

## PRESIDENT HAMID KARZAI'S SECOND INAUGURAL ADDRESS

### CRITICAL POINTS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

On November 19, 2009, Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai delivered a much anticipated second inaugural address. In the thirty-minute speech, the President laid out benchmarks and commitments to be pursued over the next five years, his final term. The event was filled with symbolism, including his insistence that his two Vice Presidents—ethnic Tajik and Hazara respectively—take oath in Pashto, while he himself a Pashtun recited the Dari version. It was an image perhaps carefully choreographed, though appeared improvised, to remind Afghans of his initial popularity as a leader who transcended ethnic limits.

This paper is an analysis of the policy implications of President Karzai's address. It will examine his remarks on key issues such as: the international military presence in Afghanistan, reconciling the insurgents, relations with the United States, composition of the new government, anti-corruption and anti-narcotics measures, past and future elections as well as enhanced Afghan role in the security sector. The quotes are from an "unofficial" translation of the speech posted on the presidential office's website.

#### INTERNATIONAL MILITARY PRESENCE AND THE SECURITY SECTOR

##### ► Increased Afghan Participation And Leadership

"...Within the next three years, Afghanistan, with continued international support and in line with the growth of its defense capacity, wants to lead and conduct military operations in the many insecure areas of the country... We are determined that by the next five years, the Afghan forces are capable of taking the lead in ensuring security and stability across the country."

##### Significance:

President Karzai articulated two crucial benchmarks in the above remarks: Afghan forces leading military operations in three years, and taking lead in ensuring security and stability across the country in five years. While highly ambitious, these commitments are nonetheless likely to be well received by people inside Afghanistan, in the United States and the broader international coalition.

Whether true or not, a perception exists outside Afghanistan that Afghans are not doing enough to share the burden. There is also a desire in Washington and European capitals to transition towards more Afghan-led security sector initiatives. From the Afghan side, delivery on the President's commitment depends on the ability of his next Interior Ministry to build and reform a police force that is large and able enough to enforce rule of law around the country and the Defense Ministry's success

in further developing the promising Afghan National Army. President Karzai's commitment will remain simply another ambitious goal if the effort to build and reform Afghan forces is not resourced, if the young forces are not properly mentored, and if the forces are not adequately equipped by the international community.

➤ Disband Private Security Firms in Two Years

"...The goal of a powerful national government can be realized by the stronger presence of national security forces in all parts of the country. Within the next two years, we want operations by all private national and international security firms to be ended and their duties delegated to Afghan security entities..."

Significance:

Ending the operations of private security firms in the country, and delegating their tasks to Afghan security forces within two years time is likely the most challenging commitment President Karzai made. It is also one of the most crucial.

There are at least thirty-nine [private security firms](#)—local and international—registered in the country, with armed staff numbering in the tens of thousands. The international civilian and military presence in Afghanistan relies heavily on these companies, and [some of them are owned by powerful and politically connected people in the country and abroad](#). President Karzai mentioned curbing the activities of private security firms in the context of "achieving state monopoly over security affairs." Tackling the challenge private security firms pose to that monopoly will require a lot of political resolve from the Afghan government and the international military presence in the country.

The most controversial part of the operations of private security firms in Afghanistan is convoy security. Reports indicate that they are involved in practices that allegedly [help fund the insurgency](#), for example, by making arrangements with insurgents to deter attacks on their convoys. Two years ago the Afghan government's National Directorate of Security (NDS) had suggested that ["the United States... take the tens of millions paid to security contractors and instead set up a dedicated and professional convoy support unit to guard its logistics lines..."](#) The NDS proposal was not implemented. President Karzai's commitment to address the controversial issue of private security firms is encouraging, but success will depend on his resolve to follow through on this.

➤ Afghan Control of Detention Facilities and Policy

"The detention and prosecution of suspects is the authority and responsibility of the Afghan government. We have to strengthen the security of our prisons and detention centers, and expedite further the reform process within our justice system. We will continue to discuss this issue with the United States of America to ensure that detention and legal prosecution of suspects will be the responsibility of the government of Afghanistan alone."

