



Afghanistan Update

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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.

Key Issue: Karzai's Relations with the West

- President Hamid Karzai continued his comments regarding Western allies over the weekend, accusing the U.S. and NATO of interfering in Afghan affairs and warning that it risked turning the Taliban insurgency into a legitimate resistance movement – against foreign invaders.
- He made the comments during a private meeting with about 60 or 70 Afghan lawmakers Saturday, less than 24 hours after a conciliatory phone call with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to assure her of his commitment to working with the U.S. This followed his comments last Thursday, when Karzai accused the West of manipulation and fraud in last August's presidential election.
- In fresh comments on Monday, Mr. Karzai stood by his accusations that the West – specifically the U.S. – was responsible for election fraud in Afghanistan. "What I said about the election was all true, I won't repeat it, but it was all true," he told the [BBC](#).
- Experts believe that Karzai is playing a clever balancing act, appealing to Afghan nationalist sentiment that doesn't want decisions about their future to be made by foreigners.
- Analysts also fear that Karzai is drawing closer to regional allies like Iran and China, whose interests may clash with those of the West.

Key Issue: Marja Strategy Runs into Problems

- A key tactic that helped to turn the tide of insurgency in Iraq is running into serious problems in southern Afghanistan, the [New York Times reports](#).
- Since the start of a major offensive in February, U.S. Marines have flooded Marja with hundreds of thousands of dollars a week, aiming to win over wary residents by paying them compensation for property damage or putting to work men who would otherwise look to the Taliban for support.
- But the Taliban have already found ways to thwart the strategy in many places, including killing or beating those who take the compensation or join Marine-sponsored work programs, and have "re-seized control and the momentum in a lot of ways" according to a Marine spokesman.
- Cash payments had originally persuaded more than 20 store owners at one bazaar in northern Marja to open their doors after the U.S. offensive, but by late March Taliban intimidation had forced all but five shops to close.
- Reports also state that Taliban fighters, indistinguishable from the local population, are taking compensation money from the Marines and then use it to buy I.E.D.s and ammunition.
- "We've got to re-evaluate our definition of the word 'enemy,'" said Brig. Gen. Larry Nicholson, commander of the Marine expeditionary brigade in Helmand Province. "Most people here identify themselves as Taliban... We have to readjust our thinking so we're not trying to chase the Taliban out of Marja, we're trying to chase the enemy out," he said. "We have to deal with these people."

Key Issue: Electoral Complaints Commission

- President Karzai has responded angrily to the decision of the Afghan lower house last week that rejected almost unanimously a controversial decree that gave him the power to appoint all five members of the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC). The commission previously included three foreign, U.N.-appointed members.
- At one point during the two and a half hour meeting on Saturday, Mr. Karzai suggested that he himself would be compelled to join the Taliban if the parliament didn't back his move to take control of the ECC. Waheed Omar, a presidential spokesman, since denied that Mr. Karzai said he would join the Taliban.
- The upper house of Afghanistan's parliament (that is one-third appointed by President Karzai) backed his decree on the ECC over the weekend.
- Fresh parliamentary elections are slated for September, and analysts suggest that Mr. Karzai's control over the ECC could benefit candidates allied with him, potentially producing a more pliant legislature.

Key Issue: Kandahar Meeting

- Tribal elders in the Afghan city of Kandahar have sharply criticized President Karzai over issues of security and corruption.
- Mr. Karzai traveled Sunday to the southern city of Kandahar with the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, Army Gen. Stanley McChrystal to win support for an anti-Taliban offensive there.
- However, he was told few dared join the army for fear of being killed by the militants. Others accused him of failing to deal with bribery and nepotism.
- According to the [BBC](#), many tribal elders stood up at the shura (meeting), speaking loudly, angrily, some shouting at the president, complaining of police corruption, official bribes and insecurity.
- Meanwhile, Mr. Karzai sought to reassure anxious residents ahead of a planned offensive there for later this summer. He promised them that no operation would take place without their approval and support, assuring them that they would be consulted beforehand.

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