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## **Karzai's Governing Strategy: A Threat to ISAF COIN Implementation**

by James Sisco

Karzai's initial governing strategy, focused at centralizing power within the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA), has failed. He perceives that US and international community support for his regime is eroding. Therefore, Karzai is systematically building a coalition of regional powerbrokers in preparation for a post-American Afghanistan. By strategically reshuffling provincial, district, and ministerial positions, Karzai is gradually reproducing the powerbrokers' political and economic patronage structures he tried for seven years to displace with his own. He is doing so to create the political space required to maintain his family's influence beyond the 2014 elections or to exit the presidency intact.

Implementing this strategy allows President Karzai to achieve his objectives due to three effects. First, and most importantly, he begins to break his dependence on the international community for his administration's survival. Second, he is able to leverage remaining international assistance to secure continued powerbroker interest in the short-term viability of GIROA. Finally, Karzai can choose to reconcile with the Taliban to reinforce his bargaining position. This new Karzai governing strategy mitigates the consequences of the impending decline in international support, though at the expense of the Afghan population and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) counterinsurgency (COIN) implementation.

An effective counter to Karzai's power sharing strategy is a bottom-up, grass roots COIN implementation that directs international resources toward village-level and civil society capacity. GIROA, the Taliban, and local powerbrokers have very little legitimacy with the population. Building legitimate, accountable governance capacity at the village level buys ISAF valuable time for reform efforts to take hold. Rebalancing Afghan society, so that the local areas exert more influence and checks on powerbrokers and GIROA, stands to make the entire political structure more accountable.

### ***Karzai's Politics in Afghan Historical Context***

#### ***Karzai's Dilemma***

President Hamid Karzai is now caught in a paradox he cannot resolve without harming his own personal interests. Karzai believes the international benefactors sustaining GIROA are undermining his authority and ability to govern the country through the reform agenda.<sup>1</sup> His main patrons, the US, its allies, and the international community, are expected to drawdown their

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<sup>1</sup> "Afghan president blames U.N., international community for vote fraud." *Japan Today*. (April 2, 2010). <http://www.japantoday.com/category/world/view/afghan-president-blames-un-international-community-for-vote-fraud>; "Karzai demands halt to Afghan civilian casualties." *Reuters*. (February 7, 2010). <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE6160KM20100207>; "Karzai May Compromise on Ban of Private Guards." *The New York Times* (October 24, 2010) <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/25/world/asia/25afghan.html>.

military forces and reduce their funding to the Afghan government, the main resources underwriting GIRoA's viability.<sup>2</sup> Afghan public support for and faith in Karzai, his appointees, and GIRoA in general continues to dissipate due to rampant corruption and the ineffective extension of public services. At the same time, the Taliban influence has steadily expanded from 4 provinces in 2006 to 33 of 34 provinces in 2010.<sup>3</sup> If Karzai maintains the cooptation governing strategy he adopted in 2004, he will inevitably lose the financial resources needed to support his governing alliance and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).<sup>4</sup>

### Karzai's Attempt to Consolidate Power

Karzai's initial governing strategy was the direct result of the US war against the Taliban in 2001-2002, which focused on transnational terrorism rather than Afghan domestic reform. This created an unfavorable balance of power in Afghan society by relying on the latent mujahidin warlord structure to defeat the Taliban. The US reinforced the existing mujahidin structure at the same time it sought to build a government headed by ex-patriot aristocrats and technocrats.<sup>5</sup> The US settled on Karzai due to his broad connections and ability to work across interest groups, but the fact remained that his base of support at the time was weak. Karzai, therefore, adopted a strategy of building a central government based on the cooptation of the US-backed powerbrokers that displaced the Taliban since they retained the bulk of the existing military power. Trading militias for government patronage and influence was the price of a limited deployment of US forces.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, many of the powerbrokers invited into GIRoA were the same mujahidin-era warlords whose corrupt and self-serving rule made the Taliban a logical alternative for much of the population in the mid-1990s.<sup>7</sup> Karzai's strategy of cooptation resulted in a government bureaucracy headed in many cases by illiterate or semi-literate powerbrokers and their agents. This pathology in GIRoA bureaucracy was exacerbated by the fact that these individuals rose to power based on their ability to ruthlessly extract wealth from their localities and networks.<sup>8</sup> As leaders of line ministries and GIRoA representatives, they extract massive amounts of money from both international development projects and the population. In the end, Karzai's cooptation strategy institutionalized GIRoA as a kleptocracy, empowered predatory powerbrokers over local populations, and divorced the government from the needs of the population.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Salahuddin, Sayed. "Afghanistan Boosts Budget Revenue by 45 Percent." Thomas Reuters Foundation AlertNet. (March 25, 2010). <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/SGE62O070.htm>; "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan National Budget 1389." *The World Bank*. (2010). p.4. <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/AFGHANISTANEXTN/Resources/305984-1264608805475/6739619-1282159147458/SY1389Budget.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Talbi, Karim. "Shadow Taliban Government Rules Afghans' Lives." *Agence France Presse*. (January 26, 2010). <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5gW19u3ZojrsONNK4I9tiX5TViJyA>

<sup>4</sup> Giustozzi, Antonio. "'Good' State versus 'Bad' Warlord? A Critique of State-Building Strategies in Afghanistan." *Working Paper #51, Crisis States Research Centre LSE, Development Studies Institute*. (October 2004), p.8.

