

MMU: Afghanistan, Pakistan signal new era, 10 September 2008

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FEATURE STORY

Afghanistan, Pakistan signal new era

INDEX

BUSINESS

No articles featured today

NATION

'Civilian deaths fuel public backlash'

Disaster in Afghanistan

Let Them Eat Cake

Bush orders troops out of Iraq to Afghanistan

US troops raid Haqqani terror network

Ex-envoy attacks Afghan strategy

Taliban urges next Canadian prime minister to pull troops out of Afghanistan

Al-Qaeda releases video on eve of 9/11

Terror of a different kind

Bush plan for Afghanistan not enough: Obama

HRW criticises US, NATO for 'collateral damage' in Afghanistan

Karzai sees Pakistan's new president sworn in

50 Taliban killed or wounded in air strike

'I just need peace'

Al Qaeda chief in Pakistan killed in Miranshah attack

Rockets land in Kabul; no casualties

Relatives offer to dig up graves to show Afghan civilian deaths

Blasphemy case shows Afghan divide

Unwinnable war in Afghanistan

Security round-up: rebel clashes kill five

Joint Jirga between Pakistan, Afghanistan after Eid

Decapitation in Afghanistan

Police kill two inmates in failed prison break

Attack on media in Afghanistan

Bush terms Pakistan a major theatre in terror war

2 Afghan civilians killed, 10 wounded by NATO bomb

Good Intentions

Countering the Taleban's 20-year war

Bush Afghanistan Plan Ignores Commanders' Advice

Karzai arrives in UAE for talks with the country's leadership

HUMANITARIAN

No articles featured today

PRESS RELEASES

No articles featured today

FEATURE STORY

Afghanistan, Pakistan signal new era

Karzai, Zardari vow effort on security, civilian deaths

Chicago Tribune, United States

By Kim Barker

Chicago Tribune correspondent

September 10, 2008

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan

In a rare show of unity between Pakistan and Afghanistan, the two countries' leaders said Tuesday that they would jointly fight militants and wanted the number of civilian casualties inflicted by U.S.-led forces to be reduced.

On the day newly elected Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari took the oath of office, neither he nor Afghan President Hamid Karzai announced any changes in policy at a joint news conference. But their message of cooperation instead of confrontation could not have been more distinct from their two governments' relations over the past three years.

It was a message that, if translated into policy and action, bodes well for the U.S. and its fight against terrorism after years of trying to get the two countries to work together.

Karzai, who had often criticized former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and even refused to shake his hand, called Zardari "brother" and said he was honored and pleased to be in Islamabad.

And Zardari, who led the push to force former military ruler Musharraf to resign last month, decided he wanted Karzai to see him sworn in as president Tuesday.

"I assure him, if there are any weaknesses on this side or that side of the border, we together should stand together and make sure that those weaknesses are settled," Zardari said.

Zardari, the widower of assassinated former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, whose death has been blamed on militants, was overwhelmingly elected president Saturday by the parliament and provincial assemblies. The ruling coalition led by his Pakistan People's Party now controls the government. He has been eager to show the world that he is serious about fighting militants in areas along the border with Afghanistan.

Musharraf, who seized power in 1999, was seen as a strong U.S. ally in the war on terror. But critics, including Zardari and Karzai, accused him of not doing enough against terrorists. Zardari and other Pakistan People's Party officials insist that a democratically elected government will be much more effective at fighting terrorism than a military ruler.

"Yesterday's war, we have not had the people behind it," Zardari said Tuesday. "But today's war does have the people of Pakistan. In fact, it has the president of Pakistan, who himself is a victim of terrorism."

But it is not clear whether Zardari can control the country's powerful military or the Inter-Services Intelligence, Pakistan's main spy agency, which Afghan officials have accused of being behind most major terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and supporting militants in the tribal areas.

The message of cooperation is likely to be a welcome one for the U.S. administration, especially given that two years ago, relations between Musharraf and Karzai were so bad that President George W. Bush called them both to Washington to try to mediate.

But the joint news conference also means that the U.S. may face a more concerted backlash against civilian casualties. People in both countries have turned increasingly against the U.S. and NATO forces because of a perceived rise in

civilian casualties and the reluctance of foreign forces to accept responsibility in some cases.

On Sunday, the U.S. military said it would reopen an investigation into an air raid last month in the western Afghan province of Herat, where the UN and Karzai's government say as many as 90 civilians were killed. The U.S. had earlier said only seven civilians died.

In Pakistan, missile strikes blamed on the U.S. have increased in the past week, and witnesses have said many of those killed were civilians—a complaint difficult to verify. A rare cross-border ground attack by U.S. forces last week sparked universal condemnation from Pakistani officials and civilians.

Karzai said civilian casualties were not acceptable on either side of the border. "The war against terrorism will only be won if we have the people with us," he said. "There is no other way."

Zardari said he would protest to the U.S., as he did last week, if civilians are killed. "We cannot deny that innocents are dying," he said.

During the news conference, Zardari said parliament would decide whether to strip certain presidential powers added by Musharraf.

"The president is subservient to the parliament," Zardari said. "Whatever the parliament demands and whatever rights the parliament and the people of Pakistan want and can come to a consensus on, the president will have no choice but to bow before the people of Pakistan."

kbarker@tribune.com

[Back to Top](#)

BUSINESS

No articles featured today

[Back to Top](#)

NATION

'Civilian deaths fuel public backlash'

Written by <http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Tuesday, 09 September 2008

Civilian deaths triple between 2006-2007 as NATO changes battle rules

CIVILIAN deaths in Afghanistan almost tripled from 2006 to 2007, fuelling a "public backlash" against the presence of foreign troops in the country, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a report.

Tuesday's report, which also condemns the Taliban's use of "human shields", coincides with NATO's decision to tighten the rules of engagement on the battlefield to cut down on the number of civilian casualties.

The decision comes after harrowing new footage surfaced showing the dead bodies of children killed in the Shindand air-strike in August, which the UN said killed 90 civilians.

The US army said only seven civilians at most were killed during a US operation in the district, but video footage seen by media organisations on Monday showed the bodies of at least 10 dead children.

The video appeared to lend weight to UN allegations that the US-led raid killed more civilians than the US army said it did.

The commander of ISAF, General Dan McKiernan, who issued the new rules of engagement for troops operating in Afghanistan, has asked US central command to re-open an inquiry into the air-strike in Shindand.

The new rules of engagement for NATO troops will focus on house searches, with Afghan forces leading the way after seeking permission from residents.

Human Rights Watch, which examined air-strikes conducted by NATO and US-led troops, said few casualties occurred when air-strikes were planned, with almost all deaths occurring during unplanned strikes.

Asia director of Human Rights Watch, Brad Adams, said: "Mistakes by the US and NATO have dramatically decreased public support for the Afghan government and the presence of international forces providing security to Afghans."

But Human Rights Watch also found several instances of Taliban forces using civilians as shields to deter US and NATO attacks.

In 2006, at least 929 Afghan civilians were killed because of fighting related to armed conflict.

Of those, at least 699 died during Taliban attacks and at least 230 died during US or NATO attacks.

More than half the civilians killed in US and NATO attacks were killed by air-strikes In 2007, at least 1,633 Afghan civilians were killed in fighting related to the insurgency.

Of those, some 950 died during attacks by the various insurgent forces, including the Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

At least 321 were killed by US or NATO airstrikes, tripling the number of civilians killed in US and NATO airstrikes from 2006 to 2007.

In the first seven months of 2008, at least 540 Afghan civilians were killed in the fighting. Of those, at least 367 died during attacks by the various insurgent forces and 173 died during US or NATO attacks. At least 119 were killed by US or NATO airstrikes.

"The US needs to end the mistakes that are killing so many civilians," said Adams.

"The US must also take responsibility, including by providing timely compensation, when its airstrikes kill Afghan civilians. While Taliban shielding is a factor in some civilian deaths, the US shouldn't use this as an excuse when it could have taken better precautions. It is, after all, its bombs that are doing the killing."

[Back to Top](#)

Disaster in Afghanistan

Center for Research on Globalization, Canada

By John W. Warnock

Global Research

September 9, 2008

It is difficult to find out what is really going on in Afghanistan. The focus of the mass media is almost entirely on the military activities of the Canadian and NATO forces. There is absolutely no coverage of political developments. The news on the economy is limited to the state of the poppy industry. This is no accident. The North American media, including the CBC, has strongly supported the U.S./NATO strategy and the administration of President Hamid Karzai. Contrary to the mainstream message, things are not going well.

Rise in civilian casualties

Over the past few weeks NATO forces have killed civilians in a number of incidents, and popular opposition to the western military effort is increasing. On August 22 the United States bombed the village of Azizabad in Herat province; the result was the death of 91 civilians, including over 60 children. Rockets and missiles were also used. Many homes were destroyed. Local citizens stoned the Afghan army when they tried to distribute supplies. NATO forces in Paktika province launched an artillery attack on a village on September 1 as part of a general sweep-and-destroy mission against Taliban forces. Three children were killed and seven injured. That same day U.S. and Afghan forces carried out an overnight raid in Hud Kheil, east of Kabul. A family of four, including two children, were killed when hand grenades were thrown into their house. In Kabul hundreds blocked the main road out of town protesting the military practices of the international forces.

Afghan government and NATO attacks In response to the steady increase of civilian deaths this year, the Afghan parliament passed a resolution in August calling on the Karzai administration to negotiate a new status-of-forces agreement with NATO and United States, making it consistent with Afghan and international law. President Karzai's cabinet demanded "an end to air attacks in civilian areas, illegal detentions and unilateral house searches." There is growing opposition to the presence of the occupying forces. The Senlis Council reported in June 2008 that in their most recent public opinion survey "more than six out of ten of those interviewed ... said that foreign troops should leave." This is the position taken by many of the democratic parties in Afghanistan. Malalai Joya, the outspoken critic of

the Karzai government, has called for all foreign troops to leave the country. She argues that Afghans can settle this dispute better on their own.

The approaching famine

However, the most important current issue in Afghanistan is the drought, the crop failure, and the prospect of famine. This story has received no coverage in the North American media. Over the last winter Afghanistan received well-below normal rainfall and mountain snow pack. The spring runoff was light, and crop yields from irrigated agriculture have been significantly reduced. There are conditions of drought throughout the country. In many areas there are no crops and livestock has perished from lack of pasture. Wheat provides the staple food, and production is 60 percent below average. Recent rains have brought flooding, as the land has been hardened by the drought. Floods are more common because over the past few decades 60% of the woodland has been removed by the population seeking fuel for cooking and winter heating. The jump in fuel prices has raised the cost of the delivery of food from neighbouring countries. Food prices are rising. The price of a 50 kg bag of wheat flour is now \$35. One half of the population in Afghanistan lives on less than \$2 per day. The government of Afghanistan reports that 42% of the population lives in "extreme poverty", defined as a per capita income of less than \$120 per year. The United Nations Mission in Afghanistan reported in August that "at least four million most vulnerable people have already been pushed into the 'high-risk food-insecurity' category." Children are the most vulnerable. One in five children die before the age of five, mainly due to malnutrition. In response, the United Nations and other food agencies have called for an emergency fund of \$404 million in order to purchase food. To date less than 20% has been forthcoming from donor countries.

What is happening to women's rights?

