

AFGHANISTAN NEWS BULLETIN

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In This Bulletin:

- ✚ Afghan Forces Able to Conduct Night Raids, MoD says
- ✚ US mulls transfer of Taliban prisoners at Gitmo
- ✚ Afghan Officials Concerned Over Situation of Prisons
- ✚ Afghanistan: Karzai and the Taliban in a Tizzy Over News of Secret Peace Talks
- ✚ Afghan president pledges action over abuse of women
- ✚ Report: Afghans Will Require Substantial Help After 2014
- ✚ Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs Slams National Front's Meeting With US Republicans
- ✚ Military investigates theft of gear en route home from Afghanistan
- ✚ Was \$73B of Afghan aid wasted?
- ✚ 'Fear in their hearts' as Pakistanis ferry NATO wares into Afghanistan

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Afghan Forces Able to Conduct Night Raids, MoD says

TOLO News, 11 January 2012- Afghan Ministry of Defence Spokesman General Zahir Azimi said at a press conference on Wednesday that if the Afghan president assigns the responsibility for conducting night raids to the Afghan security forces, they will be capable of handling these operations.

"As members of the defence ministry we are obliged to carry out the orders of President Karzai," General Azimi said. "Night operations should be fully transferred to ANA forces because our commando forces are powerful enough."

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has asked the US to stop night raids immediately.

Isaf said night raids will continue because they are the most effective way of targeting insurgents but the organisation stressed it will try to involve the ANA in the operations.

Over the past 20 days, 20 joint operations have been conducted in various areas of the country. About 42 insurgents have been killed and 240 others have been captured in these operations, General Azimi said.

He added that 18 ANA soldiers also died.

The defence ministry believes that security situation is 26 per cent better than it was a year ago. General Azimi did not say how this was calculated.

The ANA is currently planning Operation Nawid (Hope) will commence after New Year in Afghanistan on March 21. The operation will continue for 19 months.

As international troops prepare to leave the country in 2014, Afghan forces are increasingly taking over the responsibility for providing security. In the second phase of transition, Afghan forces have already taken over security in seven out of 18 areas.

The strength of the ANA is currently 180,000 men strong. The growth target is 195,000 by November of this year.

US mulls transfer of Taliban prisoners at Gitmo

WASHINGTON (AP) 11 January 2012-- The Obama administration has appeared to acknowledge there are discussions about transferring some Taliban prisoners at Guantanamo Bay as part of the U.S. support for Afghan reconciliation efforts.

But Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says no decision about releasing any Taliban prisoners has been made.

Clinton had a meeting Wednesday at the State Department with the foreign minister of Qatar (GUH'-tur). She thanks the U.S. ally for offering to host a Taliban political office. She said there was support for the idea from Afghan President Hamid Karzai and the Taliban.

Clinton said she's sending the State Department's special representative for Afghanistan to Kabul and Qatar next week to work on the details.

Afghan Officials Concerned Over Situation of Prisons

TOLOnews.com, Tuesday, 10 January 2012-The Afghan Ministry of Interior on Tuesday expressed concern about the situation in the Afghan prisons.

The Pul-e-Charkhi central prison which is one of the main detention centres in the country is not in good condition.

"Despite your efforts and commitments, the Afghan Prisons and Detention Centres are facing many challenges that need practical efforts to be tackled," Afghan Minister of Interior, Gen. Besmellah Mohammadi said. "The Interior Ministry is committed to take necessary actions in this regard."

Infiltration of insurgents, presence of mobile phones with prisoners, and using drugs inside prisons are the current challenges in prisons.

"Lack of appropriate surveillance outside of the prison is the main cause of infiltration of mobile phones and drugs inside the prison," Afghan Minister of Justice Habibullah Ghalib said.

The concerns come as Afghan authorities are due to take over responsibilities of all prisons in the country including the US-run Bagram detention centre.

Some experts believe that the Afghan government has failed to provide proper environment for the prisoners in the jails under its control.

Afghanistan: Karzai and the Taliban in a Tizzy Over News of Secret Peace Talks

News of secret peace talks prompts an ultimatum from the Afghan president to the U.S.— and sows dissension in the Taliban's ranks. Sami Yousafzai and Ron Moreau on the upheaval on all sides.