<sup>5</sup> van Grieken, D.D. *Collaborating Warlords in Afghanistan's Political Reconstruction Process*. (Utrecht: Center for Conflict Studies, 2005), p.64-68.; Giustozzi, Antonio. "'Good' State versus 'Bad' Warlord? A Critique of State-Building Strategies in Afghanistan." *Working Paper #51, Crisis States Research Centre LSE, Development Studies Institute*. (October 2004), p.2.

<sup>6</sup> Giustozzi, Antonio. "'Good' State versus 'Bad' Warlord? A Critique of State-Building Strategies in Afghanistan." *Working Paper #51, Crisis States Research Centre LSE, Development Studies Institute*. (October 2004), p.3.

<sup>7</sup> Rashid, Ahmad. *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).; van Bijlert, Martine. "Between Discipline and Discretion: Policies Surrounding Senior Subnational Appointments." *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Briefing Paper Series*. (May 2009), p.7.

<sup>8</sup> Giustozzi, Antonio. "'Good' State versus 'Bad' Warlord? A Critique of State-Building Strategies in Afghanistan." *Working Paper #51, Crisis States Research Centre LSE, Development Studies Institute*. (October 2004), p.10.

<sup>9</sup> van Grieken, D.D. *Collaborating Warlords in Afghanistan's Political Reconstruction Process*. (Utrecht: Center for Conflict Studies, 2005).

Karzai's new governing strategy seeks to form a government regime based on a power sharing agreement with Afghanistan's regional powerbrokers. This is consistent with the Afghan political culture of the "politics of relationships."<sup>10</sup> However, by including powerbroker "rotten apples" into his governing alliance, Karzai is, to paraphrase Antonio Giustozzi, establishing the conditions for his government to meet the same fate as the *jihadi* movement in the mid-1990s: the resurgence of the Taliban.<sup>11</sup> To stem the Taliban resurgence, it is reasonable to assume that Karzai is willing to include the Taliban in the power sharing agreement.

### ***Karzai's Evolving Governing Strategy***

President Karzai's strategy is simple: to solidify his regime in the absence of international resources through a patronage network. There are two hypotheses as to why Karzai is implementing a power sharing strategy. One assumes that Karzai seeks to extend his family's political influence beyond 2014 and the other assumes he seeks to leave the presidency under controlled circumstances.

#### *Hypothesis 1: Continuing the Karzai Regime*

Abdullah Abdullah, Karzai's challenger in 2009, recently argued that the President is setting the stage for overturning the presidency's 2-term limit in the Afghan Constitution.<sup>12</sup> To accomplish this goal, the Afghan Parliament will have to change the Constitution. Karzai does not have enough allies in the Wolesi Jirga to do this without support from other powerbrokers. Given ethnic tensions,<sup>13</sup> Afghanistan's Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazara powerbrokers have no reason to agree to this arrangement unless they believe that they can consolidate their resource bases through the regime. Institutionalizing their rule and fortifying their patronage networks through GIRA can solidify their resource bases while avoiding Wolesi Jirga oversight. Powerbrokers would therefore have a continuing interest in Karzai's presidency.

Alternatively, President Karzai might attempt to create an environment where a family member could replace him. The industrial base of Afghanistan has historically been dominated by elites affiliated with the monarchy,<sup>14</sup> and it has been allowed to be dominated currently by elites and regional powerbrokers affiliated with Karzai.<sup>15</sup> Powerbrokers invested in this system could influence the voter base in future elections if members of Karzai's family can be trusted to maintain the system. The Karzai family's ability to maintain international financing to sustain his patronage network would only enhance a power sharing strategy for this purpose. Divesting power to Afghanistan's regional powerbrokers could be sufficient inducement for them to support Karzai's agenda, especially in the absence of a clear successor in 2014.

#### *Hypothesis 2: Controlled Exit from the Presidency*

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<sup>10</sup> van Bijlert, Martine. "Between Discipline and Discretion: Policies Surrounding Senior Subnational Appointments." *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Briefing Paper Series*. (May 2009), p.21.

<sup>11</sup> Giustozzi, Antonio. "'Good' State versus 'Bad' Warlord? A Critique of State-Building Strategies in Afghanistan." *Working Paper #51, Crisis States Research Centre LSE, Development Studies Institute*. (October 2004), p.10.

<sup>12</sup> Farmer, Ben. "Hamid Karzai lines up ultimate showdown with Nato with plan to stay in power." *The Telegraph*. (October 27, 2010). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/afghanistan/7970498/Hamid-Karzai-lines-up-ultimate-showdown-with-Nato-with-plan-to-stay-in-power.html>.