Significance:

The issue of detainees in U.S. and NATO custody and their ability to detain "suspects" is likely to test Kabul's relations with its allies. The Afghan government sees resolving cases of certain detainees as crucial to confidence building with parts of the insurgency that it wants to flip. Therefore President Karzai's government will seek greater control over the maintenance and prosecution of suspects.

The detention practices are also widely recognized as one source of public dissatisfaction with the international military presence in the country, as there have been numerous cases of unjust detentions. Nonetheless, the U.S. and allies are likely to resist an all out transfer of control over detention facilities and policy to the Afghan government. There are many reasons for this, including the dismal state of Afghanistan's judiciary and prison systems, as well as the likelihood that the suspects will be released through corruption, or use Afghan [prison facilities as launching pads for insurgent operations](#).

Douglas M. Stone, a Major General in the U.S. Marine Corps, is leading an effort to “overhaul” the detention policies in Afghanistan and help build Afghanistan's detention facilities. Until these efforts produce results, Afghan control over the detention policies and practices of the international military presence is likely to remain weak. As recently as this week, the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) [complained about lack of access to prisoners in Bagram](#). Issues such as access to prisoners are likely to be addressed earlier than a transfer of major control to the government of Afghanistan.

➤ **Avoid Civilian Casualties**

“I am pleased to see that our continuing discussions with NATO and ISAF, and our joint operational measures, have resulted in a considerable reduction in the number of civilian casualties. We would like to expand and enhance such measures, so that casualties among our civilian population to be avoided.”

**Significance:**

Over the past several years, especially in late 2008 and early 2009, civilian casualties as a result of NATO and U.S. operations were a major point of contention between President Karzai and his international supporters. As late as May 2009, President Karzai made impassionate appeals and even threats on the need to reduce civilian casualties. That he is content with progress since then, and is publically acknowledging it, is a major success for General Stanley McChrystal's Command in Afghanistan.

Since General McChrystal's arrival as Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, there has been significant reduction in civilian casualties as a result of military operations. The incidents that did cause civilian casualties—such as the September aerial strike in Kunduz—were promptly followed by damage control measures. In particular to the Kunduz incident, General McChrystal launched a prompt and widely televised acknowledgment of the mistake and the need to avoid such incidents in the future. All in all, the second half of 2009 has been largely positive on avoiding civilian casualties.

## RECONCILING THE INSURGENTS

### ► Ending the War

“...the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has placed national reconciliation at the top of its peace-building policy. We welcome and will provide necessary help to all disenchanted compatriots who are willing to return to their homes live peacefully and accept the Constitution. We invite dissatisfied compatriots, who are not directly linked to international terrorism, to return to their homeland. We will utilize all national and international resources to put an end to war and fratricide. We will call Afghanistan’s traditional Loya Jirga and make every possible effort to ensure peace in our country...”

#### Significance:

In a thirty minute—3500 plus words—speech, there was no mention of the “Taliban” or “insurgents.” Instead, they were referred to as “disenchanted compatriots” or “dissatisfied compatriots.” That Afghanistan is at war with an insurgency supported from outside and sustained by internal factors was never conveyed by President Karzai’s speech. It is fair to assert that Hamid Karzai does not see himself as a wartime leader, but is rather—as he has often stated publically—inclined towards the non-military persuasions of Gandhi and Khan Abdul Ghafar Khan, the so-called Frontier Gandhi. His mild approach to the insurgents despite their ruthlessness and reach might also be part of a strategy to keep negotiations on the table should the insurgents ever come around. It could also be an indicator of his uncertainty about international resolve to fight the insurgency, or part of his efforts to expand his own political constituency.

President Karzai’s approach to the insurgency is curiously insufficient. The insurgency in Afghanistan does have “dissatisfied” and “disenchanted” Afghans in it—but it is also led by unsavory characters who do not hesitate to send suicide bombers and blow up civilians in market places and schools. A call for reconciliation coupled with resolve for defeating the insurgents should they refuse to lay down their arms is likely to earn him better standing with his people and the international community. It will also deny the insurgents public relations points—for each time the President invites them over, they rebuff him by insulting his office with slurs like calling him a “puppet.” More importantly, the President’s approach to the insurgents is likely to have negative impact on the morale of the young forces under his command—the Afghan National Army, the Afghan National Police, and the National Directorate of Security officers—who face off with the enemy on a daily basis.

