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NEWS:

Wolesi Jirga Calls for Interpellation of Defense and Interior Ministers, Questions Minister of Foreign Affairs and Head of NDS over Attacks

The Wolesi Jirga (WJ) on 1 August called for interpellation of the ministers of Interior and Defense for not taking sufficient action against Pakistan's artillery attacks in eastern Kunar province. The WJ also questioned Foreign Affairs Minister Zalmai Rasoul and National Directorate of Security Head Mr. Rahmatullah Nabeel over the attacks and the deteriorating security situation in the country.

The decision to interpellate Mr. Bismillah Khan (Minister of Interior) and Mr. Rahim Wardak (Minister of Defense) was taken after 20% of the MPs signed a proposal to interpellate them. Some MPs including Mr. Gul Padshah Majedi (Paktia), Ms. Hameeda Akbari (Wardak) and Mr. Zalmai Mujadedi (Badakhshan) were of the opinion that the interpellation be conducted promptly.

Responding to the calls for immediate interpellation of the ministers, Mr. Abdul Rauf Ibrahimy (Kunduz) told the House that it was proper to continue with the questioning of the ministers and security officials since it had been scheduled almost a week ago and set the interpellation for next week. After debating the issue the House agreed to hold the interpellation on Saturday 4 August.

Subsequently, the MPs reverted to the questioning of Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Director of the NDS over the attacks and the response of the Afghan government. Minister Rasoul stated that his ministry has keenly pursued the issue of the artillery attacks through diplomatic channels, but their efforts had so far failed to yield any results. He informed the MPs that his ministry had summoned Pakistan's ambassador to Afghanistan and showed him proof of the attacks. "We have been proceeding through diplomatic channels with Pakistan, and if this fails to work then Afghans should decide on another way to resolve this security issue," said Mr. Rasoul.

Updating the house, Mr. Nabeel, the NDS General Director said that Pakistan has in the last two years targeted Kunar, Nuristan, and Nangarhar provinces. According to him Pakistan's strategy has been four-pronged – missile attacks; moving their bases closer to the border and even encroaching onto Afghan territory; pushing Afghans to get Pakistan's identity cards; and keeping the borders open to Taliban to enter Afghanistan. He listed several reasons for the attacks including the need to establish safe heavens for the Taliban to fight the government security forces post 2014 and an attempt to stretch the border all the way to Kunar River.

The MPs expressed dissatisfaction with the diplomatic route and urged the government to raise the issue with SAARC, NATO and the UN Security Council. "Afghanistan signed the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) with the United States in order to secure Afghanistan from its neighbors. So what has been the role of the US in this regard? Were they officially requested to take action based on the SPA or

not?” Mr. Ali Akbar Qasemi asked Minister Rasoul.

In response to the MPs questions, Mr. Rasoul acknowledged that the diplomatic route was lengthy as certain procedures had to be followed. He said that Afghanistan will have to ask for US support based on the SPA.

Explaining the role of the NDS, Mr. Rahmatullah Nabeel said that their main task is intelligence and collecting information. They are not a policy making security organ, he said and urged Afghans to give moral support to the security forces, especially those at the borders.

Concluding the session, Mr. Abdul Rauf Ibrahim (Kunduz) requested the Minister of Foreign Affairs to officially send a letter of complaint to the UN Security Council.

Meshrano Jirga Invites Security Officials over Pakistan’s Artillery Attacks

The Meshrano Jirga (MJ) on 29 July invited the Interior Minister, Parliamentary Affairs Deputy Minister and high-ranking security officials to update the House on Pakistan’s recent artillery attacks on Kunar province and the general security situation of the country. Mr. Bismillah Khan Mohammadi (Minister of Interior), Mr. Sher Mohammad Kareemi (Chief of Army Staff), Mr. Zia (Operational Deputy of National Directorate of Security) and Mr. Kareem Baz (Deputy Minister of Parliamentary Affairs) attended the MJ session.

Speaking on behalf of the MJ Defense Commission, Kunar Senator Mohammad Amin Safi raised several questions over the shelling of Kunar’s border districts, which according to him, has been going on for the past two years. He said the attacks have resulted in thousands of people being displaced from their homes. “Can you enlighten us on the steps that the government has taken to stop these attacks? Also since it is the duty of North-Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to defend Afghanistan’s borders, have you asked them to defend our borders? How do you assess NATO’s silence in this regard?” Mr. Safi added that since Pakistan was denying these attacks, did the Afghan government have evidence to prove that Pakistan was indeed responsible? He also wanted the officials to inform the House whether the United Nations (UN) had been alerted about the attacks.