<sup>13</sup> Filkins, Dexter. "Overture to Taliban Jolts Afghan Minorities." *The New York Times*. (June 26, 2010). <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/27/world/asia/27afghan.html>

<sup>14</sup> Giustozzi, Antonio. "Afghanistan: Transition without End, An Analytical Narrative on State-Making." *Crisis States Research Center*. (November 2008), p.19-20.

<sup>15</sup> Giustozzi, Antonio. "Afghanistan: Transition without End, An Analytical Narrative on State-Making." *Crisis States Research Center*. (November 2008), p.42-43.

With a deteriorating security situation and less predictable international support, Karzai might determine that his best option is to exit the presidency through a negotiated peace. Former National Director of Security Amrullah Saleh is reported as stating that Karzai is pressing a deal with the Taliban because he has lost faith in the ability of the coalition and GIRoA to defeat the Taliban.<sup>16</sup> The fact that Karzai would openly weep that his son, Mirwais, might grow up in exile<sup>17</sup> indicates that he has contemplated having to leave the country whether on his terms or not. Veteran journalist and commentator on Afghanistan, Selig Harrison, recently suggested that Karzai's reconciliation overtures are part of a broader power sharing strategy to maintain his presidency.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Karzai's powerbroker allies could lose interest in the regime if they cease profiting from it. His anti-Taliban supporters would also feel threatened by potential Taliban inclusion and require control over their own resource bases to protect themselves from Taliban expansion.

To achieve a controlled exit, Karzai will need to shrewdly utilize his powers of appointment to establish an acceptable balance of power among the participating powerbrokers. Absent reasons to work with the Karzai regime, the country could quickly Balkanize along tribal, powerbroker, and ethnic lines, leading potentially to a rapid and violent collapse of the regime. Divesting power to Afghanistan's regional powerbrokers could be sufficient inducement for them to support Karzai until his term expires.

### ***Strategy Indicators***

Karzai's recent decisions and actions, while perplexing to many observers, are analogous to the politics typical of a royal court. In describing a medieval court, Goldberg writes, "The king rewarded those members of his court with whom he was especially pleased with gifts of money and territory. Royal siblings... were perceived by the subjects of the realm as extensions of the monarch himself."<sup>19</sup> That Karzai recreated a similar political structure is unsurprising since he comes from an aristocratic family. Foust notes,

Afghanistan does not have the benefit of strong institutions, so governance is based on relationships and patronage -- trading favors, or appointments, for money. In the West, it is normally called corruption. In Afghanistan though, corruption is, unfortunately, how the system works.<sup>20</sup>

When viewed from this perspective, what Westerners consider corruption is in reality a matter of managing the realm. Evaluations of Karzai's governing strategy should map how his appointments and decrees affect his patronage system. As a result, Karzai's power sharing strategy can be discerned through his recent appointments to key positions, his manipulation of executive agencies, his flirtation with reconciliation, and his possible nationalization of private security companies (PSCs).

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<sup>16</sup> Filkins, Dexter. "Karzai is Said to Doubt West Can Defeat Taliban." *The New York Times*. (June 11, 2010). <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/12/world/asia/12karzai.html>

<sup>17</sup> Foust, Joshua. "You would cry too: In defense of Hamid Karzai." *Foreign Policy*. (September 28, 2010). [http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/09/28/you\\_would\\_cry\\_too\\_in\\_defense\\_of\\_hamid\\_karzai](http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/09/28/you_would_cry_too_in_defense_of_hamid_karzai)

<sup>18</sup> Harrison, Selig. "A Smart Pashtun Play: Why Washington Should Back Karzai." *Newsweek*. (July 6, 2010). <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/07/06/a-smart-pashtun-play.html>

<sup>19</sup> For an interesting comparison see, Goldstone, Nancy. "Miss the Middle Ages? Try Afghanistan." *The Wall Street Journal*. (October 16, 2010). <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-goldstone-karzai-20101016,0,7203364.story>

<sup>20</sup> Foust, Joshua. "You would cry too: In defense of Hamid Karzai." *Foreign Policy*. (September 28, 2010). [http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/09/28/you\\_would\\_cry\\_too\\_in\\_defense\\_of\\_hamid\\_karzai](http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/09/28/you_would_cry_too_in_defense_of_hamid_karzai)

### Appointments: Consolidate powerbroker control over regions

All ministerial, provincial, and district appointees serve at the pleasure of the President of Afghanistan, which means they can be replaced to meet Karzai's patronage needs. Karzai unsuccessfully tried for seven years to displace many powerbrokers' networks with his own. Since he now needs their support, Karzai can reproduce the powerbrokers' patronage structures by strategically reshuffling provincial, district, and ministerial positions. In this bureaucracy, "Political power is not exercised in a progressively depersonalized, formalized and rationalized way through agreed 'rules'. Rather, it continues to be exercised in a personal and patronage-based manner, but within the overall framework of bureaucratic rules."<sup>21</sup>

In the lead up to and following the 2010 Parliamentary elections, there have been a significant number of high ranking personnel changes in the Ministries of Interior (MoI) and Defense (MoD), the district governorships, and the provincial governorships. These appointments must be evaluated according to how the new appointees' political relationships align with a Karzai power sharing strategy. Although there has not been a systematic study along this line, there is some *prima facie* reason to suspect the moves are part of a calculated strategy.