Currently, the insurgency has the momentum in Afghanistan. The prospects of “reconciliation” will remain dim if that momentum is not shifted, and the external patrons of the insurgency are not convinced that the Afghan government and its international partners will fight the fight if that is what it takes. The President mentioned convening a Loya Jirga—traditional assembly of elders called in times of emergency or major national decisions—to help with reconciling some of the insurgents. It is important to note that the insurgents have always refused Kabul’s call for reconciliation. Some insurgent leaders such as [Gulbudin Hekmatyar](#) have set unrealistic demands including international military withdrawal, and an interim set up before new general elections. It is unclear if President Karzai has any new magic formula for convincing insurgents to take part in a Loya Jirga or send authoritative emissaries to it.

## RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES

### ➤ Acquire Major Non-NATO Ally Status

“...We believe that our friendship with the United States of America is not limited to our joint struggle against violent extremists and the forces of division and destruction; rather, it is based on Afghanistan’s long-term interests towards the consolidation of stability and tranquility for our people in this region... I am fully confident that this friendship will further expand. The people of Afghanistan will never forget the sacrifices made by American soldiers to bring peace to Afghanistan. Afghanistan is determined to take all the necessary steps towards strengthening US-Afghan relations... Afghanistan hopes to acquire the status of a major non-NATO ally of the United States...”

#### Significance:

Despite recent tensions between the Afghan government and the Obama Administration, President Karzai made a clear declaration of intent for close ties with the United States. In a region skeptical of the United State’s presence in Afghanistan, the President’s hopes for achieving a “major non-NATO ally” status may raise questions. His remarks about relations with the U.S., however, marked a return to his rhetoric of the time when he enjoyed overwhelming support in Washington. This shift may signify a sense of realism inside his office, and a return to governing as opposed to campaigning mode.

The speech showed a desire by his government to leave behind the tense and often disorderly public disagreements between Washington and Kabul. Secretary Clinton’s subsequent praise is a promising new start to mending fences, an effort of immense importance to succeed against the insurgency and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and the region.

## HIS NEW GOVERNMENT

### ➤ Invites Dr. Abdullah and Dr. Ashraf Ghani to Come to the Government

“...I would like to invite all the presidential candidates, including my brother Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, and Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, who is here with us today to come together to achieve the important task of national unity, and make our common home, Afghanistan, proud and prosperous...”

#### Significance:

President Karzai has been under intense international pressure to form an inclusive government. The history of his past eight years in office also indicates a preference for having his opponents inside the tent as opposed to outside. Calling on Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani to join him is evidence of that. Ashraf Ghani has expressed conditional willingness to join the next government. [In a recent BBC Persian interview](#), he stated that he wants clear commitments from President Karzai on women’s rights and opportunities for youth and the poor before he joins the government. Abdullah on the other hand [has ruled out becoming part of the Karzai administration](#). He has expressed a preference to build an opposition party and focus on parliamentary elections next year.

➤ Start Vetting Appointees

“...We must use full care and foresight in appointing all government officials and members of the administration. The ministers of Afghanistan must possess integrity and be professionals serving the nation...”

Significance:

The composition of President Karzai's new cabinet and key appointments at the provincial level—governors and police chiefs—is being closely observed by the Afghan public and the international community. Whatever decisions he makes on the staffing of his cabinet will play the key role in determining the Afghan public's view towards his new term. It is likely that the president will reward members of his broad political coalition with cabinet positions, a choice that could have negative impact on the government's efficacy. However, repaying his political debt in form of appointments is inevitable and, frankly, not unique to President Karzai's situation. How he pays back these debts will be crucial—the available choices in front of him are limited.

#### COUNTER-CORRUPTION AND COUNTER-NARCOTICS

➤ Enhance Anti-Corruption Measures

“...alongside an intensified judicial reform, all government anti-corruption efforts and agencies have to be strengthened and supported...Measures for supporting the anti-corruption agencies include: increasing the scope of their authority, improving their capacity and resources for detection and investigation, expanding their organizational structure, as well as reforming the relevant anti-corruption laws and regulations...The Government of Afghanistan considers it to be its responsibility to dismiss all government employees who are connected to the cultivation and trafficking of illicit drugs, and to deliver them to the hands of the law...”

