



# Afghanistan Update

9 March  
2010

A twice-weekly, one-page situation report from the [Afghanistan Congressional Communications Hub](#) on the latest developments affecting U.S. policy and engagement in Afghanistan.

## In the News:

- General Kayani, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, made an unannounced visit to Kabul. He met with President Karzai as well as General McChrystal at ISAF's headquarters.
- President Karzai will make a two-day trip to Pakistan this week, during which he will visit President Zardari to possibly seek Pakistan's assistance in talks with the Taliban.
- Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad intends to visit President Karzai on Wednesday this week. This is Ahmadinejad's first visit since Karzai's reelection. Iran's semi-official Mehr news agency said Karzai invited Ahmadinejad to expand bilateral ties.
- The Ministry of Interior has banned tinted vehicle windows as a security measure effective Thursday. There will be no exceptions for diplomatic or official vehicles, and Interior Minister Hanif Atmar has already removed his own car's window tinting. Violators will have their vehicles impounded.

## In Quotes:

*"There is still much fighting ahead, and there will assuredly be some dark days. But looking forward there are grounds for optimism."* **Defense Secretary Robert Gates** on Afghanistan's security situation, 8 March 2010.

## In Quotes:

*"Although Congressional and other VIP travel builds crucial support for U.S. efforts in Afghanistan, it also taxes the same military and civilian assets that would otherwise be deployed in the vital counterinsurgency and reconstruction efforts that the visitors seek to evaluate."* Department of State **Office of Inspector General**, February 2010.

## IG Report: Civilian Surge Struggles

The Department of State Office of Inspector General [released a report](#) discussing many challenges faced by the U.S. Embassy in Kabul in effectively managing the so-called "civilian surge."

Embassy personnel grew from 320 to 900 in early 2010, but the "performance of the Embassy's management section has been adversely affected by lapses in oversight." Furthermore, embassy oversight of contracts and grants is inhibited by a shortage of qualified personnel and the poor security situation.

Multiple rest and recuperation breaks for embassy personnel can limit the development of expertise and breaks continuity of operations, which a former ambassador likened to "an institutional lobotomy."

The report said that "some describe the incredible volume of visitors from all branches of the federal and even state governments as 'war tourism.'"

The report concludes with more than 100 formal and informal recommendations for improving effectiveness in the Department of State's Afghanistan operations.

## Key Issue: Gates visits Afghanistan

- Defense Secretary Robert Gates made a surprise visit to Afghanistan on Monday. This was his first trip since the President Obama ordered the surge of 30,000 additional U.S. troops, of which approximately 6,000 are now in-country.
- In a joint press conference President Karzai outlined his plan for a peace conference in April aimed at ending the Afghan war and reintegrating insurgent fighters into Afghan society. Karzai said reconciliation will be available for the Afghans "who were forced into opposition, who have no ideological enmity to Afghanistan and its constitution, and who are not part of al Qaeda network or other terrorist networks."
- On reconciliation of Taliban leadership, Gates predicted that serious talks will only occur "when [the Taliban] see that the likelihood of their being successful has been cast into serious doubt. My guess is they're not at that point yet."
- Karzai also said he will soon announce new anti-corruption measures, and that Western countries should do more to clean up their own aid contracts. Gates agreed, saying that Washington needs to improve its own contract oversight efforts.
- Gates also expressed concern that Iran was playing a "double game" in Afghanistan, acting friendly while undermining U.S. forces. He said that Iranian support to insurgents was still "relatively low."

## Key Issue: Possible Insurgency Schism

- Taliban and Hezb-e-Islami infighting appears to have led to a split among insurgents in Afghanistan's North. More than 120 fighters from the anti-government Gulbuddin faction of Hezb-e-Islami surrendered to the Afghan government according to a police spokesman in Baghlan Province.
- Around 25 Taliban and Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin (HIG) fighters and 19 civilians were killed in the fighting, possibly over disputed control of regional taxation, tolls, and drug routes.
- In February the Taliban's Baghlan Province "shadow governor" Mir Mohammad was arrested by Pakistan authorities in Karachi, and Taliban fighters might suspect that the HIG tipped off Pakistani authorities to his movements.
- According to HIG commander Qazi Burhaan the fighting erupted when Taliban militants kidnapped some of his men. When HIG fighters were surrounded by Taliban militants they called the government, announcing they were switching sides, and requesting reinforcements which they quickly received.
- HIG was allied with Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan's northern provinces of Baghlan and Kunduz. Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, HIG's leader, never swore allegiance to the Taliban's spiritual leader Mullah Omar. Several weeks ago Hekmatyar's son-in-law met with Karzai's envoy in the Maldives, possibly discussing reconciliation.

## Contractor Oversight News

Representative James Moran (D-VA), the third-ranking Democrat member on the House Appropriations Defense subcommittee, promises to resist the award of an Afghanistan training contract to Xe, formally Blackwater. In an interview given before leaving on a trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan Moran said Defense Secretary Robert Gates would "have to be political (*sic*) brain dead to award them this." [FP](#)

The [Afghanistan Congressional Communications Hub](#) serves Members and staff by providing relevant and accessible information on Afghanistan. It is non-partisan. Contact [ACGH@NewStrategicSecurityInitiative.org](mailto:ACGH@NewStrategicSecurityInitiative.org) if you would like a specific issue paper or to be placed on the distribution list.