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WORKING TO PREVENT CONFLICT WORLDWIDE

Afghanistan's Political Transition

Asia Report N°260 | 16 October 2014

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Executive Summary

Ashraf Ghani was inaugurated as president of Afghanistan on 29 September, under difficult circumstances. He inherited a government that is running out of money and losing ground to a rising insurgency. His ability to confront those problems and other challenges as foreign troops withdraw will be shaped by the aftermath of the political contest that brought him to power. Forming a national unity government with his election rival Abdullah Abdullah presents opportunities to stabilise the transition, preventing further erosion of state cohesiveness. Yet, it also poses risks, particularly of factionalism within Kabul, which could undermine urgently needed reforms. Given the international role in developing the agreements that have created this new partnership, and the absence of mechanisms to resolve internal differences, the international community should serve as a guarantor of Kabul's new political order and, if necessary, mediate any serious disputes that arise.

Political transitions in Afghanistan have always been fraught. The transfer of power in 2014 may yet prove the most peaceful handover of leadership in the country's history, despite the tensions that emerged in the process. Hamid Karzai now stands as the only Afghan leader to have voluntarily surrendered his office, and his legacy will be further strengthened if he uses his considerable influence to make the next administration a success and refrains from trying to control the new president.

Karzai's departure was mandated by the constitution, but a genuine contest to replace him was never guaranteed. In 2013 and early 2014, Western diplomats pushed their Afghan counterparts to ensure the election would go ahead as planned and Afghan elites engaged in a vigorous struggle over the rules and authorities that would govern the process. The absence of a dominant candidate led to colourful campaigns ahead of the 5 April first round, and all the major slates included candidates from a diverse mix of ethnicities, tribes and political factions – which meant that the first round did not place significant stress on the traditional fault lines of Afghan society. Urban areas enjoyed a celebratory mood after the apparently successful first round, which encouraged observers to overlook signs of fraud.

The second round became far more divisive as ethnic Pashtuns and Uzbeks rallied in large numbers around the Pashtun candidate Ghani and his Uzbek running mate Abdul Rashid Dostum; at the same time, Abdullah's ticket became identified mainly with ethnic Tajiks and some powerful Hazara factions. These divisions were aggravated by a perception in the Abdullah camp that Karzai, a Pashtun himself, threw the resources of the presidency behind Ghani before the 14 June run-off. Abdullah's supporters threatened violent action after preliminary results showed Ghani winning, which prompted urgent international mediation, and a 12 July deal to audit all of the votes and give the losing party a role in a unity government.

This gave rise to an extended standoff between the Ghani and Abdullah campaigns, as the two sides disagreed about how votes should be disqualified for fraud and how the next administration might include both teams. The impasse was broken when Ghani and Abdullah signed a four-page agreement on 21 September, promising a "genuine and meaningful partnership" that made Ghani president and gave Abdullah the freshly created role of chief executive officer who answers to the president but has powers similar to that of an executive prime minister.

Abdullah strengthened the legitimacy of the new government by publicly acknowledging Ghani as the next president, but their arrangement will face serious tests in the coming months as the two sides negotiate the appointment of cabinet ministers, governors and other key officials. Disenchanted voters will also likely want to see final results from the electoral commissions, which have so far not published any tallies.

Ghani and Abdullah must also steer the government through some urgent business in the coming weeks, including satisfying the requirements of the Financial Action Task Force and the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, to prevent Afghanistan from being blacklisted by financial institutions and ensure continued donor support. The new government did, however, sign the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the U.S. one day after Ghani's inauguration, followed the same day by signing the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with NATO. The two agreements allow the continued presence of ten-thousand-plus foreign forces after December 2014, in addition to technical, fiscal and material support to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF). Still, the new government will need to persuade donors to give billions of dollars to maintain the ANSF personnel roster in the coming years and provide technical capabilities such as air support. Even with some foreign troops staying in the country, Afghanistan's security forces will likely face unprecedented challenges during the 2015 fighting season.

Some of the damage to the reputation of democracy in Afghanistan, after such a bruising process, might also be repaired with a transparent review of lessons that could be applied to strengthen the 2015 parliamentary and 2019 presidential elections. Such a review, with the potential for reconsidering laws, regulations, and even the constitution, may allow for some dilution of the winner-takes-all and overly centralised presidential system, as well as other necessary reforms. A shakeup of the Kabul elites may also provide a rare opportunity to reduce corruption, provided Ghani and Abdullah are willing to confront the entrenched interests of their own supporters.

Despite rising violence, the behaviour of Taliban commanders during the second round of voting suggests a capacity for political behaviour by the insurgents that could, with time, potentially turn into an opening for negotiations about how to eventually resolve the conflict. Ghani has offered political talks to the Taliban and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's Hizb-e Islami, but he must avoid any unilateral attempts to reach out to the insurgents; if done without Abdullah's active participation and backing, such efforts could risk unravelling the national unity government and hence a fragile political transition.

Recommendations

Afghanistan and its donors must focus on the cohesion of the unity government while rapidly implementing promised reforms. This will require continued financial and material assistance from donors, including support for Afghan security forces. President Ashraf Ghani must proceed quickly with his stated plans, including anti-corruption measures, constitutional reform, improvements to the electoral system, and political engagement with insurgents. At the same time, he must avoid unilateral action that could alienate his partners in the new government.

To ensure the cohesion of the new government

To the incoming government of Afghanistan:

1. Move ahead quickly with reforms described in Ashraf Ghani's manifesto, with the understanding that efforts to reduce corruption and disrupt mafias within the state apparatus must not provide an opportunity for new criminal networks to become entrenched in government, and that any reforms must balance the interests of all stakeholders.
2. Publish the timeline appended to the 21 September agreement, the special protocol for the chief executive officer, and any other additional texts to the 12 July and 21 September agreements, so that the Afghan public has a full understanding of the deals that underpin the unity government.

To the UN, U.S., and other donors:

3. In cooperation with other members of the international community, work to safeguard the 12 July and 21 September agreements. This will include the UN using its good offices to help resolve differences and other influential international actors mediating any serious disputes that may arise between the signatories or their supporters, and encouraging regional powers to play a constructive role by pressing Afghan factions to assume moderate positions and eschew violence.

To prepare for the 2015 parliamentary and 2019 presidential elections

To the incoming government of Afghanistan:

4. Start immediately planning for the next elections. This will include establishing the election reform commission, outlined in the political agreement, which should review the conduct of the 2014 elections and audit process; providing a public explanation of its findings, and offering measures to help remedy shortcomings, particularly by building confidence in electoral institutions; publishing the detailed results of the 14 June run-off vote; and working toward a new voter registry.

To the UN and donor countries:

5. Assist the Afghan government with its review of the 2014 elections and its preparations for the 2015 parliamentary and 2019 presidential elections, with a view toward sustained international political support and technical involvement in

the short term. In the long term, strengthening Afghan institutions should make such foreign assistance unnecessary.

To ensure the future stability of the Afghan state

To the incoming government of Afghanistan:

6. Address the economic crisis with steps such as satisfying the requirements of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF), to prevent Afghanistan from being blacklisted by financial institutions and ensure continued support from donors.
7. Strengthen governance with reforms such as reviewing the structure of government in the proposed constitutional Loya Jirga with a view to diluting the centralisation of power in Kabul, including by devolving some responsibilities to elected local officials; in addition, seize the opportunity presented by the leadership transition to remove corrupt and abusive figures from government and security posts.

To the UN and donor countries:

8. Provide commitments of financial support for Afghan security forces at approximately their current force strength until the insurgency diminishes; in addition, assist the ANSF to resolve capacity gaps in areas such as close air support, tactical airlift, over-the-horizon surveillance, logistics and battlefield medical evacuation.
9. Address the economic crisis with urgent steps to ensure the fiscal solvency of the new government; reiterate ongoing commitments and ensure predictability of support; and, if necessary, delay the TMAF review until spring 2015 to give the new government additional time for preparations.

Kabul/Brussels, 16 October 2014

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Afghanistan's Political Transition

I. Introduction

No matter what occurred during the 2014 presidential election, the process was destined to make history.[1] The idea of electing leaders in Afghanistan has existed since at least the 1920s, when King Amanullah Khan established the country's first parliament.[2] Until 2014, however, no election had been conducted under laws passed by an elected assembly, and no election brought any significant change at the highest level in Kabul. This year also marked the first time that Afghans witnessed a leader of any kind – elected or unelected – showing an apparent willingness to surrender power. President Hamid Karzai indicated a desire to retain influence after the expiry of his constitutional mandate in 2014, but he also repeatedly called for his own replacement.[3]

In 1986, Babrak Karmal's resignation had been involuntary, since the Soviet leadership replaced him with Najibullah.[4] The 1992 transfer of authority by former President Sebghatullah Mojaddedi to Burhanuddin Rabbani was misunderstood in some quarters as a peaceful transition of power,[5] but Mojaddedi was under pressure from armed rivals.[6] The only other change of leadership without the principal contenders resorting to violence arguably happened in 1901, when Abdur Rahman, known as the "Iron Emir", died of natural causes and bequeathed the government to his son.[7]

While the 1901 transition had showcased the Iron Emir's legacy of strong government institutions, the 2014 protracted and contentious handover of power has, conversely, revealed significant institutional weakness in Kabul. Political turmoil has undermined efforts to raise customs and other sources of revenue for the central government, partly because of an economic slowdown but also because of increased

[1] This paper looks at the internal politics of Afghanistan; a separate paper, forthcoming, will examine Afghanistan's most important regional relationship – that with Pakistan. For Crisis Group analysis of the 2010 parliamentary elections, see Asia Briefing N°117, *Afghanistan's Elections Stalemate*, 23 February 2011; on the 2009 presidential elections, Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°96, *Afghanistan: Elections and the Crisis of Governance*, 25 November 2009; and Crisis Group Asia Report N°171, *Afghanistan's Election Challenges*, 24 June 2009. For further discussion of Afghan electoral institutions, see also Asia Reports N°101, *Afghanistan Elections: Endgame or New Beginning*?, 21 July 2005; and Asia Briefing N°31, *Elections and Security in Afghanistan*, 30 March 2004.
[2] Thomas Barfield, *Afghanistan: A Cultural and Political History* (Princeton, 2010), p. 189.
[3] An analyst counted more than a dozen statements from Karzai's office in July-August 2014 in which he called for the inauguration of his successor without delay. "Déjà vu – Abdullah pulls out, process continues", Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), 30 August 2014.
[4] Lester Grau, "Breaking Contact Without Leaving Chaos: The Soviet Withdrawal From Afghanistan", *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2007).
[5] "For once, Afghanistan sees a peaceful transition", editorial, *The New York Times*, 29 June 1992.
[6] Crisis Group interview, senior Afghan politician, Kabul, 17 July 2014. The politician witnessed a conversation between Mojaddedi and Rabbani in which the latter threatened the former with a tank and armed men stationed nearby, forcing Mojaddedi to resign.
[7] Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History From Alexander The Great To The Fall Of The Taliban* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 218.

smuggling and corruption.[8] Insurgents have seized the moment to make gains on the battlefield, further eroding the central government's claim to represent the only legitimate source of authority in the country.[9] Electoral institutions have been suspected of participating in fraud, forcing the resignation of the chief electoral officer.[10] In short, all of the pillars of the state have been shaken by the political process.

The aftermath of such a difficult transition will engender serious risks for the country. A brief spell of optimism around the 5 April first round of voting was later replaced with a measurable decrease in public confidence as negative political trends emerged.[11] The level of concern in Washington was underscored by two visits from U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, who brokered a political deal between the frontrunners on 12 July. The deal proved inadequate as a foundation for a political accord, however, since both sides had divergent understandings of the text.[12] A more detailed agreement signed on 21 September provided some clarity but leaves significant questions unanswered, such as how the factions within the new unity government will resolve disputes.

Tensions between the political camps have broken out into armed conflict only sporadically, but the new administration will face security challenges as it deals with the political, ethnic, regional and tribal rivalries that have been exacerbated by the transition. The elites' inability to resolve their disputes in a timely and organised fashion has also tested the patience of some donors, particularly after Afghanistan failed to inaugurate a new president before the early September NATO summit in Wales.[13] More fundamentally, some Afghan voters feel disappointed by elections they perceive as having been stolen, or compromised by deals that obviated the need for an electoral contest.

Many of those risks also imply opportunities, if the new government can muster the necessary cohesion, motivation, and international support to take advantage of the transition. Voters who opted for change in Kabul may now feel encouraged. This will include those who had never participated in elections, preferring to express their discontent by assisting the armed insurgency. Taliban support for Ghani in the south and south west may have been more widespread than is generally understood, which could have implications for future peace and reconciliation efforts. While the July and September deals may be imperfect, they have also opened a conversation about revising the winner-takes-all presidential system enshrined in the constitution.[14] In principle, this could include reducing the power of the presidency and introducing reforms to allow voters greater influence over the composition of local governments. Even without such changes, a shakeup at the top of government could, in theory, provide an opportunity to disrupt criminal networks of insiders and those heavily implicated in corruption and human rights violations.

[8] William Byrd, "Afghanistan's Looming Fiscal Crisis: What Can Be Done?", United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 27 August 2014.

[9] Large-scale insurgent attacks seriously threatened at least twenty of Afghanistan's 400 district centres in the 2014 fighting season, according to Crisis Group monitoring.

[10] "Top Afghan election official resigns", *The Washington Post*, 23 June 2014.

[11] Crisis Group interviews, Kabul and Kandahar, April-September 2014.

[12] Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, August-September 2014.

[13] Crisis Group interviews, senior Western diplomats, Kabul, June-September 2014.

[14] The 12 July deal commits the new president to "initiate a process of amending the constitution" within two years of inauguration, to establish the position of an executive prime minister. See Appendix B.

This report reviews Afghanistan's 2014 presidential election and the related political contests. Drawing on interviews in Kabul and the work of researchers in several provinces, this study does not seek an exact determination of the extent to which the results indicated voter preferences, in part because any election during an escalating civil war will never reflect the full range of popular opinion. It is also beyond the scope of this report to make any assessment of the 2,595 candidates contesting 458 provincial council seats. The paper focuses on the politics behind the presidential contest, analysing the causes and consequences of the ensuing crisis in Kabul, and looking at ways of mitigating risks and seizing opportunities.