Supporters of the U.S. project in Afghanistan always point to how many girls are now going to school. But as Ann Jones points out, the number cited (5 million) is fewer than half the children of school age. In Kabul 85% are in school; in the Pashtun south, less than 20% and "near zero for girls." Radio Free Afghanistan's Jan Alekozai recently toured eastern Afghanistan. He noted that there were schools but no teachers, no chairs and tables, no electricity or water, no books, and no labs. "The participation of women is zero in the provinces," he argued. While some are going to school "they cannot walk, for example, in a park - or with their families." In February 2008 Womankind Worldwide (UK) released a survey of the status of women in Afghanistan. They found that 87% of Afghan women report domestic violence, 60% of all marriages are still forced, and 57% of all recent marriages involved girls under the age of sixteen, which is contrary to the law. Ann Jones, who spent a number of years in Afghanistan working for women's rights, is not surprised. President Karzai's wife is a qualified gynecologist but does not practice her skills. She remains locked up in the presidential fortress, the Arg, and is not seen by the general public. Since the onset of the 20th century, she is the first wife of a state leader who has not publicly championed women's rights.

Change of regime in Afghanistan

Few Canadians would know that there is a presidential election scheduled for Afghanistan in 2009. Hamid Karzai has announced that he will run again. After his tour of eastern Afghanistan, Jan Alekozai reported strong opposition to the local warlords and the Karzai government. He judged that Karzai would have a hard time getting 20% of the votes in the 2009 election. The people blame the Americans and NATO for the increase in the power of the warlords. The main opposition to Karzai will come from the United National Front, which is largely a coalition of the warlords and Islamist leaders based in the parliament. They have demanded a change in the constitution to bring in a parliamentary system of government with political parties and elections by proportional representation. The Front is dominated by the Islamist forces from the Northern Alliance. The Front has called for a new international meeting to settle the ongoing civil war in Afghanistan. This would be hosted by the United Nations and include all neighbouring states as well as representation

from Afghanistan's political groups, including the armed opposition. In late August Fazel Sangcharaki, speaking for the Front, stated that many foreign envoys have supported this proposal. But the problem is the opposition of the U.S. government.

Canadian government stresses militarism

The policy of the Canadian government since 2001 has been to put the highest priority on its military role in Afghanistan. In support of the Afghan "war on terrorism", the Canadian government has been spending around \$1 billion per year on the military and only \$100 million on humanitarian assistance and economic development. Much of the military budget has been spent on acquiring new military hardware, needed for counter-insurgency warfare.. Just before Stephen Harper forced a fall election, polls emerged which showed that Canadians remain skeptical of the role in Afghanistan. A poll by Ipsos Reid for the Department of National Defence revealed that the majority of Canadians still want Canada to emphasize peacekeeping. A CBC poll done by Environics reported that 56% of Canadians disapprove of Canada's military role in Afghanistan. Since the March 2008 agreement by the Conservatives and Liberals to extend Canada's mission to 2011, Afghanistan has largely disappeared from political discussion. The challenge for Canadians is to make this disastrous war in Afghanistan an issue in the current election.

John W. Warnock is a Regina political economist and author of *Creating a Failed State: the US and Canada in Afghanistan*. (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, May 2008).

[Back to Top](#)

Let Them Eat Cake

LewRockwell.com

By Karen Kwiatkowski

September 10, 2008

Andrew Bacevich, retired Army Colonel and Professor at Boston College, is a traditional conservative. His good advice regarding our contemporary foreign policy, like that of the late Lt. General William Odom, fell on deaf ears in both Washington and in the so-called "conservative" heartland.

Bacevich and Odom were consistent and correct in advising a somewhat constitutional and certainly more prudent foreign policy than Washington has pursued for some decades. Because they are conservative, they sought to make sense, to connect what we are doing today in Iraq and Afghanistan to an American tradition that, perhaps, has simply gone awry.

I found it interesting that in an American Conservative excerpt from his new book, *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism*, Bacevich refers to our "occupation" of Afghanistan. Not a lot of people are referring to Afghanistan as an occupied country, but it is.

The indications were there early on, with the US-selected puppet governor crowned December 2001, and the reluctance and minority of NATO troops vis-à-vis American troops (28,000 and counting). As with all occupations over time, instead of a pacified group, or groups, we see strengthening and growing sophistication in the national and local resistance to the occupation.

As noted by Australian journalist John Pilger, in 2003 with his documentary "Breaking the Silence" and more recently this year, what we are doing in Afghanistan has the trappings of vicious total domination, and it frankly doesn't seem to be doing the already impoverished Afghans much good. Almost a year ago, 60 Minutes did a segment on Afghanistan, where the narrator tut-tutted when an Afghan observed, "We used to hate the Russians much more than Americans. But now when we see all this happening, I am telling you Russians behave much better than the Americans."

That October 2007 broadcast was about recent inadvertent killing of civilians by air strikes. What changed in eleven months? The mass murder by air and land of Afghan civilians, including women and children, continues. It's not only the U.S. military doing the killing, of course. But none of that murder of innocents would be happening, or would have happened, had Washington not, as Pilger and others have observed, first planned to invade and then moved to base-build in, and occupy, Afghanistan.

In a sheer quantitative sense, the United States has long since avenged 9-11, racking up hundreds of thousands of dead, wounded, and scarred innocents. It has long since avenged 9-11 in sheer destruction, laying waste to cities, villages, homes and hearths, industry, government and religious observance. The destruction and murder is now habitual, profligate and self-indulgent. To the world, the President of the United States - present and future - is an uncouth and supersized version of Marie Antoinette.

In the most recent Afghan outcry over the death of innocent men, women, and children - the American military spokeswoman Lt Col Rumi Nielson-Green had this to say: "Soldiers treated wounded people at the scene, which indicated that the Laws of Armed Conflict were followed."

How very nice for them. Laws of armed conflict? Is there possibly a way for a state to conduct war that is traditional, lawful, good? The three main principles of the LOAC - military necessity, distinction, and proportionality - provide a clue.

Military necessity relates to those acts needed to achieve a military objective, or win a battle, and no more. Distinction means not targeting, and being careful not to inadvertently damage civilians and civilian property. Proportionality prohibits the use of any force that exceeds that needed to accomplish the military objective. Sounds fair, but in the context of occupying Afghanistan (or any occupation), is following the laws of armed conflict even possible?

Notwithstanding the military spokeswoman's allegations of soldierly medical care for blown up babies, the LOAC cannot honestly be observed in military occupations. Ever.

Odom and Bacevich have described our foreign policy and security challenges as evolving recently, mid-20th century, and their writings indicate that there may be a way, or at least a hope, for our military empire to be benign. In this, they are conservative in the sense that Joe Biden and John McCain are conservative.

In 1963, looking at libertarian solutions for war and defense, Murray Rothbard wrote, "For it is precisely the characteristic of modern weapons that they cannot be used selectively, cannot be used in a libertarian manner. Therefore, their very existence must be condemned...." In "War, Peace, and the State," Rothbard addresses primarily nuclear weapons, but makes clear that the indiscriminate nature of conventional weapons, for the same reason, renders their use unacceptable, immoral and wrong.

But without these weapons, how would we fight our war in Afghanistan, occupy that country, and counter the nationalists, the tribalists, the Taliban, the hundreds of families and thousands of sons and daughters, wives and husbands each seeking their own vengeance, each asserting their existence as angry and powerful people, not faceless collateral damage?

Of course, we could not fight such a war, and we should not. Sadly, the government and the American demos believe freedom and prosperity, our own and that of others, can and ought to be produced by force. This belief is anti-American, un-conservative, and logically flawed. It is wrongheaded, and it is the foreign policy and heartfelt ideology of both major presidential candidates.

As American occupations bring suffering - untold and denied, unmeasured so as to be deniable - Washington cannot understand why the occupied do not simply submit. Whether it is cake, or brioche, or the heavy American porridge of bristling state socialism and angry imperialism, the Bush-Obama-McCain answer to heartbroken Afghans and to the world, is "Eat it!"

LRC columnist Karen Kwiatkowski, Ph.D. [send her mail], a retired USAF lieutenant colonel, has written on defense issues with a libertarian perspective for MilitaryWeek.com, hosted the call-in radio show American Forum, and blogs occasionally for Huffingtonpost.com and Liberty and Power.

[Back to Top](#)

[Bush orders troops out of Iraq to Afghanistan](#)

The Canberra Times, Australia

BY OLIVIER KNOX IN WASHINGTON

10/09/2008

With less than five months left as president, George W. Bush is ordering a modest US troop withdrawal from Iraq and ramping up force levels in Afghanistan. Mr Bush, in remarks prepared for delivery to the US National Defence University overnight, was also to lump Pakistan in with both countries as a key battleground in the global "war on terror".

The vastly unpopular United States President could still unveil other strategic shifts in his approach to the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq before leaving office in January, but the speech strongly suggested any large-scale withdrawal from Iraq would fall to his successor.

Mr Bush, referring to the top US commander in Iraq, planned to say, "If the progress in Iraq continues to hold, General [David] Petraeus and our military leaders believe additional reductions will be possible in the first half of 2009."

For now, Mr Bush was announcing he would bring home 8000 of the 140,000-plus US troops in Iraq over the next few months with about half of them out by the time the White House changes hands and send roughly 4500 more soldiers to Afghanistan.

"Afghanistan's success is critical to the security of America and our partners in the free world. And, for all the good work we have done in that country, it is clear we must do even more."

Mr Bush also had a firm message for Pakistan, saying it had a responsibility to fight extremists "because every nation has an obligation to govern its own territory and make certain that it does not become a safe haven for terror".

His message came amid media reports of multiple air strikes inside Pakistan recently by US or international troops based in Afghanistan, which accuses its neighbour of abetting, or at least turning a blind eye to, cross-border violence.

Without commenting directly on a US strike in Afghanistan that the Karzai Government said killed 90 civilians, Mr Bush declared that "the history of warfare" showed such losses were inevitable but the US "mourns every innocent life lost".

With the deeply unpopular Iraq war shaping the fight to succeed him, Mr Bush was intending to say that the draw-down of US troops was possible only because fragile US and Iraqi gains had attained a "degree of durability".

Under the Bush plan, about 3400 combat support forces will leave Iraq over the next few months; one Marine battalion will come home by November; and one US Army combat brigade will return in February.

Mr Bush tied the withdrawal to security gains from the "surge" of roughly 30,000 US troops he ordered to Iraq in January last year in a high-stakes bid to wrest the war-torn country from the grip of sectarian violence. AFP

[Back to Top](#)

US troops raid Haqqani terror network

Written by <http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Tuesday, 09 September 2008

Network accused of having ties to Al-Qaeda raided in south-east

US TROOPS have launched an operation against the Haqqani terror network in the south-eastern province of Khost, the US military said.

The raid was launched on Monday near the border with Pakistan against militants suspected of carrying out roadside bomb attacks against government and foreign forces, the army said in a statement.

Jalaluddin Haqqani, who is accused of having close ties to Al-Qaeda, is the Taliban's leader in south-east Afghanistan and was one of the main recipients of US funds during the mujahideen's resistance against the Soviet invasion.

The US statement about Monday's raid failed to mention another operation on Monday in which Pakistani witnesses and intelligence officials said US drones fired missiles at a house and religious school founded by Haqqani, just across the border in Pakistan, killing 23 people.