Representing the Justice and Reform Parliamentary Group, Mr. Nesar Ahmad Harris (Appointee) questioned the security officials why the Afghan forces did not respond to the Kunar attacks, adding that there were rumors that Pakistan had occupied around 22km of Afghan land.

Highlighting the deterioration of the country’s security situation, Mr. Abdul Wahab Irfan (Takhar) said that Pakistan’s intelligence services (ISI) is targeting key figures of the Afghan government. According to him, the recent assassination of Senator Arsalan Rahmani and MP Ahmad Khan Samangani in suicide bombings shows that the security situation is worsening. “ISI wants to assassinate all influential figures of Afghanistan by 2014, what have you done to save the lives of prominent Afghan officials?” he asked.

Appreciating the National Directorate of Security (NDS) officials’ efforts in seizing tons of explosives, Mr. Zalmi Zabuli (Zabul) said that the NDS should urge the president to invite the Pakistani prime minister and show him the explosives that were seized. He said the NDS should do the same to the Iranian ambassador whose spies were destabilizing Afghanistan.

Responding to the Senators, Interior Minister Mr. Bismillah Khan Mohammadi admitted that the Pakistani intelligence service and army have been shelling Kunar province for the past two years, but could not

confirm allegations that Pakistan was occupying Afghan land. “The security organs presented the report on the attacks to the president. It is up to you (Parliament) and the government to decide on what action to take regarding these attacks. We have the ability to defend our country,” he said. The Interior Minister added that this year alone Pakistan has fired around 1 000 rockets into Afghanistan. “The Afghan parliament and the government have the authority to take a decision and give us orders or instructions in this regard,” he said.

Speaker Muslimyar disagreed with the minister saying there was no need to wait for the decision of parliament. He said it is the duty of the security forces to defend the country and the people.

Representing the Defense Ministry, Mr. Sher Mohammad Kareemi, Chief of Army Staff also confirmed Pakistan’s artillery attacks. According to him, the issue was raised with the Pakistani defense minister, Afghan line ministries, NATO and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) commander but the ISAF commander and NATO have remained quiet while Pakistan has denied the attacks. “It is clear that Pakistan has a hidden agenda behind these attacks and the occupation of Afghan soil in Nangarhar and Khost. Pakistan is trying to pressurize the Afghan government to accept the Duran line as an international border. It is our basic responsibility to protect and defend the people,” said Mr. Kareemi.

In his turn, Mr. Zia said the NDS’ position was that Pakistan wanted to accommodate its spies in these areas where the people have left their homes and pave way for the Taliban to enter Afghanistan. He added that the NDS has prepared a report of these attacks, which has since been sent to relevant organs. Mr. Zia also informed the Senators that the NDS has boycotted meetings with NATO because of its silence toward Pakistan’s attacks. He assured the Senators that the NDS is doing everything to ensure the security of the key figures of the country.

Concluding the discussion, Mr. Muslimyar urged the government and security organs to defend the country and assured them of MJ support.

Wolesi Jirga Ban Appointment of Dual Nationality-holders, Approves Agreements

The Wolesi Jirga on Monday 30 July approved a draft law banning recruitment of Afghans holding dual nationality as ambassadors or consul-generals. According to the legislators, these dual citizenship holders are more committed to their second country than Afghanistan.

During the session the legislators approved two agreements, and four other accords. International Affairs Committee Chairman, Mr. Mohammad Noor Akbari (Daikundi) and the Deputy Chair of the Internal Affairs Committee Mr. Abdul Qayoum Sajadee (Ghazni) presented a member’s bill on employment of Afghan diplomats and consular for approval. The bill centered on the issue of diplomats and consular who have dual citizenship. Since there were no controversial articles in the bill it was put for a vote directly and was approved by the majority of members present.

The Strategic Partnership Agreement between Afghanistan, the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, which covers such issues like good governance, security and cultural relations, was also passed. The House also approved the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Dominican Republic; the protocol on the training of Afghan ground forces with Turkey; the accession of Afghanistan to reformative institution of counter Narcotics 1340; and the law on the preservation of Afghanistan’s cultural heritage were approved by the consensus votes of the MPs.

