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NEWS:

Legislators Blame Takhar Deaths on International Forces

International forces were blamed for recent deaths of Afghans in Takhar province by lawmakers in both houses of the National Assembly this week. A North Atlantic Treaty Organisation-led (NATO) night raid that resulted in the death of two women and two children in the capital of Takhar province sparked violent protests that left 11 more civilians dead and several others injured.

Speaking during the 20 May plenary session of the National Assembly's Wolesi Jirga, MP Qudratullah Zaki (Takhar) accused the police force of "opening fire on innocent civilians, killing 20 and causing injuries to 75 others".

MP Sayed Ikramudin Masumi (Takhar) said, "I believe that what happened in Takhar was a result of a lack of coordination between Afghan authorities and international forces. In the future, I think there needs to be more coordination between them in order to be able to stop incidents like this taking place." MP Haji Sayed Jamal Fakuri Beheshti (Bamyan) concurred, adding that International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is supposed to protect Afghans. "Our people are meant to feel safe. But evidently that is not the case. We need to send a delegation to investigate this case," said Mr. Beheshti. MP Haji Khalil Ahmad Shahidzada (Herat) added; "The incident has two angles: the atrocities committed by foreign forces and atrocities committed by internal forces. The authorities promised that these kinds of irresponsible raids would not take place but they have not been able to stop them."

MP. Sayed Alemi Balkhi (Kabul) disagreed with Mr. Shahidzada. In his view, NATO is solely responsible for the deaths of civilians in Takhar. "We are picking on the wrong people. The crimes have been committed by NATO troops, why are you punishing the local officials? These things are useless. I suggest we release a three-line press release addressing the Security Council to ask the NATO troops to leave Afghanistan. The heart of the problem lies in Pakistan not in Afghanistan. We should demand that the United Nation's Security Council order the NATO troops out of Afghanistan," said Mr. Balkhi.

One legislator also accused the international forces of disrespecting the Afghan people by sexually abusing women during the night raid in Takhar province. MP Alhaj Mawlawi Abdul Rahman Rahmani (Balkh) said: "When I hear the Takhar case, I can't stop crying. When an infidel strips a Muslim woman, who would be able to tolerate it? They also want us to sign the strategic partnership with them and I am sure they will make us sign it. If we stay quiet, Allah will ask us in the afterlife about this."

Contributing to the debate, MP Sawar Ahmad Usmani Farahi (Farah) said: "Whatever crime that is committed in the five continents of the world, is done by those who claim to be spearheading the democratic movement around the world. We have condemned it many times in the past but it hasn't worked. Now what we have to do is refer this case to the United Nations Security Council as a crime against humanity. They kill thousands and all they say is 'excuse me' or 'I am sorry'. The perpetrators of these crimes must be recognized, prosecuted, named and shamed."

MP Mawlawi Shahzada Shahed informed members that protestors in his province have declared a jihad if the Afghan government does not punish perpetrators of the violence. Mr. Shahed further suggested that the National Assembly should have been closed for a day to “show that we are unhappy with the so-called friends”.

Adding his voice to the debate, MP Ramazan Bashardust (Kabul) said: “If our own Afghans sexually assault their daughters, why do we complain about the Americans? If our own Afghans make teenage boys dance (for sexual purposes), why do we complain about the Americans?” MP Shakiba Hashimi (Kandahar) agreed; “What do you expect from a corrupt system, we keep asking for policies or we summon the authorities. Why do we complain about the foreign forces when our own government is dictated to by foreigners?”

Badakhshan MP Mrs. Fawzia Kofi, however, recommended caution about making hasty decisions without knowing what actually happened. “We do not have first hand information from Takhar yet and I suggest we should wait till we get more information then decide.”

At the end of the plenary session, members decided to adopt Speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahimi’s (Kunduz) suggestion to send a delegation to Takhar province to investigate the incident, and invite the heads of security organizations in the country. “These incidents are painful and listening to them is very difficult, let alone experiencing it. A delegation will be formed to visit the province and investigate the case. We will invite the Ministers of Interior and Defense as well as the Director of National Directorate of Security to our general plenary to answer your questions.”

Meanwhile senators in the National Assembly’s Upper House (Meshrano Jirga) also added their criticism of international forces in Afghanistan during the 22 May plenary session. Senator Mawlawi Abdul Wahab Erfan (Takhar) said: “As long as the infidels are present in our country, we can expect things like these. But those local troops, who opened fire at the protestors and caused rivers of blood there, must be prosecuted. I hear from the provincial authorities that they say the protestors had been infiltrated by the Taliban. I categorically reject that.”