Several of the dead were relatives of Haqqani, who is considered close to Osama bin Laden.

Jalaluddin Haqqani broke a seven-year silence last month, vowing in a video tape to increase attacks against US and NATO "invaders" in Afghanistan.

"The Americans said the Taliban was beaten and defeated but we are not defeated," Haqqani says in the tape, his face appearing next to images of Taliban attacks, including a suicide bombing at an American compound in Afghanistan.

"It was our tactical plan to fade away and prepare for a guerrilla war. We will defeat [George] Bush [the US president] and continue our jihad until doomsday," he said.

In July, Haqqanis family said that one of Jalaluddin's sons had been killed in a battle with Afghan troops.

The governemnt linked the Haqqani network to the assassination attempt on President Karzai in April.

About 2,500 people, including 1,000 civilians, have been killed in fighting in the first six months this year, aid agencies say.

[Back to Top](#)

[Ex-envoy attacks Afghan strategy](#)

[BBC News](#)

[Tuesday, 9 September 2008](#)

The West has no coherent strategy for victory in Afghanistan, according to the former EU envoy Francesc Vendrell.

Mr Vendrell told BBC TV's HARDtalk programme the Afghan plan needed an overhaul - but this was not possible under the current US administration.

Mr Vendrell, who left office in August, lamented "many mistakes" made in Afghanistan and called for fast action against corruption rife in the country.

The US is set to announce a modest boost to its Afghan troop contingent.

US President George W Bush is expected to reveal plans for a "quiet surge" in troop levels in Afghanistan, coinciding with the withdrawal of some 8,000 US troops from Iraq.

Impossible to change

Mr Vendrell was asked on HARDtalk if the West had a coherent strategy to bring peace to Afghanistan.

"No," was his reply. "Because for as long as the Bush administration is in office it is impossible to change the Bush administration's approach to Afghanistan.

"They don't want to see any changes because they still hope to present Afghanistan as a success story," Mr Vendrell said.

"We will need to wait, not for very long, for a new administration to be established and at that point we need to reveal our strategy, not only a US strategy but the overall strategy, because clearly what we are doing so far is not going to lead to success."

Mr Vendrell, a veteran Spanish diplomat, left the EU post in Afghanistan at the end of August.

"I don't leave with a sense of failure," he said.

"But I do leave with a sense of regret that we made so many mistakes. I don't believe the situation will lead to failure but we have got to do a hell of a lot to get things right."

Mr Vendrell added his voice to the criticism of civilian deaths in Afghanistan from aerial bombings. "It is doing us an enormous amount of harm with the public," he warned.

"In 2002, we were being welcomed almost as liberators by the Afghans. Now we are being seen as a necessary evil, perhaps something that they need to put up with because our departure would probably mean a civil war, but these kinds of actions completely undermine the efforts to win hearts and minds."

Mr Vendrell's successor as EU envoy to Afghanistan is the Italian diplomat, Ettore Francesco Sequi.

HARDtalk is broadcast on BBC World News at 03:30 GMT, 08:30 GMT, 14:30 GMT, 20:30 GMT and 22:30 GMT.

HARDtalk can also be seen on BBC News at 04:30 BST & 23:30 BST.

[Back to Top](#)

Taliban urges next Canadian prime minister to pull troops out of Afghanistan

The Canadian Press, Afghanistan

10/09/2008

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan

The Taliban say they know that an election campaign is underway in Canada and that's why they have stepped up attacks against Canadians in Afghanistan.

Taliban spokesman Qari Muhammad Yusef said Tuesday the insurgent movement wants Canada's next prime minister to pull Canadian troops out of Afghanistan.

"Yes, I know that the election is being held in Canada. That is why our attacks on Canadians are increased," Yusef said through a translator.

"One of the Canadian soldiers, who has won a medal as well, was killed in our recent attacks."

Sgt. Scott Shipway died Sunday when his armoured vehicle struck an improvised explosive device in the volatile Panjwai district of Kandahar.

The seasoned soldier, who was cited for saving a comrade's life during his previous tour in Afghanistan in 2006, was just days away from the end of his second tour when the blast occurred.

Yusef said he's familiar with Prime Minister Stephen Harper but isn't sure about the other candidates or parties running in the Canadian election.

While he doesn't know which party is most likely to withdraw Canadian troops from Afghanistan, Yusef said such a platform will be "good for that party and for their nation and for the Canadian people."

"My suggestion for the next prime minister is to withdraw Canadians from Afghanistan," he said, adding Canada needs to stop following U.S. foreign policy.

"When any of these party leaders come to power, the first thing they must do is ask the Canadians to come from Afghanistan to Canada."

Liberal Leader Stephane Dion responded: "We will not be intimidated by the Taliban."

Speaking to reporters in Napanee, Ont., Dion said "Canada has a role to play" and is committed to the current mission in Afghanistan.

"We have a strong respect and admiration for our courageous men and women and our civilians. I'm sure that NATO, the government of Canada, the government of Afghanistan will work together to protect the people as much as possible."

"The end date of this mission is 2011," Dion said.

"It's an iron-clad commitment of the Liberal party that if we are the government we will do our best to help the people of Afghanistan until 2011, and after that the mission in Kandahar will be terminated for the government of Canada and for our troops."

"We'll have other missions to do in the world."

Dimitri Soudas, a spokesman for Harper, commented that "the Taliban are a vicious organization that kill innocent people and target Canadian soldiers."

"All party leaders should put partisan politics aside and rally behind our troops and their mission. And Parliament has made a decision on this matter," Soudas said.

NDP Leader Jack Layton said: "The suggestion that there's going to be violence meted out against Canadian soldiers to try and influence the election here is reprehensible."

"We'll decide our own policies right here in Canada with regard to the war in Afghanistan," he said.

Yussef, the Taliban spokesman, also commented on the U.S. election coming this fall.

He said he doesn't care much for American politics. He said he believes the next U.S. president, regardless of who is chosen, will be just as bad as the current one.

"American elections are just a fixed game. Their policies were mad 20 years ago," he said.

"Whoever will be the leader, he will playing the same role - I mean a negative role."

This is not the first time the Taliban have spoken out directly to Canadians in recent weeks.

Days after two Canadian aid workers were shot to death in an ambush south of Kabul last month, the Taliban issued an "open letter" urging Canadians to press their government to withdraw troops from Afghanistan.

The Taliban suggested attacks like the one that killed Shirley Case and Jacqueline Kirk, who were working for the New York-based International Rescue Committee, would happen again as long as Canada continued following the "American" agenda.

In the letter, insurgents blamed Canada for injuring and killing many Afghan men, women and children.

The Taliban suggested the attack on the aid workers was revenge, possibly for an incident two weeks earlier when Canadian troops accidentally shot two children to death. The Canadians feared the vehicle they were riding in was going to attack them when it failed to stop as ordered.

Yussef reiterated the Taliban warning to Canadians little more than a week ago after three soldiers were killed in a direct fire ambush in the Zhari district of Kandahar.

Cpl. Andrew Grenon, Cpl. Mike Seggie, and Pte. Chad Horn died when their armoured vehicle was hit in a "direct attack."

"I repeat what I said before, that I warn Canadians again to leave Afghanistan if you don't want to have more casualties here," Yussef said at the time.

[Back to Top](#)

[Al-Qaeda releases video on eve of 9/11](#)

Written by <http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Tuesday, 09 September 2008

[Second in command accuses Iran of backing US military in the region](#)

AL-QAEDA'S second in command, Dr Ayman Al-Zawahiri, has accused Iran of supporting the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In a videotape broadcast on the television station Al-Jazeera, Al-Zawahiri criticised Iran for its recognition of Iraq and Afghanistan.

He said both countries were serving America and condemned Iran for its failure to respond to America's "seven year crusade".

He also criticised Iran's religious scholars for failing to sanction jihad against American and foreign forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The tape was released on the eve of the anniversary of Al-Qaeda's deadly attack on the World Trade Centre in 2001.

[Back to Top](#)

Terror of a different kind

Across Afghanistan, women are setting fire to themselves. What drives them to this level of desperation?

The Guardian (UK)

September 9, 2008

When Vietnamese monk Thich Quang Duc set fire to himself at a busy intersection in Saigon in 1963, few of the Afghan women who later followed his example were even born. Most of them had probably never heard of the burning Buddhist monk, of the way pictures of his spectacular protest made the then US president, John F Kennedy, famously shriek "Jesus Christ!", or of the way, as some say, his self-immolation speeded up the downfall of the regime against which the monk was protesting.

His death triggered many questions and interpretations. In the words of one commentator at the time: "To set oneself on fire is to prove that what one is saying is of the utmost importance." Thinking of the Afghan women who set light to themselves, just what is this thing of utmost importance that they are trying to say? Since March 2008, there have been a hundred cases of self-immolation in southwestern Afghanistan alone; 100 women who got hold of fuel, soaked themselves in the liquid and lit the match to stage a small-scale domestic revolution of a spectacular nature. If they wanted to say something, they wanted to say it with vehemence. If they wanted to leave this world, they didn't want to leave quietly. But what is their motivation? And who or what is the subject of their protest?

Unlike the burning monk, who wrote down all his hopes, wishes and complaints prior to his death, little is known about what motivates the Afghan women. Few of them survive to tell the tale and those who do survive are unwilling to talk. Afghan documentary film maker Olga Sadat spent months at a hospital which specialises in treating burns. She waited patiently but persistently to win the trust of the women she interviewed for her film *Yak, Do, Seh* (One, Two, Three). The film is a documentary cautionary tale the aim of which is to discourage self-immolation. In an interview with Germany's Deutsche Welle international radio, Sadat said,

"Unfortunately, in the eight months that I was working on the film, only one of the many women who had set themselves on fire and were brought to the hospital managed to survive. But even that woman is in a bad state."

The woman had set fire to herself in protest against maltreatment on the part of her husband.

Sadat told Deutsche Welle that she believes that the women who set themselves on fire are confident that someone will come to their rescue while they are in the process of catching fire. Those she did manage to interview for her film said that when they lit the match, their aim was not suicide. They just wanted the people who maltreated them to take notice of the suffering they had caused.

Forced marriages and maltreatment by husbands and fathers is often cited as the cause of the despair that leads women to use household fuel to set fire to themselves. But a closer look reveals a more complex picture.

Sometimes the protest is directed against other women, such as an unkind mother-in-law. Other times girls have set fire to themselves for the love of a man they could not marry. And then there's protest against institutions, like case of the woman in Laghman, northern Afghanistan, who came to the court hiding petrol under her burqa. She had petitioned for divorce and was awaiting the verdict when she set fire to herself.

Female drug addiction is an equally powerful trigger that has led to self-immolation in places like Ghore, in western Afghanistan. But the fact remains that the women themselves are usually silent on the meaning of their own suicides and the meaning of their acts remains essentially ambiguous.

In a recent statement, the Afghan women's affairs minister said:

"As long as all individuals, but especially the families, fail to ensure women's social and human rights, it's impossible for the government or the related offices to have any notable success in reducing violence against women."

Other officials, like Sima Shir Mohammadi, the head of the women's affairs department in Herat, blame the war. They say violence stops government offices and aid agencies from reaching remote areas. That's why cases of self-immolation have fallen in the cities but increased in rural areas.