Daily Beast, by Sami Yousafzai , Ron Moreau | January 10, 2012-Nothing stirs up a conflict more effectively than the first feeble glimmers of peace. Anyone who doubts it can just look at Afghanistan, where news of preliminary peace talkshas provoked President Hamid Karzai to issue yet another ultimatum to his U.S. partners—and where Taliban fighters are feeling betrayed by their leaders' sudden willingness to negotiate.

Late last week, Karzai blindsided the Americans by demanding that they hand over all Afghan prisoners to his government within 30 days, together with the entire U.S.-run detention facilityat Parwan, just north of Kabul. Washington has been trying to work out a security plan to keep a small but significant U.S. military presence in Afghanistan after the 2014 withdrawal deadline for American forces. But for that to happen, as Karzai explained in an exclusive interviewlast week with *Newsweek* and The Daily Beast, the Afghan president wants two things: an immediate end to U.S. forces' night raids on Afghan homes suspected of harboring insurgents, and a speedy handover of the Americans' Afghan prisoners and the Parwan Detention Center. "These we consider to be a violation of our

sovereignty," he said, "and we want them to end all that before we sign the partnership deal." U.S. officials knew he wanted control of the detainees, but they had no idea he would demand it so soon.

Why the sudden impatience? The presidential palace is keeping mum, but a former senior Taliban official now living in Kabul tells *The Daily Beast* there's a logical explanation. "If you have control of Taliban prisoners, then you have a very good bargaining chip with the Taliban," says the former Taliban diplomat, who maintains impeccable contacts with both the Afghan government and the Taliban. At this preliminary stage, senior Afghan officials tell *The Daily Beast*, the Taliban's negotiators care about only one issue: winning the release of some or most of their detained comrades, many of whom are top-ranking military commanders. And Karzai wants to be the one who makes that deal.

The Afghan president was clearly miffed to learn that the Americans, the Europeans, and the Taliban had been talking behind his back for months about opening a Taliban representative office in the Gulf state of Qatar. He did his best to sound statesmanlike as he accepted the fait accompli. "We will go along with it for the return of peace to Afghanistan as soon as possible," he told *Newsweek* and *The Daily Beast*. Still, he clearly dislikes being treated as an afterthought—and if he can quickly get control of the hundreds of Taliban prisoners (many of them high-value detainees) currently held by the Americans, that will put him in the driver's seat for any future talks with the insurgents.

At the top of the Taliban's wish list are the former senior commanders currently held at Guantánamo Bay. They include Mullah Fazil Akhund, the brutal former chief of army staff who surrendered in northern Afghanistan in late 2001; Mullah Nurullah Nuri, a former senior governor in the north, and Mullah Khairullah Khairkhawah, a former interior minister. To get any of them sprung may be out of the question at present. But the Americans are also holding plenty of important Taliban commanders in Afghanistan. Right now the Taliban's best hope is that Karzai will get control of those prisoners, and that he can then be persuaded to let them go in defiance of U.S. objections.

Taliban leaders know that as long as so many senior commanders remain in custody, the insurgency will be relatively weak on the battlefield. More than that, however, the release would be a sorely needed boost for Taliban morale, which was hit hard when the Qatar talks were revealed. "If negotiations can bring back some prisoners to the Taliban side, that would show skeptical commanders and rank-and-file fighters that the leadership is accomplishing something in the talks and not just selling out the jihad," says the former Taliban diplomat.

At present, however, word of the Qatar talks has left many insurgents "incredulous and confused," says a senior Taliban commander from eastern Afghanistan. The group has always demanded a total withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan as a precondition for any discussion of peace—and now, without notice, the leadership seems to have abandoned that position. "Many Taliban were stunned," says the commander, declining to be named for security reasons. "No one understands what's happening. It's unbelievable." To many fighters, it's been as if their leadership "was committing religious suicide," the former Taliban diplomat says.

