



Written by on November 19, 2009

Karzai Begins 2nd Term as Afghan President

Hamid Karzai was sworn in for a second term as the president of Afghanistan on November 19, and in his inaugural address he promised to eliminate corruption and to take over responsibility for his nation's security within five years.

"Afghanistan wants to lead operations in non-secure areas in the next three years," Karzai said in his address, adding that Afghan forces should be able to take control of security within five years.

The British *Guardian* reported that Karzai said he wants "expert" and competent ministers in his government, and he pledged to crack down on corrupt officials, describing corruption as a "dangerous enemy of the state."



Karzai also pledged to set up a *loya jirga* (a Pashto phrase meaning "grand council"). [Wikipedia defines a loya jirga](#) as "a political meeting usually used to choose new kings, adopt constitutions, or decide important political matters and disputes in Pashtun areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan."

In his speech Karzai extended an olive branch to his opponents, including his closest contender in the presidential election. "I would like to invite all the presidential candidates, including my brother Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, to come together to achieve the important task of national unity, and make our common home, Afghanistan, proud and prosperous," he said.

However, in a statement made to the Association Press, Taliban spokesman rejected Karzai's plea for national unity, stating: "Today is not a historic day. This is a government based on nothing because of the continuing presence of foreign troops in Afghanistan. Karzai's call to the Taliban to come to the government has no meaning. He became president through fraud and lies."

A BBC reporter compiled a list of reactions to Karzai's new government from Western leaders, including these excerpts:

- **UK Foreign Secretary David Miliband:** "[President Karzai] said that in five years time, the Afghan forces will lead the security effort right across the country. He has also set out very clearly how governance and [a] crusade against corruption is an important part of that.

"Now it's deeds that matter — not just words — but we've got to make sure in our own interests — not just in the interests of people here — that it's followed through."

- **NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen:** "We strongly support his intention to form a capable and inclusive administration, and to make it accountable, one in which corruption has no place. It is critically important that the Afghan people, and the citizens of the countries sending troops to the international mission, see concrete progress in this regard."



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- **Secretary of State Hillary Clinton:** “I think that there’s a very clear understanding on the part of not only President Karzai, but his government, that the results of this election have to be seen and felt in the lives of the people of Afghanistan.

“Those of us in the international community represented around this room, as well as others who are not here, are willing to support and encourage the next years of effort by the people and government of Afghanistan.

“We expect outcomes that deliver on security — the build up of a Afghan national security force as well as a national police force — tangible benefits that flow to the people of Afghanistan and an accountable, transparent government in so far as that can be obtained, as well as a strong stand against corruption.”

On the eve of the inauguration, Clinton flew from Beijing, where she had been part of President Obama’s Asian tour, to Kabul, to pay a visit to Karzai that had not been announced to the media. Mrs. Clinton told reporters aboard her plane en route to Afghanistan:

“We are asking that [the Karzai team] follow through on much of what they previously said, including putting together a credible anti-corruption governmental entity. They’ve done some work on that, but in our view, not nearly enough to demonstrate a seriousness of purpose to tackle corruption.” She added, “We are concerned about corruption. We obviously think it has an impact on the quality and capacity of governance.”

Will Secretary Clinton’s admonition be just empty words, or does she honestly believe that U.S. pressure will be enough to prompt Karzai to clean up his government?

History is certainly not on Karzai’s side. As Steven J. DuBord observed in his recent article, “[Corruption Rampant in Afghanistan](#)”: “[U]nfortunately for Afghanistan, corruption’s ugly head seems to stay reared most of the time; the war-torn nation fell from being the fifth most corrupt last year to the number two spot this year. (According to the 2009 [Corruption Perceptions Index](#) (CPI) produced by Transparency International.)

If Afghanistan’s ranking has fallen so rapidly even with a strong contingent of U.S. and NATO advisers present, how can things improve after we are gone? Which raises the question: To what end are we sacrificing our soldiers’ lives?

Photo of Hillary Rodham Clinton, Hamid Karzai, and Richard C. Holbrooke: AP Images



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