Earlier, in an interview with an Iranian feminist website, Shir Mohammadi said her department had worked hard to tackle the problem: "We had meetings with religious scholars and asked them to make use of religious texts, Qur'anic verses and the prophet's sayings in their Friday sermons and in radio and television speeches to tell the people in rural areas that suicide is not the solution." The clerics also tell worshippers that maltreatment of girls and women is not allowed in Islam. Both Shir Mohammadi and the women's affairs minister believe that the cooperation of religious scholars is essential in solving this problem. This society is traditional and the people respect the clerics and follow their advice.

Time will tell whether the preachers' message will prove effective and discourage women from resorting to fuel and matches to get their message across. What's certain is that the traditional path of "patience and forbearance" has lost its appeal to Afghan women.

[Back to Top](#)

Bush plan for Afghanistan not enough: Obama

The Times of India - US

10 Sep 2008

RIVERSIDE, OHIO

Barack Obama said President George W Bush isn't acting quickly or forcefully enough to get more US forces into Afghanistan and out of Iraq.

Bush "is tinkering around the edges and kicking the can down the road to the next president" with his decision Tuesday to bring home only 8,000 combat and support troops from Iraq by February, the Democratic presidential candidate said.

Bush said a Marine battalion scheduled to be sent to Iraq in November will instead be deployed to Afghanistan, followed by an Army combat brigade early next year. In all, that would add 4,500 to 4,700 combat troops in Afghanistan.

Less than two hours later, Obama went before reporters during a campaign stop in the Midwestern battleground state of Ohio to respond.

"His plan comes up short _ it is not enough troops, not enough resources, with not enough urgency," Obama said. "The next president will inherit a status quo that is still unstable."

The Democratic presidential nominee said Bush doesn't understand that Afghanistan and Pakistan are the central front in the war on terrorism, not Iraq. He said his Republican White House rival, John McCain, doesn't get that, either.

Obama said if elected in November, he will remove troops from Iraq in a measured but methodical way and send more into Afghanistan. He recently proposed sending two brigades, or about more 7,000 troops, into Afghanistan, while withdrawing one or two brigades a month from Iraq.

Except for bringing home the 8,000 troops, Bush said, he'll keep the US force strength in Iraq intact until the next president takes over. He said more US forces could be withdrawn if conditions allow in the first half of 2009, but that will be the call of his successor. About 146,000 US troops are in Iraq.

McCain spoke at a rally in Lebanon, Ohio, just after Bush made the announcement. The Republican presidential nominee's only acknowledgment of Iraq was to tell the crowd that the US is winning and Obama was wrong about the war.

[Back to Top](#)

[HRW criticises US, NATO for 'collateral damage' in Afghanistan](#)

[Press Trust of India, India](#)

[Sept 9, 2008](#)

[New York](#)

Concerned over continuing civilian casualties in the airstrikes by the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, a leading human rights watchdog has criticised them for major 'collateral damage' and asked to fix the issue. In a 43-page report, "Troops in Contact: Airstrikes and Civilian Deaths in Afghanistan", released yesterday, estimates that in 2006, at least 929 Afghan civilians were killed in the fighting.

Of these, 699 died during Taliban attacks (including suicide bombings and other bombings unlawfully targeting civilians) while at least 230 in US or NATO attacks.

It also criticised the "poor response" by US officials when civilian deaths occur." Prior to conducting investigations into airstrikes causing civilian loss, US officials often immediately deny responsibility for civilian deaths or place all blame on the Taliban, the report stated.

Warning that such incidents erode the confidence of people in both the government and international forces, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) said more civilian casualties occurred during rapid response operations than planned airstrike on the Taliban targets.

In 2007, at least 1,633 Afghan civilians were killed in the armed conflict. Of those, some 950 died during attacks by the various insurgent forces, including the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Whereas, a total of 321 were killed by the US or NATO airstrikes. Thus, civilian deaths from US and NATO airstrikes nearly tripled from 2006 to 2007, it said.

In the first seven months of 2008, as many as 540 Afghan civilians were killed. At least 367 of them died during attacks by the various insurgent forces and 173 during US or NATO attacks, the report said. PTI

[Back to Top](#)

Karzai sees Pakistan's new president sworn in

Written by <http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Tuesday, 09 September 2008

Afghan president flies to Pakistan to watch Zardari take the presidential oath

PRESIDENT Hamid Karzai has arrived in Pakistan for a day-long visit to attend the swearing in ceremony of Asif Ali Zardari as the country's next head of state.

Karzai flew to the Chaklala Air Base on Tuesday and was received by acting President Muhammadmian Soomro, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Interior Minister Rehman Malik.

Zardari, the widower of the assassinated former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, won Pakistan's presidential election on Saturday.

The election was called after his predecessor, Pervez Musharraf, resigned rather than risk being impeached.

Zardari is one of Pakistan's most controversial politicians.

For years he has been hounded by allegations of corruption and spent more than a decade in prison on murder, corruption and other criminal charges.

[Back to Top](#)

50 Taliban killed or wounded in air strike

Gulf Times - Home

Published: Wednesday, 10 September, 2008

KANDAHAR

Foreign forces in Afghanistan killed or wounded 50 suspected Taliban militants in an air strike in southern Uruzgan province, an Afghan official said yesterday.

The air raid was carried out in Tirin Kot district on Monday, the province's intelligence chief, Gulab said.

The Nato-led force and the US military said they had no information.

"We got the intelligence about the insurgents gathering in a village, so we asked the Nato forces for help," said Gulab, who uses only one name. "As a result of the air strike 50 insurgents were killed or wounded," he said.

Violence in Afghanistan this year has been the worst since the Taliban's ouster in 2001, forcing some Western politicians to warn that the battle-scarred nation may slide back into anarchy.

Separately, some 23 Taliban insurgents died during operations by Afghan and Western forces in other areas of the south and east of the country on Monday, Afghan officials said.

Elsewhere, US-led coalition troops said they had targeted the network of veteran Taliban commander Jalaluddin Haqqani on Monday during an operation in eastern Afghanistan, near the border with Pakistan, and detained two suspected militants.

It did not refer to another operation the same day in which Pakistani witnesses and intelligence officials said US drones fired missiles at a house and religious school founded by Haqqani, just across the border in Pakistan, killing 23 people. - Reuters

[Back to Top](#)

'I just need peace'

In Logar, Afghans want an end to decades of war, regardless of who wins

Stars and Stripes Mideast

By Michael Gisick

Tuesday, September 9, 2008

LOGAR PROVINCE, Afghanistan

It had been two or three months since the U.S. platoon had visited the village at the north end of the province, backed up

against the dry mountains that separate Logar from the outskirts of Kabul to the north. And this would be a short visit.

Second Lt. Richard Sposito, the 23-year-old platoon leader, hands out some toothbrushes, notebooks and pens to the children, trying to keep the presents out of the hands of the village's older men.

The Afghan soldiers who accompanied the Americans, meanwhile, begin agitating to head home for afternoon prayers - it being the second day of Ramadan and already late morning, with a long bumpy drive ahead. So Sposito wraps it up with a few questions.

Everything is fine, the villagers respond. They are poor. They need jobs. But security, one offers, is "perfect."

A few minutes later, perhaps 5 kilometers down the bumpy road home, a bomb explodes underneath a truck in the middle of the American-led convoy. No one is seriously injured, but the blast is another sign of the times in Logar.

It is hardly the most violent province in Afghanistan - U.S. commanders see it mainly as a staging ground for insurgent attacks on the capital.

Probably because they have bigger ambitions, officers say, the insurgents prefer to keep a relatively low profile within Logar, shying away from direct confrontation with the Americans.

But if the insurgency operates at a relatively low level within the province, then so do the Americans, whose tactics are defined by the limitations of their force as by anything else.

Sposito's platoon of military police officers, fewer than 40 U.S. soldiers, patrol a roughly 700-square-mile area of northern Logar.

And aside from a Czech reconstruction team and a handful of French soldiers who work with the Afghan army, they are the only coalition presence in the area.

It is "not even close" to enough troops, says Capt. Boe Faircloth, who commands the headquarters company that includes the MP Platoon, part of the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division.

Faircloth says it would take at least four platoons to secure the northern part of the province, but the brigade is spread thin across a vast area that stretches southeast from Logar to the restive border with Pakistan.

"We try to establish a presence and gather intelligence," Faircloth says.

"We try to spread the message to the people to support their Afghan forces, because we can't do it all. We tell people to call them."

'Tell us or the ANA'

Sgt. Susana Lovko is one of the platoon's medics, but as they move through a market along the main road one morning, the first day of Ramadan, she's at the front of the patrol, extending a hand to the bearded old men, striking up conversations. She's just about the only woman on the street, and the rest are wearing burqas.

She stops at a small bookstore, asking whether they have any texts for children trying to learn Pashto. She stops at a fruit stall and buys some grapes. "Tashakor," she says, Pashto for "thank you."

Sposito drops in at a few shops, trying to spread the message.

"We know there are some bad guys out in Baraki-Barak," he tells one shop owner who hails from that village. "If [you] hear anything or see anything, just please let us know, so that way we can try to help support you."

The man protests: He's not a bad guy. How would he know anything?

"I know, I know," Sposito tells his interpreter. "I'm just saying, if he sees anything, he should tell us or the ANA."

Nobody is talking, which, Sposito says, is understandable.

"They're at the point where they have to be careful what they say and what they put out," he says.

In some ways, the sense of deteriorating security here is a result of the arrival of the Americans. In a bid to disrupt an escalating series of rocket attacks and suicide bombing in Kabul, a platoon from the 82d Airborne arrived in northern Logar over the winter. Sposito's platoon replaced them in the spring.

Before that, there were no Americans to challenge the insurgents.

But now, a man who approaches Lovko says after the soldiers have moved on, people feel caught in the middle of a war that no one seems to be winning.

The Taliban pressures us for support, the man says, and so do the Americans. Both have guns.

"The people are afraid of the Taliban, and they are also afraid of you people," he says.

Asked which side he hopes will win, the man, who gives his name as Abdullah, just shrugs.

"I just need peace," he says. "If America wants to bring it, or if Taliban, I just need peace."

It's an ambivalence that the American troops find frustrating, even if some say it is understandable.

Faircloth says he has not received a single report of the Taliban doing anything positive - building a single school, providing a single meal. Yet still, he says, there's this apathy.

"As long as they can have their farm, put food on the table, a lot of people could care less who wins," he says. "If you ask them why, they'll talk about how they've had 35 years of war. People are just beat down, tired. A lot of them, all they've ever known is war."

Even if there were a whole American brigade in Logar, Faircloth thinks it would be slow going.

"You can go up to somebody and lay out the whole IED (improvised explosive device) that you just found in his neighbor's house, and he'll still insist that his neighbor is a good guy," he says.

But then, you can't just let a bunch of terrorists take over the country again, Faircloth muses.

Others are more optimistic.

"I think people definitely want the government to succeed," Sposito says. "I think 85, 90 percent of the people support what we're trying to do. But people are afraid."

After the roadside bomb on the second day of Ramadan, the patrol hooks up the damaged vehicle to another truck and pushes on south.

They get stuck in the next village when one of the Humvees has a mechanical issue.