“Mentally the Taliban in the field aren’t ready for the talks,” the commander says. “They can’t imagine sitting down to talk with the Americans who are still here and still killing us.” What really hurts is the uncertainty about what’s really happening, he says. “If you put a small doubt in the mind of our fighters, that this is not a struggle for our ideology and Islam but rather for power-sharing, some Taliban may not fight,” he warns. The former Taliban diplomat confirms that the possibility worries some Taliban leaders: “There’s a fear out there that 50 percent of the fighters may not return to the battlefield next spring after hearing the news of the talks.”

That worry may be why senior Taliban officials still have not publicly confirmed the meetings in Qatar—even though their silence only worsens the disquiet in the ranks. “Ending the war is good,” the commander says. “But after all our sacrifices, we should know what compromises and conditions we have to make for peace.” For that matter, he wonders, how does anyone even know that the Qatar negotiations have been approved by the Taliban’s supreme leader, Mullah Mohammad Omar? “I won’t believe anything said or written about the talks until we hear directly from Mullah Omar himself in his own voice,” the commander says.

“There’s a fear out there that 50 percent of the fighters may not return to the battlefield next spring after hearing the news of the talks,” says a former Taliban official in Kabul.

There’s something else that bothers some Afghan insurgents. The man who seems to be the Taliban’s No. 2 negotiator in Qatar is actually a citizen of Pakistan, a fact that’s been confirmed to The Daily Beast by an intelligence officer for the Afghan government. Although Afghanistan’s insurgents have always relied heavily on Pakistan’s covert support, experience has taught them not to trust the neighboring country’s motives. The Pakistani national, Mullah Abdul Aziz-ur-Rahman Ahmadi, currently lives in Qatar’s capital, Doha, as a businessman, while his brother, Hafiz Rashid Ahmed, runs a madrassa in the Pakistani border town of Quetta. Their father, a wealthy Afghan, moved the family from Afghanistan to Quetta even before the 1979 Russian invasion.

And yet the family’s Taliban credentials could hardly be better. What’s more, Ahmadi’s Pakistani citizenship may be the most hopeful sign to date that the talks could bring real results. Under Mullah Omar’s regime, Ahmadi was the first secretary of the Taliban’s Embassy in Abu Dhabi, and his brother worked in the Taliban’s consulate in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Their father was a key financier of Mullah Omar’s movement from its very start, in 1984. Ahmadi is said to have been instrumental in the negotiations with the Americans and Qataris for the establishment of the Taliban office in Doha. Until now, however, there’s been one vital player missing from the talks: Pakistan. Without Islamabad’s cooperation, peace is a vanishingly unlikely prospect. Ahmadi’s participation in the talks might—just might—be a first hint of Pakistan’s acceptance of the Qatar negotiations.

Afghan president pledges action over abuse of women

AFP, 11 January 2012-Afghan President Hamid Karzai pledged Wednesday to take action against the “cowardly” perpetrators of violence against women in the wake of a horrific case of the torture of a child bride.

The president made the commitment after a visit by a delegation from the Afghan Women's Network over Sahar Gul, 15, who was burned and beaten and had her fingernails pulled out after she defied efforts to force her into prostitution.

Gul was found last month in the basement of her husband's house in northeastern Baghlan province, where she had been locked in a toilet for six months by her husband and his parents.

The president said that he always took measures as soon as he heard about cases of violence against women, and would continue to take the issue seriously so that the culprits were brought to justice.

"Hamid Karzai termed violence against women as a cowardly act and said: 'In our country women are not just the victims of family violence, but they also get killed by terrorists and foreign forces,'" said a statement from his office.

This last remark was seen as a reference to civilian deaths in the US-led war against Taliban insurgents — a regular Karzai target.

The statement gave no details of what action the president would take. Gul's mother-in-law, sister-in-law and father-in-law were arrested but her husband is still at large.

Afghan Women's Network lawyer Wida Latif told AFP ahead of the meeting that the group would ask Karzai to give the girl a place to live.

"Or else she will be taken to a women's shelter and will be forgotten like many other women who live in those shelters," said Latif.

According to figures in an Oxfam report in October, 87 percent of Afghan women report having experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence or forced marriage.

The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission logged 1,026 cases of violence against women in the second quarter of 2011 compared with 2,700 cases for the whole of 2010.

