to be this way.

In 2001, most Afghans welcomed US forces as saviors, not crusaders.

Thanks to their presence, Afghans were able to resume cherished pastimes banned under the Taliban: They played soccer, flew kites, danced the Attan, and, most importantly, they laughed out loud. Afghans could tend to their beloved rose gardens, or drive their buses and cars, blaring loud music. Women could seek medical help, and widows could find employment, without running the risk of being beaten, or worse: stoned or shot to death in the soccer stadium.

After the fall of the Taliban, the overwhelming majority of Afghans – across ethnic lines – wanted to reinstate the constitutional monarchy that had served Afghanistan so well in the past.

During the long reign of King Zahir Shah (1933-1973), Afghanistan blossomed into a modern state. It became the largest exporter of raisins in the world, and was renowned in the region

for its carpets, fruits, melons, and semi-precious stones. Kabul rivaled Islamabad as a city of modernity and culture, and was considered by Westerners in the 1960s as the Geneva of Asia.

There was relative stability in this historically strife-ridden state, which enabled completion of large-scale development projects like dams and roads. Most important, the only “Taliban” were religious students who studied the Koran.

Afghans saw their king as fair and inclusive. Under Zahir Shah, the central government established Afghanistan’s first professional standing Army, yet generally left the provinces alone in their handling of day-to-day affairs. Kabul did not try to force its “modernization” program upon the conservative elements, especially in the Pashtun belt inhabited by proud tribes who were deeply skeptical of anything “foreign” being imposed on them.

So memorable was this period that Afghans at the Bonn Conference in 2001, which was set up to plan the future of Afghanistan’s government, clamored to reinstate Zahir Shah and the 1964 Constitution that set forth equal rights for all Afghans before the law.

Yet this broad desire was stymied.

What happened? Washington sought the counsel of certain expatriate Afghans with self-interested agendas in 2001 that had long divorced themselves from their people and culture. Their heeded advice did not mirror the hopes and aspirations of Afghans who had stayed behind to endure the brutality of the Soviets, the warlords, and then the Taliban. So Afghan-American kingmakers thrust Hamid Karzai as the new head of government, relegating Zahir Shah to photo-ops for the Western press.

Today, President Karzai is derisively called the “mayor of Kabul,” as his mandate barely extends outside the cities. The 2004 Constitution does not mirror the hopes and aspirations of its people. The Afghan National Army is dubbed “The Northern Alliance Forces” by Pashtuns. And Kabul tries to exert control over the provinces by direct fiat, defying their history of fierce independence.

At this stage, Washington and its coalition partners have tough choices: 1) Leave or 2) Fix the political mess they helped to create.

The US military surge that Petraeus now directs will probably just delay the descent into chaos once NATO begins pulling out in 2011. Saving Afghanistan now requires encouraging Karzai and his political and military leadership to accept some painful options that might include comfortable exile. It requires holding another Afghan loya jirga (grand council) to determine if Afghans want a constitutional monarchy reinstated under a charismatic descendant of Zahir Shah.

His lineage would serve as a reminder of what was, and what can be. It would be a public relations nightmare for the Taliban. If NATO is serious about its mission it needs to ensure that Afghanistan’s commander-in-chief is seen as legitimate in the eyes of Afghans.

Shireen K. Burki is currently completing a book on state-society relations in Pakistan and Afghanistan. An ethnic Pashtun, she served at the United States Marine Corps’ Center For Advanced Operational Culture Learning from 2006 to 2008 as an expert on South Asia and Southwest Asia.

Pentagon sees distrust between India, Pakistan on Afghanistan

Lalit K Jha - Jul 2, 2010 - 19:18

WASHINGTON (PAN): A top Pentagon official on Thursday acknowledged there is distrust between India and Pakistan on Afghanistan because of historical reasons.

Certainly, given the historic tensions between India and Pakistan, both tend to view Afghanistan through that prism, the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Michele Flournoy, said in response to a question at the Washington-chapter of the Asia Society.

However, he hoped the two South Asian neighbours would themselves sort this out through dialogue to establish stability in the region.

"We are very supportive of any steps that the Indians and Pakistani government choose to take to deal with the issues directly between them and to reduce tensions and build confidence," Flournoy said.

She said India has played a very important role in economic and social development in Afghanistan in multiple sectors and they would like to see them continue to play that role.

"I think, with regard to India and Pakistan, there is an inherited distrust between the two countries and we are very supportive of whatever steps they take in being transparent with one another and take some confidence building measures," Flournoy said.

She added Pakistan, India and Afghanistan had a stake in the stability of the region and that the United States had strategic partnerships with all the three countries. "One of the things we continue to try to press is our belief that the common stake in regional security can actually bring them to a place of cooperation that they've not experienced before, but it's not going to be easy to get there," she acknowledged in response to a question.

The Pentagon official reiterated that the US has no plan to abandon Afghanistan after July 2011, when the drawdown of its troops would begin. She said the US has enduring US commitment to the region. We have learned our lessons from history. We have no plans to depart the region and to abandon Afghanistan anytime soon, she said.