II. Election Preparations

A. *Electoral Laws and Authorities*

Afghanistan's constitution limits the president to two terms.[15] This means that Karzai's constitutional mandate expired on 22 May 2014. While there was some speculation in Kabul about setting this requirement aside temporarily to extend Karzai's tenure, Western diplomats told their Afghan counterparts that failure to hold an election in 2014 would imperil donor assistance.[16] This gave rise to increasing competition among Afghan elites in 2013 about the rules and authorities governing the political contest. "All of the political parties are very concerned about the process, and they are pushing hard for reforms", a Western official said.[17] With expiring terms of leadership for top officials at the Independent Election Commission (IEC), debates in early 2013 focused on appointment of the IEC chairman and chief electoral officer, with the latter position viewed as holding crucial power over the administration of the vote. Under pressure from his opponents, Karzai agreed to defer the appointments until after parliamentary approval of election laws.[18]

Afghanistan had already committed to ensuring a "robust electoral architecture," as part of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework that defined donors' expectations.[19] This required passing an electoral law and a structural law governing the duties of the IEC, which would give Afghanistan its first legal framework for an election without resorting to presidential decree. As electoral laws progressed from the drafting stage at the justice ministry through legislative committees and eventually parliament, an analyst wrote: "What we are seeing is, to a large extent, a contest over who gets to appoint the people who organise and supervise the elections and ultimately control which votes get counted".[20]

Karzai's opponents wanted greater independence for the electoral process, pushing for a strong Independent Electoral Complaints Commission (IECC) and legal mechanisms that would limit the presidential power to appoint election officials.[21] The laws passed the upper and lower houses of parliament on 17 July and 20 July 2013, and were generally welcomed by Western diplomats.[22] However, the final text of the laws diluted the powers of the IECC, removing provisions for international observers and leaving the announcement of results exclusively in the hands of the IEC.[23]

[15] "The presidential term expires on the first of Jawza of the fifth year after the elections". Article 61 of the Constitution of Afghanistan (2004).
[16] Crisis Group interviews, senior U.S. officials, Washington DC, 28 April 2013. Also, "Readout of President Obama's telephone call with President Karzai", The White House, 9 April 2013; and Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°236, *Afghanistan: The Long Hard Road to the 2014 Transition*, 8 October 2012.
[17] Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Kabul, 18 February 2013.
[18] Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Kabul, 17 April 2013.
[19] Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, 8 July 2012 at http://bit.ly/1BWPw4K.
[20] "Who will control the 2014 electoral process: An update on Afghanistan's electoral laws", AAN, 4 July 2013.
[21] Article 64, Chapter 3, Article 5 of the 2004 constitution gives the president broad powers of appointment, but does not specify that he should appoint electoral officials.
[22] "United States embassy welcomes the signing of the IEC structure law", statement from U.S. embassy in Kabul, 17 July 2013.
[23] Chapter 3, Article 14 of the "Law on the Structure, Duties and Authorities of the Independent Election Commission [IEC] and the Independent Electoral Complaints Commission [IECC]".

The process of selecting the IEC leadership became more complex under the new electoral laws, but the revised procedure did not significantly reduce the president's influence over the commission. The structural law allows educated and qualified Afghans over 30 to submit their names to a selection committee, which then narrows the field to 27 names, from whom the president chooses nine commissioners to serve six-year terms.[24] In practice, however, most members of the selection committee were appointed by, or considered loyal to, President Karzai – who announced his selections on 29 July 2013, less than two weeks after the laws passed. Abdullah Abdullah, through his political party, the National Coalition of Afghanistan (NCA), accused the president of undue influence over the process.[25] When the newly appointed commissioners selected Zia-ul-Haq Amarkhil as the chief electoral officer in August 2013, a Western diplomat offered the opinion that he was effectively "Karzai's guy".[26]

Despite concerns about the political character of the IEC, however, most Western officials expressed satisfaction with the commission's technical preparations. It was praised for improving its balloting procedures and fraud mitigation techniques, including the use of serial numbers on ballots; indelible ink for voters' fingers with higher concentrations of silver nitrate; and tamper-evident tape for coating results sheets and making it harder to rewrite the vote counts.[27] Some Western officials were disappointed that donors declined to fund the estimated $80 million cost of preparing voters' lists for each polling centre,[28] instead choosing to add new voter cards to the estimated 17.5 million already distributed.[29] By the time of the first round, the IEC had issued 3.8 million new cards,[30] making the total number of voting cards significantly greater than the estimated twelve to thirteen million eligible voters.[31] Given the worsening of security since the previous elections, no officials predicted a clean vote – but some hoped for an improved process. "This time the elections could be better", a senior UN official said.[32]

[24] Chapter 2, Article 8 of the structural law. The selection committee includes the speakers of the upper and lower houses of parliament, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, the chair of the Independent Commission for Oversight of the Implementation of the Constitution (ICOIC), the chair of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), and "one person from the civil society organisation [sic] related to elections". The latter position remained unfilled during the 2013 process of selecting commissioners.

[25] "Karzai appoints nine candidates as commissioners in the IEC", Tolo News, 29 July 2013. Some observers noted that while Karzai appeared to have played the biggest role in selecting the IEC leadership, some commissioners remained influenced by former IEC chairman Fazl Ahmad Manawi, a prominent Abdullah supporter. Crisis Group email correspondence, senior Western election observer, Kabul, 25 September 2014.

[26] Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Kabul, 14 August 2013.

[27] "Statement of the NDI pre-election delegation to Afghanistan", National Democratic Institute, Kabul, 9 December 2013, p. 4.

[28] Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Kabul, 28 May 2014.

[29] Strategic Plan of the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan, IEC, 5 June 2012, p. 22.

[30] "End of voter registration process", press release, IEC, 2 April 2013.

[31] "Lack of cash and monitors add to Afghan election troubles", Reuters, 1 December 2013.

[32] "Transcript: Press conference by the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Ján Kubiš", UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Kabul, 2 April 2014.

B. *Unexpected Alliances*

President Karzai's strong influence over the planning of the election did not include any public indication as to which candidate, if any, enjoyed his support. This made for an uncertain political landscape in 2013 as leading figures formed shifting alliances.[33] The Cooperation Council of Political Parties and Coalition of Afghanistan (CCPPCA) rallied several of the biggest names behind loose demands for electoral reform in early 2013. This group included Abdullah Abdullah and several of the leaders who later became part of his election team, including Mohammad Mohaqeq and his mostly ethnic Hazara party, Hezb-i-Wahdat-i-Islami Mardom-i-Afghanistan; some elements of the predominately Pashtun Hizb-e Islami Afghanistan;[34] former intelligence chief Amrullah Saleh; and the wealthy governor of Balkh province, Atta Mohammad Noor. But the CCPPCA also included many figures who later campaigned against Abdullah, and the breadth of the coalition inspired some speculation that a bitterly contested election might be avoided through an *Ijma e Milli*, or national gathering, that would form a dominant slate with the leading contenders.[35]

However, several months of negotiations failed to produce a consensus among Kabul elites. The CCPPCA lacked cohesion and quickly lost relevance, while a loose-knit group of senior Pashtun politicians – sometimes nicknamed "doctors without borders" because of their university degrees and itinerancy – also struggled to coalesce around a single candidate.[36] This produced a rush of last-minute alliances before the 6 October 2013 registration deadline. The IEC disqualified fifteen of 26 candidates, apparently because they filed incorrect paperwork or because they did not meet citizenship requirements, and published a final list of candidates on 20 November.[37] The three leading teams to emerge included figures from diverse political and ethnic backgrounds:

a) Ashraf Ghani's alliance with predominately Uzbek Junbish-i-Meli-Islami Afghanistan, led by Abdul Rashid Dostum, brought together disparate figures: Dostum's experience on the battlefield as a northern commander could not be more different from Ghani's history at the UN and World Bank. Still, the alliance expanded Ghani's support base beyond the urban elites and his ethnic Pashtun strongholds in the south east, giving the slate a strong presence

[33] For a more detailed account of Afghan politics in 2013, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°141, *Afghanistan's Parties in Transition*, 26 June 2013.

[34] Hizb-e Islami's factions are not well-understood, but the party is usually described as having both an armed wing involved with the insurgency and a political wing active within government.

[35] Crisis Group Asia Briefing, *Afghanistan's Parties in Transition*, op. cit.

[36] The pejorative label "doctors without borders" was used by political opponents and not the members themselves, many of whom did not recognise that any group existed. At various times, the label referred to potential candidates such as former Finance Minister Ashraf Ghani; former Foreign Minister Zalmai Rassoul; Interior Minister Omar Daudzai; former U.S. Ambassador Zalmai Khalilzad; former Education Minister Farouq Wardak; the president's older brother, Qayum Karzai; former Interior Ministers Ali Jalali and Hanif Atmar; and Jelani Popal, former head of the Independent Directorate Local Governance (IDGL). Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, August-September 2013.

[37] The list included frontrunners Ashraf Ghani, Abdullah Abdullah, Zalmai Rassoul, Qayum Karzai, and Ittihad-al-Islami leader Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf, along with less significant contenders such as former Nangarhar Governor Gul Agha Shirzai; former parliamentarian Daoud Sultanzoy; former Vice President Hedayat Amin Arsala; senior Hizb-e Islami member Qutbuddin Hilal; former Defence Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak, and Mohammad Nadir Naeem, grandson of King Zahir Shah. "On announcement of final list of 2014 presidential and provincial council election candidates", press release, Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan, 20 November 2013.

in the ethnic Uzbek districts of the north west. A third member, former Justice Minister Sarwar Danish, an ethnic Hazara, further diversified the team.[38] Ghani described his core supporters as including Sebghatullah Mojaddedi, a former interim president; and Sayyid Ahmad Gailani, the Pashtun head of a Sufi order and leader of Mahaz-i-Meli Islami Afghanistan.[39]

b) Abdullah Abdullah joined forces with Mohammad Mohaqeq, giving the ticket influence in the central region. He also aligned with former parliamentarian Mohammad Khan, a former head of intelligence for Hizb-e Islami, who previously served under Gulbuddin Hekmatyar but later joined the unarmed wing of Hizb-e Islami under Abdul Hadi Arghandiwal. This expanded Abdullah's base beyond his mostly ethnic Tajik strongholds in the north, where he enjoyed support from several Jamiat-i Islami Afghanistan factions, giving him a small foothold among ethnic Pashtuns and Hizb-e supporters – particularly in Mohammad Khan's home province of Ghazni. This represented a political detente, to some extent, between factions that had engaged in bitter warfare during the 1990s.

c) Zalmai Rassoul selected Ahmad Zia Massoud, the brother of famed Tajik commander Ahmad Shah Massoud, as his first running mate. This helped Rassoul gain support in the north, although his influence within Jamiat-i Islami networks remained weaker than Abdullah's. Rassoul also signalled his intention to move beyond traditional politics by appointing former Bamiyan Governor Habiba Sarabi, an ethnic Hazara, as the only female politician on a major ticket. Rassoul was born in Kabul, speaks primarily Dari and lacks political strength among his fellow Pashtuns in the south – but this problem was solved when Qayum Karzai dropped out of the race and threw his support behind him in early March 2014 (see below).[40]

[38] Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, January-March 2014.
[39] "A year ago, Mujaddedi and Gailani came and said, 'We should put our hands on Ghani and make him president'", Ghani said at a press conference. Crisis Group observation, Kabul, 10 September 2014.
[40] Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, January-March 2014.

III. The First Round

A. *Vigorous Campaigns*

The campaign period, from 2 February to 2 April 2014,[41] featured a busy schedule by the three leading teams as they chartered planes and flew supporters and journalists to all regions of the country for rallies. These events were notable for a lack of violence, with no serious insurgent attacks – despite being relatively easy targets, with porous security and crowds usually numbering in the thousands.[42] "It was amazing to see thousands of happy people in a field together", a politician said.[43] Speeches and televised debates generally focused on broad themes about improving Afghanistan, without emphasis on ethnic rivalries.[44] Several media outlets were highly partisan during the campaign, however, as Abdullah, Ghani and Sayyaf all benefited from associations with broadcast stations that gave more than 95 per cent of their airtime to a single candidate.[45] The leading candidates vastly outspent their rivals, with Abdullah, Ghani and Rassoul each placing almost twice as many advertisements as other candidates.[46]

The prominence of the frontrunners discouraged minor candidates from devoting resources to the election, and three dropped out of the race – Rahim Wardak, Qayum Karzai and Mohammad Nadir Naeem – with the latter two endorsing Rassoul.[47] The move by Karzai's older brother, in particular, was interpreted in some quarters as a presidential endorsement of the Rassoul ticket. Election officials started to complain of suspicions that the Rassoul campaign was benefiting from government resources, particularly in the south. After reports emerged of police beating people who tried to leave a Rassoul rally, a senior IEC official lamented his inability to enforce the government's neutrality: "The problem is that I don't have guns or jails to catch the people who commit crimes". The IEC's recourse under such circumstances was to refer cases to the attorney general, he said, but the process was slow and corrupt. "We need a mechanism so we can prosecute right away. People feel that the election law doesn't have sharp teeth".[48]

B. *A Weak "Palace Candidate"*

The president did not endorse Rassoul, but also did not contradict the widespread impression in early 2014 that he enjoyed his tacit support. Choosing the Rassoul ticket amounted to backing an underdog, because three polls in December 2013 sug-

[41] "Timeline of 2014 presidential and provincial councils elections", IEC, undated at www.iec.org.af.
[42] Crisis Group observations, February-April 2014.
[43] Crisis Group interview, senior Afghan politician, Kabul, 1 June 2014.
[44] "Preliminary statement of the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) Election Mission for Afghanistan's 2014 presidential and provincial council elections", Kabul, 7 April 2014, p. 4.
[45] "Preliminary statement of the EU Election Assessment Team (EU EAT)", Kabul, 7 April 2014, p. 6.
[46] Ibid, p. 5.
[47] "Afghan president's brother withdraws from election race", *The Guardia*n, 6 March 2014.
[48] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 16 March 2014. The IECC later fined the Rassoul and Sherzai campaigns for symbolic amounts – about $3,500 and $1,800 respectively – after allegations of election law violations, including the misuse of government resources. "Electoral watchdog fines Sherzai, Rassoul", Pajhwok Afghan News, 1 April 2014.

gested that Ghani and Abdullah were leading.[49] Some speculated that Karzai wanted to throw his support behind the weakest of the frontrunner candidates, "just weak enough for Karzai to exert a Putin-like leverage over the next administration".[50] In February, senior Western officials said that Rassoul appeared to be gaining support from the "Karzai machine" in the south, including the police apparatus, but that the Karzai networks were less coherent in the south east, a Ghani stronghold.[51]

Rassoul denied receiving any help from the palace, but also gave such a tepid performance on the campaign trail that journalists started asking him whether he actually wanted to win. Rassoul, 71, admitted that he had been planning to retire, and that the campaign was a last-minute decision.[52] Regular visitors to the presidential palace said that Rassoul's poor showing caused a "panic" within Karzai's circle, and prompted a last-minute search for a new alliance with a frontrunner days before the election: "Karzai is realising that Rassoul may lose".[53]

C. *Violence and Media Blackout*

Insurgents launched a series of attacks in Kabul during the period of heightened media attention before the 5 April election. This included the fatal 11 March shooting of a foreign correspondent for Swedish Radio, which prompted some media to curtail their election coverage. Such caution deepened after 4 April, when an Associated Press photographer was killed and a correspondent wounded by an Afghan police commander in Khost province.[54] On 20 March, a shooting inside Kabul's Serena hotel killed eight people including a foreign observer from the National Democratic Institute (NDI), prompting it to withdraw its team of fifteen international long-term observers;[55] several other organisations also evacuated staff.[56] The dead included a popular Afghan journalist, along with his wife and two of his children, which instigated a campaign among the Kabul media to boycott coverage of Taliban attacks during the election period.[57] A database of incidents maintained by the U.S. special forces reportedly showed rising violence in the weeks ahead of the vote,[58] but media reporting of attacks diminished.