The appointment of security officials at all levels has historically been subject to political consideration and recent attempts to establish a merit-based system have had uneven impact.<sup>22</sup> Harrison argues that Karzai has already begun the process by appointing new Pashtun leadership to important MoD positions.<sup>23</sup> A recent report commissioned by the Congressional Research Service notes this point, but also notes that some observers consider the security services to be controlled by Tajiks.<sup>24</sup> MoI Bismullah Khan, a Tajik, has also reshuffled the leadership in his ministry, with some indication of a stronger Tajik influence emerging there.

The appointment of provincial and district governors is also well known to be infused with political bargaining. Although the Independent Directorate for Local Governance (IDLG) is charged with identifying and appointing qualified personnel to fill the positions, President Karzai is still known to make appointments as a result of political considerations as well.<sup>25</sup> The recent appointments of governors in the western provinces of Herat and Nimruz, known affiliates of Ismail Khan, and the strong alignment of the northern provinces' governors with Vice President Fahim Khan would suggest that close scrutiny should be paid to further changes in political appointments.

### Establishing and Manipulating Government Entities

Constitutionally, the Wolesi Jirga is charged with acting as a check on presidential authority. President Karzai's relationship with it as an organization is now significantly strained. Nevertheless, Karzai has had some success in preventing the Wolesi Jirga from becoming a

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<sup>21</sup> Lister, Sarah. "Understanding State-Building and Local Government in Afghanistan." *Working Paper #14, Crisis States Research Centre LSE, Development Studies Institute*. (May 2007), p.6.

<sup>22</sup> Wilder, Andrew. "Cops or Robbers? The Struggle to Reform the Afghan National Police." *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit*. (July 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Harrison, Selig. "A Smart Pashtun Play: Why Washington Should Back Karzai." *Newsweek*. (July 6, 2010). <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/07/06/a-smart-pashtun-play.html>

<sup>24</sup> Katzman, Kenneth. "Afghanistan: Politics, Elections, and Government Performance." *Congressional Research Service*. (October 13, 2010), p.3.

<sup>25</sup> van Bijlert, Martine. "Between Discipline and Discretion: Policies Surrounding Senior Subnational Appointments." *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Briefing Paper Series*. (May 2009), p.11-16; Nixon, Hamish, "Subnational State-Building in Afghanistan." *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Briefing Paper Series*. (April 2008), p.25.

unified opponent by extending patronage and privilege to individual Members of Parliament (MPs).<sup>26</sup> It appears that Karzai already took advantage of the Wolesi Jirga's limited oversight of his ministers by appointing two key officials more amenable to a power sharing strategy than their predecessors, the National Director for Security (NDS) and the MoI.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, a weak party structure prevents a coherent opposition from coalescing.<sup>28</sup>

Karzai frequently exercises his strong constitutional authority to marginalize Wolesi Jirga's oversight. He does so by creating executive agencies over which the Wolesi Jirga has no substantive influence, such as the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) and the IDLG. While the opposition to Karzai in the Wolesi Jirga remains weak, he has the ability to manipulate appointments and executive agencies to fulfill his power sharing strategy.

Karzai has further insulated himself from the influence of the Wolesi Jirga by appointing the members of the APRP and the High Peace Council (HPC). The Joint Order formally authorizing the APRP makes the Chief Executive Officer, Secretary Stanekzai, "responsible for implementation of the strategic decisions made by the [High Peace Council]."<sup>29</sup> Provincial governors are charged with overseeing the operational and security components of the APRP, with NDS, ANA/ANP, ISAF, and UNAMA sitting on provincial advisory boards.<sup>30</sup> This overall reconciliation and reintegration structure allows President Karzai to manipulate the entire process since he ultimately appoints the HPC/APRP members; the governors; the ANA, NDS, and ANP commanders; and the district governors who implement the program.

Most of the APRP members are mujahidin-era and regional powerbrokers.<sup>31</sup> Notable members include Ismail Khan (Tajik), Sher Mohammed Akhundzada (Pashtun), Burhanuddin Rabbani (Tajik), Pir Sayed Ahmed Gilani (Pashtun), Said Nur'allah (Uzbek), Abdul Rasoul Sayyaf (Pashtun), Abdul Hakim Mujahid (former Taliban), and Sibghatullah Mojadeddi (Pashtun).<sup>32</sup> As noted Afghanistan scholar Martine van Bijlert writes,

In many ways, the list is a reiteration of the myths of the jihad, honouring those who made the emergence of the Taleban seem like a source of relief ... a list like this signals that 'reconciliation' may well end up simply adding the warlords that were excluded from Bonn to those already allowed in 2001 [*sic*] ... This is not a list of people that have been chosen for their contacts or mediation skills. It is a reconfirmation of where the armed – and increasingly economic – power lies and where it will remain; of what kinds of people are trusted by 'the palace', regardless of their impact.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Larson, Anna. *The Wolesi Jirga in Flux, 2010: Elections and Instability I*. (Kabul: *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit*, 2010), p.5-8.