Report: Afghans Will Require Substantial Help After 2014

VOA, Al Pessin, 11 January 2012-A respected London research organization says the Afghan government likely will be able to retain control of the country after foreign troops end their combat role in three years. But the International Institute for Strategic Studies says Western nations will need to provide financial and military support for Afghanistan for much longer.

The 300-page report says the challenges ahead for Afghanistan are huge, and its path will be difficult. But the authors, including Middle East expert Toby Dodge, come away with what they call 'constrained optimism,' as long as the West does not abandon Afghanistan when its combat troops leave in 2014.

"The United States and its allies, brought together within NATO and the United Nations, have to keep a quite muscular, omnipresent watching brief on Afghanistan," said Dodge. "Certainly there will be an 'over the horizon' watching brief and a presence on the ground in Kabul. But the main commitment will be financial, and I think there is enough of a political

consensus to guarantee that over the next decade.”

The report warns the Kabul government may not have full control over the country by 2014. But the authors believe its security forces should be strong enough to assert control where necessary to prevent terrorists from using the country as a base, as they did in the years before the September 11th attacks in 2001.

Some experts believe Afghanistan will need a more robust foreign military presence than Western nations want to provide after 2014, including training, air support, counter-terrorism units and rapid reaction forces. But retired British Brigadier Ben Barry, who wrote the book’s security chapter, said there also may be resistance to a continuing Western military role from the Afghans.

“You could see Afghan nationalism coming into play, and the Afghans becoming increasingly fed up with Western boots on the ground, with civilian casualties and collateral damage, and also a sense that Western boots on the ground are a recruiting sergeant for the Taliban and Jihadists. We have seen this to a certain extent in Iraq,” said Barry.

The IISS report is fairly optimistic about the future role of Afghanistan’s neighbors. It says the relative strength of the Afghan government forces the country’s neighbors to deal with Kabul, rather than their preferred ethnic groups or militias.

The book does, however, express concern about what the authors call the myriad risks in Pakistan.

Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs Slams National Front's Meeting With US Republicans

TOLO News, 11 January 2012- Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Wednesday said that recent meeting between the members of the Afghan National Front and some of the US republican lawmakers in Berlin was against the Afghan constitution.

In a statement released by the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs the meeting between the newly Afghan National Front and US lawmakers in Berlin has been considered against the Afghan constitution and interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs.

The MoFA has warned against repetition of such moves in future.

Efforts by some Afghan political parties to change the current system and to establish a federal system have followed some criticisms in Afghanistan, and the Afghan government has warned that such meetings must not repeat.

"The Afghan government is against any kinds of meetings and actions that are against national unity and the constitution. The Afghan government considers such moves as interference in Afghan internal affairs and such actions should not be repeated in future," the MoFA statement said.

Meanwhile, the spokesman for the National Front told TOLONews on the phone that there was nothing illegal about the meeting with the US lawmakers in Berlin. The spokesman warned that the achievements of the last ten years faced the threats of being spoilt.

"We want the government to address concerns of the Afghan people. The government has been weak in the fields of security and fighting against corruption. We believe that the achievements of the last ten years could be lost after foreign troops leave by the end of 2014, Faizullah Zaki, Spokesman for the National Front, said.

Chief of the National Front Ahmad Zia Massoud, Leader of Junbish-e-Milli Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum, Leader of Afghan People's Wahdat Party, Haji Mohammad Mohaqes, and former Chief of the National Directorate of Security Amrullah Saleh were the figures who recently had a meeting with some of the US republican lawmakers in Berlin where they emphasised on establishment of a decentralised political system in Afghanistan.

Military investigates theft of gear en route home from Afghanistan

Globe and Mail, January 10, 2012-Someone is plundering the sea containers the Canadian Forces are using to ship supplies home from the Afghanistan war – theft that has prompted a military investigation.

Canada ended its combat role in Afghanistan in 2011, and hundreds, if not thousands, of boxy sea containers are being shipped back home loaded with everything from tents to tires.

The boxes are taken from Kandahar in southern Afghanistan by land to a port on the coast of Pakistan, where they are placed on ships to Montreal.

But upon unloading the containers in Canada, the Forces discovered that thieves have emptied some, and replaced the contents in some instances with rocks to simulate the weight of the pilfered goods.