The press blackout contributed to an impression of relative calm as polls opened on the morning of 5 April. Television showed long queues of voters and orderly polling stations, and the IEC claimed that seven million people cast ballots.[59] The owner

[49] Polling has a poor track record of reflecting popular opinion in Afghanistan, but the three surveys – by Glevum, Democracy International and Tolo News – all showed Abdullah narrowly leading Ghani. "Polling comes to Afghanistan, suggesting limit to sway of President Karzai", *The New York Times*, 28 December 2013.
[50] "Rigging the Afghan vote", *The New Yorker*, 31 March 2014.
[51] Crisis Group interviews, Western officials, Kabul, 16 February 2014.
[52] "Afghan elections: Frontrunner denies he is Hamid Karzai's placeman", *The Telegraph*, 4 April 2014.
[53] Crisis Group interview, senior Western officials, Kabul, 31 March 2014.
[54] Crisis Group interviews and observations, Kabul, March 2014.
[55] "Despite threats of violence, Afghans demonstrate determination to move democratic process forward", press release, NDI, 7 April 2014. Also, "Under fire: The status of the 2014 election observation", AAN, 5 April 2014.
[56] "Preliminary Statement", EU EAT, op. cit., p. 3.
[57] "Afghan journalists boycott Taliban coverage after Kabul hotel attack kills reporter, children", ABC, 21 March 2014.
[58] Crisis Group interview, Western official, Kabul, 31 March 2014.
[59] "Relief in Afghanistan after largely peaceful landmark election", Reuters, 5 April 2014.

of a popular Afghan media outlet acknowledged that such images misrepresented the events of a violent day, but claimed it was his patriotic duty to promote anti-Taliban narratives.[60] Soon afterward, White House officials suggested that U.S. forces in Afghanistan might be reduced more quickly than planned, because of a "surprisingly smooth election".[61]

The Taliban claimed to have launched more than 1,000 attacks on election day, but Western security analysts counted only 400 to 500 incidents, roughly half of them related to the elections.[62] Whatever the precise figure, Afghan forces suffered about 40 killed and wounded, and at least 40 civilians were killed with more than 100 injured.[63] "It was one of the most violent days in Afghanistan", a U.S. military commander said.[64] Much of the violence was concentrated in eastern provinces, however, and affected only 280 of the 28,500 polling centres.[65] This prompted discussion in Kabul about why the insurgents had apparently declined to make a greater effort to disrupt the process. "The Taliban took a day off and made a political point with that", a Western diplomat said. "They could have easily disrupted it. They did it because they don't have a political alternative right now".[66]

D. *Urban vs. Rural*

"The Taliban have lost", said Thijs Berman, head of the EU Election Assessment Team (EU EAT), as vote counting got underway.[67] This reflected a widespread view in the capital that a successful election showed weakness among insurgents who rejected the formal political system.[68] Social media networks were filled with triumphant slogans, as the 8 per cent of Afghans with access to the Internet revelled in the country's apparent progress toward democracy.[69] The surge in confidence was measurable: in the week after 5 April, the Afghan currency enjoyed an official increase in value from about 57.6 Afghanis per U.S. dollar to less than 57, and anecdotal observations showed even greater improvement.[70]

The currency's gains deteriorated in the following weeks, however, as the Afghani returned to its pre-election values and reports trickling into Kabul from rural districts started to erode the narrative of success. About a fifth of Afghanistan is urban,[71] and the majority who reside in villages tended to have a more sceptical view of the elections. "The election was really only in the main cities", a retired Afghan

[60] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 21 April 2014.
[61] "Exclusive: U.S. force in Afghanistan may be cut to less than 10,000 troops", Reuters, 21 April 2014.
[62] Crisis Group interviews, Western security analysts, Kabul, April-May 2014.
[63] Ibid.
[64] "Officials: Despite Afghan election success, insurgents remain active", *Stars and Stripes*, 9 April 2014.
[65] "Preliminary Statement", EU EAT, op. cit., p. 4.
[66] Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Kabul, 29 April 2014.
[67] "EU Election Assessment Team preliminary statement on 5 April 2014 presidential and provincial council elections", press release, 7 April 2014.
[68] Crisis Group interview, senior Afghan official, Kabul, 29 April 2014.
[69] "Experts: Afghan turnout boosted by social media", Deutsche Welle, 8 April 2014.
[70] Crisis Group interviews and observations, Kabul, April 2014.
[71] Population statistics are not reliable in Afghanistan, because no census has been completed. This estimate is derived from a survey of 21,000 households across the country. "National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2011-12", Central Statistics Organisation (CSO), Kabul, p. 19.

military officer said. "Why do we create a system in which bad people sell control of rural villages during the elections?"[72]

Polling stations across Wardak province were "mostly empty", according to a report;[73] a journalist in Andar district noted that among 32 polling centres declared open by the IEC, only twelve functioned;[74] officials in Logar described "low to zero" turnout outside of the provincial capital; in Shinwar district, polling stations remained open but few people voted.[75] Turnout was also reportedly low in Ghormach district of Baghis province, and Shah Wali Kot district of Kandahar province.[76] Such anecdotal impressions of low turnout were not reflected in the final election results announced on 15 May, however. The IEC claimed, implausibly, to have registered tens of thousands of votes in the aforementioned locations.[77]

E. *Fraud Overlooked*

In the months leading up to 5 April, foreign diplomats had discussed what signs of fraud should prompt serious international action. Some senior officials expressed reluctance to take strong action on fraud prevention, suggesting that some types of misconduct were intrinsic to the political contest, and that Karzai would react negatively to any foreign interference.[78] Most of the embassies in Kabul were scrupulous about avoiding any impression of favouring particular candidates, reflecting a general sentiment that the diplomatic corps would accept almost any outcome that would be acceptable for Afghans.[79] The candidates also seem to have embraced the notion that some fraud was inevitable, with a campaign manager estimating that perhaps a quarter of all districts were inaccessible and therefore fertile ground for invented results. "In insecure areas there will be more cheating", he said. "This is the actual plan of the government".[80]

Still, the scale of the fraud was difficult to estimate. The IEC received calls starting at 9:30am on 5 April, only two and a half hours after polls opened, from Governor Atta insisting that the biggest city in his province, Balkh, had run out of ballots. Other prominent figures also started lobbying for extra ballots early in the day.[81] In the absence of voter lists, it was impossible for election authorities to determine

[72] Crisis Group interview, retired Afghan general, Kabul, 1 June 2014.
[73] "In Taliban stronghold, a scared electorate", *The Washington Post*, 5 April 2014. Also, Matthieu Aikins and Anand Gopal, "The ghost polls of Afghanistan", *Harper's Bazar*, 7 April 2014.
[74] "Why two thirds of Andar's polling centres may have never opened", AAN, 23 April 2014.
[75] "Apathy and fear of Taliban combine to keep rural voters away from the polls", *The New York Times*, 5 April 2014.
[76] Crisis Group interviews, Afghan government officials, Kandahar, April 2014.
[77] The final results of the first round were Abdullah Abdullah, 45 per cent; Ashraf Ghani, 31.6; Zalmai Rassoul, 11.4; Abdul Rab Rasul Sayyaf, 7.0; Qutbuddin Hilal, 2.8; Gul Agha Shirzi, 1.6; Daoud Sultanzoy, 0.5; and Hedayat Amin Arsala, 0.2. "IEC announces final presidential election results, sets date for run-off", press release, IEC, Kabul, 15 May 2014.
[78] Karzai pre-emptively warned the donors to avoid meddling in the election, particularly after the memoir of former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates was published in January 2014, alleging that the U.S. tried a "clumsy and failed putsch" against the president in 2009. "US 'tried to oust Hamid Karzai by manipulating Afghan elections'", *The Guardian*, 10 January 2014.
[79] Crisis Group interviews, Western officials, Kabul, February-March 2014.
[80] Crisis Group interview, campaign manager, Kabul, 16 March 2014.
[81] Crisis Group interview, Western election observer, Kabul, 13 April 2014.

whether these demands resulted from high turnout and inaccurate estimate of how many voters might arrive at polling stations – or ballot stuffing.[82]

Without rigorous third-party monitoring,[83] many Western observers relied on data analysis. After the first round, some pointed out that two provinces had been allotted so many ballots that the number of potential votes was roughly twice the number of eligible voters.[84] These provinces were Panjshir and Paktika, two of the biggest strongholds for Abdullah and Ghani respectively.[85] Another analysis that examined the 605 pages of results released by the IEC found "around a dozen" polling centres with implausible results, often favouring Ghani.[86] A Western observer mission that applied a different set of statistical triggers privately estimated that around 600,000 votes showed signs of "potential fraud".[87]

Such analysis did not capture irregularities in locations such as Ghormach and Shah Wali Kot, where several officials involved with the balloting acknowledged that they covered up an absence of voters by faking results in favour of several candidates.[88] At one station in Shah Wali Kot, a local official said he felt disappointed that an offensive by Afghan security forces to clear insurgents away from the voting location meant nobody showed up on election day. He claimed that local authorities cut a deal with observers from the campaigns: 200 votes for Ghani, 300 for Rassoul, 60 for Sayyaf and 40 for other candidates, distributing votes to three Pashtun candidates in an ethnic Pashtun enclave. The fraud went undetected.[89]

Similarly, in Ghormach, most polling centres remained closed because of insurgent threats but the four that were open were returned with every single ballot cast: with 6,600 potential votes from eleven boxes of 600 votes each, the final results claimed that exactly 6,600 voters braved the dangerous roads. This unlikely outcome was the result of local authorities appeasing all major campaigns, as government staffers acknowledged that they stuffed boxes in favour of Rassoul, Sayyaf, Ghani and, in the largest numbers, for Abdullah.[90]

It is unclear how local authorities decided to allocate the fraudulent votes, but they may have been swayed by armed force: in the cases of Ghormach and Shah Wali Kot, the candidate who appears to have most benefited was allegedly backed by local security forces.[91] In other places, provincial governors might have swayed the vote:

[82] The IEC had a contingency stock of 1,082 stations, of which 548 were released on election day to compensate for apparent shortages of ballots. The extra stations released amounted to 100 per cent of the available contingency in five provinces: Baghlan, Balkh, Bamiyan, Herat and Nimroz. These were all Abdullah strongholds, with the exception of Nimroz.

[83] The largest third-party monitoring organisation, the Free and Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan (FEFA), claimed to have fielded more than 10,000 observers but decided that information collected in the first round was insufficient for a parallel vote tabulation. Crisis Group interview, FEFA official, Kabul, 14 April 2014; FEFA website at www.fefa.org.af.

[84] This was based on population estimates from Afghanistan's Central Statistics Office, but wide variations in population figures undermine the value of such analysis.

[85] Crisis Group interview, Western election observer, Kabul, 12 April 2014.

[86] Ian Schuler, "Afghanistan's election results", Development Seed, 30 May 2014.

[87] Crisis Group interview, Western observer, Kabul, 18 May 2014.

[88] Crisis Group interviews, Afghan officials, Kandahar and Maimana, April 2014.

[89] Crisis Group interviews, Afghan officials, Kandahar, April 2014.

[90] Crisis Group interviews, Afghan officials, Maimana, April 2014. In the first round, Ghormach district returned 4,005 votes for Abdullah; 322 for Ghani; 666 for Rassoul; 1,584 for Sayyaf, and 23 for other candidates. These figures were released by the IEC and made accessible at http://2014.afghanistanelectiondata.org.

[91] Crisis Group interviews, Afghan officials, Kandahar and Maimana, April 2014.

an Afghan election observer said, "the governor is like a king".[92] A Western election observer noted that fraud safeguards were often ignored in the first round as election authorities accepted hand-drawn tabulation sheets rather than using official forms, and counted materials submitted in brown envelopes instead of tamper-proof pouches.[93] An embassy in Kabul collected reports of the IEC's district field coordinators (DFCs) asking campaigns for bribes of $5 to $20 per vote.[94]

These concerns were generally overlooked as the election moved toward a second round. The IEC announced final results of the first round on 15 May, showing Abdullah in the lead with 45 per cent of the vote and Ghani trailing with almost 32 per cent; at the same time, the IEC announced a run-off because neither candidate had surpassed the required 50 per cent threshold.[95] Both leading candidates had complained of fraud earlier in the process, but when the results showed them moving to the second round they shifted focus toward their renewed campaigns rather than challenging the outcome.[96]

[92] Crisis Group interview, director of an Afghan election observation group, Kabul, 19 May 2014.
[93] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 17 May 2014.
[94] Crisis Group interview, Western diplomat, Kabul, 29 May 2014.
[95] "IEC announces final presidential election results, sets date for run-off", IEC press release, 15 May 2014.
[96] "Afghan contenders accept results and move on", *The New York Times*, 15 May 2014.