The Afghan soldiers decamp to the shade of an orchard, the time for prayers having come and gone.

Villagers gather by the side of the road, impassively watching the Americans work.

The soldiers who have stayed in their trucks watch back, but everyone seems tired. No one has eaten.

Maybe someone in this village just tried to kill them, maybe someone in the last village, maybe someone somewhere else.

But, nobody got hurt. Staring out the window of his Humvee, one soldier offers a benediction to the faces by the side of the road.

"Nice try," he says, adding an expletive.

[Back to Top](#)

Al Qaeda chief in Pakistan killed in Miranshah attack

* Abu Haris among 26 people killed g Haqqani's four guards, two wives also killed * US targets Haqqani's network in Afghanistan

Daily Times, Pakistan

Daily Times Monitor

Wednesday, September 10, 2008

LAHORE/KABUL

Al Qaeda Pakistan chief Abu Haris was among 26 people killed in Monday's missile strike by the United States in Miranshah, Geo News quoted sources close to Taliban commander Jalaluddin Haqqani as saying on Tuesday.

According to the channel, Haqqani's four guards and two wives were also killed in the attack. Four missiles hit a madrassa run by Haqqani while three landed in populated areas. It is not known if Haqqani was present at the seminary at the time of the strike.

Haqqani, a close aide of Taliban supreme leader Mullah Omar, has not been seen since the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001. The latest attack, in which three Al Qaeda leaders - Hamza Arabi, Qasim Hamza and Musa Arabi - were also killed, comes at a time when the US-led coalition troops are investigating last week's ground attack in Angoor Adda area of South Waziristan that claimed 20 lives.

Talking to Dawn News, US Consul General in Karachi Kay Anske said America believed in Pakistan's sovereignty, adding that western Pakistan was not an area of concern for the US.

Haqqani's network: Meanwhile, the US military said it had targeted Haqqani's network during an operation in eastern Afghanistan near the border with Pakistan, and detained two suspected militants. The raid was launched on Monday in Khost province against militants suspected of carrying out roadside bomb attacks, said the US military. The US military said soldiers had found numerous AK-47s, grenades and other military equipment during the raid in Khost.

Also on Tuesday, two rockets hit central Kabul, landing in an area near the main North Atlantic Treaty Organisation base and the presidential palace but causing no casualties or damage, said Afghanistan's Interior Ministry.

[Back to Top](#)

Rockets land in Kabul; no casualties

<http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Written by Abdullah Anwari

Tuesday, 09 September 2008

Police discover two more rockets pointed at the capital, ministry says

TWO ROCKETS landed in Kabul on Tuesday, inflicting no casualties, the Interior Ministry said.

A spokesman for the ministry, Zemarai Bashari, said the rockets struck the Shashdarak area near the NATO-led ISAF compound at about 4am.

Police later discovered two more rockets aimed at Kabul in the Chahar Asyab district of Kabul province, Bashari said.

[Back to Top](#)

Relatives offer to dig up graves to show Afghan civilian deaths

Gulf Times - Home

Published: Wednesday, 10 September, 2008

AZIZABAD

Relatives of Afghans killed in a US-led coalition raid in western Herat province offered yesterday to dig up graves to support claims of large-scale civilian deaths.

But they said that US-led forces must leave Afghanistan "in shame" if it was proven that an American account of the Aug. 22 air strike in Shindand district that most of the victims were Taliban fighters was wrong.

The incident has outraged Afghans and opened a rift between coalition forces on the one hand and the Afghan government and the UN on the other, which both say that more than 90 civilians were killed.

The US military, which earlier disputed that figure, said it would re-investigate after new evidence had emerged about civilian casualties in the raid on Azizabad village.

"We are ready to dig out every grave to show the Americans that civilians, including women and children, were killed in the air strikes," village elder Gul Ahmad Khan, who

said he lost three children in the strike, said.

But Khan, who represented the village during President Hamid Karzai's visit last week to commiserate with the families, said the US must first agree it would pull out all its forces from the country if it was proved that civilians died in the strike.

"We will welcome them if they visit our bombed village to investigate. But we should have a deal first, if the Americans are proved wrong, then they should leave Afghanistan in shame," he said.

Yesterday, two more civilians died when a bomb fired by a Nato aircraft missed its target by more than 2.5km in the eastern province of Khost, killing two civilians and wounding 10, the alliance said.

It said it was investigating how the weapon, aimed at an insurgent rocket position, had malfunctioned causing civilian casualties.

Afghans have been angered by a spike in civilian deaths in recent months and the country's Western-backed government has sought a review of foreign combat operations.

The US military earlier said the Shindand raid had targeted a Taliban commander who was among 30 to 35 militants killed in the strike. It said five to seven civilians also died.

Villagers said false intelligence about the presence of Taliban in the village had been fed to coalition forces and have urged the Afghan government to punish those responsible.

A group of women, wailing outside their ruined homes, demanded that the Afghan government hand over a man named Nadir to them. They said he had misled foreign forces.

"I don't want anything from the Americans, even if they give the whole of Afghanistan I don't want it," screamed Mah Pari. "We want the government to hand us over Nadir alive," she said.

Pari said she lost four members of her family when bombs struck a house where people had gathered for a charity dinner to mark the death of a villager six months ago.

Wali Mohamed, another villager, said many died while fleeing the bombing. "They were shot dead from the air," he said, adding his wife lost her sight in the strike.

Villagers showed a Reuters journalist a grainy cellular telephone video of a row of bodies lying in shrouds and blankets on the floor of the village mosque. It was not clear from the video how many bodies were there.

Another video showed bodies being taken to the graveyard.

At least 60 of the dead were women and children, the Afghan government says.

"Under any shape it occurred, this event must be regarded as the biggest violation by Nato forces in Afghanistan," state-controlled Afghan daily Anis said in an editorial. - Reuters

[Back to Top](#)

Blasphemy case shows Afghan divide

BBC News, Kabul

Alastair Leithead

Tuesday, 9 September 2008

In Kabul's grim and crowded central prison, a 23-year-old student from northern Afghanistan spends each day wondering if and when he will be put to death.

Sayed Pervez Kambaksh was sentenced in January, in five minutes, at a local court in Mazar-e-Sharif, with no legal representation to defend charges of blasphemy after reports he had downloaded from the internet un-Islamic material on women's rights.

"I don't know what will happen to me," he said from the prison office where we were allowed half an hour to interview him.

"My trial was unfair from the beginning. From day one, they have been treating me very harshly as a criminal, not a suspect, and I don't know who has done this to me.

"My case has been politicised - my lawyer has been threatened. I have lost nine months of my life now in four prisons," he said.

'Deviated from religion'

There is an appeals process but his family have little faith in it - there have been many delays and little information.

The international community has raised the issue and asked for Sayed Pervez Kambaksh to be pardoned or released, but the case is a glaring example of the conflict between conservative Islam and the liberal Western views of Afghanistan's international backers.

"Kambaksh has deviated from religion, and Islam orders that he must be executed," said Enayatullah Baleegh, a member of the Islamic ulema council and a popular and well-respected Muslim scholar.

"The courts of Afghanistan, as per the constitution, have sentenced him to death and we certify this 100%," he said.

This is not the voice of an extremist minority, Enayatullah Baleegh delivers his religious guidance at one of Kabul's main mosques and on state-run television every week.

He advised against us visiting the mosque to hear his message at Friday prayers, as he said some of those present might object to our presence.

But an Afghan BBC cameraman recorded the speech a few days before the country's national day, and Mr Baleegh began with a history lesson.

"The English were cruel and invaded Afghanistan, but the brave people of this country repulsed the British forces with the power of their strong belief in Allah," he said.

"Islam is the religion of peace, but if a human attacks you and invades your land the Koran has another order.

"It says when the infidel attacks you, you should not think yourself weak... you should behead them... you should hold them hostage and should intensify the war and break their morale."

Complex mix

It's not what the UK, or other countries pumping in money to help rebuild Afghanistan, will want to hear from influential mullahs instructing the people in the capital city.

But it goes a long way to illustrate the pressures on President Hamid Karzai, who is keen to portray himself as independent from the international community on which he depends.

Afghanistan has been a fiercely conservative Islamic country for centuries - from well before the Taleban imposed their interpretation of how people should live.

"President Karzai is a deeply conservative Pashtun who understands the traditions - his wife never appears in public and he prays five times a day," said Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, the British ambassador to Afghanistan.

"He understands perhaps better than anyone that one of his jobs is to reconcile these traditions - the call for modernism, the call for openness and at the same time respect for sincerely and devoutly-held religious traditions.

"In many ways we need to understand that the Taleban are the violent expression of an authentic and legitimate strain of deeply conservative, religious Pashtun nationalism that needs to be accommodated in any enduring political settlement in this country," Sir Sherard said.

The balance is not easy to achieve - the Bonn conference in late 2001 created the complex mix when it agreed on a constitution combining Western and Sharia law.

It's unlikely Sayed Pervez Kambaksh will be put to death, but the way his case is handled is incredibly sensitive and important for President Karzai to get right and he could be in prison a while longer.

It's also a reminder that dissatisfaction over progress in Afghanistan, particularly with justice and security, will only encourage the voices of extremism and conservatism.

[Back to Top](#)

Unwinnable war in Afghanistan

Irish Times, Ireland

Wednesday, September 10, 2008

PRESIDENT BUSH'S announcement yesterday that US troop numbers are to be reduced in Iraq and increased in Afghanistan registers the changing dynamics of these two wars.

Both dedicated to fighting terrorism, in the Bush administration's view this objective is now being better achieved in Iraq. The Nato operation in Afghanistan is going badly, as Taliban forces increase their military pressure on the intervention force and the Afghan government. This is bolstered by growing popular anger over steeply rising civilian casualties in attacks on villages and US air support operations and the seeming impunity of those responsible. New military rules of engagement issued this week are intended to tackle these problems, but the damage has been done.

For Nato a great deal is at stake in Afghanistan. It is the first out-of-area operation launched by the alliance, in a crucial strategic zone and on foot of al-Qaeda's linkup with the Taliban regime after the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington in 2001. This made the rapid overthrow of that regime an easily attained task by US troops, followed by installation of the new government led by President Hamid Karzai. He has been able to rule only with the support of regional warlords backed up by the Nato force and an expensive host of international non-governmental organisations. In practice his writ has not extended far from the Kabul region.

Progress in nation and state-building has been painfully slow. It has been mired by corruption, political alienation from foreign domination, continuing military campaigns and the huge increase in opium production, so that Afghanistan now supplies 90 per cent of the world market for the drug. The country's fate is increasingly bound up with that of neighbouring Pakistan. Currently that state is undergoing a change of presidential and political leadership which resents how Nato troops and aircraft disregard its territorial sovereignty along the 1,500 mile border with Afghanistan.

This internal and regional instability is matched by disagreements among the Nato allies on how to conduct the war. Washington insists more troops are urgently required to prosecute it, but most Nato members are not willing to supply them and some are even preparing to withdraw next year. There are also disagreements on whether outright military victory is possible or whether it is necessary to negotiate with Taliban leaders and their supporters if the fighting is to be scaled down. Increasingly this looks like an unwinnable war fought for unrealistic objectives by a divided alliance tempted to use more and more unacceptable means. It is a recipe for failure; but this would be such a shock that it is simply not contemplated by Nato's leaders.