<sup>27</sup> Harrison, Selig. "A Smart Pashtun Play: Why Washington Should Back Karzai." *Newsweek*. (July 6, 2010). <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/07/06/a-smart-pashtun-play.html>

<sup>28</sup> Larson, Anna. *The Wolesi Jirga in Flux, 2010: Elections and Instability I*. (Kabul: *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit*, 2010), p.5-8.

<sup>29</sup> "Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP)." *Islamic Republic of Afghanistan National Security Council, D & R Commission*. (April 2010), p.22. [http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/pdf/afghan\\_report\\_051110.pdf](http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/pdf/afghan_report_051110.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> "Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP)." *Islamic Republic of Afghanistan National Security Council, D & R Commission*. (April 2010), p.22. [http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/pdf/afghan\\_report\\_051110.pdf](http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/pdf/afghan_report_051110.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> Riechmann, Deb. "Afghan government sets up 70-member peace council." Associated Press (September 28, 2010). [http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5iqETCMPbriSHgWTvfFp3qa4\\_s3eAD9IGTPC00?docId=D9IGTPC00](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5iqETCMPbriSHgWTvfFp3qa4_s3eAD9IGTPC00?docId=D9IGTPC00)

<sup>32</sup> van Bijlert, Martine. "Warlords' Peace Council." *Afghan Analysis Network*. (September 28, 2010). <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=1175>

<sup>33</sup> van Bijlert, Martine. "Warlords' Peace Council." *Afghan Analysis Network*. (September 28, 2010). <http://www.aan-afghanistan.org/index.asp?id=1175>

High Peace Council members are comprised mainly of ministers with equities in the peace process, such as the Minister of Interior, the Minister of Defense, the National Director of Security, the Director of IDLG, and the Secretary of the APRP.<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, the IDLG was formed by Karzai in 2007 as a concession to the international community to extend governance to the provincial and district levels. It is currently headed by a well-respected technocrat, Jelani Popal. If properly run and resourced, IDLG can be a significant partner in generating accountable governance at the village and district levels. However, the IDLG represents a potential threat to Karzai's power sharing strategy because empowered districts and villages undermine the influence of his powerbroker allies and, consequently, his new strategy.

There is increasing worry that Karzai is politicizing this agency and weakening its efficacy.<sup>35</sup> By placing a powerbroker at IDLG's head instead of a technocrat, the agency can quickly reverse any gains it has made. Moreover, Karzai can limit IDLG's mission by restricting Popal's resources and freedom to interact with other service ministries. As an executive agency, Karzai can easily manipulate the IDLG's effectiveness.

### Electoral Fraud

Karzai has been charged with influencing the elections process in both the last presidential and parliamentary elections. Although constitutionally and politically bound to conduct elections, Karzai has fulfilled this obligation with a procedural democracy that he is able to influence. Over one-third of the votes cast for Karzai in 2009 were thrown out by the United Nations-backed Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC), forcing him into a run-off election.<sup>36</sup> In response to the international pressure, Karzai blamed the international community for the voter fraud and unsuccessfully attempted to eliminate international representation on the ECC.<sup>37</sup>

The 2010 Parliamentary elections were also tainted by voter fraud with 25% of all votes being thrown out.<sup>38</sup> There is no clear evidence at this point that candidates supported by Karzai were overly represented in the 295 already announced election probes.<sup>39</sup> Given that Karzai will want little resistance from the Wolesi Jirga while implementing his power sharing strategy, it is likely that his allies will be well represented in the fraud results. In addition, if he does desire to change the constitution to extend his term in office, he will need a strong voting base in the

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<sup>34</sup> "Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP)." *Islamic Republic of Afghanistan National Security Council, D & R Commission*. (April 2010), p.22. [http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/pdf/afghan\\_report\\_051110.pdf](http://media.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/world/pdf/afghan_report_051110.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> *Speaking from the Evidence: Governance, Justice, and Development*. (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2010), p.6.; Maass, Citha. "Searching for an Exit Strategy: The Afghanistan Donor Conference in Paris Marked the Beginning of a Paradigm Shift." *The Asia Pacific Times*, Vol. 2, #7 (July 2008). [http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/common/get\\_document.php?asset\\_id=5193](http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/common/get_document.php?asset_id=5193)

<sup>36</sup> "Karzai declared elected president of Afghanistan." *Cable News Network (CNN)*. (November 2, 2009). <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/11/02/afghanistan.election.runoff/>

<sup>37</sup> Ahmad, Sardar. "Karzai appoints new elections chief for Afghanistan." *Agence France Presse (AFP)*. (April 17, 2010). <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5hpciHEuDX1kuA5rnKA5j7GdXysuw>; "Afghan president blames U.N., international community for vote fraud." *Japan Today*. (April 2, 2010). <http://www.japantoday.com/category/world/view/afghan-president-blames-un-international-community-for-vote-fraud>; Boone, Jon. "Hamid Karzai takes control of Afghanistan election watchdog." *The Guardian*. (February 22, 2010). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/feb/22/karzai-afghanistan-electoral-complaints-commission>.

