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News

MP describes raid, condemns civilian casualties and false intelligence

In the May 5 Wolesi Jirga plenary, Safia Sediqi (Nangarhar), who lost a family member during a Coalition raid on her house, described the event and condemned civilian casualties and false intelligence.

The MP argued that civilian deaths are creating a wedge between the people and government. According to her, “the Coalition forces asked about my house in the village and then attacked it. The troops remained at my home until 4am and killed my relative, the father of six children. His two year old daughter says that Americans came and slaughtered her father. The girl yesterday said that she wants a gun to kill Americans.” She explained that the operation had a serious impact on the village and had left people scared.

Sediqi blamed, at least in part, false intelligence for the raid. “Coalition forces were relying on incorrect and false information to search people’s homes and kill innocent people,” she said. She requested that the WJ help her in proving that the Coalition forces searched her home illegally by requesting the evidence used in targeting the location. She claimed that “80% of operations carried out by Coalition forces are based on incorrect information.” American forces, according to Sediqi, recruit informants who "don't know their own people."

Sediqi warned that such “wrong decisions” will foment a reaction from the people.

Responding to Sediqi’s comments, H.E. Speaker Qanooni pledged that “I will take up this issue seriously during my meeting with the US delegation. We condemn the attack on your house and will find a solution for this problem.”

Senators angered at civilian casualties, call for ‘legalization’ of foreign forces

During the Meshrano Jirga plenary of May 2, members held an emotional discussion on continued civilian casualties resulting from Coalition operations. Senators expressed concern over what they perceive to be Coalition insensitivity to and ‘targeting’ of civilians. The outcry comes subsequent to the death of MP Safia Sediqi’s relative (above).

Abdul Hanan Haqyoon (Paktia) called on the upper house to condemn the raid and the killing of three women in Zabul Province. “We are always praying for the victims of such incidents. Can we find any way to put an end to these miseries? Foreign troops are performing barbaric actions in Afghanistan.”

H.E. Speaker Mujadidi told the senators that he had appealed to government officials, including President Karzai, to stop civilian casualties, but that, unfortunately, no one had listened to his suggestions. He added that the government should prosecute perpetrators of these incidents, but that, “President Karzai can’t replace even a district chief. I told him that if he can’t manage or control things, he should resign,” said Mujadidi.

Expressing the need for a defined legal framework within which Coalition forces operate, Mohammad Alem Ezedyar (Panjshir) said, “We have talked several times to President Karzai regarding foreign troops in Afghanistan and demanded of him the legalization of their presence.” Karzai had reportedly accepted the suggestions and assigned the MoFA and MoD to draft a law, but, “Unfortunately, to this day, I have not seen any draft law,” said Ezedyar.

Mawlawee Abdawali Raji (Baglan) lamented the lack of leadership in protecting civilians. “The foreign troops are continuing their barbaric actions and the NA members do not have any Parliamentary immunity... Alas! Afghanistan has no elders to protect our rights,” he said.

Aiming to strike a balance, Speaker Mujadidi acknowledged the need for the continued presence of international forces in Afghanistan. “If the foreigners leave, Pakistan will occupy Afghanistan under the name of Taliban and Al Qaida,” Mujadidi warned. Asserting his leadership, the speaker added, however, that, “You say we don’t have an elder to fight for your rights. We have leaders and elders. See! I am one of them, but I have no power. If I had power, I would declare Jihad.”

Meshrano Jirga briefed on security situation, commander pledges ear

After persistent complaints from the upper house of being ignored by the highest government officials, Minister of Interior, Hanif Atmar, Deputy Minister of Defense, Mohammad Akram,

and National Directorate of Security head, Amrullah Saleh, appeared in the plenary on May 4 to report on security developments and address senators' concerns over civilian casualties, home searches, and the deteriorating security situation in Kandahar Province and other areas.

The officials briefed senators on the situations in Kandahar, Helmand, Kunduz and Baghlan provinces. They described the Marja operation as successful and that security in the district had improved with "terrorists relocating to Kandahar Province." Minister Atmar explained that insurgents are supported by foreigners and find sanctuary outside Afghanistan. The Pakistani ISI trains fighters and deploys them to Afghanistan as either suicide bombers or militants to fight the government, according to Atmar. "I want to let you know that we are ready to combat terrorists and defend our people from their attacks," Mr. Atmar said.

A quick exit by the officials to prepare for President Karzai's trip to the US limited the question and answer period. Speaker Mujadidi explained that the president's office had requested the move and pledged that the security officials will be invited back to the MJ.