Senator Hidayat Ullah Rehayee (Bamyan) said “Some Uzbek suicide bombers had entered Takhar province to attack. The ISAF had intended to capture them but the operation sadly resulted in some innocent lives being lost.”

Concluding the debate, Speaker Fazel Hadi Muslimyar (Nangahar) said: “The government wants freedom of speech, democracy and wants to respect people’s right for peaceful protest, but is ill prepared for demonstrations. The government should be ready to control protests with the use of tear gas and non lethal means; not bullets.”

WJ Apprised of Security Situation

Defense Minister Mr. Abdul Rahim Wardak, Interior Minister Mr. Bismilah Mohammadi, Acting Director of National Directorate of Security Mr. Eng Rahmatullah Nabil and Mr. Barna Karimi, Deputy Head of Local Authority Department apprised the Wolesi Jirga’s 25 May plenary session about the country’s security situation.

Introducing the four government officials Speaker Abdul Rauf Ibrahimi’s (Kunduz) said; “As you know the security situation of the country has deteriorated in the past week. We have invited the honorable gentlemen to give answers to your questions.”

Before MPs could ask their questions, Mr. Wardak briefly updated MPs on the general security situation from a 'Defense Ministry perspective'. Mr. Wardak said: "The enemy has adopted a new strategy and is targeting our security forces. They are trying to create a wedge between our people and our soldiers in order to show that we are not capable. In their opinion, this would convince the international community not to invest in us."

In his briefing, Mr. Mohammadi informed members that the Ministry of Information (MoI) has made considerable successes in halting insurgent attacks. "The Taliban were planning a wave of attacks on government establishments but they have largely failed. Approximately 1680 people have been arrested and charged with terrorist activities. Nine people have been captured red-handed with their suicide vests. We are trying our best and we are succeeding to some extent," he said.

Interrupting Mr. Mohammadi, Speaker Ibrahimi announced that the Minister of Defense had to leave the House because the President has summoned him for a meeting. "The President has summoned the Minister of Defense for a meeting with David Petraeus and the Deputy Foreign Minister of the USA," he said.

The announcement irked some MPs; "It's the biggest insult for the House. The Ministers should remain in the House and the President should postpone the meeting with foreigners to another time. The whole point today is to express our grievances against the foreigners and now they want a meeting," said Mr. Sayed Hussain Alemi Balkhi (Kabul).

Responding to Speaker Ibrahimi's question about the importance of the meeting with the President, Mr. Wardak explained that it was significant as it sought to discuss issues relating to the NATO-led night raids and the US Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister was due to leave for Pakistan later that day.

Mr. Kalakani (Kabul) said: "We are living under exceptional circumstances. Our security is provided by foreigners whether we like it or we don't, so much depends on them. The Minister should go." Supporting the need for Mr. Wardak to attend the meeting with the president, Mrs. Fawzia Kofi (Badakhshan) suggested that all of the government officials should leave and come back another day. "If one leaves and the rest stay, we will not be able to reach a conclusion," she said. The MPs concurred and it was agreed that the officials should come back on 28 May.

Senators Briefed on Economy, International Trade

The Meshrano Jirga on 22 May invited four government officials – Finance Minister Mr. Hazrat Omar Zakhailwal, Commerce Minister Dr. Anwarul Haq Ahadi, Head of Afghan Chamber of Commerce Mr. Qurban Haqjo and Deputy Economy Minister Mr. Nasir Ahmad Shahidi – to brief Senators on issues related to international trade.

Mr. Zakhailwal briefly highlighted the state of the country's finances saying there have been considerable leaps but more needed to be done. "The GDP per capita has gone up from \$180 to over \$600 but it is partly due to international assistance. We have to have alternatives to foreign aid. The first alternative is our mining industry, second is agriculture and the third one is revenues from transit," said Mr. Zakhailwal.

Responding to some Senators' assertion that the Afghan economy is not self-sufficient Minister Ahadi said: "No country is economically self-sufficient, that's why international trade comes to play."

Mr. Haqjo objected to the information given by Mr. Zakhailwal and said poverty is best measured by having a walk to a roundabout. "We are the second poorest country in the world. I don't like that bar for

poverty we have accepted in Afghanistan which is a dollar a day. We had golden opportunities in the past that we have squandered,” said Mr. Haqjo. He went on to criticize government officials. “The appointments in these ministries have been based on ethnic and tribal bases. The people appointed to head economic sectors were all thinking about their personal gains and how to line their own pockets. As long as there is corruption, the masses will not experience any economic growth. There is a small, well connected elite clique that enjoys the rewards but the ordinary people do not,” said Mr. Haqjo, representing the Afghan Chamber of Commerce.