IV. The Second Round

A. *Quiet Campaigns*

Candidates who had been disqualified in the first round had little incentive to accuse the frontrunners of misconduct, because they needed to curry favour with the leading camps in hopes of earning a spot in the next government. "The first question that all the major politicians asked me was, 'Who do you think will be the winner?'" said a veteran Afghan journalist. "Everybody wanted to back a winner".[97] Even Abdullah and Ghani stayed on cordial terms, as talks between the two camps explored the possibility of a national unity government that might avoid the expense and security risks of a second round of voting.[98] Such backroom negotiations became the focus of Kabul politics, with comparatively fewer rallies and public events during the 22 May to 11 June campaign.[99] Some reports also suggested that Abdullah's campaign in particular held fewer public events because his team was running out of money.[100]

The IEC made some gestures toward cleaning up the process before the second round, such as removing 440 of 3,150 DFCs in response to allegations that they "cooperated with the candidates".[101] A senior IEC official said that some district-level election officers had been coerced with threats of violence, but also alleged that other DFCs willingly took advantage of the election to make a profit.[102] No senior members of the election commissions were disciplined, however, and Abdullah's campaigners later claimed that many of the dismissals worked to the advantage of Ghani by removing his opponents within the system.[103]

Still, after emerging from the first round with more than a thirteen-point lead, Abdullah's team seemed confident. New posters and billboards featured the well-known politicians who flocked to his campaign, including Rassoul and Gul Agha Shirzai, the governor of Nangarhar province.[104] Abdullah also received a public endorsement from Mahmoud Karzai, another of the president's brothers, and Sayyaf, a confidante of the Karzai family, leading to speculation that Abdullah had successfully positioned himself as a "continuity candidate" who promised to secure the interests of Karzai's circle.[105]

B. *Karzai's Reversal*

After the first round, Western officials expressed relief that the president did not appear to throw his support heavily in favour of any candidate. "Karzai wanted to end up on the winning side, so he wasn't sure how to play the first round, and the state

[97] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 17 June 2014.
[98] Crisis Group interviews, Ghani and Abdullah supporters, Kabul and Islamabad, April 2014.
[99] Crisis Group observations, Kabul, May-June 2014.
[100] Crisis Group interview, senior Western observer, Kabul, 16 September 2014.
[101] Crisis Group interview, senior IEC official, Kabul, 2 June 2014.
[102] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 2 June 2014.
[103] Crisis Group interview, Abdullah campaigners from the south, Kabul, 7 July 2014.
[104] Photograph tweeted by *The Wall Street Journal* correspondent Nathan Hodge, @nohodge, 12:39am, 22 May 2014.
[105] Crisis Group interviews, Western officials, Kabul and New York, May 2014. "Mahmood Karzai endorses Abdullah for runoff", Tolo News, 27 May 2014. "Sayyaf team endorses Abdullah", Tolo News, 3 June 2014.

machinery was less decisive than it could have been", a diplomat said.[106] There was widespread speculation that Karzai might get more involved in the second round, however. Abdullah strategists said they promised him and his entourage safety and guarantees to protect their financial interests, along with reassurances that former ministers and governors would continue to enjoy some patronage. "We deliberately adopted a policy of kindness toward him", said an Abdullah adviser. "Almost all of the major figures have come over to our side".[107] Karzai gave the impression that he supported the Abdullah ticket, or at least seemed to accept his victory, as he made plans for an inauguration ceremony and invited the Abdullah team to assist with drawing up a guest list.[108] In meetings, the president often indicated that he felt exhausted by his duties. "Karzai is tired", an Afghan journalist said. "All of his close friends say this".[109]

In the final days before the 14 June vote, however, Karzai seemed to reverse course and offer his support to the Ghani campaign. This included meeting with a prominent security commander for the south and allegedly instructing him to assist Ghani's team on election day.[110] "It's crystal clear that the machinery of government went behind Ghani", said a campaign manager. "The Karzai brothers only supported Abdullah to confuse him".[111] Such a last-minute manoeuvre was possible after months of preparations that established the palace's role in the process, a veteran journalist said. "The Karzai strategy was to win the election for Ghani, and he had the power to do this because he kicked the internationals out of the electoral institutions".[112]

C. *Abdullah Claims Fraud*

Both candidates accused each other of fraud within hours of polls closing on 14 June. General consensus among the six main domestic and international observer groups was that fewer people voted in the second round,[113] although patterns varied in different parts of the country. The IEC, however, claimed that turnout had increased.[114] The commission would later say that initial turnout figures increased from seven million in the first round to about eight million in the run-off.[115] IEC Chairman Ahmad Yousuf Nuristani praised the presence of strong candidate observer teams for reducing fraud.[116] Abdullah's side had registered 42,160 observers, while Ghani had 45,186,[117] but both camps acknowledged that they struggled to monitor all 22,828 polling stations.[118]

[106] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 28 May 2014.
[107] Crisis Group interview, senior Abdullah campaign adviser, Kabul, 2 June 2014.
[108] Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, June-July 2014.
[109] Crisis Group interview, veteran Afghan journalist, Kabul, 16 June 2014.
[110] Crisis Group interviews, Afghan officials, Kabul and Kandahar, June 2014.
[111] Crisis Group interview, senior Rassoul campaign official, Kabul, 16 June 2014.
[112] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 17 June 2014.
[113] Crisis Group interviews, Western officials, Kabul, 15 June 2014.
[114] "IEC says high turnout, less fraud in runoff", Tolo News, 14 June 2014.
[115] "IEC announces preliminary results of the 2014 presidential election run-off", press release, IEC, 7 July 2014.
[116] Ibid.
[117] "Preliminary statement of the National Democratic Institute's Election Mission for Afghanistan's 2014 presidential runoff election", NDI, Kabul, 16 June 2014.
[118] Crisis Group interviews, Ghani and Rassoul campaign officials, Kabul, June 2014.

Abdullah became more vocal than Ghani about fraud in the days after the run-off, claiming his team had documented evidence of fraud by his opponents and accusing the IEC and IECC of bias. Such concerns had historical precedent for Abdullah, who had struggled to contain the outrage of his supporters in 2009 as they protested against alleged fraud during Karzai's successful re-election campaign.[119] Abdullah promised his followers that he would be tougher in 2014: "Our stance is that any kind of performance by the election commissions after this shall be regarded as illegal", he declared on 19 June.[120] By swiftly announcing that he would not accept the results, Abdullah may have stepped outside the bounds of the electoral code of conduct, which all candidates signed.[121] This began a cycle of increasingly heated rhetoric from both campaigns, prompting a UN statement on 22 June asking the users of social media to refrain from "rhetoric that brings back memories of tragic, fratricidal, factional conflicts in the 1990s that cost the lives of tens of thousands of civilians".[122]

Ethnic rivalries had not featured prominently during presidential campaigns,[123] but those rifts emerged as serious concerns after the run-off –particularly after the Abdullah team started to release wiretaps of phone conversations suggesting fraud by government and IEC officials who spoke candidly about favouring Pashtuns and Uzbeks, the ethnic groups most associated with the Ghani campaign.[124] The recording that gained the most attention purported to show Chief Electoral Officer Zia-ul-Haq Amarkhil speaking about "sheep" and "goats" that needed to be fattened, which the Abdullah campaign described as coded language for stuffing ballot boxes.[125] Amarkhil denied wrongdoing and expressed confidence that Karzai would not ask for his resignation, but then stepped down on 23 June.[126] Later that day, Abdullah's team suggested that the removal of Amarkhil could allow a return to the formal process but reiterated demands for greater international supervision and a wholesale disqualification of suspicious votes from the south east.[127]

[119] "Abdullah walks a tightrope as supporters vent fury at Afghanistan's 'stolen' election", *The Guardian*, 3 November 2009.
[120] Statement by Abdullah, broadcast on Noor TV, 19 June 2014.
[121] Based on articles 78 and 79 of the electoral law, the IEC's code of conduct requires candidates to, among other things, "accept the decisions of the Independent Election Commission" and "accept the certified results of election".
[122] "UNAMA urges responsible use of social media on election issues", press release, UNAMA, 22 June 2014.
[123] "Ethnic divisions playing lesser role in Afghan elections", *Stars and Stripes*, 3 April 2014.
[124] "Recruit Uzbeks. Recruit Pashtuns", says a voice, purported to be that of the chief electoral officer speaking to a subordinate. "'Amarkhel Gate' – sheep, tape, resignation", AAN, 24 June 2014.
[125] "Afghan election official draws ire of Abdullah supporters", *The Wall Street Journal*, 22 June 2014.
[126] "UNAMA acknowledges resignation of chief electoral officer", press release, UNAMA, 23 June 2014.
[127] Crisis Group interview, senior Abdullah campaign official, Kabul, 23 June 2014. On 25 June, the Abdullah campaign sent a list of demands to the IEC, including prosecuting Amarkhil for "national treason"; re-running the election in provinces heavily affected by fraud; disqualifying votes from certain polling stations; and hiring a new chief electoral officer acceptable to both camps. Most of the demands were rejected by the IEC, in writing, the same day. "Elections 2014 (36): Some key documents", AAN, 8 July 2014.

D. *Ghani's Explanation*

The Ghani campaign circulated documents after the second round, offering an explanation for the surge of votes in his favour.[128] He claimed to have gained an additional 2.4 million votes above his previous total through a variety of outreach efforts during the run-off. This included new campaign tactics such as sending 3.8 million SMS messages to mobile phones, and significant emphasis on more traditional forms of politics. His team described brokering "hundreds" of agreements with tribal leaders and developing a roster of 2,665 religious scholars who issued edicts calling for his supporters to vote.[129]

These efforts, they claim, gave a degree of physical protection to Ghani's campaigners and supporters, particularly in the dangerous south and east. "We recruited a lot of mullahs away from Abdullah's side, and let's face it: many of our mullahs are in contact with the Taliban", said a Ghani campaigner. Besides the main Taliban insurgent group, the Ghani team also claimed to have won favour with armed factions of Hizb-e Islami and the Haqqani network, the latter through intermediaries in the Zadran tribe.[130] "The Taliban stepped aside and allowed voting in the second round", said another member of the Ghani team. "In some cases they faked attacks to please their masters".[131]

The ticket also gained endorsements from four former presidential candidates in the second round, including Qayum Karzai, who was described by Ghani campaigners as a key figure for mobilising votes in the south.[132] In addition, Ghani strategists say they sent four-man teams of observers to target stations where they believed Abdullah had committed fraud in the previous round. Equipped with 10,000 mobile phones, they were described as suppressing Abdullah's ability to stuff boxes in his strongholds. "This reduced Abdullah's fraud dramatically", an organiser said.[133]

E. *What Happened?*

As with the first round, Western observers had difficulty weighing the contrasting narratives from Ghani and Abdullah. Basic analysis of the results revealed a suspiciously high number of boxes with round numbers on the tally sheets, suggesting tens of thousands of votes for both candidates tainted by fabricated results.[134] Other analysis compared the number of votes cast with population estimates for each area, and applied other fraud triggers, concluding that the number of suspicious Ghani votes exceeded Abdullah's by more than a million ballots, making for an "extremely close election" but still leaving Ghani as the winner.[135] A minority of Western observers were convinced that Abdullah won the election.[136]

[128] "Afghanistan 2014 election tipping points: How smart campaigning drew millions of voters to the polls for Dr. Ashraf Ghani", undated briefing slides. Also, "How Ghani won the votes", media backgrounder, 16 July 2014.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Crisis Group interview, senior Ghani campaign adviser, Kabul, 29 June 2014.
[131] Crisis Group interview, Ghani campaign official, Kabul, 1 July 2014.
[132] The others were Daoud Sultanzoy, Hedayat Amin Arsal and Qutbuddin Hilal. The campaign also gained support from Hanif Atmar, Ali Jalali and Finance Minister Omar Zakhilwal.
[133] Crisis Group interview, Ghani campaign organiser, Kabul, 25 June 2014.
[134] Crisis Group findings, July 2014.
[135] Drew Bollinger and Ian Schuler, "What Happened in the Afghanistan Elections?", Development Seed, 17 July 2014. The Ghani team disputed the population estimates used for this analysis. For

Afghans in several towns and cities across the east, south east, and southern regions said they noticed some fraud during the second round but many reported higher turnout in Ghani strongholds.[137] "I can confirm that we had more real votes than fraudulent ballots, but the fraud that took place was very bad", said a local journalist in eastern Afghanistan.[138] Still, a religious leader in Nuristan province insisted that the elections represented a genuine political contest: "There is no reason to say this is just a drama or a fake show", he said.[139]

Campaigners for Abdullah in the southern provinces claimed that the rural areas overwhelmingly produced fraudulent votes for Ghani, and complained that police blocked their observers from voting locations.[140] An election commission staffer in Kandahar confirmed that some of the results were imaginary, saying only 140 people cast their votes at one location and that election authorities negotiated with a local police chief and campaign representatives to fill out the hundreds of remaining ballots, with 75 per cent filled out for Ghani and 25 per cent for Abdullah. Still, among the people who did show up at the polls, the election staffer noticed greater enthusiasm in the second round. "Two men walked from a village seven kilometres away, so poor they were barefoot", he said. "They told me: 'We heard there is competition between a Persian and Pashtun, so our blood boiled and we got registered and we voted for the first time'. They would feel shame if a Pashtun was defeated".[141]

F. *Kerry Intervenes*

The IEC announced preliminary results on 7 July, showing 56.4 per cent of the vote in favour of Ghani, with Abdullah trailing at 43.6 per cent.[142] This sparked outrage from Abdullah's supporters, who gathered the next day at the Loya Jirga hall on the campus of the Polytechnic University of Kabul, many of them heavily armed. While his followers shouted at him to declare a "parallel state", Abdullah expressed his indignation at the process but stopped short of calling for direct action and asked for patience while he prepared for a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry.[143]

As the U.S. official hastily arranged a trip to Kabul, tensions climbed in the city: election officials took additional security precautions, adding machine-gun nests to their rooftops.[144] Some of Abdullah's supporters, including the powerful northern Governor Atta, allegedly made preparations to seize control of government buildings in at least three provinces and occupy the presidential palace in Kabul.[145] U.S. Presi-

example, criticism focused on turnout figures for Khost province that exceeded the number of eligible voters based on a population of 556,000 as estimated by Afghanistan's Central Statistics Office; Ghani's team answered by showing population figures from the National Solidarity Programme of 1.3 million for Khost. Crisis Group interviews, Ghani campaigners, Kabul, July 2014.

[136] Crisis Group interviews, Western observers and diplomats, Kabul, June-September 2014.

[137] Crisis Group interviews, July 2014.

[138] Crisis Group telephone interview, Jalalabad, 3 July 2014.

[139] Crisis Group telephone interview, religious scholar, Parun, 5 July 2014.

[140] Crisis Group interview, Abdullah campaigners from the south, Kabul, 7 July 2014.