"Some sea containers have arrived in Canada missing equipment," Lieutenant-Commander John Nethercott told The Globe.

The Forces say no weapons or ammunition or explosives have been determined to have been stolen. Munitions and restricted equipment is instead airlifted back to Canada.

"We can additionally confirm that no uniforms are missing from any of the containers that have been inventoried to date," Lt.-Cdr. Nethercott said.

Military investigators together with the Canadian Border Services Agency are probing the theft.

"The Canadian Forces National Investigation Service is investigating the matter and the Canadian Forces are working to ensure every reasonable security measure is in place to ensure the secure shipment of the remaining containers," the spokesman said.

Was \$73B of Afghan aid wasted?

Politico, By: James R. Petersen, January 11, 2012-I worked in Afghanistan as an auditor for six months last year and spent another seven months at the D.C. headquarters of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, charged with monitoring aid from the U.S. Agency for International Development, the State and Defense departments and others.

Washington has appropriated nearly \$73 billion for reconstruction and development in Afghanistan since 9/11, according to SIGAR's October 2011 quarterly report, up \$17 billion in each of the past two years. That's a lot of money for our indebted nation.

Our leaders ought to have good reasons for giving this aid. Maybe they do. Taxpayers, however, whether they support our efforts or not, still deserve answers to basic questions: Where has all this money gone? Has anyone verified it went where it was supposed to go? Is it cost effective to run aid programs in a war zone?

The answer is no. The money isn't going where we think it is — and \$73 billion is a ton of treasure to waste.

Essentially, all U.S. aid programs are contracted out to nongovernmental organizations, which means that our agencies are really huge contract management centers. NGOs take out administrative costs and the rest goes to aid.

At USAID, for example, NGOs' administrative costs at most programs are about 30 percent. This means, for every dollar from USAID, 70 cents goes to recipients on the ground and the NGO keeps 30 cents to cover overhead.

Thirty percent in administrative costs may sound high, but in Afghanistan, USAID has struggled to keep NGO overhead costs below 70 percent — more than double the norm. Costs can escalate when organizations operate in a war zone. But a mere 30 cents out of every dollar for Afghanistan goes to aid.

It gets worse.

Of that 30 cents, frequently only half reaches the intended recipient. The remainder is lost, stolen or misappropriated by Afghan workers and officials. Many projects don't even attain their own internal goals, according to reports from inspectors general and the Commission on War-Time Contracting. The June 2011, Senate Foreign Relations Committee report concluded that few, if any, of these aid programs are sustainable in the long term.

Add in the cost of the USAID's bureaucratic superstructure — including \$500,000 annually for each U.S. employee in Kabul, and the supporting staffs in Washington — and sometimes less than 10 cents of every dollar actually goes to aiding Afghans.

I'm not the only one "on to" this problem of high costs. To make USAID's administrative cost ratios look better on paper, the agency has been pushing its contractor organizations to distribute aid faster and monitoring the NGOs' "burn rate." Consequently, Afghans are drinking from a fire hose of U.S. reconstruction aid money, inevitably leading to waste, fraud and abuse — and few tangible aid results on the ground.

To find out where the money went, SIGAR's auditors rely principally on NGO management reports and on summary financial data from USAID's financial system. But the NGO's raw accounting data is unaudited and unverified. That means the U.S. reconstruction effort is ultimately flying blind.

Wrapping our arms around the size and scope of the problem will require a few simple steps.

First, SIGAR, USAID and State and Defense departments' IGs charged with overseeing the spending must audit and report on the amount of money spent by NGOs that does not go directly to measureable aid projects. Then, add in the cost of maintaining the administrative superstructure in Washington and Kabul, and that can quantify the U.S. "return on investment."

It is low, maybe less than 30 percent. For some programs, it may be less than 20 percent.

Second, the IGs should unleash their forensic auditors to analyze the accounting records at all the NGOs, where the detailed cash transaction data is. The data in USAID's system is too cleansed and summarized to be of much use. Forensic auditors are adept at using sophisticated software algorithms to evaluate huge amounts of computerized accounting data. They can shake the tree and examine what falls out, so we can answer the \$73 billion question: "Where did the money go?!"