Everything has to be seen in the context of a long-term commitment to both the security and development of Afghanistan. That said, he (Obama in his December speech on Afghanistan) also identified July 2011, as an inflection point in our strategy, when the surge of forces would end, and the beginning of a process of transition would begin, based on the conditions on the ground," she said.

US strategy in Afghanistan 'not working'

Fri, 02 Jul 2010 02:27:18 GMT

Press TV: A renowned French Army general has called for a review of the US strategy in war-torn Afghanistan, saying the current strategy is 'not working.'

Vincent Desportes, the head of elite Interforces Defense College, told *Le Monde* newspaper that the strategy employed by former US war commander in Afghanistan Stanley McChrystal had made the situation in the country "worse than ever," AFP reported on Thursday.

The traditional counter-insurgency strategy, adopted by McChrystal for about a year ago, has failed to yield result, Desportes said.

"If the McChrystal doctrine is not working or is not accepted, it would be good to review the strategy," argued the French general, calling for the pullout of US troops.

Meanwhile, McChrystal's successor General David Petraeus said on Thursday that there would be "no change" in the application of the rules of engagement in the US-led war in Afghanistan.

Petraeus was appointed as the commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan after McChrystal was forced to resign over criticizing his civilian commanders, including US president Barack Obama.

McChrystal's strategy entailed deployment of tens of thousands of extra troops in Afghanistan.

Gen. Desportes also criticized Obama's decision to send 30,000 extra troops to Afghanistan.

With more than 100 foreign troops dead, June was the deadliest month since the US-led forces stationed in Afghanistan.

Official figures, shows that more than 2,500 civilians were killed in NATO operations last year, making 2009 the deadliest year for civilians in Afghanistan.

The increasing civilian casualties has led to a decline in support for the Afghan war in NATO member states.

The US-led invasion of Afghanistan was launched in 2001, with the official objective of curbing militancy and bringing peace and stability to the country. Nine years on, however, US officials admit the country remains unstable as ordinary civilians continue to pay the price.

Social Headlines

Private education key to pass university entrance test

Niamatullah Zafarzai - Jun 27, 2010 - 10:43

KABUL (PAN): A number of students complain that only those of their colleagues were qualifying competitive examinations who attend private courses before the examination . Hekmatullah Hakimi, who completed his diploma at the Abuzar Ghaffari Higher Secondary School and his engineering degree from the Nangarhar University, said had attended courses launched by Nazar Zalmay and Tolo-i-Danish private education centres in Kabul. Hakimi said he was not able to get admission in the engineering faculty if had not attended the courses .

He said the number of students sitting the competitive examinations were usually more than the number of seats available in the university classes and only a few candidates manage to make their way to their desired institutions .

According to the Higher Education Ministry, only 33,000 among the 90,000 students managed to qualify for higher education and over 22,000 for graduation.

Hakimi asked the government to raise the standard of education in the government schools by promoting professionalism among the teachers as well as increasing their salaries .

Low salaries usually force the teachers to turn to part time jobs to manage their daily expenses. Salaries of teachers included in the upper grade are ranging from 6,000 to 22,000 afghanis a month, while those not included in the same category are getting 3,000 to 5,000 afghanis per month .

The grades of the teachers were increased and their salary slabs were raised following a competitive examination last year .

Ziaullah, 18, who completed his schooling from Pul-e-Charkhi school in the capital Kabul and now studying at the Kabul University, also expressed reservations about the standard of education at the governmental institutions .

He said he had attended a course under the Arman Naween programme in Kabul and only then managed to qualify the competitive examination for the higher education. "The course improved my knowledge and helped me qualify the examination," he added .

The young man said he knew several such students who worked hard during their school days but could not qualify the competitive examination because they did not attend the privately organized courses .

He also demanded of the government to increase the salaries of teachers and raise the level of education at the government-run schools .

Nineteen-year-old Ihsanullah is among the students who could not manage to qualify the competitive examination because he did not attend the private courses as part of his preparation .

He completed his school education from the Ibrahim Khalilullah Higher Secondary School last year and could not attend a course because of his working at his shop. Though the teaching standard at the school was good, he could not get standard education because most of the teachers were not professionals, he added .

Head of the Education Department in Kabul, Najeebullah Karwan, said the private courses were helping the students in improving their standard and level of education. He said some 400 private institutions were busy arranging such courses in this central capital. Of those, 129 were being run without formal registration with the government, he added .

Spokesman for the Education Ministry Muhammad Asif Nang agreed that the teaching level at the schools was not up to the standard. However, it did not mean that it was so much low to

stop students from qualifying the tests. He said the families should also focus on the education of students besides sending them to schools .

Although private course were being organized in Kabul and some other cities of the country to improve the level of education of the students. But in many parts, there are no such courses alongside the non-availability of professional teachers in schools .

According to the Education Ministry officials, more than 185,000 teachers were teaching at 12,000 schools across the country. Nang said nearly 6,000 teachers were highly educated, 85,000 were graduates and 12,000 had studied up to 12th class .