[141] Crisis Group interview, election commission staffer, Kandahar, 4 July 2014. Abdullah Abdullah has a Pashtun father and a Tajik mother, but is often politically associated with Tajik parties. Pashtuns sometimes refer to Tajiks as "Persians" because of their linguistic ties to Iran.

[142] "IEC announces preliminary results", op. cit.

[143] Crisis Group observations, Kabul, 8 July 2014.

[144] Crisis Group interviews, senior IEC and IECC officials, July 2014.

[145] "Anxious moments for an Afghanistan on the brink", *The New York Times*, 14 July 2014.

dent Barack Obama called both candidates to appeal for calm. U.S. officials also "indirectly threatened cuts in U.S. assistance to Afghanistan if either of the two presidential candidates takes steps outside Afghanistan's constitutional mechanisms to resolve their election dispute".[146]

After negotiations at the U.S. embassy, and pressure from some Western observers for a full audit, Abdullah and Ghani reached an agreement on 12 July.[147] They promised to respect the outcome of a sweeping audit that would gather all ballot boxes from provincial centres and bring them to Kabul for examination under UN auspices. Besides the technical agreement on a full audit, the candidates also reached a verbal agreement on a political framework for a "unity government" but the text was not released.[148] Within a day, both sides were speaking about the agreement in starkly different terms, with an Abdullah spokesman saying that "power will be divided between the winner and loser 50/50",[149] and the Ghani camp maintaining that no power sharing was envisioned.[150]

G. *Auditing and Negotiating*

This set the conditions for a prolonged stalemate: the Abdullah camp pushed for strong commitments on a political deal and threw up obstacles to the swift conclusion of the audit. Some of Abdullah's supporters became so obstructive during the audit process that the arguments flared into at least four fistfights and a stabbing at the IEC headquarters.[151] The Ghani camp facilitated the audit but delayed a resolution to the political talks. "We can get a better political deal if we wait for the audit", a Ghani strategist said.[152] The process was complicated by a lack of details in the 12 July agreement, as the audit started on 17 July without a clear set of rules for invalidating ballots.

The IEC announced its invalidation criteria on 30 July, but the Abdullah campaign, despite having agreed after intensive negotiations between the two camps, continued to dispute the mechanics of the process.[153] "Policies affecting how ballots would be reviewed and the manner and criteria for their rejection changed almost daily for the first several weeks of the process and remained in flux until the end", a Western observation mission concluded.[154]

At the same time, little progress emerged from weeks of talks between Ghani and Abdullah or their representatives. After the Ghani campaign suggested that some terms of the 12 July deal may violate the constitution, John Kerry signed an op-ed in a local news outlet arguing that the arrangement would respect Afghan institutions. He wrote: "It creates a new position of chief executive who will report to the presi-

[146] Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy", Congressional Research Service, 11 July 2014, p. 57.
[147] Crisis Group observations, Kabul, 12 July 2014.
[148] "Audit of all votes, govt of national unity agreed", Pajhwok Afghan News, 12 July 2014.
[149] "Elections 2014 (39): Has Kerry saved the day?", AAN, 14 July 2014.
[150] Crisis Group interviews, Ghani campaigners, Kabul, July-August 2014.
[151] "Afghan candidate threatens to quit the presidential race", *The New York Times*, 26 August 2014.
[152] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 13 August 2014.
[153] "UNAMA welcomes IEC's adoption of criteria for invalidation and recount of ballots", press release, UNAMA, 30 July 2014; "UN continues to respond to candidates' technical concerns on audit", press release, UNAMA, 1 September 2014.
[154] "Preliminary Statement", Democracy International, Kabul, 28 September 2014.

dent until the president convenes a *Loya Jirga* (grand council) to determine whether a permanent change is in the best interests of the country".[155]

However, the definition of that new job remained contentious: Abdullah envisioned a prime ministerial role for himself, while the Ghani campaign wanted a chief executive who could, in theory, be dismissed by the president.[156] The political framework referred to the position as an "executive prime minister", embracing both points of view.[157] The text remained secret for weeks, until Kerry returned to Kabul in an effort to clarify the situation. This resulted in a joint declaration by the candidates on 8 August, reiterating their respect for the audit and confirming that "the two parties remain bound and committed to the entirety of the political framework".[158] Privately, however, organisers from the Ghani campaign noted that their candidate did not sign the political framework and they continued to dispute some of its provisions.[159]

The audit finished on the evening of 4 September, but the IEC claimed that the data entry and adjudication process would further delay results. An Afghan security official acknowledged that the delay was somewhat artificial, because authorities were worried about potential violence by Abdullah's supporters if results were announced in the absence of a political deal.[160] Threats from the Abdullah camp were so concerning to international officials that the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) on 13 September warned of "grave concerns related to direct threats and verbal attacks against the UN", suggesting that the UN may relocate staff and reduce operations.[161] The tensions resulted in a temporary scaling back of UN presence at the regional office in Mazar-e-Sharif, which is responsible for five northern provinces.[162]

H. *A Winner, Finally*

Ghani and Abdullah signed an agreement on 21 September, promising a "genuine and meaningful partnership" that would allow them to govern together.[163] Later the same day, the IEC announced Ghani as the winner, although it declined to officially publish results.[164] The only information the IEC formally released was inscribed on an engraved wooden plaque given to Ghani, congratulating him for receiving 55.27

[155] "Op-Ed From Secretary Kerry", Tolo News, 30 July 2014.
[156] The president would retain the power to appoint and dismiss the CEO, which is why a constitutional amendment would be necessary to fully establish an executive prime ministership. It is understood, but not explicitly stated, that the terms of the unity government's formation preclude Ghani from exercising the presidential power to dismiss the chief executive.
[157] See Appendix B.
[158] "Joint declaration of the electoral teams regarding the lawful finalisation of the second round of the presidential elections of 1393 and the formation of a government of national unity", Kabul, 8 August 2014.
[159] Crisis Group interviews, Ghani campaign officials, August 2014.
[160] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 5 September 2014.
[161] Tweets by UNAMA official account, @_UNAMA_, 13 September 2014.
[162] Crisis Group email correspondence, UN official, Kabul, 25 September 2014.
[163] Agreement on the Structure of a National Unity Government, 21 September 2014. Text signed by Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, then witnessed by UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General Jan Kubis and U.S. Ambassador James Cunningham, and released by the U.S. embassy on 21 September.
[164] "Ghani named Afghan president-elect after deal to end election dispute", Reuters, 21 September 2014.

per cent of the 7.12 million valid votes.[165] This corresponded with leaked results from the audit showing Ghani with 55 per cent of the valid votes, while Abdullah took 45 per cent. Of the eight million ballots audited, about 850,000 were invalidated – with Ghani's votes accounting for about two thirds of the invalidations.[166] The EU EAT said that the audit process had been unsatisfactory and "questions remain on the electoral process and on the final outcome".[167] Some Western election observers concluded that "evidence was not unveiled that would cause the outcome to be reversed",[168] and still other Western observer teams declined to publish any judgment about the final results.[169]

The Abdullah team protested the IEC's decision to inscribe the tally on the wooden plaque, among other complaints, and threatened to boycott the inauguration ceremony.[170] The inauguration proceeded smoothly, however, with Ghani sworn in as president and immediately appointing Abdullah as chief executive officer.[171] Reaction among ordinary Afghans was mixed, with some expressing relief that the process had finally reached a conclusion and others worrying about the durability of the new government.[172]

[165] "IEC presents President-elect with winner certificate", Tolo News, 26 September 2014.
[166] "Monitors of Afghan vote are said to back secrecy", *The New York Times*, 22 September 2014.
[167] "Strong interrogations on the Afghan election process remain, after publication of the outcome of the Presidential election by the IEC", EU EAT press release, 21 September 2014.
[168] "Robust and public review needed for Afghan election reform", NDI, press release, 24 September 2014.
[169] For example, the 28 September Democracy International statement makes no assessment of whether the audit produced a credible result.
[170] "Dr. Abdullah threatens to boycott the presidential inauguration", Khaama Press, 28 September 2014.
[171] "Ahmadzai, Abdullah sworn in as prez, CEO", Pajhwok Afghan News, 29 September 2014.
[172] Crisis Group interviews, Kandahar, 21 September 2014.

V. Emerging Risks

A. *Government Paralysis*

Afghanistan's government suffered an extended period of paralysis during the political transition, with the economy ministry estimating that $1 billion in donor assistance remained in limbo as foreign governments waited for a new president before going ahead with planned work.[173] Ghani had expressed concern that such paralysis could extend into the next presidency if a flawed political deal gave the country a "two-headed government".[174] For months, his team had been privately cautioning foreign diplomats that his plans to improve Afghanistan's government, outlined in a 309-page manifesto,[175] could be hampered by any power-sharing deal that did not give him the ability to rule effectively, indicating a continued reluctance to share power. "It's the foreigners who want negotiations, because they don't want the north to join the insurgency", a Ghani adviser said. "But we have already experienced a sort of coalition government under Karzai. If Ghani accepts a bad political deal, his modernisation plans will fail".[176]

The Afghan government cannot afford to drift. The Financial Action Task Force, a regulatory group that monitors concerns about money laundering, has threatened to blacklist the country unless it takes steps toward meeting basic standards before a review in October.[177] Afghanistan also needs to prepare for a November review of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF) commitments,[178] although some donors appear willing to wait until another meeting in spring 2015 before asking hard questions about compliance.[179]

Avoiding such paralysis may require international partners to intervene when serious disagreements arise between members of the unity government. Unusually for legal texts in Afghanistan, the drafting language of the agreements between Ghani and Abdullah was not Dari or Pashto, the two most common languages of the country; rather, the deals appear to have been written originally in English.[180] Western diplomats and officials in Kabul played a significant role in facilitating the agreements, and the 21 September deal includes U.S. and UN representatives as witnesses. The deals, however, contain no mechanisms for managing disputes between the parties. Some analysts have suggested that disagreements could be resolved by the Supreme Court or the Independent Commission for Overseeing the Implementation of the Constitution (ICOIC),[181] but given the international role in the agreements

[173] May Jeong, "Afghanistan's marathon presidential election brings country to standstill", *The Guardian*, 12 August 2014.
[174] "Afghan election front-runner rejects equal share of power with rival", Reuters, 10 September 2014.
[175] The manifesto is available in English at en.ashrafghani.com.
[176] Crisis Group interview, prominent Ghani supporter, Kabul, 5 July 2014.
[177] Nathan Hodge, "Afghanistan escapes blacklisting over standards to fight money laundering", *The Wall Street Journal*, 28 June 2014.
[178] "Co-chair's statement, Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF) senior officials meeting", Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 3 July 2013.
[179] Crisis Group interviews, Western diplomats, Kabul, August 2014.
[180] Crisis Group email correspondence, senior Abdullah and Ghani advisers, August 2014. Also "Constitutional Implications of a National Unity Government", Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), 28 September 2014.
[181] Ibid.

there may be a residual burden on representatives of the UN, U.S. and other diplomatic missions in Kabul to serve as mediators and, when required, as arbitrators.

B. *Ethnic Conflict*

Amid a rising insurgency, violence between the presidential camps remained comparatively rare throughout 2013-2014. Election-related armed clashes increased during the second round, however, as ethnic and tribal groups became more clearly identified with particular camps: Abdullah's slate was dominated by Tajik figures and support from Mohaqeq's powerful Hazara faction; the Ghani camp emerged as heavily Pashtun and Uzbek in character, along with some Hazara support. "The people are concerned that the elections might become an ethnic conflict", a politician said.[182] Such concerns deepened as Abdullah's campaign complained about alleged ethnic bias within the palace and electoral commissions: "The Pashtuns believe their blood is a little purer", said an Abdullah adviser.[183] Some of Abdullah's followers grew restive as they sensed their rivals planning to take power. "If we are forced to defend our rights with violence we will do it", said a senior Jamiat figure. "So far, we have refrained. Ghani wants to defame us as the 'warlord team' so they can accuse us of violence, but it hasn't happened yet".[184]

A senior member of one campaign team predicted that rising hostility between the camps would create a risk of violence on three fronts: between Jamiat and Junbish, aligned with Abdullah and Ghani respectively; between the Tajik and Pashtun ethnic groups more generally; and, to a lesser extent, between the Durrani and Ghilzai tribal confederacies of the Pashtun ethnicity, now associated with Karzai and Ghani respectively.[185] The latter warnings were dismissed by several interlocutors in the south east and south, who said good relations between Ghani and the Karzai family made such tensions unlikely.[186] In the east, some observers predicted a risk of violence if the transition harmed the business interests of two prominent Abdullah supporters: Parliamentarian Hazrat Ali and Governor Gul Agha Shirzai of Nangahar province, both of whom allegedly feared losing influence to parliamentarian Zahir Qadir, a Ghani supporter.[187] In the central region, Western military officials reportedly met with former Kabul police chief Amanullah Guzar, a staunch Abdullah supporter, to emphasise the importance of a peaceful transition.[188]

Most security concerns focused on the north and north west, however, where many interlocutors predicted further trouble in the early stages of the new presidency. Senator Arifullah Pashtun, speaking at the opening session of the upper house of parliament on 7 September, reportedly alleged that "light and heavy weapons" were being distributed to Abdullah's supporters.[189] A Western diplomat based in Mazar-e-Sharif estimated that local commanders had distributed more weapons to their informal militias than at any point in the last six years, partly because of Junbish-Jamiat tensions but also because they feared a Taliban resurgence as foreign troops

[182] Crisis Group interview, senior Afghan politician, Kabul, 1 June 2014.
[183] Crisis Group interview, senior Abdullah campaign adviser, Kabul, 2 June 2014.
[184] Crisis Group interview, senior official, Jamiat-i Islami Afghanistan, Kabul, 7 July 2014.
[185] Crisis Group interview, senior Rassoul campaign official, Kabul, 16 June 2014.
[186] Crisis Group interviews, Kandahar, Khost and Gardez, July 2014.
[187] Crisis Group interviews, Western security officials and Afghan politicians, Kabul, August 2014.
[188] Crisis Group interview, Western security official, Kabul, August 2014.
[189] Crisis Group email correspondence, Western parliamentary monitor, Kabul, 7 September 2014.

departed.[190] A member of parliament said a bullet for an AK-47 assault rifle that cost 25 to 30 Afghanis a year earlier would sell for 40 Afghanis in August 2014, as ammunition prices increased along with demand triggered by rising anxiety about the future.[191]