The alternative would involve a more determined political effort to engage regional and nationalist supporters of the Taliban resistance in political dialogue for a more broadly based regime. To be convincing this would need substantial support from neighbouring powers and a gradual scaling down and later a gradual withdrawal of Nato forces. It is hard to see where the courage and imagination needed to initiate such a process can come from.

[Back to Top](#)

Security round-up: rebel clashes kill five

Written by <http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Tuesday, 09 September 2008

Four men wounded in twin suicide bombing die in hospital, docotors say

CLASHES between militants and private security contractors have left five people dead, including two civilians, in the south-eastern province of Paktia, an official said.

The head of the Wazai Zadran district said the fighting erupted on Monday morning, killing two Talibs and one security contractor.

Two passengers travelling in a passing car were killed by stray bullets, he said.

In the southern province of Kandahar, four people injured in Sunday's bombing of the provincial capital's police headquarters have died, doctors said.

One doctor, who refused to be named, said the men belonged to the police force.

The men, who were among the 31 injured in the two suicide blasts, died on Monday, he said.

On Tuesday, a US-led coalition air-strike killed 50 Taliban militants in the Trinkot district of Uruzgan province, the provincial police chief said.

[Back to Top](#)

Joint Jirga between Pakistan, Afghanistan after Eid

Pakistan Times - Metro

'Pakistan Times' Metro Desk

10/09/2008

ISLAMABAD

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi Tuesday said that joint Jirga between Pakistan and Afghanistan will held soon after the Eid.

Talking to private television channel, "Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to initiate Jirga process and hopefully a joint jirga will be taken place in Islamabad immediately after Eid."

He said list of jirga participants has already been exchanged between two governments adding all important figures have been included in the jirga.

To a question he said, Pakistan gives values to peace process with India. The Minister said composite dialogue between Pakistan and India has been useful and Pakistan wanted to remain engaged in a constructive manner.

However, Shah Mehmood Qureshi said Pakistan cannot ignore new situation developing in the occupied Kashmir.

To a question he said, the government has decided to consult all major political parties on the issue of Kashmir.

He said chief of PML-N Nawaz Sharif has been taken into confidence on the issue of Kashmir when he came to congratulate President Asif Ali Zardari.

The government will set up a committee on issue of Kashmir in which every party will get a presentation , he added He said "We wanted to develop national consensus on the issue of Kashmir"

Foreign Minister said core issue of Kashmir has to be addressed in accordance with aspiration of Kashmir people for durable peace in the region.

[Back to Top](#)

[Decapitation in Afghanistan](#)

[Strategy Page](#)

By James Dunnigan

September 9, 2008

Discussion Board on this DLS topic Afghanistan is once more becoming a gathering place for special operations (commando) operators from dozens of countries. This has led to the development of a new strategy, of trying to destroy the Taliban and al Qaeda leadership. Several years worth of experience and information collected by the thousands of commandos has provided a way to do this. Commandos could track the terrorist leaders, and also use a network of informants they had developed along the border, on both sides, over the years. In addition, the U.S. had developed

electronic and visual surveillance capabilities that provide the commandos with additional eyes, and weapons. The commandos are particularly fond of Predator and Reaper UAVs, which come operators describe as having a full time spy satellite overhead. Commandos, as well as smart bombs and Hellfire missiles.

These "decapitation" operations have increased this year, and are expected to keep increasing into next year. The Taliban and al Qaeda have already figured out what is going on, and are increasingly paranoid when it comes to informers, using their own cell or satellite phones, and any unidentified aircraft in the area. The terrorists keep changing the way they meet and communicate, yet they keep getting killed. While the terrorists can replace leaders and technical specialists, they cannot replace them with people of equal experience. And as they move into the shallow end of the talent pool, more mistakes are made. Al Qaeda operatives who have fled Iraq to Afghanistan, have noticed, and commented on, the lower level of technical expertise among their Afghan brothers. While most Iraqi terrorists were literate, and some even had formal technical training, most Afghans are illiterate, and any technical training they might have was acquired informally. This has led to more bombs that don't go off on cue, or, worse yet, explode while being worked on, or emplaced. This sort of thing will happen more, as the talent pool gets diluted. The terrorists have a nearly inexhaustible supply of gunmen and suicide bombers from the hundreds of pro-terror religious schools in Pakistan. Plenty of cash is available from contributions and criminal activities (particularly working for the heroin gangs in Afghanistan). But leadership cannot be bought, nor can you hire technical people to work the high risk (and high death rate) border areas. You have to develop your own leaders and technical people. And if the enemy kills off those leaders and techies too rapidly, the terror operations will collapse. That's how the Israelis crippled Palestinian terrorist operations several years ago, and how the Americans crushed al Qaeda in Iraq, and throughout the rest of the world. Now that solution is being applied to the terrorists in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and commandos from over a dozen nations are in charge.

From the beginning, in September, 2001, Afghanistan was very much a special operations war. The United States asked all of its allies to contribute their commando forces, and most eagerly obliged. This enthusiasm came from the realization that this part of the world was particularly difficult to operate in, and would be a welcome challenge to men who had trained hard for years for missions like this. In addition, most nations saw Islamic terrorism as a real threat, and knew that key terrorist leaders were still hiding out in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. Even after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, which many Western and Middle Eastern nations opposed, they kept sending their commandoes to Afghanistan. But few commandos were allowed into Pakistan, where most of the Taliban and al Qaeda leadership were hiding. Efforts to operate in Pakistan created growing hostility from Pakistani intelligence agencies, which contained many al Qaeda sympathizers. The Pakistani government was reluctant to come down too hard on the Taliban and al Qaeda members on their Afghan border. So the commandos proceeded to learn all about the pro-Taliban tribes in Afghanistan, and secretly sneaked across into Pakistan as well.

Most of these commando operations have been kept secret. This is typical for commando operations, but in this case, many of the nations involved don't want it known that they are involved. This has especially been the case with Arab nations that have contributed commando units. The only time any information gets into the media is, typically, when a commando contingent returns. In that way, the Norwegian media covered the return of their special forces from, as it was described, "another mission" to Afghanistan. Many nations have either sent their commandoes to Afghanistan in shifts, maintaining a near continuous presence, or send some in for a few months, or up to a year, then bring them home for a year or so, before sending them back. For many nations, this is the only combat experience any of their troops are receiving. These countries are often officially hostile to the U.S. effort in Iraq, and refuse to send combat troops to Afghanistan. But commandos in Afghanistan are another matter, partly because nearly all commandos are eager to go.

Afghanistan has been called "the Commando Olympics," because so many nations have contingents there. While the different commando organizations aren't competing with each other, they are performing similar missions, using slightly different methods and equipment. Naturally, everyone compares notes and makes changes based on combat experience. That's the draw for commandoes, getting and using "combat experience." Training is great, but there's nothing like operating against an armed and hostile foe. This is all a real big thing, as the participating commandoes are becoming a lot more effective. But you can't get a photograph of this increased capability, and the commandoes aren't talking to the press. So it's all a big story you'll never hear much about, except in history books, many years from now.

[Back to Top](#)

Police kill two inmates in failed prison break

<http://www.quqnoos.com/>

Written by Abdullah Anwari

Tuesday, 09 September 2008

Hunger-strike in southern jail ends as prisoners try to escape

POLICE have killed two prisoners and injured another during a foiled jail break in the southern province of Helmand, the prison's chief said.

Head of Helmand's prisons, Ghulam Ali, said the prisoners tried to escape on Monday night, two days after inmates went on hunger-strike in protest over conditions in the jail.

Earlier in the year, hundreds of Taliban militants and prisoners escaped from a large jail in neighbouring Kandahar province after militants rammed an explosives-packed water truck into the jail's front gates.

[Back to Top](#)

Attack on media in Afghanistan

Deccan Herald - [Edit Page](#)

By Deepali Gaur Singh

Wednesday, September 10, 2008

Media persons are facing political persecution in the name of national interest.

Hailed as one of the most important civil achievements of the time in the war-embattled country, the fall of the Taliban in 2001 had translated into a boom for the Afghan media industry. And yet the euphoria has been short-lived despite over 750 newspapers and magazines across the country as nearly 80 per cent of these exist with the patronage of ex-mujahideen commanders.

Amnesty International recently asked the Afghan government to prevent suppression of media freedom by the country's intelligence agency, the National Security Directorate (NSD). The warning comes at a crucial time in Afghanistan's faltering democracy when the average Afghan feels increasingly threatened by the unhindered power of former warlords-turned-politicians and the government's inability to reign them in.

From the debarring of Malalai Joya from Parliament, who constantly changes residences for safety reasons, for comparing her fellow parliamentarians to zoo animals, to the more recent detention of Mohammad Nasir Fayyaz, a documentary filmmaker, for "misrepresenting" government officials on his programme, the list of such incidents is endless. Fayyaz who had questioned some powerful ministers regarding illegal land grabbing on his show The Truth has been threatened by parliamentarians in the past too including former warlord Abdul Rasul Sayyaf. Earlier this year, another journalist Perwiz Kambakhsh was arrested on charges of blasphemy by a provincial court in Mazar-e Sharif for allegedly downloading material from the Internet that examined the role of women in Islam. His trial was held behind closed doors without a defence lawyer since most refused fearing reprisals. He faces the death sentence.

Officially, the NDS only has the authority to address national security threats. But with ambiguity surrounding its scope and powers, the ambit for its willful reinterpretation only increases. Consequently, many believe that it is merely a tool for the government to silence its critics. Between May 2007 and 2008, the Afghan government is believed to have been responsible for half the reported incidents of intimidation, arrest or violence against journalists. Police have repeatedly abused Sohaila Wedah Khamoush, a reporter for the independent daily Payman. Khalil Narmgoy was released last month after 35 days in captivity for writing a satire criticising President Karzai. In 2007 the NDS had detained Kamran Mir Hazar, editor of kabulpress.org, an online news portal, for publishing material critical of the government.

But tragically for the media it is not the government alone that has been intolerant of its critics. Only recently, Raj, the manager of the independent radio outlet in the central province of Daikundi, was arrested for inadequate coverage of the local governor's work.

In April 2007, police officers raided Tolo TV and arrested journalist Hamed Haidary for 'misquoting' former Attorney General Abdul Sabit in a bulletin. Tolo TV has a violent history of attacks against its presenters with the murder of Shaima Rezayee in 2005 and threats to her colleague, Shakeb Issar who eventually fled to Sweden after being holed up inside the station for days.

The government argues that critical reporting, given the present security concerns, weakens the central government and

strengthens the Taliban. Thus, a June 2006 NDS directive citing 'national interest' to restrict the media is frequently used. Media freedom in Afghanistan could be further restricted by a to-be-approved, revised media law containing several ambiguous provisions that surpass restrictions allowed under international human rights law.

The Ministry of Culture and Information in April 2008 sent all media houses a letter carrying guidelines for self-censorship stating that any matter that goes against the Sharia laws should not be printed, broadcasted or telecasted.

The backlash against the press is the result of the deteriorating security situation, the declining public support for official policies and the resultant weakening of the government's position. And the stories are more or less the same.