Senator Sefatullah Haqmal (Logar) said: “I agree with Mr. Haqjo that unless we reform our administration and curb corruption, we won’t have economic growth.” Mr. Haji Nazar Mohammad (Kuchi) concurred, saying: “Much has been done but not enough. The most worrying issue is the cartel of big businessmen in Afghanistan.”

Mr. Zakhailwal said: “It would not be possible to eradicate poverty in the next 10 years. We can’t ignore the achievements of the past 10 years.” Responding to the accusations about ethnic balance in his department, Mr. Zakhailwal said: “Forty-five percent of the entire ministry is made up of Pashtoon, while forty-three percent are Tajiks.”

Deputy Minister Shahidi gave an overview of macroeconomic policies that the government needs to pursue for sound job creation and economic stability. He said that in 2010 Afghanistan witnessed negative inflation or deflation of about 4%. He identified agriculture and education as the two sectors where investment was urgently needed. “We must prioritize the agricultural and education sectors. We have to invest in these sectors as a matter of priority. The most important thing in our society is social justice. Our policies must encourage it,” said the Deputy Minister.

Senate Endorses Lower House Amendments to Military Officers Law

The Meshrano Jirga’s (MJ) Internal Security and Defense Affairs Committee on 13 May endorsed the Wolesi Jirga’s (WJ) proposed amendments to the Law on Personal Affairs of Military Officers. In June 2010, the Lower House passed the law, which “regulates the recruitment, promotion, transfer, leave rewards, punishment, suspension, resignation and recruitment of military officers”.

The Defence Committee considered the first 16 articles of the law and suggested minor revisions concerning the issue of retirement addressed in the bill. Members felt the issue of retirement will be regulated by another law which is yet to be submitted to the National Assembly (NA) for review and subsequent approval.

The Committee also agreed to WJ-proposed amendments concerning the length of courses at the military training academy. Currently all officers graduating from a military academy are given diploma certificates irrespective of the time they spend pursuing their training programs. Senators also agreed to the proposal that military ranks be made uniform and take into account the number of years in service.

The committee will complete the review of the amendments to the law before adjourning for the summer recess, tentatively scheduled for 6 June.

Meshrano Jirga ratifies Ban on Cluster Munitions Convention

The Meshrano Jirga on 24 May ratified the Ban on Cluster Munitions Convention. Speaking on behalf of the Committee of International Affairs in support of the measure, Mr. Mawlawi Mohammad Faizi (Panjshir) said: “The Cluster Munitions Convention has been ratified by the Wolesi Jirga (WJ) and has been formally sent to us. We studied the Convention and it serves interests of our country very well. I suggest we too ratify it.”

With no member opposing, the Convention was put to the vote and the House ratified it.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Local Authorities Deputy Director Attend MJ Plenary

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mr. Homayon Azizi and Local Authorities Deputy Director Mr. Barna Karimi attended the 24 May Meshrano Jirga plenary session to respond to Senators’ questions relating to activities of their respective ministries.

Senators asked Mr. Karimi to explain the criteria used to appoint mayors and provincial governors. “Some district chiefs are illiterate and what are you going to do with them? The other question is about mayors’ elections – it has remained on paper for far too long. We are meant to have elected mayors but we haven’t,” said Mr. Gul Ahmad Azami (Farah). Mrs. Belqis Roshan (Farah) added: “Regardless of the reasons for governors’ appointments, I would like to know if these jobs are lifelong jobs? In the past, seven of Farah’s governors have only been changed because of pressure from protestors. But sadly they have been moved to different provinces.”

“We are aware that some officials are appointed based on compromise, is that true?” asked Mrs. Aziza Musleh (Samangan). Mrs. Anar Kali Hunaryar (Kabul) agreed adding: “There are only a few female senior officials in the provinces. I would suggest as a Senator that you consider giving more roles to the women of the country.”

Senators also asked Mr. Karimi to explain some of the measures that the government has put in place to curb rampant corruption by governors and mayors. “We have evidence that governors and mayors are involved in illegal land grab. What have you done to stop it?” asked Mr. Sefatullah Haqmal (Logar).

Mr. Karimi briefed Senators about the process of competitive appointments in the local authorities and said that the system is as transparent and fraud-proof as possible. “There is a board comprised of representatives from houses of the National Assembly, civil society, Kabul University, the Science Academy, the Ministry of Higher Education and the government that decides local appointments. The same board conducts the interviews, organizes the questions and makes decisions. It can’t get better than that,” said Mr. Karimi.”