Western officials met regularly with Balkh Governor Atta Mohammad Noor, arguably the most powerful of Abdullah's supporters, in an effort to mitigate any potential negative reactions to the electoral process.[192] "He's got so much invested in Abdullah", a senior military official said. "He has so much to lose".[193] A confidante of Atta said that he was shifting assets outside of Afghanistan as a hedge against a Ghani victory, on the assumption that Ghani would empower his ally Dostum – Atta's old rival – to seize some of his business interests in the north west.[194] "Dostum wants Mazar-e-Sharif, and Atta doesn't want to lose it", an Afghan political analyst said.[195]

The most prominent example of election-related violence in Mazar-e-Sharif happened on 20 June, when the bodyguards of Paktia Provincial Governor Juma Khan Hamdard, a Ghani supporter, became embroiled in an hour-long battle with a highway police unit associated with Governor Atta. The incident left five dead and four wounded.[196] Ghani reportedly intervened personally to stop the feud from escalating: "Dostum planned to fly to the north and join this fight, but Ghani told him not to react", said a Hamdard relative.[197] On other occasions, the Afghan National Army (ANA) – arguably the strongest of the country's institutions – stepped in to defuse tensions. When a battle erupted between Jamiat and Junbish commanders in Faryab province on the morning of 4 September, the volleys of machine-gun fire and rocket-propelled grenades were only halted when an ANA commander threatened both sides with artillery and armoured vehicles. "They only fear the army", a local aid worker said.[198]

Armed supporters from both camps instigated skirmishes, and Western diplomats often said Abdullah and Ghani deserved credit for subduing their bellicose tendencies. No violence erupted after the 21 September announcement of Ghani as president-elect and the reaction to his inauguration on 29 September. Such an outcome was never pre-ordained, however: "The hardliners on both sides were constantly looking for ways to unravel the whole thing", a Western official said.[199] Ghani and Abdullah will need to continue serving as voices of restraint as they strive to make the unity government function, and must receive international support in these efforts. All sides should work in a transparent manner, explaining to the public how the new government is working. In particular, the new government should publish any timelines, annexes, protocols or other texts related to the deals. More fun-

[190] Crisis Group interview, Western official, Kabul, 28 August 2014.
[191] "Tension rises as NATO wind-down threatens Afghan boomtown", *Financial Times*, 9 September 2014.
[192] Crisis Group interview, Western military official, Kabul, 2 September 2014.
[193] Crisis Group interview, senior Western military official, Kabul, 7 September 2014.
[194] Crisis Group interview, Afghan businessman, Kabul, 25 August 2014.
[195] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 2 July 2014.
[196] "Afghan political confrontation turns into deadly gunfight", *The Wall Street Journal*, 20 June 2014.
[197] Crisis Group interview, relative of Juma Khan Hamdard, Mazar-e-Sharif, 23 June 2014.
[198] Crisis Group interview, Afghan aid worker, Maimana, 4 September 2014.
[199] Crisis Group email correspondence, Western official, Kabul, 15 September 2014. Dostum's heavily armed followers are reportedly making their presence felt in Kabul, with the police reluctant to confront them. "President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan is sworn in, even as he shares the stage", *The New York Times*, 29 September 2014.

damentally, constitutional reforms should be enacted to dilute some powers of the presidency, which would help to mitigate factional tensions in the government and also help lower stakes of future presidential elections.

C. *Losing Faith*

Another risk during the political transition is the possibility that some Afghan voters have become disenchanted by the months of squabbling among the Kabul elites. Any loss of faith in democracy could have negative consequences for future elections, suppressing voter turnout in the 2015 parliamentary round and subsequently the 2019 presidential election. The degree to which ordinary Afghans respect their leaders could also affect the broader functioning of the state, influencing government revenues and the progress of the insurgency. Such effects, which would only become quantifiable in the months and years after the election, may be hard to disaggregate from other dynamics. Still, some of the Kabul elites who participated in the election said they feel ashamed by the process. "My elderly cousin didn't want to vote. I told her: 'Go, vote. This time your vote will be counted.' Now she's laughing at me", an Abdullah strategist said.[200] Another campaign official said:

> Democracy died in this election, or maybe it never lived. We still don't have political parties or impartial electoral institutions. Money became the biggest factor. Everybody was selling votes. I mean, come on, the districts are insecure. How can you trust the votes from those areas?[201]

The election also created anxiety among Afghan officials who recognised that the process had tested the patience of the donor countries that supply 90 per cent of the government budget. "If the international community sees a bad election, why would they help us?" asked a senior politician.[202] At the same time, some Afghans who participated in the elections said it was unfair for the international community to expect a smooth transition. "We are crying foul after everything was set up to create a foul result", said a failed candidate. "To expect a transparent election was a daydream".[203]

Failure to select a president was widely understood as weakening Afghanistan's pitch to NATO leaders at the early September Wales summit, where Afghan officials tried to persuade their counterparts to commit to $6 billion per year in support for Afghan security forces.[204] Afghanistan received a verbal commitment of $5.1 billion for the year 2015, which was $1 billion more than had been committed in Chicago, showing some receptivity among NATO but still requiring the new president to lobby donors to maintain existing ANSF personnel rosters in the coming years.[205] Some indications suggest that the U.S. may have appetite for spending more money than

[200] Crisis Group interview, senior Abdullah campaign adviser, Kabul, 24 June 2014.
[201] Crisis Group interview, senior Rassoul campaign official, Kabul, 16 June 2014. For Crisis Group analysis of the role of political parties in the transition, see Asia Briefing, *Afghanistan's Parties in Transition*, op. cit.
[202] Crisis Group interview, senior Afghan politician, Kabul, 1 June 2014.
[203] Crisis Group interview, presidential candidate, Kabul, 29 June 2014.
[204] "Afghan Fin Min seeks hike in int'l aid to security forces", All India Radio, 20 August 2014.
[205] Crisis Group email correspondence, NATO official, Brussels, 8 September 2014. Also, "NATO commits to fund Afghan forces through 2017 as challenges remain", *Stars and Stripes*, 4 September 2014.

anticipated on the ANSF, because the recent collapse of government security forces in parts of Iraq serves as a cautionary lesson.[206]

Such assistance is far more likely now that Afghanistan has entered into a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the U.S. Signed on 30 September, one day after Ghani's inauguration, and entering into force on 1 January 2015, the BSA will enable the continued presence of possibly 9,800 U.S. troops with two missions: counter-terrorism and building ANSF capacity.[207] The same day, Kabul signed the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with NATO, which will allow the retention of possibly an additional 2,000 to 4,000 international forces as part of Operation Resolute Support, once the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)'s mission ends in December 2014.[208] Even with such support, the ANSF will face unprecedented challenges in 2015, particularly since the insurgents are already making modest territorial gains in remote districts.[209]

[206] Crisis Group interview, senior U.S. official, Brussels, 17 September 2014.
[207] "Background briefing on the U.S.-Afghanistan Security and Defence Cooperation Agreement", special briefing, senior State Department officials, Washington DC, 30 September 2014.
[208] "Agreement between the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on the Status of NATO Forces and NATO Personnel Conducting Mutually Agreed NATO-led Activities in Afghanistan", 30 September 2014; Crisis Group interviews, senior Western military officials, 7 September 2014.
[209] "Taliban advance into Sangin threatens British military gains in Helmand", *Observer*, 13 September 2014.

VI. Future Opportunities

A. *Reconsidering the System*

Despite the many risks incurred during the transition, the ongoing realignment at the highest levels of Afghanistan's government creates opportunities to improve governance, reduce corruption and, ultimately, steer the country toward greater peace and stability. Ghani's manifesto contains hundreds of policy proposals, some of which could profoundly improve Afghanistan if implemented. These include wide-ranging plans to reform the security sector; initiate a peace process with the insurgents; improve delivery of government services; strengthen accountability in public finances; and start weaning Afghanistan from its dependence on foreign aid.

Within days of taking office, Ghani signalled an intent to tackle difficult problems by reopening the inquiry into the 2010 collapse of Kabul Bank, which cost donors almost $1 billion.[210] One of his most ambitious plans would involve wresting government revenues away from "irresponsible individuals", presumably local strongmen with a history of diverting customs and other state income for their own purposes.[211] This has inspired a mix of hope and trepidation among some foreign observers, who speculate that this may include the removal of corrupt officials and human rights violators. "Ghani has told scores of warlords, generals and police chiefs they're going to be cashiered within 60 days of his taking office", said a former Western official.[212] No such assertion exists on the public record, however, and it is unclear how Ghani will handle the many competing security, economic, and political pressures on his administration.

Ghani will face similar challenges if he seeks to fulfil his promise to publish the Conflict Mapping Report, a detailed investigation by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) into alleged war atrocities from 1978 to 2001.[213] Karzai had suppressed the report, which apparently contains allegations against a wide range of powerful figures – including Ghani's political opponents and prominent supporters.[214] A more modest policy proposal, which Ghani re-emphasised in a press conference, was a new appointment system for local officials.[215] The details have not been articulated, but Ghani suggested this may include "specialised committees" to select five candidates for the mayoralty of Kabul, with the president making the appointment from those selected.[216]

While the political stalemate during the summer of 2014 has discouraged many voters, should there be perceptible changes in the way Afghanistan is governed, it would encourage Afghans to embrace the idea that ballots can affect the leadership of their country. "In the street before the election you could hear lots of people saying that the government has always selected the leader in the past, but this time it's different", a senior Afghan politician said. "Now they know the power of their own vote".[217] For many people involved in the process, even after the disorderly second

[210] "Kabul Bank fraud: Ghani reopens Afghan corruption case", BBC, 1 October 2014.
[211] "Change and Continuity: A Manifesto", Ghani campaign handout, undated, p. 71.
[212] Crisis Group email correspondence, former Western official, 9 September 2014.
[213] "2014 Elections (20): The Ashraf Ghani interview", AAN, 18 May 2014.
[214] "Top Afghans tied to '90s carnage, researchers say", *The New York Times*, 22 July 2014.
[215] Ghani manifesto, op. cit., p. 81.
[216] Crisis Group observations, Kabul, 10 September 2014.
[217] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 1 June 2014.

round, there remained some appreciation for the moment's historic significance: "This is the first true change of power without fights and killings, and we're keen to make history".[218]

Ghani has raised hopes about reforms on a broad spectrum of issues, speaking at length after his inauguration about plans to fight corruption, reduce poverty, promote economic development, and clean up the judiciary.[219] Such ambitious goals, while entirely laudable, may risk inflating expectations of a new government whose survival rests on an untested political detente between opposing teams. In that context, and given the urgent economic crisis, the new government may be well-advised to start by satisfying the requirements of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)[220] and the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF),[221] to prevent blacklisting by financial institutions and ensure donor support. Other economic priorities should include reducing corruption and improving government revenue collection.

Many participants in the elections said the primary lesson of the process should be the necessity of voters' lists or, preferably, implementation of the National Identification Document (eNID) or "E-Tazkira project", an effort to produce biometric identity cards as a substitute for driving licences, passports and voter registration cards. "I don't care who shouts at me, saying this is too expensive, because until we have an E-Tazkira system we will have big problems", said a senior IEC official.[222] Such recommendations have unfortunately been ignored in the past, but their inclusion in the 21 September agreement may improve their chances of implementation.[223]

Others pinned their hopes on the articles of the 12 July political framework that promised to reform the electoral system and hold a *Loya Jirga* that would reconsider the constitution. The agreement does not describe what kind of reforms are necessary, and only mentions amending the constitution to establish the position of executive prime minister, but this has already started discussions in Kabul about ways of improving Afghanistan's highly centralised system of government and the flawed Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) that discourages political parties.[224] "Right now, the system itself is preventing the formation of political parties", said a campaign manager.[225] Even in the absence of such reforms, creating the post of executive prime minister, or chief executive officer, should serve to dilute presidential

[218] Crisis Group interview, Ghani campaign organiser, Kabul, 25 June 2014.
[219] "Ashraf Ghani sworn in as new Afghan president", BBC, 29 September 14.
[220] In a recent statement, the FATF called on Afghanistan to address six deficiencies: "adequately" criminalising money laundering and terrorist financing; implementing legal frameworks that would identify, trace and freeze terrorist assets; implementing a related oversight program for all financial sectors; implementing adequate procedures for the confiscation of assets; establishing a fully operational and effective Financial Intelligence Unit; and implementing effective controls for cross-border cash transactions. "Improving Global AML/CFT Compliance: on-going process", FATF, Paris, 27 June 2014.
[221] The TMAF requires Afghanistan and its donors to monitor performance in five areas of development and governance: "representational democracy and equitable elections"; "governance, rule of law and human rights"; "integrity of public finance and commercial banking"; "government revenues, budget execution and sub-national governance"; and "inclusive and sustained growth and development". Article 11, Annex, Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework, op. cit.
[222] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 2 June 2014.
[223] Article A, fifth bullet point. "Agreement between the Two Campaign Teams Regarding the Structure of the National Unity Government", 21 September 2014. See Appendix C.
[224] For more on political parties and SNTV, see Crisis Group Asia Briefing, *Afghanistan's Parties in Transition*, op. cit.
[225] Crisis Group interview, senior Rassoul campaign official, Kabul, 16 June 2014.

power, which generally failed to reflect the complex decentralised nature of the Afghan polity. "Creation of the CEO post involves a substantial delegation of presidential authority", an analysis concluded.[226]

B. *Explaining the Taliban Pause*

The Taliban also made history during the election, as violence trends during the second round showed a remarkable, unanticipated change of behaviour. In the months ahead of 14 June, many observers in Kabul – ambassadors, journalists, analysts – expressed concern that the Taliban's reputation as a fighting force had been sullied by their failure to interrupt the 5 April process, leading to speculation about the potential for major attacks in the second round.[227] This concern was heightened by the seasonal trends in the conflict, which have always reached peak intensity during the summer. Indeed, violence remained high on 14 June, but the targeting and geographic distribution of attacks was unusual.