<sup>38</sup> Abi-Habib, Maria. "Afghan Vote Tally Reveals New Faces, Fraud." *The Wall Street Journal*. (October 20, 2010). <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304011604575564103091339366.html>

<sup>39</sup> "120 more Afghan candidates face charges of electoral violation." *Xinhua News*. (October 24, 2010). [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-10/24/c\\_13573123.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-10/24/c_13573123.htm)

Wolesi Jirga. The main way for him to accomplish this objective is to guarantee candidates connected to his patronage network get elected.<sup>40</sup>

### Reconciliation

Since the conclusion of Parliamentary elections, President Karzai has stepped up the pace of his reconciliation efforts. With ISAF facilitating the movement of Taliban envoys to meetings with the Karzai's reconciliation representatives,<sup>41</sup> Karzai must understand that a negotiated peace with the Taliban is acceptable in principle to the US and its international partners.<sup>42</sup> The HPC's chairman, former President and noted anti-Taliban leader Burhanuddin Rabbani<sup>43</sup> even offered a somewhat conciliatory tone stating recently, "We are taking our first steps," he said. "I believe there are people among the Taliban that have a message that they want to talk. They are ready."<sup>44</sup> In other words, Karzai must realize that coming to an accord with the Taliban is acceptable and can be worked into his strategic calculus.<sup>45</sup>

### PSCs

President Karzai's recent decree eliminating PSCs by January 2011 has been interpreted by Western embassies and the international community as having "unintended" consequences, such as limiting NGO and development agency assistance to the population.<sup>46</sup> While Karzai has expressed concern about PSCs since his 2007 decree,<sup>47</sup> he has since altered his position from regulating them to eliminating or nationalizing them. Examining this change of approach in the context of Karzai concluding a power sharing agreement indicates the decision was a calculated tactical move.

President Karzai recognizes the threat PSCs pose to his power sharing strategy. Estimates of PSC employees range from 18,500 to nearly 40,000 armed men, many of whom are hired by Afghanistan's powerbrokers.<sup>48</sup> By nationalizing these companies, Karzai achieves important strategic objectives. First, he establishes a new patronage system by eliminating PSCs he does not control while favoring PSCs that improve his relative influence. Second, this gives regional power brokers a vested (economic) interest in his presidency. International aid agencies and NGOs will likely have to contract with the MoI for security services, adding further funding

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<sup>40</sup> Coburn, Noah and Anna Larson. "Patronage, Posturing, Duty, Demographics: Why Afghans Voted in 2009" *Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit*. (August 2009), p.7.

<sup>41</sup> Shanker, Thom, David E. Sanger and Eric Schmitt. "U.S. Aids Taliban to Attend Talks on Making Peace." *The New York Times*. (October 13, 2010). <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/14/world/asia/14nato.html>

<sup>42</sup> "US, reversing course, backs Afghan peace effort." *Associated Press* (October 14, 2010). <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2010/10/14/afghan-peace-council-chief-taliban-ready-talk/>

<sup>43</sup> Riechmann, Deb. "Afghan government sets up 70-member peace council." *Associated Press* (September 28, 2010).

[http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5iqETCMPbriSHgWTvffP3qa4\\_s3eAD9IGTPC00?docId=D9IGTPC00](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5iqETCMPbriSHgWTvffP3qa4_s3eAD9IGTPC00?docId=D9IGTPC00)

<sup>44</sup> Riechmann, Deb. "Afghan peace council chief says Taliban ready to talk." *The Washington Times*. (October 14, 2010).

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/oct/14/afghan-peace-council-chief-says-taliban-ready-talk/>

<sup>45</sup> McGreal, Chris. "Taliban leaders met with Afghan government." *The Guardian*. (September 28, 2010).

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/28/taliban-leaders-met-afghan-government>

<sup>46</sup> Abi-Habib, Maria. "Karzai Stands By Private Security Ban." *The Wall Street Journal*. (October 25, 2010).

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303864404575572412957210650.html>

<sup>47</sup> Rimli, Lisa and Dr. Susanne Schmeidl. "Private Security Companies and Local Populations. An exploratory study of Afghanistan and Angola" *Swiss Peace*. (November 2007), p.23.

[http://www.swisspeace.ch/typo3/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdf/PSC.pdf](http://www.swisspeace.ch/typo3/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/PSC.pdf)

<sup>48</sup> Rimli, Lisa and Dr. Susanne Schmeidl. "Private Security Companies and Local Populations. An exploratory study of Afghanistan and Angola" *Swiss Peace*. (November 2007), p.6.

