



# Afghanistan Update

26 February  
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:

- **Kabul was shaken by large attacks this morning that targeted guest houses used by foreigners.**
- **The major military operations in Marjah are in their second week;** around 150 insurgents and 35 civilians have died.
- **Pakistan has captured 7 of the 15 Afghan Taliban's leadership in the last week,** including the movement's second in command, Mullah Baradar, and the commander of military operations for eastern Afghanistan, Mullah Abdul Kabir.
- **Pakistan has announced that it will transfer Mullah Baradar into Afghan custody.** Pakistan denied the FBI's request to take Baradar into U.S. custody.
- **Afghan insurgent leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar announced a peace plan** that is contingent on the immediate withdrawal of all foreign forces, according to Pakistani media reports.

## In Quotes:

*"These barbaric attacks are a matter of deep concern and are clearly aimed against the people of India and the people of Afghanistan. These are the handiwork of those who are desperate to undermine the friendship between India and Afghanistan."* **India's Foreign Minister SM Krishna** 26 Feb 2010

## In Quotes:

*"We have no agreement with the Taliban—not for fighting the war, and not for the peace... The only thing that unites the Taliban and [us] is the war against the foreigners."* **Gulbuddin Hekmatyar** on his alliance with the Taliban in January, 2010.

## Who's Who:

**Gulbuddin Hekmatyar** is the leader of the Afghan insurgent movement Hizb-e-Islami, which is active in eastern and central Afghanistan. While currently allied with the Taliban, he refused to pledge loyalty to Taliban leader Mullah Omar.

Hekmatyar, a Ghilzai Pashtun, has a long history of switching sides in Afghanistan's wars. Born in 1947, he was a communist in his youth and a Mujahidin commander against the Soviets. Hekmatyar was the largest single recipient of U.S. money in the 1980s.

Hekmatyar was Prime Minister of Afghanistan twice in the 1990s, and lived in exile in Iran when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan. He has been closely allied with Osama Bin Laden, and is currently believed to be closely aligned with rouge factions in Pakistan's intelligence service. Some analysts comment that Pakistan's recent capture of Quetta Shura Taliban figures was an effort to reduce the effectiveness of Hekmatyar's insurgent rivals.

A legal wing of Hekmatyar's Hizb-e-Islami, an Islamist party that he founded in the 1970s, has over two dozen seats in the Afghan parliament and two ministerial positions in Karzai's government. Though the legal Hizb-e-Islami denies formal links with Hekmatyar, many of its senior members are believed to maintain communications and openly support the idea of bringing him into the government.

## Key Issue: Foreigners Targeted in Kabul

- More than 30 people are reported to have been killed in suicide attacks against two guesthouses used by foreigners in Kabul at around 6:30 this morning.
- A car bomb exploded outside a guesthouse popular with Indians, and suicide bombers were among a team that stormed another guesthouse frequented by Britons and Americans, starting a firefight with security forces that lasted for more than 90 minutes.
- Zabiullah Mujahid, a Taliban spokesman, said the suicide bombers focused "where the foreign people are staying," and that "the actual targets are foreign people."
- The attacks come on the morning of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, when fervent jihadists believe their actions are received with higher regard.
- Indian government officials were killed in today's attacks, and some analysts speculate Indians have been targeted with tacit approval and assistance by rouge factions in Pakistan's intelligence service.

## Key Issue: Recent Parliament Developments

- President Karzai has given the Independent Election Commission the authority to reallocate parliament seats reserved for women to men in cases where there are not enough female candidates.
- Analysts worry that if female seats can be reallocated that the election process would be open to intimidation, as conservative groups could discourage participation by female political candidates.
- The Afghan constitution guarantees women 25% of the seats in Parliament, at two per province. Women currently hold 28%.
- This new authority for the Independent Election Commission comes days after Karzai removed the international majority on the five-member Election Complaints Commission.
- The Election Complaints Commission forced Karzai into a run-off election with their accusations of widespread voter fraud last year. Karzai will be allowed to appoint all members of a new panel.
- Some analysts point out that the presence of international members on Afghanistan's Election Complaints Commission infringed on the country's sovereignty, and that Afghanistan must be allowed independence in its electoral processes.

## Budget News

A new \$60 million modern detention facility at Bagram has greatly improved the conditions in which Afghan detainees are kept. The new facility will cost \$5 million per year to operate and can host up to 2,300 inmates. The prison, run by U.S. Col. John Garrity, has been inspected by independent human rights groups that have confirmed a vastly improved detention process and legal review. The average detainee gains 36 pounds during their detention, and has access to a productive prison workshop. [McClatchy](#)

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