Despite the presence of thousands of electoral staff and candidate observers in remote districts, the number of election-related attacks decreased as compared with the previous round. Few of those election-related attacks happened in the Ghani heartlands of the south and south east, which together accounted for perhaps 5 per cent of election violence on 14 June.[228] By contrast, in the three months before the second round, the same provinces in the south and south east had suffered roughly 45 per cent of all insurgent attacks.[229]

The Taliban did not explain this extraordinary display of restraint. Three days before the second round, their official website posted a "final warning" to the people of Afghanistan, telling them to avoid participating in the election. "You know that the candidates in the present elections are all those notorious figures who have supported the occupiers from the very beginning of the American invasion against their own religion, homeland and people", the statement said.[230] Such rhetoric has been a staple of Taliban propaganda for a dozen years, and the messages from the insurgency remained unchanged after voting day: on 15 June, the Taliban released another statement calling the second round a "shameful U.S. game" and praising the fighters who disrupted the process.[231]

In the tense aftermath of the second round, with Ghani supporters under pressure to explain their dramatic vote gains in dangerous parts of the country, some of them started to describe outreach – direct and indirect – to members of the insurgency, securing promises of help in the run-off (discussed earlier).[232] "The Taliban feel they can trust him [Ghani] because he wasn't involved in the killing of innocent people", said a campaign organiser.[233] This explanation was often mocked by the Abdullah camp. An Abdullah supporter from a western province alleged that the Ghani campaign had distributed faked "night letters" in an attempt to trick villagers

[226] "Constitutional Implications of a National Unity Government", op. cit.
[227] Crisis Group interviews, Kabul, April-June 2014.
[228] Crisis Group interview, Western security official, Kabul, 17 June 2014.
[229] Crisis Group interview, Western security analyst, Kabul, 20 June 2014.
[230] "Final warning of the Islamic Emirate regarding the second term of Elections", Voice of Jihad (a Taliban website), 11 June 2014.
[231] Crisis Group email correspondence, Western security official, Kabul, 15 June 2014.
[232] Crisis Group interviews, Ghani supporters, Kabul, June-August 2014.
[233] Crisis Group interview, Ghani campaign organiser, Kabul, 25 June 2014.

into believing that the Taliban had endorsed the candidate, and to provide a plausible cover for large-scale fraud.[234]

Some stories of Taliban support for the elections did appear fabricated. For example, a one-page letter circulated in the south, purportedly from Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar, called on voters to support "an acceptable and experienced person", and urged insurgent fighters to avoid disturbing the process. Taliban experts who examined the letter said the document was an obvious fake, and noted that insurgent leaders would not use such letters to communicate orders to their ranks.[235]

Still, most indications from rural areas of the south and south east pointed to widespread assistance to the Ghani campaign by armed insurgents. A security analyst counted more than a dozen districts in the south east where insurgents instructed people to vote for Ghani.[236] A senior election official said the Taliban had been surprisingly helpful to his staff in Baghlan province, allowing election observers and commission staff to conduct their business, even knocking on doors and telling people to vote. He also noted similar behaviour by armed factions of Hizb-e Islami in Wardak province. In previous elections, Taliban had cut off voters' fingers if they were marked with the indelible ink to indicate they had voted.[237] According to the official, the Taliban reversed that policy in many parts of the country: "The Taliban in Charkh district said, 'If your finger is not inked we will cut it off', and the same thing happened in Helmand. It was exactly the opposite of what we expected".[238]

In Kandahar, a wealthy businessman who served several years as a detainee at Bagram on suspicion of involvement with the insurgency said that he was impressed by Ghani's visit to the prison during his detention. He credited Ghani's advocacy on behalf of the detainees with eventually helping him get released, and he later became a prominent campaigner for Ghani in the south. "I know many other former prisoners in Kandahar and other provinces who are helping Ashraf Ghani as volunteers", he said.[239]

This behaviour tended to facilitate the election process in places where Ghani supporters lived, or directly helped his campaign, but it is unclear whether the Taliban were expressing support for Ghani or, rather, taking action against their old enemies in the Shura-yi Nazar-i Shamali ("Supervisory Council of the North").[240] Many of Abdullah's supporters had roots in that northern council of strongmen who fought the Taliban until 2001. A former Taliban official said that the Ghani campaign had talks with Taliban representatives in Dubai before the run-off, but remained sceptical about whether Ghani had won any favour with the insurgent leadership. "The

[234] Crisis Group interview, former Afghan politician, Kabul, 2 July 2014. The Taliban frequently distribute printed or handwritten statements, often sent under the cover of darkness, giving rise to the popular term "*shabnama*" or "night letter".
[235] Crisis Group email correspondence, three Taliban experts, 8-9 July 2014.
[236] Crisis Group interview, Western security official, Kabul, 17 June 2014.
[237] In the most famous example of anti-election violence in 2014, a group of elderly voters in Herat province had their fingers cut off.
[238] Crisis Group interview, senior IECC official, Kabul, 21 June 2014.
[239] Crisis Group interview, Ghani campaigner and ex-Bagram detainee, Kandahar, 3 July 2014.
[240] For more on the Shura-yi Nazar, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°62, *Afghanistan: The Problem of Pashtun Alienation*, 5 August 2003; Also "A second round surge in turnout in Loya Paktia?", AAN, 20 June 2014.

Taliban understand that the election result matters and they wanted a weak president", he said. "They are not in favour of Ghani, they are against Shura-yi Nazar".[241]

Another former Taliban official had a more optimistic view of the insurgents' actions. Local and regional Taliban commanders did not want to stop people from voting because they felt pressure from ordinary people who demanded to participate in the elections, he said, adding that Dostum's presence on the Ghani ticket was not viewed as strongly negative in the south and east because the former warlord had not directly participated in the conflict with the Taliban in recent years.

The insurgents proved they could behave in a coherent political fashion across a vast territory, he added, although they seemed unlikely to give up the combat side of their two-part military and political strategy.[242] According to a Western analyst: "There's a potential to get some of these guys more involved in politics. But in Quetta, at best it's a 'talk and fight' strategy. Lots of these guys still believe they can weaken the government enough to topple it".[243] A Ghani campaign official said that peace talks might eventually benefit from the channels opened with the Taliban during the elections, but added that it was not likely to happen quickly. "If we can discuss security for the election with the Taliban and we get this kind of success, maybe we can solve other problems with them in the future", he said. "But it will take time".[244]

The next significant test of such political behaviour by the insurgents will happen during the 2015 parliamentary elections. Ghani has already indicated that he will continue reaching out to the insurgents, saying in his inaugural speech: "We ask opponents of the government, especially the Taliban and Hizb-e Islami, to enter political talks". The insurgents responded with two attacks that killed at least fifteen people in Kabul, and a statement rejecting the unity government as a "U.S.-orchestrated sham".[245] While Ghani appears willing to reach out to the insurgents, with Abdullah's Tajik and Hazara constituents increasingly concerned about insurgent threats after the exit of international forces, he should be wary of backdoor deals or concessions to the armed opposition that could destabilise the national unity government.

[241] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 2 July 2014.
[242] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, 12 July 2014.
[243] Crisis Group interview, Kabul, August 2014.
[244] Crisis Group interview, Ghani campaign official, Kabul, 1 July 2014.
[245] "Ashraf Ghani sworn in as new Afghan president", BBC, 29 September 2014.

VII. Conclusion

Afghanistan emerges from the political transition having lost much of the enthusiasm that accompanied the first round of voting in April. Even on the streets of Kandahar, where an overwhelming number of voters supported Ghani, the announcement of his victory did not provoke widespread celebration. "I am one hundred per cent sure that they will start fighting inside the palace and all our hopes will be lost", said an elderly shopkeeper.[246]

Indeed, the stability and cohesion of the new leadership in Kabul will be a central issue for the incoming government. Making a unity government function has been a serious challenge for leaders in countries with far fewer pressing issues than Afghanistan. The Ghani administration also inherits a treasury that is almost empty, having recently announced that hundreds of thousands of civil servants will not get paid as scheduled in October because the government has less than the $116 million required for monthly payroll.[247] The austerity measures do not include salaries for Afghan security forces, which already face unprecedented challenges: insurgents reportedly launched 700 ground offensives in the six months leading up to Ghani's inauguration, killing 1,368 policemen and 800 soldiers, a toll exceeding all previous records from the last dozen years.[248] This follows an overall pattern of escalation in the conflict, and underlines the need for renewed donor commitments to support the Afghan security forces at approximately their current force strength until the insurgency diminishes. The ANSF will also need international assistance to resolve capacity gaps in areas such as close air support, tactical airlift, over-the-horizon surveillance, logistics and battlefield medical evacuation.[249]

Afghanistan's ability to fight its battles, and pay its bills, will be circumscribed by any disunity in Kabul. An analyst noted that the unity government, while preventing trouble in the short term, also failed to give Afghanistan a fully democratic process: "The 2014 election has not cemented the idea of cycles of power, with polls producing winners and losers who can make it back to government or lose power in the future".[250] Yet, the outcome has steered Afghanistan away from some potentially nightmarish scenarios. A violent break from the process by either of the contending teams could have opened new fronts in the ongoing civil war and seriously tested the basic structure of the state; as it stands now, several of the most powerful political factions in the country maintain a valuable stake in the new government, improving its chances of survival.

It remains to be seen what role Karzai will play in the coming years. He clearly maintained a strong influence over the process in 2013 and 2014, but his actions were somewhat muted as compared with his efforts to affect the outcome of the 2009 election. This produced a genuine contest between strong contenders in a process marred by substantial fraud but without any single dominant player determining the outcome. "We genuinely weren't sure who was going to win either of the two rounds", said a Western official. "I think this would have been a lot more clear if

[246] Crisis Group interview, 21 September 2014.
[247] "Cash-poor Afghanistan will delay paying civil servants: finance ministry official", Reuters, 27 September 2014.
[248] "After rancor, Afghans agree to share power", *The New York Times*, 21 September 2014.
[249] For analysis of ANSF funding and capacity gaps, see Crisis Group Asia Report N°256, *Afghanistan's Insurgency After the Transition*, 12 May 2014.
[250] "Finally, a deal, but not yet democracy", AAN, 21 September 2014.

there was a genuinely unified state apparatus behind one candidate".[251] While turnout figures must be treated with scepticism in any system with such a high degree of fraud, the 2014 elections appeared to reverse a dangerous trend toward apathy among Afghan voters: the number of ballots cast during elections in 2004, 2005, 2009 and 2010 had steadily eroded with each vote, down to an estimated 4.2 million valid votes in the 2010 parliamentary round; there was likely a significantly greater number of valid votes in 2014.[252]

While Afghans showed a renewed interest in democracy, electoral reforms are urgently needed to sustain this and restore voters' faith in the wake of a bitterly disputed result. The UN has noted a willingness by Ghani and Abdullah to reform the electoral system, and offered to help with the process: "There is the pressing need for fundamental electoral reform and both parties in the government of national unity are committed to implementing such reforms without delay".[253] U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry was not entirely hyperbolic in his claim that, "in the end, statesmanship and compromise triumphed".[254] Since such triumphs frequently prove to be fleeting in Afghanistan, the most difficult tests of statesmanship for the new leaders in Kabul still lie ahead.

Kabul/Brussels, 16 October 2014

[251] Crisis Group email correspondence, Western official closely involved with running the election, Kabul, 15 September 2014.
[252] "Afghanistan Wolesi Jirga 1389 turnout summary [sic]", IEC statement, undated.
[253] "Background note on United Nations involvement in audit of presidential election 2014", UNAMA statement, Kabul, 22 September 2014.
[254] John Kerry, "Afghanistan's triumph of statesmanship and compromise", *The Washington Post*, 26 September 2014.

Appendix A: Map of Afghanistan

Appendix B: Political Framework, Text of 12 July 2014

Agreement reached 12 July 2014 between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, released by the U.S. embassy in Kabul on 8 August 2014. "Part One" refers to a technical deal on the audit process; this second part describes the incoming government.

Pursuant to the results of the credible and comprehensive election audit described in Part One, the candidates commit to implement a political agreement whereby the winner of the election will serve as President and will immediately form a government of national unity with the following characteristics:

The government of national unity will develop and implement a comprehensive program of reform to empower the Afghan people and address the need for peace, stability, security, rule of law, justice, economic growth, and delivery of services.

The President will convene a Loya Jirga, and initiate a process of amending the constitution, to establish the position of an Executive Prime Minister within two years.

Until such time as the position of Executive Prime Minister is constitutionally established, the functions of an Executive Prime Minister will be performed by a Government Chief Executive Officer. This position of Government CEO will be immediately established by Presidential decree, and will be held by a nominee of the runner-up and mutually agreed by the President.

The President will create the position of Leader of the Opposition. The runner-up will select the person of his choice to fill this position.

Appointments to the key national security, economic, and independent government agencies will be apportioned according to the principle of achieving parity between the choices of the President and the Leader of the Opposition. Cabinet, judiciary, and key sub-national appointments will be apportioned according to the principle of fair representation, chosen by the President in consultation with the Leader of the Opposition.

The President commits to maintain continuity of the leadership in key national security agencies for at least 90 days.

The unity government commits to adopt within one year fundamental reforms of the electoral system, developed by a broadly representational process, with a goal of remedying prior electoral shortcomings.

Appendix C: Agreement on the Structure of a National Unity Government, 21 September 2014

Text signed by Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, then witnessed by UN SRSG Jan Kubis and U.S. Ambassador James Cunningham, and released by the U.S. embassy on 21 September.

This period in Afghanistan's history requires a legitimate and functioning government committed to implementing a comprehensive program of reform to empower the Afghan public, thereby making the values of the Constitution a daily reality for the people of Afghanistan. Stability of the country is strengthened by a genuine political partnership between the President and the CEO, under the authority of the President. Dedicated to political consensus, commitment to reforms, and cooperative decision-making, the national unity government will fulfil the aspirations of the Afghan public for peace, stability, security, rule of law, justice, economic growth, and delivery of services, with particular attention to women, youth, Ulema, and vulnerable persons. Further, this agreement is based on the need for genuine and meaningful partnership and effective cooperation in the affairs of government, including design and implementation of reforms.

The relationship between the President and the CEO cannot be described solely and entirely by this agreement, but must be defined by the commitment of both sides to partnership, collegiality, collaboration, and, most importantly, responsibility to the people of Afghanistan. The President and CEO are honour bound to work together in that spirit of partnership.

A. Convening of a Loya Jirga to amend the Constitution and considering the proposal to create the post of executive prime minister

- On the basis of Article 2 of the Joint Statement of 17 Asad 1393 (August 8, 2014) and its attachment ("…convening of a Loya Jirga in two years to consider the post of an executive prime minister"), the President is committed to convoking a Loya Jirga for the purpose of debate on amending the Constitution and creating a post of executive prime minister.
- After the inauguration ceremony, the President will appoint in consultation with the CEO by executive order a commission to draft an amendment to the Constitution.
- On the basis of Article 140 of the Constitution, the national unity government is committed to holding district council elections as early as possible on the basis of a law in order to create a quorum for the Loya Jirga in accordance with Section 2 of Article 110 of the Constitution.
- The national unity government is committed to ratifying and enforcing a law on the organization of the basic organs of the state and determination of the boundaries and limits of local administration by legal means.
- The national unity government commits to completing the distribution of electronic/computerized identity cards to all the citizens of the country as quickly as possible.
- The above issues and other matters that are agreed to will be implemented on a schedule which is appended to this agreement.