[Back to Top](#)

Bush terms Pakistan a major theatre in terror war

Pakistan Dawn, Pakistan

By Anwar Iqbal

Sept 9, 2008

WASHINGTON

US President George W. Bush on Tuesday named Pakistan among the major battlegrounds in the global war on terrorism and reminded Islamabad that it was its responsibility to eradicate terrorism from the tribal areas.

"Defeating these terrorists and extremists is also Pakistan's responsibility - because every nation has an obligation to govern its own territory and make certain that it does not become a safe haven for terror," he said.

In a speech to the US National Defence University, Mr Bush also revealed that earlier on Tuesday he had telephoned President Asif Ali Zardari and "pledged the full support of America's government as Pakistan takes the fight to the terrorists and extremists in the border regions".

Mr Bush said that Iraq, Afghanistan and "parts of Pakistan" posed "unique challenges" to the United States.

"They're all theatres in the same overall struggle. In all three places, extremists are using violence and terror in an attempt to impose their ideology on whole populations," he said. "They murder to impose their dark vision of the world."

Mr Bush said that in all three places, America was "standing strongly with brave elected leaders and determined reformers and millions of ordinary citizens who seek a future of liberty and justice and tolerance".

In Washington's diplomatic circles, the speech is seen as a move aimed at telling the new government in Islamabad that in the war on terror it has no option but to continue to play the role assigned to it after the Sept 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States.

The strategy outlined in the speech makes it clear that the new government will have to continue to pursue the policies of the Musharraf administration for combating militants in tribal areas and in the rest of the country - a policy which contributed to the former president's unpopularity in Pakistan.

Mr Bush's message follows US air and ground strikes inside Pakistan's tribal belt, killing dozens of people, including women and children.

Although he devoted part of the speech to Pakistan, Mr Bush's focus was Afghanistan where he is now redeploying more than half of the troops withdrawn from Iraq.

The US will withdraw about 8,000 of its 146,000 soldiers in Iraq by February - and send 4,500 more to join the 33,000 in Afghanistan.

Mr Bush said that the improved security situation in Iraq permitted a "quiet surge" of troops in Afghanistan in the coming months.

By doing so, Mr Bush is trying to set the agenda for the next administration which will replace his government in January.

Redeployment of troops and an increased US involvement in Afghanistan will make it difficult for the next administration to disengage itself from the Afghan conflict any time soon.

Both Democratic and Republican presidential candidates, however, have already said that unlike Iraq, they want the US to succeed in Afghanistan and are willing to commit more US troops to achieve this target.

Mr Bush, in his speech, not only expressed a strong support to Afghanistan but also endorsed Kabul's claim that terrorists hiding in Pakistan's tribal areas were responsible for much of the bloodshed inside Afghanistan.

"With the help of their sanctuary in Pakistan, they ruthlessly attacked innocent Afghans across the country," Mr Bush said.

The speech indicates a major shift in US attitudes towards Pakistan's western frontier where once Islamabad was a key US ally while Kabul was a member of the Soviet bloc.

Now the United States has a direct military presence in Afghanistan while its policies are strongly resisted by religious militants in Pakistan.

South Asian analysts in Washington say that this change in ground realities has encouraged the US to view Pakistan from Afghanistan's prism.

And Mr Bush endorsed this view by telling Pakistanis that their country had become a base for destabilising Afghanistan's nascent democracy.

"As we take these new steps in Afghanistan, we must also help the government of Pakistan defeat Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters hiding in remote border regions of their country," he said.

"These extremists are increasingly using Pakistan as a base from which to destabilise Afghanistan's young democracy."

But Mr Bush acknowledged that in the past year, the Taliban, Al Qaeda and other extremist groups operating in the tribal regions have stepped up their attacks against the Pakistani government, "hoping to stop that country's democratic progress, as well".

He reminded Islamabad that defeating these terrorists and extremists was in Pakistan's interest because they posed a mortal threat to Pakistan's future as a free and democratic nation.

Mr Bush, however, assured Pakistan that America and its Nato allies would continue to help in its efforts to defeat the

extremists.

"The same terrorists who murdered innocent civilians in Karachi and Islamabad are plotting new attacks against the United States and Europe."

[Back to Top](#)

2 Afghan civilians killed, 10 wounded by NATO bomb

Associated Press

By RAHIM FAIEZ

September 9, 2008

KABUL, Afghanistan

A NATO bomb missed its target by more than 1 1/2 miles and hit a house Tuesday, killing two Afghan civilians and wounding 10 at a time of rising tension between the Afghan government and international troops over the use of airstrikes.

Meanwhile, a roadside bomb killed three U.S. coalition soldiers and an Afghan contractor, the coalition said.

NATO said its weapon malfunctioned Tuesday in the eastern Khost province. The bomb's target was a spot used by insurgents to fire rockets.

"An immediate investigation into the cause of the incident has been launched and further details will be forthcoming once established," the statement said.

Because of Afghanistan's mountainous terrain and few roads, U.S. and other foreign forces rely heavily on the use of airpower in their fight against Taliban and al-Qaida fighters. But the use of airstrikes in civilian areas have been blamed for a series of civilian deaths, which caused President Hamid Karzai to ask for a review of the use of U.S. and NATO air power.

"The war against terrorism will only be won if we have the people with us. There is no other way," Karzai said after attending the inauguration ceremony for Pakistan's new president, Asif Ali Zardari. "In order for us to have the people with us, we must avoid civilian casualties."

Afghan and U.N. officials say some 90 civilians were killed in a U.S. special forces operation in the village of Azizabad on Aug. 22. The U.S. has said up to seven civilians were killed but is reinvestigating the incident after video images of victims came to light.

The bodies of at least 10 children and many more adults covered in blankets and white shrouds appear in videos obtained by The Associated Press on Monday.

The two grainy videos, apparently taken by cell phones, showed bodies lying side-by-side on the mosque floor, covered by floral-patterned blankets and black-and-white checkered shawls. One young boy lay curled in a fetal position; others looked as though they were asleep. One child had half its head blown off.

It was impossible to verify conclusively that the videos showed the aftermath of the Azizabad attack, but the contents appeared to back claims by Afghan and U.N. officials that the U.S. operation killed far more civilians than the military has acknowledged.

Karzai said Tuesday that he was pleased that the investigation into the Azizabad incident had been reopened. He said Afghan authorities had received "messages of regrets and condolences from as high as the president of the United States."

"While we say 'no civilian casualties,' we reiterate ... that we are dedicated in the war against terrorism because it brings our people safety and security that we so much need," Karzai said.

Karzai has said that the Azizabad bombings have brought relations between the Afghan government and the U.S. to one of its lowest points since the ouster of the Islamic militia from power in 2001.

Shortly after the Azizabad attack, he ordered a review of whether the U.S. and NATO should be allowed to use airstrikes or carry out raids in villages. He also called for an updated "status of force" agreement between the Afghan government and foreign militaries. That review has not yet been completed.

Meanwhile, two separate airstrikes in Afghanistan's south and east killed more than 27 militants, including Chechen fighters, Afghan officials said Tuesday.

Authorities clashed with Taliban fighters and requested airstrikes from foreign troops in the southern Uruzgan province on Tuesday, which killed 15 militants, said provincial police chief Juma Gul Himat.

In the eastern Paktika province, meanwhile, another airstrike hit a group of foreign fighters and killed 12 militants, including nine Chechen fighters, said Ruhulla Samon, the spokesman for the provincial governor.

There were no casualties among Afghan forces in either clash.

Afghan and Western officials have warned that higher numbers of foreign militants have joined the fight inside Afghanistan, which is seeing record levels of violence nearly seven years after a U.S.-led invasion drove the fundamentalist Taliban from power over its sheltering of the al-Qaida terrorist network.

More than 4,000 people have died in insurgency-related violence this year, according to an Associated Press tally of figures from Western and Afghan officials.

Associated Press writers Fisnik Abrashi in Kabul and Noor Khan in Kandahar contributed to this report.

[Back to Top](#)

Good Intentions

Newsweek

By Ron Moreau

09/09/2008

The Afghan and Pakistani presidents do their best to appear friendly toward one another, but how long can the bonhomie last?

In his first press conference just hours after being sworn in as president today, Asif Ali Zardari chose to share the spotlight with Afghan President Hamid Karzai, apparently in an effort to calm the tense relations between the two neighboring countries, each of which is fighting an expanding Islamic insurgency. Karzai, whom Zardari had invited to his Inauguration at the presidential palace in Islamabad, had had a very rocky relationship with former president Pervez Musharraf. Karzai had blamed the Taliban's resurgence on the sanctuaries that he claimed the guerrillas enjoyed in Pakistan's tribal belt along the two countries' common border. Musharraf denied the charge, shooting back that Karzai should put his own house in order first and that the Taliban was a homegrown problem.

As Karzai and Zardari shared the rostrum together this afternoon, all vitriol from the past was gone. The two leaders seemed to be of the same mind on how to tackle their respective insurgencies and how to cooperate together. "Pakistan and Afghanistan are like twins joined, inseparable. That is why both are suffering the same problems, the same evils," said Karzai, 50, wearing a lambskin cap and a blue and green striped cape. "For each step you take in the war against terrorism for bringing peace and stability to the two countries, Afghanistan will take many steps with you." Zardari agreed. "We should stand with each other," he said.

Zardari, 53, made it clear that he has the ability to rally Pakistanis to support the war on Islamic extremism, while Musharraf, having widely been seen as Washington's man who was fighting an American war, did not. "Yesterday's war may not have had the people behind it, but today's war does," he said. "In fact it has the president of Pakistan [behind it], who is also a victim of terrorism," he added, referring to the death of his wife, former prime minister Benazir Bhutto, who was a victim of a terrorist attack while campaigning last December.

Karzai couldn't seem to tire of praising his counterpart. "The feeling of brotherhood and good neighborliness goes beyond the complaints that we have," he said. "Today I see the president and prime minister of Pakistan [as having] exactly the same viewpoints as I have, and they have the same background of suffering as we have in Afghanistan."

Karzai didn't even single out Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan as his country's main problem but rather pointed out that insurgents have sanctuaries on both sides of the border. In responding to a question on the mounting civilian casualty toll in Afghanistan, Karzai said the U.S.-led coalition should not fight the war in villages or populated areas but rather should "concentrate on the sanctuaries, whether those sanctuaries are in Afghanistan or Pakistan."

Zardari, wearing a pinstriped suit and rimless glasses, said he accepted the presidency in the name of his martyred wife, adding that the country could be proud of the democracy that has taken hold since her death. "We can proudly raise our heads up and boast that we are indeed a democracy," he said.

He also tried to inject a new, less imperial tone into the presidency since the days of the autocratic Musharraf, emphasizing the more than eight years he had spent in jail under the general's rule. "You should see in my presidency a humility after long suffering," he said. "I've suffered [because] a president or an individual thinks he knows more than the wisdom of the people or the Parliament."

About his future plans and vision for the country, however, Zardari had little to say. He did not say what he plans to do with Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, whom Musharraf had sacked, and whose restoration to the bench had been a common goal of both Zardari and former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, his coalition partner until last month. When Zardari reneged on promises to reinstate the justice, Sharif walked away from the coalition, weakening it.