While the majority accepted the explanation, others, including Bilqees Roshan (Farah), declared a post US visit meeting of little value. "The Cabinet members should have carried our views to H.E. Obama. They should have conveyed our views to President Karzai... If the US Congress members solicit our views before such high profile meetings, why can't our own president do the same?" argued Roshan before abruptly leaving the session with three other senators. Others downplayed Roshan's protest, attributing it to a lack of knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of a Meshrano Jirga member.

In a related development, the MJ received a letter from ISAF and US force Commander General Stanley McChrystal stating that he is prepared to appear in the Meshrano Jirga to discuss senators' security concerns as soon as he is cleared to do so. In the meantime, his office is open to senators who wish to discuss issues of concern, according to the letter.

WJ delegation visits Pakistan

Speaker Younus Qanooni last week led a delegation of five MPs to Islamabad, Pakistan to meet with representatives of the Pakistan National Assembly. The exchange aimed to explore ways to establish an inter-parliamentary dialogue between the two countries.

During consultations with the WJ delegation, the speaker of Pakistan's National Assembly, Dr. Fehmida Mirza, stressed the importance of fostering relations between the two parliaments. "The governments are in touch, but the two countries have always lacked people-to-people contact. We need to establish greater ties between both houses," she said.

Speaker Qanooni voiced support for Mirza's call for closer ties. "What the governments have done is good, but not enough. MPs speak the words of the people and can build confidence between two brotherly nations," he said. The Afghan delegation was in Pakistan "with a new message of friendship. Let's start anew. Let's forget about the past and look forward to the future," Qanooni declared.

Delegation member Fatema Nazari (Kabul) took the opportunity to congratulate Mirza on her election as the first female speaker of an Islamic parliament. "You are an inspiration for Afghan female MPs. One day we also hope to be in a position to elect a female speaker," Nazari said.

Speaker Qanooni extended an invitation to Mirza to visit the WJ to further promote inter-parliamentary dialogue between the two countries.

The Afghan delegation also met with Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gillani, and the chairman of the Senate, Farooq Hamid Naek.

Speaker Qanooni told the Wolesi May 8 plenary that, "We assured the Pakistani officials that tense relations between us are not in the interest of either country." In turn, Pakistani officials assured the Afghan delegation that Pakistan does not support terrorist groups, explained Qanooni.

MPs Sayed Ishaq Gilani (Paktika), Sayed Mansoor Naderi (Baghlan), Fazel Karim Aimaq (Kunduz), and Dr. Gholam Farooq Maranai (Nangarhar) also participated in the mission.

MPs question foreign minister on Afghans in Iran

Amidst conflicting reports on the number of Afghans sentenced to death in Iran – 284 to 3,000 – Wolesi Jirga (WJ) members invited Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Zalmai Rasul to brief them on the issue.

Rasul explained on May 8 that, according to Iranian officials, nine people have been hanged and 284 are awaiting execution. But, he said, "I cannot guarantee the veracity of these figures; they have been provided by the Iranian government."

Disputing the figures, Abdul Salam Qazi Zadah (Herat) said, "I can tell you that eight more persons have been executed and their bodies have been sent to Afghanistan."

Calling on MPs to exercise caution while stating numbers, Speaker Qanooni said, "We have to be careful about stating figures because, God forbid, if those figures are less than perfectly accurate, it will be bad for the WJ's prestige."

Rasul assured the MPs that the issue has been a top priority during his first four months on the job. He has instructed the Afghan Embassy in Tehran to send a group of officials on a fact finding mission. “We must adhere to legal frameworks to find a solution for this...we have to be careful not to provoke our people against the foreign diplomats, because we also have diplomats in those countries,” Rasul said.

Several MPs sought to address the core of the issue. They argued that as long as there are illegal Afghan refugees in Iran, there will be problems of this nature – their illegal status makes them subject to harsh treatment, according to MPs. “A mechanism needs to be found so that the Iranian government allows one million Afghan workers to work in Iran,” suggested Eng. Mohammad Asem (Baghlan).

Other MPs proposed more radical solutions. “The USA is the strongest and richest country on earth, why don’t we ask them to let a million of these refugees move to the USA? Why can’t we ask Canada, Australia, to do the same?” asked Mohammad Akbary (Bamyan).

To conclude, Minister Rasul explained that there will be no confirmation of the figures until the fact finding groups complete their missions. He agreed to travel to Herat to meet the relatives of those executed in Iran.