The national debate about whether to engage in Afghanistan and for how long is likely to continue in Washington. But everyone can agree that, with a staggering \$15 trillion national debt and facing budget austerity, U.S. taxpayers have a right to know where the money is going in Afghanistan. And to turn off the spigot if necessary.

Alarmingly, it appears that those charged with policing the cookie jar and those who spent \$73 billion of our money have failed us.

James R. Petersen served as senior auditor for the special inspector general for Afghanistan Reconstruction. He previously served as senior vice president of mergers and acquisitions at CDI Corp.

'Fear in their hearts' as Pakistanis ferry NATO wares into Afghanistan

DW, 11 January 2012- NATO forces in Afghanistan rely heavily on overland supply routes from Pakistan. For the Pakistanis who drive the supply trucks, danger lurks around every corner as they face the threat of attack by militants.

Ordinarily, the men behind the wheel of the many NATO supply tankers driving into Afghanistan from Pakistan arrange musical gatherings and sing melancholic songs together by the roadside. "I am sad as I am far away from dear ones, so how can it be a happy occasion," chants one musician.

There are dozens of such drivers gathered here, though most are spectators to the performance. Many of them hail from the tribal border regions between Pakistan and Afghanistan and have been caught in limbo in the southern city of Karachi since late November last year.

That was when Pakistan put a freeze on all NATO convoys through its territory into Afghanistan after 24 Pakistanis were accidentally killed in an alliance air attack near the border regions in what NATO termed a "tragic unintended incident."

The convoys come under frequent attack by militants based in the Khyber Pass. Last year alone, around 200 oil tankers were destroyed and hundreds of other vehicles were attacked.

No choice but to drive

Despite the danger, there are countless drivers, such as 18-year-old Niamat Khan, who are waiting for work to restart. Niamat explains why he has chosen such a dangerous occupation.

"Nobody is willing to lend me more money. Working bringing NATO supplies into Afghanistan is the only source of income for me and my family," he says. "There is a lot of tension in my family at the moment because one of them is ill and they need the money. I am here listening to the music to forget my tension and grief."

The round trip from Karachi to Bagram airbase near the Afghan capital, Kabul, takes around one month to complete and can earn the drivers anywhere up to around \$1,000.

Norshed Khan, a 20-year-old who is among the tanker drivers, says life-threatening scenarios come with the territory.

"Recently a helper on the truck in front of me was shot dead right in front of me," he recounts. "I have seen people being killed many times and once a bomb exploded in an oil tanker very close to me. I think about my family and mother all the time and miss them very much."

Quadrat Ullah, 22, says he is anxious to get back on the road despite the risks.

"I often remember the day I saw a helper in the truck in front of me get killed. We all have fear in our minds and hearts but despite the danger we do what we have to do because it's our profession and the profession of our forefathers," he says.

The irony is that most of the drivers side ideologically with the Pakistani Taliban. For many seated at the musical gathering, driving trucks for NATO violates their beliefs. They say, however, that they have no other choice but to live in sin.

Strong demands

The treacherous job of ferrying NATO goods from Pakistan into Afghanistan is often the only source of income for those living along the long road between the two countries, says Shabeer Ahmed, a human right activist working in the tribal region.

"It is obvious that if the drivers lose their jobs, and their children and family are without a source of income, they will definitely engage in unlawful activities in the tribal areas due to their poverty," he said.

That poverty is currently being exacerbated by the freeze on NATO convoys by the Pakistani government.

Brigadier Mahmood Shah, who formerly oversaw the tribal regions but is now a security analyst, says Pakistan will consider restoring the supply line "only if NATO guarantees that NATO forces will respect the territorial integrity of Pakistan and act according to the Rules of Engagement."

"That means NATO planes must not come within five miles of a Pakistan military check point. If they come close then the Pakistani military will attack them," he says. "NATO must also pay tax in advance to Pakistan as per international rules and regulations. Also Pakistan wants an equal share of intelligence with America. The US must give complete details about all CIA agents who are in Pakistan and explain clearly what their goals are."

Despite the danger posed by the long drive into Afghanistan, most drivers eagerly await its reopening. It is a sign of just how financially dependent the Pakistan tribal regions have become on the war on terror.