Meanwhile, Mr. Ghulam Sarwar Usmanee (Farah) informed members that the United States Ambassador to Afghanistan, Mr. Rayon Crocker recently accused 44 Afghan MPs of receiving money from Iran so that they do not assent to the US-Afghan Strategic Partnership Agreement. “Such irresponsible assertion blights the image of Parliament as well as the trust of constituents on their representatives in Parliament,” Mr. Usmanee said. He added that Ambassador Crocker should be summoned to Parliament, failure of which he should be approached through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to send the list of the 44 MPs. In his view, “Such a list will bring into perspective the independence of the Afghan Parliament, in case Ambassador’s assertions are true, otherwise the Ambassador should apologize to the Afghan Parliament officially.”

GENDER:

Wolesi Jirga’s Women’s Affairs Committee Summons Civil Service Reform Commission, IDLG Directors over Gender Issues

The Wolesi Jirga Women Affairs Committee on 31 July summoned directors of the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (CSC) and Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) to discuss gender considerations during the recruitment process as well as alleged improper conduct of some IDLG employees towards female MPs.

CSC employment board director Mr. Mohammad Nader Hotak, Gender Director with the Administrative Reform and CSC Ms. Nayela Naseri, IDLG Administrative deputy Mr. Abdul Mateen Beig, IDLG Human Resources director Mr. Azizullah Qazikhel, IDLG Policy director Baser Sabir and Women Affairs Deputy Minister Mozhgan Mostafawi attended the committee meeting.

Opening the meeting, committee chair Fawzia Kofi told the guests that legislators wanted an explanation on why the 30% quota allocated to females in government departments has not been met and why the CSC reform process has been politicized. Ms. Kofi also asked the government officials to explain allegations of improper conduct of IDLG employees towards female MPs.

To substantiate the seriousness of the gender issues Ms. Mohsini (Daikundi) narrated her ordeal during her visit to her constituency during the recess. According to her, the people of Daikundi arranged a gathering for the opening ceremony of a bridge in Shahrestan district and while she was delivering her speech, two men suddenly entered the session and started firing their weapons apparently in a bid to shoot Ms. Mohsini. She said that two days before the event she had received a call from the security department that the district governor had planned to disrupt the event. According to Ms. Mohsini the district governor has always been against women.

In response, Deputy minister Mostafawi said that her ministry has been working tirelessly for the full implementation of the quota of women in government positions. She said her ministry has jointly signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Administrative Reform and CSC and crafted an affirmative action policy in order to reach the goal of 30% women representation in government positions. She added that since last year the percentage of women employees has actually decreased from 30% to 21% due to the Priority Reform and Restructuring system, which demands that employees in certain government departments must hold a minimum qualification of a bachelor’s degree. Most of the women who have been serving in government departments over the years did not have these degrees.

She said such ministers as Education, Public Health, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled are some of the few which have a good percentage of women employees. In the security sector, she said the figure is around 4-5% women employees. Ms. Mostafawi asked the CSC to specify the tenure of employment of

provincial directors as well as raising the official rank one step forward to encourage women to apply for vacant positions.

In her brief to the committee, CSC Gender Director Ms. Naseri said the Administrative Reform and CSC is concerned with implementation of the Gender policy, inclusion of Gender in laws, elimination of discrimination and enhancing women's participation in the civil service. She added that to attain these targets the commission has developed a 5-year action plan to maintain Gender equality at all levels of government. Ms. Naseri said the commission is going to establish gender units in all 34 provinces, as well as evaluate women's working conditions. She added that the commission has successfully established gender units in all ministries albeit at lower ranks, which is why women are less effective than men at all levels because the leadership positions are all occupied by men.

On the improper conduct of IDLG staff to female legislators, Mr. Beig, the IDLG deputy stated that this was the first time that he had heard of such misbehavior and promised to investigate the issue. He added that IDLG is committed to bringing positive reform at every related level. Regarding the recruitment process he said that all the local employees are hired in a transparent and neutral process but most of the times it is the parliamentarians who interfere with the process.

At the end of the meeting the committee resolved that it was necessary to amend the civil service law to include the 30% quota for recruitment of women in all government positions. The Women's Affairs Ministry and CSC were tasked to conduct a survey on women in both leadership and lower positions. The committee also called for the need to specify the tenure of employment of local directors and governors, assess women directorates in provinces, follow up on the incident against Ms. Mohsini and direct all district governors to respect all female MPs. The legislators said it was imperative that Gender be included in all training sessions conducted for local employees.