[http://www.swisspeace.ch/typo3/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pdf/PSC.pdf](http://www.swisspeace.ch/typo3/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/PSC.pdf)



to his patronage network.<sup>49</sup> For instance, estimates suggest a total of \$5.1bn worth of US aid is currently earmarked for spending and it will need to be protected.<sup>50</sup> Lastly, nationalized PSCs under MoI authority augment existing ANSF manpower by nearly 10-20%. As a result, he generates influence over armed groups that he currently does not enjoy. In the end, the nationalization of the PSCs expands Karzai's patronage network, provides PSC powerbrokers with GIRoA authority to control their territories, and creates broader MoI oversight of armed groups.

### ***Implications for ISAF's COIN Implementation***

The implications of Karzai devolving district power back to his powerbroker partners are overwhelmingly positive for those involved, but largely negative for the Afghan population and ISAF COIN implementation.

#### ***Karzai Insulates Himself from International Pressure***

The international community's reform agenda threatens Karzai's ability to spread patronage. If Karzai is to successfully establish a power sharing arrangement, he must continue to mitigate the international community's influence in the districts and provinces. This enables his allied powerbrokers to solidify control with minimal resistance and oversight. Karzai will be unable to manage his network if GIRoA's financial resources are limited by good governance restrictions. Additionally, his reliance on international assistance limits his political options since human rights norms are often attached. To establish a power sharing arrangement, he will need to free himself of such restrictions.

#### ***Weakening International Support for ISAF's Mission***

President Karzai's new governing strategy will significantly undermine ISAF's COIN strategy. Though GIRoA is a problematic and in many ways counterproductive COIN partner, there are still technocratic elements of the administration that approach good governance. The international community's ability to pressure the Karzai administration to either remove poor district and provincial governors or strongly suggest good replacements is an important component in the COIN strategy.

However, if Karzai is able to insulate his administration from the international community's influence, then he can appoint governors and police chiefs based solely on political expediency for his governing strategy. The likely result will be the installation of GIRoA officials most concerned with extracting wealth from the population and consolidating power. ISAF's COIN strategy will be directly undermined by GIRoA because popular legitimacy will have no bearing on Karzai's governing strategy whatsoever.

Americans are already questioning their commitment to Afghanistan, and a failure of the COIN strategy could easily push them against continuing the effort. International resolve, which has been girded by US diplomatic pressure, will wane as rapidly as American resolve. In short, Afghanistan will quickly find itself losing international support beyond already committed resources, leaving it to the fate Karzai and the powerbrokers involved set for it.

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<sup>49</sup> Abi-Habib, Maria. "Karzai Stands By Private Security Ban." *The Wall Street Journal*. (October 25, 2010). <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303864404575572412957210650.html>

<sup>50</sup> Boone, Jon. "Hamid Karzai's crackdown on private security puts \$1bn Afghan aid at risk." *The Guardian*. (October 21, 2010). <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/oct/21/karzai-private-security-crackdown-afghanistan>

### The Villages Pay the Price

A GIROA structure where powerbrokers or their subordinates control governorships and police offices will result in a return to the feudal economic structure that empowered the mujahidin in the 1980s-1990s.<sup>51</sup> As international resources diminish, this structure will support the powerbrokers that extract wealth from the people to maximize resources for their militias. Recent history suggests that many powerbrokers will rely upon poppy production and other illicit activities to underwrite their wealth and power.

As a result, political order in Afghanistan will be based upon ethnically and tribally-oriented political structures that dominate provincial political power institutions. This power structure will entrench the powerbrokers' predatory rule over the population. In other words, controlling the district becomes the most important GIROA institution for powerbrokers to co-opt, and the people of Afghanistan will soon find themselves unable to resist the authority of powerbrokers.

### **Countering Karzai's Strategy:**

The only effective counter to Karzai's power sharing strategy is a bottom-up, grass roots COIN implementation that enables villages to insulate themselves from powerbroker predation. COIN implementation based solely upon resourcing and extending the reach of GIROA is doomed to fail. GIROA is a fully formed *kleptocracy* built upon a political culture of patronage, and it is functionally incapable of fulfilling its obligations to its people. A Karzai governing strategy based upon power sharing will only exacerbate these intrinsic GIROA deficiencies. While reform of GIROA must be a strong element of the COIN implementation, a GIROA-centric COIN framework alone will be unable to meet the strategy's objectives. Therefore, rebalancing Afghan society so that the local areas exert more influence and opposition to powerbrokers and GIROA stands to make the entire political structure more accountable.<sup>52</sup>

The key to COIN in Afghanistan is to help villages rise above the subsistence level so that they have the resources to govern and secure themselves. A decentralized COIN approach that orients resources around enhancing existing legitimate political communities, the village or qawm, can bring security to the countryside as villagers rise up to protect their own interests. But as Dorronsoro and Pothier observe, "District governments are currently only nominally functional and fail to deliver basic services, such as justice and education, to the people."<sup>53</sup>

International assistance should therefore seek to rebalance the power in Afghan society at least to the degree it had prior to the Soviet invasion. Restoring village level governance structures, such as village shuras, business organizations, maliks, and community police, will generate immediate dividends with rural communities. Below GIROA, these elements of society can be relied upon to establish order and security if they enjoy sufficient resources. As Giustozzi notes, "They want, generally speaking, to reclaim some of the influence that they enjoyed in different periods of the past, but also, more pragmatically, to exercise some control over the

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<sup>51</sup> For example, Hansen, Cole, Christian Dennys, and Idrees Zaman. *Conflict Analysis: Baharak District, Badakhshan Province*. Cooperation for Peace and Unity. (February 2009), p. 15.; and Pain, Adam. "Opium Poppy and Informal Credit." *A Report for the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit/UK Department for International Development (FID)*. (October 2008), p.25.