B. The position of the Chief Executive Officer

- Until such time as the Constitution is amended and the position of executive prime minister is created, the position of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) will be created by presidential decree on the basis of Article 50 of the Constitution and Article 2 of the

attached Joint Declaration and its annex. The CEO and his deputies will be introduced in the presidential inauguration ceremony.

- The appointment of the CEO with the functions of an executive prime minister will take place through a proposal by the runner-up and the agreement of the President. The CEO will be answerable to the President.
- A special protocol for the CEO will be authorized in a presidential decree.
- The President will delegate by a presidential decree specific executive authorities to the CEO with a view to Articles 60, 64, 71, and 77 of the Constitution. Key elements of authorities will include the following:
    1. Participation of the CEO with the President in bilateral decision-making meetings.
    2. Carrying out administrative affairs and executive affairs of the government as determined by presidential decree.
    3. Implementing the reform program of the National Unity Government.
    4. Proposing reforms in all government agencies and decisively combatting official corruption.
    5. Exercising specific administrative and financial authorities, which will be determined in a presidential decree.
    6. Establishing working relationships of the executive branch of the government with the legislative and judicial branches within the framework of defined functions and authorities.
    7. Implementing, monitoring, and supporting the policies, programs, and budgetary and financial affairs of the government.
    8. Submitting necessary reports and proposals to the President.
    9. The President, as the head of state and government, leads the Cabinet (Kabina), which meets at his discretion on government policy, strategy, budgeting, resource allocation, and legislation among its other functions and authorities. The Cabinet consists of the President, Vice-Presidents, CEO, Deputy CEOs, the Chief Advisor, and ministers. The CEO will be responsible for managing the Cabinet's implementation of government policies, and will report on progress to the President directly and in the Cabinet. To that end, the CEO will chair regular weekly meetings of the Council of Ministers (Shura-e-Waziran), consisting of the CEO, Deputy CEOs, and all ministers. The Council of Ministers will implement the executive affairs of the government. The CEO will also chair all the sub-committees of the Council of Ministers. Based on this article of the agreement, a presidential decree will introduce and define the new Council of Ministers as distinct from the Cabinet.
    10. Providing advice and proposals to the President for appointment and dismissal of senior government officials and other government affairs.
    11. Special representation of the President at the international level as deemed necessary by the President.
    12. The CEO is a member of the National Security Council.
    13. The CEO will have two deputies, who will be members of meetings of the cabinet and meetings of the National Security Council. The functions, authorities, and responsibilities of the CEO's deputies, in line with the CEO's functions and

authorities, as well as an appropriate protocol for them, will be proposed by the CEO and approved by the President through presidential decree.

C. Appointment of senior officials

On the basis of the principles of national participation, fair representation, merit, honesty, and commitment to the reform programs of the national unity government, the parties are committed to the following:

- Parity in the selection of personnel between the President and the CEO at the level of head of key security and economic institutions, and independent directorates. As a consequence of this parity, and the provisions of Sections B(12) and (13) above, the two teams will be equally represented in the National Security Council at the leadership level, and equitably (Barabarguna) represented at the membership level.
- The President and the CEO will agree upon a specific merit-based mechanism for the appointment of senior officials. The mechanism will provide for the full participation of the CEO in proposing nominees for all applicable positions and for full consideration of all nominations. In conformity with the intent of the Joint Declaration and its annex (Article 5), the President and the CEO will consult intensively on the selection of senior appointees not covered by the Civil Service Commission through the above mechanism, which can lead to equitable (Barabarguna) representation from both parties, and with attention to inclusivity and the political and societal composition of the country, with particular attention to women and youth, and persons with disabilities, for state institutions and agencies, including key judiciary and local administrative posts. The two parties are committed to early reform of the Civil Service Commission.
- Enabling broad participation of meritorious personalities and personnel of the country at various levels of the system, using these opportunities for securing enduring peace and stability and building a healthy administration.

D. Creation of the position of leader of the runner-up team

In line with the Joint Declaration of 17 Asad 1393 (August 8, 2014) and its annex, and with the goal of strengthening and expanding democracy, the position of the leader of the runner-up team, referred to in the mentioned document as the opposition leader, will be created and officially recognized within the frame-work of the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on the basis of a presidential decree. The responsibilities, authorities, and honours of this position will be spelled out in the decree. After the formation of the national unity government with the presence of the runner-up team on the basis of this agreement, this position will act as an ally of the national unity government.

E. Electoral reform

To ensure that future elections are fully credible, the electoral system (laws and institutions) requires fundamental changes. Immediately after the establishment of the government of national unity, the President will issue a decree to form a special commission for the reform of the electoral system in accordance with Article 7 of the Political Framework. Members of the special commission will be agreed between the President and the CEO. The special commission will report to the CEO on its progress and the Cabinet will review its recommendations and take the necessary steps for their implementation. The objective is to implement electoral reform before the 2015 parliamentary elections.

F. Implementation

Any divergence in views or dispute regarding the interpretation or application of this agreement shall be resolved through consultation between the parties.

The parties express appreciation for the role played by the international community in facilitating the political and technical agreements, and welcome the assurances the parties have received of its support for the implementation of this agreement and its engagement with the government of national unity.

G. Entry-into-force

Honouring their commitments to the Technical and Political Frameworks of July 12, 2014, and the Joint Declaration of August 8, 2014, as reflected throughout this agreement, the parties reaffirm their commitment regarding the outcome of the election and implementation of this agreement to establish the national unity government, which will enter into force upon signing by the two candidates in the presence of Afghan and international witnesses.

Appendix D: Afghan Leadership After 2001

5 December 2001	The Bonn Agreement sets up interim administration, led by Hamid Karzai.
13 June 2002	An emergency Loya Jirga, or grand council, confirms Karzai as leader.
9 October 2004	Karzai wins a presidential election with 55 per cent of the vote. His closest opponent, Yunus Qanooni, gets 16 per cent.
18 September 2005	Parliamentary elections bring 249 members to the lower house, while 102 senators are selected by Karzai and provincial councils for the upper house. District elections, envisaged in the constitution, are not held because of logistical and security challenges.
20 August 2009	Presidential elections fail to produce a clear winner, with neither Karzai nor his opponent Abdullah Abdullah winning more than 50 per cent of the vote. Abdullah later drops out, averting a runoff and giving Karzai a second term.
18 September 2010	Another parliamentary election produces widespread disputes over results. District elections continue to be deferred.
5 April 2014	The first round of presidential elections reveals two front-runners: Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani, with 45 per cent and 32 per cent of the vote respectively. This leads to a second round.
14 June 2014	The runoff reverses the first-round result, putting Ghani ahead of Abdullah. Preliminary results show Ghani with 56 per cent to Abdullah's 44 per cent. Abdullah complains of serious fraud.
12 July 2014	Secretary of State John Kerry brokers a political and technical deal between the camps. The deal includes an audit of the votes and a "national unity" government that will include the winner and loser.
21 September 2014	After an audit of votes, Ghani and Abdullah sign an agreement on the formation of a national unity government that allows Ghani to become president but includes representatives from both sides. Electoral authorities decline to announce any official vote tallies.

Appendix E: About the International Crisis Group

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Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board of Trustees – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by former UN Deputy Secretary-General and Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Lord Mark Malloch-Brown, and Dean of Paris School of International Affairs (Sciences Po), Ghassan Salamé.

Crisis Group's President & CEO, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, assumed his role on 1 September 2014. Mr. Guéhenno served as the United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations from 2000-2008, and in 2012, as Deputy Joint Special Envoy of the United Nations and the League of Arab States on Syria. He left his post as Deputy Joint Special Envoy to chair the commission that prepared the white paper on French defence and national security in 2013.

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October 2014

Appendix F: Reports and Briefings on Asia since 2011

As of 1 October 2013, Central Asia publications are listed under the Europe and Central Asia program.

North East Asia

China and Inter-Korean Clashes in the Yellow Sea, Asia Report N°200, 27 January 2011 (also available in Chinese).

Strangers at Home: North Koreans in the South, Asia Report N°208, 14 July 2011 (also available in Korean).

South Korea: The Shifting Sands of Security Policy, Asia Briefing N°130, 1 December 2011.

Stirring up the South China Sea (I), Asia Report N°223, 23 April 2012 (also available in Chinese).

Stirring up the South China Sea (II): Regional Responses, Asia Report N°229, 24 July 2012 (also available in Chinese).

North Korean Succession and the Risks of Instability, Asia Report N°230, 25 July 2012 (also available in Chinese and Korean).

China's Central Asia Problem, Asia Report N°244, 27 February 2013 (also available in Chinese).

Dangerous Waters: China-Japan Relations on the Rocks, Asia Report N°245, 8 April 2013 (also available in Chinese).

Fire on the City Gate: Why China Keeps North Korea Close, Asia Report N°254, 9 December 2013 (also available in Chinese).

Old Scores and New Grudges: Evolving Sino-Japanese Tensions, Asia Report N°258, 24 July 2014.

Risks of Intelligence Pathologies in South Korea, Asia Report N°259, 5 August 2014.

South Asia

Nepal: Identity Politics and Federalism, Asia Report N°199, 13 January 2011 (also available in Nepali).

Afghanistan's Elections Stalemate, Asia Briefing N°117, 23 February 2011.

Reforming Pakistan's Electoral System, Asia Report N°203, 30 March 2011.

Nepal's Fitful Peace Process, Asia Briefing N°120, 7 April 2011 (also available in Nepali).

India and Sri Lanka after the LTTE, Asia Report N°206, 23 June 2011.

The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland, Asia Report N°207, 27 June 2011.

Reconciliation in Sri Lanka: Harder Than Ever, Asia Report N°209, 18 July 2011.

Aid and Conflict in Afghanistan, Asia Report N°210, 4 August 2011.

Nepal: From Two Armies to One, Asia Report N°211, 18 August 2011 (also available in Nepali).

Reforming Pakistan's Prison System, Asia Report N°212, 12 October 2011.

Islamic Parties in Pakistan, Asia Report N°216, 12 December 2011.

Nepal's Peace Process: The Endgame Nears, Asia Briefing N°131, 13 December 2011 (also available in Nepali).

Sri Lanka: Women's Insecurity in the North and East, Asia Report N°217, 20 December 2011.

Sri Lanka's North (I): The Denial of Minority Rights, Asia Report N°219, 16 March 2012.

Sri Lanka's North (II): Rebuilding under the Military, Asia Report N°220, 16 March 2012.

Talking About Talks: Toward a Political Settlement in Afghanistan, Asia Report N°221, 26 March 2012.

Pakistan's Relations with India: Beyond Kashmir?, Asia Report N°224, 3 May 2012.

Bangladesh: Back to the Future, Asia Report N°226, 13 June 2012.

Aid and Conflict in Pakistan, Asia Report N°227, 27 June 2012.

Election Reform in Pakistan, Asia Briefing N°137, 16 August 2012.

Nepal's Constitution (I): Evolution Not Revolution, Asia Report N°233, 27 August 2012 (also available in Nepali).

Nepal's Constitution (II): The Expanding Political Matrix, Asia Report N°234, 27 August 2012 (also available in Nepali).

Afghanistan: The Long, Hard Road to the 2014 Transition, Asia Report N°236, 8 October 2012.

Pakistan: No End To Humanitarian Crises, Asia Report N°237, 9 October 2012.

Sri Lanka: Tamil Politics and the Quest for a Political Solution, Asia Report N°239, 20 November 2012.

Pakistan: Countering Militancy in PATA, Asia Report N°242, 15 January 2013.

Sri Lanka's Authoritarian Turn: The Need for International Action, Asia Report N°243, 20 February 2013.

Drones: Myths and Reality in Pakistan, Asia Report N°247, 21 May 2013.

Afghanistan's Parties in Transition, Asia Briefing N°141, 26 June 2013.

Parliament's Role in Pakistan's Democratic Transition, Asia Report N°249, 18 September 2013.

Women and Conflict in Afghanistan, Asia Report N°252, 14 October 2013.

Sri Lanka's Potemkin Peace: Democracy under Fire, Asia Report N°253, 13 November 2013.

Policing Urban Violence in Pakistan, Asia Report N°255, 23 January 2014.

Afghanistan's Insurgency after the Transition, Asia Report N°256, 12 May 2014.

Education Reform in Pakistan, Asia Report N°257, 23 June 2014.

South East Asia

The Communist Insurgency in the Philippines: Tactics and Talks, Asia Report N°202, 14 February 2011.

Myanmar's Post-Election Landscape, Asia Briefing N°118, 7 March 2011 (also available in Chinese and Burmese).

The Philippines: Back to the Table, Warily, in Mindanao, Asia Briefing N°119, 24 March 2011.

Thailand: The Calm Before Another Storm?, Asia Briefing N°121, 11 April 2011 (also available in Chinese and Thai).

Timor-Leste: Reconciliation and Return from Indonesia, Asia Briefing N°122, 18 April 2011 (also available in Indonesian).

Indonesian Jihadism: Small Groups, Big Plans, Asia Report N°204, 19 April 2011 (also available in Chinese).

Indonesia: Gam vs Gam in the Aceh Elections, Asia Briefing N°123, 15 June 2011.

Indonesia: Debate over a New Intelligence Bill, Asia Briefing N°124, 12 July 2011.

The Philippines: A New Strategy for Peace in Mindanao?, Asia Briefing N°125, 3 August 2011.

Indonesia: Hope and Hard Reality in Papua, Asia Briefing N°126, 22 August 2011.

Myanmar: Major Reform Underway, Asia Briefing N°127, 22 September 2011 (also available in Burmese and Chinese).

Indonesia: Trouble Again in Ambon, Asia Briefing N°128, 4 October 2011.

Timor-Leste's Veterans: An Unfinished Struggle?, Asia Briefing N°129, 18 November 2011.

The Philippines: Indigenous Rights and the MILF Peace Process, Asia Report N°213, 22 November 2011.

Myanmar: A New Peace Initiative, Asia Report N°214, 30 November 2011 (also available in Burmese and Chinese).

Waging Peace: ASEAN and the Thai-Cambodian Border Conflict, Asia Report N°215, 6 December 2011 (also available in Chinese).

Indonesia: From Vigilantism to Terrorism in Cirebon, Asia Briefing N°132, 26 January 2012.

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