Nor did Zardari divulge much about his plans to address the country's mounting economic woes, other than to say he was cutting the budget of the presidency out of solidarity for people suffering from the sharp economic downturn. He also sees the country's security woes as a possible economic opportunity. "We are in the eye of the storm," he said. "I consider that an opportunity. I intend to make it our strength. We intend to take the world with us in developing the future of Pakistan."

Questioners gave Karzai and Zardari little opportunity to talk about anything but the War on Terror. Zardari made it clear that he would not allow insurgent safe havens in Pakistan. "Not one inch of land will be lost to any miscreants," he said, using the term the Pakistani military uses to refer to insurgents. But, he added Pakistan was not the aggressor and that it was only fighting against those who were attacking it. Negotiations could take place if the insurgents laid down their weapons. "We only go on the offensive against people who are on the offensive against ourselves," he said. "Otherwise we asked for peace and asked them to lay down their arms. If they lay down their arms we can negotiate with them."

Despite the apparently warm relations between the two presidents, how long can the bonhomie last? Insurgencies on both side of the border seem to be growing in intensity and breadth. Taliban safe havens in Pakistan have become such a threat to coalition forces across the border that the United States has ramped up its Predator drone attacks against militant positions inside the tribal region, carrying out at least five this month. Pakistanis widely see these attacks as violations of the country's sovereignty rather than assistance in combating extremism. A real test of their friendship will come if another major terrorist attack occurs in Kabul, like the car bombing of the Indian Embassy last July, that can be traced back to insurgent sanctuaries in Pakistan. That's when emotions could get the best of good intentions.

[Back to Top](#)

Countering the Taleban's 20-year war

BBC News website

By Paul Reynolds World affairs correspondent

Tuesday, 9 September 2008

The Taleban is planning for a 20-year war in Afghanistan - and the US and its allies are now having to develop policies to match.

The problem is that the policies carried out up till now - a combination of military operations and civilian development in the hope that in due course the Afghan government will be strong enough on its own - have led to a deteriorating security situation.

The issue beyond that though is whether the strategy is right. The former European Union envoy to Afghanistan Francesc Vedrell thinks not. He told the BBC that the current strategy would not bring success and that President Bush's administration was misleading itself on the issue. He said that many mistakes had been made.

In the meantime, reinforcements are now needed and a gradual shake-up in security planning is underway.

The new head of US Central Command, which oversees military operations across the Middle East and Afghanistan, is to be David Petraeus, the general who is credited with turning the war in Iraq around. Can a "mini surge" work in Afghanistan?

President Bush is announcing that a drawdown of troops from Iraq will enable the US to send an extra combat brigade to Afghanistan early next year.

Presidential candidates, the successful one of which will face difficult decisions in the years ahead if the war continues to be hard, are weighing in.

Senator John McCain is promising three extra brigades, Senator Barack Obama two.

The US is sending a senior counterinsurgency expert, Gen John Nicholson, to the south to invigorate operations there.

It is interesting to note that one of his forebears was a British brigadier who raised the siege of Delhi in 1857 - with a deserved reputation for great brutality that the current Nicholson will want to avoid.

Gen Nicholson's mission might herald a greater role for the US military in the south.

There is also to be streamlining of the command arrangements between the Nato-led Isaf forces and the separate US forces operating under the banner of "Enduring Freedom".

Military tactics are also under question, especially the widespread use of air power, which is needed to make up for the lack of troops on the ground. This has led to numerous disasters among the civilian population.

Few Western diplomats have any faith that the Pakistani army is in a position to stop the Taleban crossing the border. Some military figures believe that Pakistani elements still favour the Taleban and there is now a lowered expectation that, at best, Pakistan can play a role in targeting individuals.

Taleban resilient

The basic situation is that the Taleban itself is proving to be resilient. A journalist held by the Taleban recently said he had been told by a senior commander that, unlike the 1990s, the Taleban now knew it could not win the war in a few months, or indeed a few years.

It was expecting to take 20 years to evict the foreign forces.

The renewed concentration on Afghanistan comes at a time of political weakness in the Afghan government. President Hamid Karzai is seen by Western leaders as well-meaning but weak. Efforts are underway to encourage him to assert himself.

And not all Nato allies seem to have the stomach for the fight. Nato planners in Afghanistan now assume that the Dutch and Canadians will withdraw from combat operations by 2010/11, concentrating instead on training the Afghan army.

This itself is to double in size to 120,000 and some expectations are being placed on it for the long term.

The Dutch and Canadian transition might put pressure on Britain (and a new election has to be held by 2010) to reconsider, or at least justify, its level of commitment.

For the moment, British planners seem quite pleased that in Helmand province there are signs, they say, of improvement in some areas.

This is put down to counter insurgency tactics that stress the need for better civilian rule (the British are great supporters

of Helmand Governor Gulab Mangal, an ex-communist, who is seen as an efficient administrator) as well as military pressure.

But it is going to be a long haul at best.

[Back to Top](#)

Bush Afghanistan Plan Ignores Commanders' Advice

The Huffington Post

AFP

September 9, 2008

WASHINGTON

The modest shift in US forces to Afghanistan announced Tuesday by President George W. Bush falls short of his commanders' requests despite signs the seven year-old US-NATO project there is at risk.

While conditions have improved in Iraq, Bush admitted that things have not gone so well in Afghanistan, which is being shaken by an increasingly bloody insurgency fueled from safe havens in Pakistan.

"Afghanistan's success is critical to the security of America and our partners in the free world. And for all the good work we have done in that country, it is clear we must do even more," Bush said in a speech to the National Defense University.

[Read the whole story here.](#)

[Back to Top](#)

Militancy dogs Pakistan's new president

Asia Times Onlin

By Syed Saleem Shahzad

September 9, 2008

KARACHI

Asif Ali Zardari, who convincingly won presidential elections at the weekend, brings to the office a distinctly checkered past, but he has the potential to become Pakistan's most powerful president ever - unless militants have their way.

Zardari will have his finger on the nuclear button, he will be supreme commander of the armed forces and have the power to dissolve parliament and the provincial assemblies, besides being leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the lead party in the ruling coalition government in Islamabad and in two provinces.

Pro-Western Zardari's rapid rise to power followed active mediation by London and Washington, which raises serious

doubts over whether the process was meant for the benefit of US designs in the South Asian "war on terror" theater at the expense of the domestic affairs of the country.

Zardari shot into prominence when his wife, former premier Benazir Bhutto, was assassinated last December and he took over her PPP as co-chairman. He subsequently spearheaded the drive to oust former president Pervez Musharraf and led the PPP to victory in national polls in February.

As Zardari looks to the future, he will put behind him immediate allegations of electoral fraud at the weekend and the longer-standing stigma that hangs over his head through allegations of business malpractices during the two terms of Bhutto's premiership (1988-1990; 1993-1996). For these he spent 11 years in prison, and although he was never convicted he is still widely referred to as "Mr 10%".

All that matters now is that Zardari is the man of the hour and as president is destined to play a significant role not only in the "war on terror" but also in building peaceful relations with India. And along with Turkey, Pakistan wants to play a leading role in the Organization of Islamic Countries in developing a peace formula for the recognition of and peaceful coexistence with Israel.

The author of this broader role for Pakistan is Professor Husain Haqqani, the country's ambassador to Washington, a role Bhutto had chosen for him as a loyal colleague. Haqqani is also campaigning for Zalmay Khalilzad, currently the US ambassador to the United Nations, to become the next president of Afghanistan.

Haqqani has served as director of the Institute for International Relations at Boston University and as co-director of the Hudson Institute's Project on the Future of the Muslim World. He has testified in congressional committees and worked with former US president Jimmy Carter on Middle Eastern issues. He also actively engages the Department of State, the Pentagon, the National Security Council and the US Central Command.

Zardari, Haqqani and their colleagues might have a fine vision for their country and the world in general, but the crucial issue is whether Pakistan's military establishment will ever allow Zardari to play a key role in which it is not involved.

During the nearly nine years of Musharraf's presidency, the Foreign Office and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) would draft policies concerning Afghanistan, Kashmir and the Middle East and officials would (hopefully) carry them out. Now, most policies will come directly through Washington via the Pakistani ambassador.

However, given the margin of Zardari's presidential victory (he won 481 votes out of 702), the military is expected to remain under his thumb. Significantly, this poll marked the end of the former "king's party" that once backed Musharraf - the Pakistan Muslim League Quaid-i-Azam fragmented, with major defections to the opposition Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) and even to the PPP.

One of Zardari's first moves after being sworn in on Tuesday is likely to be to change the director general of the ISI, Lieutenant General Nadeem Taj, as well as the directors of internal and external security and regional ISI heads.

Bringing the ISI under civilian rather than military authority is one of Washington's long-standing desires as the agency often has a mind of its own and elements in it sympathetic to the Taliban and al-Qaeda have acted against the aims of the "war on terror".

The PPP-led government did try to bring the ISI under the Ministry of Interior two months ago, but following a strong reaction from the army the government backed off. This time, given Zardari's landslide victory, the army is unlikely to confront the government.

Militants, however, will confront the government, with another sharp reminder on Saturday of the difficult road ahead. More than 30 people were killed and dozens injured when an explosives-laden truck blew up at a police checkpoint on the outskirts of Peshawar, the capital of North-West Frontier Province.

The timing of this attack on election day, the latest in a string of bombings over the past few months, sends a clear message to Zardari, who, as president, will also oversee the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in which the

militants have strong bases and from where the Taliban launch operations into Afghanistan.

A top security official told Asia Times Online that the actual plan was a massive attack on the provincial assembly in Peshawar where voting was taking place for the new president, but the truck, carrying 60 kilograms of explosives, was held up at the check point.

Apart from fighting militancy, Zardari's government has a struggle on its hands in the form of an ailing economy. Well before Zardari's election, the US transferred US\$365 million to Pakistan as reimbursement for its efforts in fighting terrorism in the FATA. The country's foreign reserves have dropped to \$9 billion; in April they stood at \$16 billion. Saudi Arabia has expressed its willingness to grant a one-year extension in oil credit facilities to enable Pakistan to import oil on deferred payments, or to accept a grant worth \$500 million.

Zardari's real test, though, will be in fighting militancy and it is through this war that he will stand or fall, carrying with him all of Washington's hopes and expectations.

Syed Saleem Shahzad is Asia Times Online's Pakistan Bureau Chief.

[Back to Top](#)

Karzai arrives in UAE for talks with the country's leadership

Press Trust of India

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(Abu Dhabi)

Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai on Tuesday arrived in Abu Dhabi on an official visit, during which he is expected to ask the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to continue its aid to the war-ravaged country.

Karzai's visit follows an invitation to the Afghan President by Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the UAE and Ruler of Abu Dhabi emirate.

A statement released by the Afghan embassy in Abu Dhabi said the President will ask his UAE counterpart to maintain the Emirati "assistance for Afghanistan's economic development and to promote investment and trade".

According to officials, the two leaders will also discuss means to further strengthen "the existing brotherly relationship between the two countries in addition to discussing the regional issues".

Karzai is also expected to give a briefing on the situation in Afghanistan during the visit, which is likely to last several days.

"The UAE's participation in the reconstruction process of Afghanistan is greatly appreciated. The generous pledge made by the UAE in the Paris Conference has taken the existing strong bonds between our two countries a step further," a statement from Abdul Farid Zikria, Afghanistan's ambassador to the UAE said.

[Back to Top](#)

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