<sup>52</sup> Giustozzi, Antonio. "'Good' State versus 'Bad' Warlord? A Critique of State-Building Strategies in Afghanistan." *Working Paper #51, Crisis States Research Centre LSE, Development Studies Institute*. (October 2004), p.15.

<sup>53</sup> Dorronsoro, Gilles and Fabrice Pothier. "Beyond the Surge: A Political Strategy for Afghanistan?" *The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. (January 28, 2010). <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/events/?fa=eventDetail&id=2803>

activities of local authorities and demand the appointment of more professional and/or honest district managers, chiefs of police, heads of departments or even provincial governors.”<sup>54</sup> Until the villages rise above the subsistence level, which can be accomplished fairly rapidly with proper COIN implementation, they will remain dependent on some external entity, be it GIRoA, local powerbrokers, the Taliban, or the international community.

CFSOCC-A’s<sup>55</sup> Village Stability Operations concept is an excellent model from which the broader ISAF COIN implementation framework can draw lessons. The core concept is to enhance village capacity for self-protection while building up governance and development resources. While the goal is ultimately to demonstrate GIRoA’s benefit to the population, many of the resources are temporarily provided by ISAF forces. Exploiting GIRoA programs that grant the US and international community the political space to engage villages, and applying direct diplomatic pressure to expand them further, can redirect the international community’s resources to develop healthier support networks for the Afghan population than the patronage networks debilitating GIRoA.

## ***Conclusion***

President Karzai is implementing his power sharing governing strategy to create the political environment to secure his future. These actions are illustrated by establishing and manipulating government agencies, strategically reshuffling provincial, district and ministerial positions and flirting with Taliban reconciliation and reintegration. This strategy threatens to undermine ISAF’s COIN strategy by giving malign actors and powerbrokers formal control over the districts. Therefore, the US may consider a strategic course correction in order to align its national interest vis-à-vis the strategic environment that Karzai has created for himself. Clearly Afghanistan is a US strategic interest, but what is its interest within Afghanistan? Must the US align its national interests with Karzai’s governing strategy? The answer is clearly no. Ultimately, the implementation of US strategy must consider first the US national interest, but must also consider how best to achieve these interests within the environment of Karzai’s governing strategy. Two options are immediately apparent: 1) Operations which achieve US strategic goals which *counter* Karzai’s governing strategy or 2) Operations which achieve US strategic goals *through an understanding* of Karzai’s governing strategy.

A rapid and concerted effort to counteract this strategy is still possible, but ISAF must recognize Karzai’s actions for what they are and change its COIN implementation to counter his strategy. The US and the international community can effectively counteract Karzai’s strategy by supporting villages to increase their governing capacity. As Giustozzi concludes, “It is likely that with some support from the international community and particularly from donors, who are the ones with the real leverage, such efforts by ‘civil society’ actors could be more successful and have a greater impact.”<sup>56</sup> However, the US must consider if a pure countering of Karzai’s governing strategy aligns with the US national interest. Karzai has chosen his strategy in order to realize his own interests; the US should implement a strategy which realizes its own interests.

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<sup>54</sup> Giustozzi, Antonio. “‘Good’ State versus ‘Bad’ Warlord? A Critique of State-Building Strategies in Afghanistan.” *Working Paper #51, Crisis States Research Centre LSE, Development Studies Institute*. (October 2004), p.16.

<sup>55</sup> Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan

<sup>56</sup> Giustozzi, Antonio. “‘Good’ State versus ‘Bad’ Warlord? A Critique of State-Building Strategies in Afghanistan.” *Working Paper #51, Crisis States Research Centre LSE, Development Studies Institute*. (October 2004), p.16.

A change in strategy to align US interests and operations is also still possible. The US still possesses the time and resources to shape the political environment in which President Karzai operates by building up countervailing political organization. In this way, the US can still support the elected Karzai regime while limiting its ability to completely control the political system. Better organized and resourced localities will be able to assert their interests through GIRoA at all levels, which ISAF can support with its own COIN implementation and political influence. A proactive ISAF COIN implementation that enhances local governance while pushing national level reform will create a more viable and responsive Afghan government structure. The end result will be the people of Afghanistan taking greater control over their district resources and local government regardless of President Karzai's governing strategy. Though this COIN implementation will require years to mature, it sets the foundation for a more successful transition by ISAF's stated 2014 strategic objective than working principally through the Karzai regime.

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