The education level of the rest of the teachers was lower than 12th class, he added

Rally demands Dari, Pashto treated equally in public sector

Khwaja Basir Ahmad & Abasin Zaheer - Jun 28, 2010 - 10:31

KABUL (PAN): A huge demonstration attended by more than one thousand people, mostly students, in Kabul on Monday asked the government to ensure that the two official languages, Pashto and Dari, are treated equally in the public sector.

The Afghan constitution makes both Dari and Pashto official languages of the country, and if a language other than those two languages is spoken by a majority of an area, it is considered as a third official language in that area.

More than one thousand people, mostly students, from the Kabul University and several other private educational institutions took part in the rally that started from the university and culminated in front of the parliament building.

The demonstrators, carrying placards and banners, asked the government for bringing equality to the use of the two official languages in the public sector, particularly in educational bodies. Muhammad Zahir Akbari, a student of literature faculty at the Kabul University, told Pajhwok Afghan News that inequality was being carried out between the two official languages. He said the higher education ministry was doing nothing to put an end to the problem.

Some parliamentarians also talked to the protestors. "Your's demands are constitutional and the authorities concerned must pay heed to them," said an MP, Haji Farid.

A six-point resolution was also released at the end of the demonstration.

The resolution says:

"Only those university teachers should be hired who have complete proficiency in both official languages. If a lecture is given in one language, the notes should be written in another. Education in schools should be provided in both languages through maintaining their equal status. Both the official languages should be treated equally in state departments, from the President Office to a district chief office."

The resolution also warned if their demands were not met, they would hold such demonstrations in future as well.

Meanwhile, a female MP from Hazara community strongly condemned the parliament for what she said 'biased' to Hazara cabinet nominees.

Fatima Nazari was so angry when the administrative board of parliament announced that two of the seven President Hamid Karzai's cabinet nominees were unable to obtain sufficient votes.

Lawmakers rejected two Hazara nominees Muhammad Sarwar Danish and Daud Ali Najafi for higher education and transportation ministries on Monday.

Nazari accused MPs of taking bribe for casting their votes. "Curse on those who voted on the basis of ethnicity and took money."

When asked by another MP, Abdul Qadeer, sitting next to her to calm down, Fatima whacked

him in the face and shoulders twice with a water bottle. Security officials then forced her to leave the session.

Another Hazara MP, Noor Akbari, from Daikundi province, supported the allegation of Fatima Nazari, who said money was given to lawmakers by some candidates to support them and reject others.

When asked for proof, he said: "I don't have any proof, but this was for the third time that Hazara cabinet nominees were rejected."

Accusing larger ethnic groups of trying to stamp out Hazara tribe from politics, Akbari warned such actions could harm national unity.

But a public representative from Paktia, Gul Badsha Majidi, said the MPs voted on the basis of past activities of candidates.

The successful candidates include Bismillah Muhammadi, a Tajik, for the Ministry of Interior, Abdul Qudus Hamidi, an Uzbek, for the Ministry of Public Works, Jamahir Anwari, a Turkmen, for the Ministry of Refugees and Returnees, Anwarul Haq Ahadi for the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Asadullah Khalid for the Ministry of Borders and Tribal affairs, who are Pashtuns.

Economical Headlines

200 firms interested in Afghan mining sector

Abdul Qadir Siddiqui - Jun 30, 2010 - 11:41

KABUL (PAN): Nearly 200 international firms have shown their interest to invest in Afghanistan's mines, especially in the Hajigak iron ore deposit, said the mines minister on Wednesday.

Speaking to reporters here, Wahidullah Shahrani announced to tender the Afghan-Tajik oil block in early 2011 and the smaller Kashquri oil block and Shiberghan gas block in September.

Shahrani who travelled last week to London held meetings with a number of international firms and provided information on mines, which are estimated at 1-3 trillion dollars of worth. Shahrani said the mines ministry was planning to tender the huge Hajigak iron ore deposit and the oil blocks in the Afghan-Tajik basin in early 2011. The basin is estimated to contain about 1.6 billion barrels of oil, he added.

He said suggestions from mine extraction companies would be accepted after their precise study prior to the tenders.

The Hajigak iron ore deposit, about 130 kilometres west of Kabul, was discovered with the help of Italian government about 50 years ago. The deposit had 16 different zones, each of them three kilometres wide and 100 metres deep, Shahrani said.

Afghanistan to tender biggest iron deposit

Xinhua

07/01/2010

KABUL - Afghan minister for Mines Waheedullah Shahrani on Wednesday said that the government plans to tender its biggest iron deposit next September in efforts to attract foreign investments.

"The Hajigak deposit, a natural resource with over 2 billion tons of 62 percent iron, would be put for tender in September and several international companies have shown interest to invest in it," Shahrani told a news conference here after returning home from Britain.

Shahrani, who visited London recently to encourage foreign companies to invest in mining field in Afghanistan, said that some 200 international firms have shown readiness to invest in mining and explore the vast untapped underground treasure in Afghanistan.

According to the minister, the war-torn Afghanistan has a deposit of minerals worth over 3 trillion U.S. dollars.

However, Afghanistan, mired with over three decades of war, does not have any mining industry or infrastructure to explore natural resources properly, so it will take decades for the country to exploit its untapped underground treasure appropriately.