



Afghanistan Update

23 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:

- Pakistani authorities captured Mullah Abdul Kabir in the North-West Frontier Province. Kabir was a leading Querra Shura Taliban military commander for eastern Afghanistan.
- President Hamid Karzai has taken control of the Afghan election watchdog that forced him into a runoff in last August's presidential contest. Karzai gave himself the power to appoint all five members of the Electoral Complaints Commission, which previously had three U.N. appointed foreign members.
- According to a leaked memo, the UN Assistance Mission – Afghanistan (UNAMA) is suffering from very low morale and weak recruitment. At the beginning of 2010 UNAMA had a personnel vacancy rate of 44%. The situation led to the Special Representative of the Secretary General to alert the UN Security Council that if staffing problems continue, UNAMA will not be able to implement key elements of its mandate.

In Quotes:

"They're not here to occupy our country. They're just here to bring you peace... Who helped you 60 years ago? They were Americans, and they are here to help you now." **Marjah's new mayor, Haji Zahir**

In Quotes:

"It's understandable that people are impatient. They want to see clear progress on the ground." **NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen** on the Dutch Government's collapse over its role in Afghanistan, 23 February 2010.

In Quotes:

"I pledge to strengthen our efforts to regain your trust to build a brighter future for all Afghans... I have instituted a thorough investigation to prevent this from happening again." **General McChrystal** on national television in Afghanistan, apologizing for the civilian casualties in the Marjah Offensive, 23 February 2010. The apology was translated into Dari and Pashtu.

Who's Who:

Haji Zahir is the newly appointed Mayor of Marjah. He visited as mayor for the first time this week. This is the first time in two years an Afghan government official has met with Marjah residents.

Haji Zahir is described as a well-to-do Afghan from Helmand with service in the Afghan Army. He spent the last 15 years abroad in Germany.

Haji Zahir arrived on a U.S. Marine Osprey helicopter with Marine Officers and tribal elders from other parts of Helmand. Aides distributed 250 afghani (\$5) mobile phone cards to his new constituents, and he pledged honesty during his two hour visit to Marjah.

General Stanley McChrystal has called Zahir's team a "government in a box" which intends to quickly deliver basic services and implement cash-for-work programs within weeks.

Key Issue: Civilian Casualties

- U.S. Special Operations Forces ordered an airstrike that killed 27 civilians near the border between the Uruzgan and Daykundi provinces.
- The civilians were traveling in a convoy of cars that were believed at the time to be carrying insurgent reinforcements to Marjah.
- The airstrike may not have satisfied rules of engagement designed to avoid civilian casualties. NATO-ISAF ordered an immediate investigation.
- General McChrystal spoke with President Karzai to express his sorrow and regret for the incident, and pledged to fully partner with the joint investigation.
- General McChrystal tightened rules of engagement when he took command in Afghanistan in June 2009 with the intention of reducing civilian deaths.
- Civilian casualties caused by coalition forces in Afghanistan decreased by a third last year. In the same timeframe civilians killed by insurgents rose by 40%.

Key Issue: Dutch withdrawal from Afghanistan

- The Dutch government coalition collapsed Saturday after its two main political parties failed to agree on extending the country's mission to Afghanistan.
- The Netherlands is now expected to withdraw its 2,000-strong force from Afghanistan by the end of 2010, beginning in August.
- The Dutch mission, which started in 2006, has already been extended once by two years. Twenty-one Dutch soldiers have died in Afghanistan.
- While Dutch troops are not actively involved in combat operations, the U.S. views them as an important and effective ally for their training efforts in Uruzgan province.
- Afghan politicians have also lauded Dutch achievements. "We need the Dutch force in Uruzgan," Asadullah Hamdam, the province's governor, told The Associated Press. "The Dutch are very active in reconstruction, and strengthening the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police."
- Swelling of anti-war sentiment caused the collapse of the Prime Minister Balkenende's government this past weekend. Balkenende wanted to extend the Netherlands' military mission from August 2010 to summer 2011. His deputy, Wouter Bos, the leader of the country's Labor Party, had promised Dutch troops would be withdrawn by the end of 2010 during the 2007 election.

Budget News

- U.S. will provide \$85 million to improve the Afghan civil service. Ambassador Eikenberry and USAID Mission Director Bill Frej signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission Chairman Ahmad Mushahad with the mission of improving the efficiency and capacity of civil institutions and services. [RTT News](#)
- The US will spend \$600 million to build police stations in Afghanistan in 2010, spending around \$6 million on each station. [McClatchy](#)

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