Mr. Zalmai Zabuli (Zabul) used the opportunity to criticize Mr. Azizi for the manner in which he runs his ministry. “You (Mr. Azizi) increasingly act in a very authoritarian manner. If you can’t do this job, just resign. If you can’t deal with the government and the NA at the same time, please give it up. We have asked you to come to our committees but you refused to comply.”

Responding to the senators’ questions, Minister Azizi informed the House that he did not attend the Complaints Committee’s deliberations because the issues the committee wanted to raise were the same as those on the agenda for the general plenary. “I thought if there was no difference between the Complaints Committee agenda and general plenary, I’d rather come to the general plenary. This week alone, the Kabul

Mayor has been invited five times to various committees of the National Assembly. Now imagine that you were the Kabul Mayor, would you have been able to attend all of these meetings?"

COMMITTEE NEWS:

Wolesi Jirga

Higher Education Committee Discusses Student's Complaint

The Wolesi Jirga Religious, Cultural Affairs, Education and Higher Education Committee on 22 May discussed a complaint submitted to the committee by a student expelled from an Iranian university. Mr. Kamal Nasir Usooli (Khost) chaired the meeting, which was attended by the concerned student.

The student informed the committee that he was enrolled in an Iranian university but was expelled before completing his first year. "I was expelled from the university not because of misbehavior or low GPA, or committing any crime or any other illegal action, but because I was an Afghan and I was defending Afghanistan regarding some political issues," the student said. He added that he had since applied for admission at Kabul University, but had been asked by the Ministry of Higher Education to provide proof from the Iranian university. "I cannot provide that proof because the Iranian university that expelled me did not give me a transcript or anything to prove my performance there . . . I came back to Afghanistan to be an asset to my country, but the Ministry of Higher Education is creating a problem for me," the student said.

The committee resolved to meet with the Minister of Higher Education to intervene on the student's behalf.

WJ Committee Reviews Proposed Internal Rules

The Wolesi Jirga's internal Joint Committee convened on 23 May to review proposed amendments to the house's internal Rules of Procedure. Mr. Qazi Nazeer Ahmad Hanafi (Heart), deputy chairman of the Legislative Affairs Committee presided over the meeting.

While most proposed amendments were passed with minor revisions, a heated debate transpired over one article, which provides for creation of parliamentary groups. The committees were initially split over the minimum number of members needed for the creation of the parliamentary groups, but finally agreed to a minimum of 15 a parliamentary group.

The debate then shifted to a proposed reduction in the number of legislative committees. Currently, the WJ has 18 committees. The members of the Joint Committee decided to defer the controversial proposal to the plenary for further debate.

Meshrano Jirga

Education Committee Considers Complaints

Senator Mahmood Danishjo (Balkh) chaired the Meshrano Jirga's Religious and Cultural Affairs, Education and Higher Education Committee meeting on 21 May, which considered the Dihkopak Primary School principal's complaint. The school is located in District 11 of Kabul.

In a letter addressed to the committee, the principal complained that the school does not have adequate facilities to accommodate the increasing number of students in the district. "Each year the number of students increases and we are the only school for this large area with a large population The Ministry of Education has land available to build another school in this area, but it has been usurped by nomad people," the letter read.

The school principal, Department of Expropriation of the Ministry of Education Director Mr. Mohammad Sediq Karamkhail and the Deputy Director of the Department of Education of Kabul City Mr. Haidari attended the committee meeting.

Senator Danishjo inquired why the government has failed to build another school to serve the district. In response, Mr. Karamkhail said attempts to drive the nomads from the land have failed. "We tried several times to expel the nomads from the land, but some people in the government support them and prevented us from taking any action." Mr. Haidari agreed, adding that the Afghan security organizations had been informed about the problem but have failed to evict the nomads.

The committee called on the Ministry of Education and Kabul Municipality officials to "try to take proper measures to expel the nomads from the area and start building the school". "Meanwhile, I will talk to the Minister of Interior regarding this issue. If you can't seize the land, then you have to find another way to solve the problem of this school," concluded Senator Danishjo.

Upcoming Events:

- Meshrano Jirga's Legislative Committee to hold a public hearing on "*Finding solutions to the problems of prisoners*" on 1 June in the WJ Conference Room at 9:30am

Acronyms

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MJ	Meshrano Jirga
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MPs	Members of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
WJ	Wolesi Jirga