Significance:

President Karzai is under significant domestic and international pressure to show progress against corruption and narcotics. Measures such as creating anti-corruption task forces and commissions have been tried in the past, with minimum to no success. This time around, given the level of the President's public commitment, his last chance to leave behind a respected legacy, and the international focus on the issue, Afghans might begin to see results. What was missing, however, from the President's focus on this subject was the need to provide protection to the judicial and law enforcement bodies and individuals tasked with counter-corruption and counter-narcotics. In the past, one of the biggest challenges to advancing anti-corruption measures has been the lack of protection for prosecutors.

**ON PAST AND FUTURE ELECTIONS**➤ **Respect, Learn and Reform**

“...I would like to thank and express my heartfelt gratitude to my country’s men and women, who despite threats, made sacrifices to take part in this great national process. I also applaud all of the candidates for their participation in the election process; this process has moved our country one step further towards democratic maturity. Let me also commend all the candidates for their peaceful campaigns and rallies. The conduct of the election campaigns in shaping opinions and giving direction to the people’s votes were major strides towards stabilizing and ensuring the people’s preeminence in our young democracy... We must learn from our good and bad experiences in these elections and put all our energy to ultimately fully Afghanize the process. The election law has to be ratified and enforced as soon as possible... For the purpose of strengthening oversight over government decisions, we want to organize district level elections in addition to the parliamentary elections next year. For the purpose of better city management, mayoral elections will be held soon.”

**Significance:**

President Karzai’s statement on the elections can be interpreted as an attempt to highlight the positives of the process in order to: A) counter the questions raised about his legitimacy by those who argue that the process was a failure; B) to take the initiative from the insurgents who pride themselves for derailing the process.

President Karzai is right to suggest that despite its flaws the electoral process was positive and marked steps forwarded towards democratic maturity. Much of the outside criticism of the elections fails to take into account the fact that over four million Afghans voted, despite severe risks, and that the campaign process was largely civil and politically advanced. That said, however, President Karzai’s statement would have been much more credible if he had clearly repudiated the fraud committed in his name and that of other candidates.

The reference to the need to “Afghanize the process” is a polite way of saying that the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC), staffed by three foreigners and two Afghans, needs to be changed. The ECC was in charge of the audit process that brought Karzai’s vote tally from the unaudited number of 54.7 to below fifty percent.

Going into parliamentary elections next summer or fall, ratifying and enforcing a new electoral law is key. A draft of the law is being discussed in the parliament, and it remains to be seen if Afghanistan moves towards a parliamentary election system that encourages party formation and political mobilization. The current system, single-non-transferable-vote (SNTV) electoral system does not foster political party mobilization and has led to a fragmented and chaotic parliament. “District level elections”—a reference to elections for district councils called for in Article 140 of the Constitution—will face major challenges as many districts’ boundaries in the country are not specified and there exists no credible or comprehensive census. President Karzai mentioned mayoral elections, but did not specify a timeline. Mayoral elections are a provision called for in the Afghan Constitution, under Article 141. Committing to both these elections, neglected until this date, could be a sign of progress. But for it to produce tangible reform, rigorous planning, and changes in the election administration are needed.

## CONCLUSION

President Karzai's second inaugural address was delivered with immense symbolism. It was subject to intense local and international media scrutiny. On many of the critical issues, as outlined above, the Afghan President managed to strike the right notes. Lacking, however, from his remarks was the intensity of a wartime leader who is confronted with the violent challenges that are bleeding the forces under his command and forces hosted by his government. The commitments he made are ambitious, to say the least. Sincere progress towards achieving them will be crucial to maintaining international support. Afghans and Afghanistan's international partners will be hoping that President Karzai's inaugural address was not just another speech, but the beginning of a process where good words and intentions are matched by equal action. Nonetheless, with this speech, the Afghan President has turned a new page. Writing the new chapter in Afghanistan, and succeeding, is not just President Karzai's task alone but requires streamlining the political side of the international effort and resourcing the military mission.