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AFGHANISTAN REVIEW

This document is intended to provide an overview of relevant sector events in Afghanistan from 03 February - 09 February 2010. More comprehensive information is available on the Civil-Military Overview (CMO) at www.cimicweb.org. Hyperlinks to original source material are highlighted in blue and underlined in the embedded text.

UNODC: COUNTER-NARCOTICS

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In a report issued today, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) projects a stable opium crop in Afghanistan in 2010. The UNODC *Winter Rapid Assessment* 2010 is based on farmers' intentions at the time of planting in a total of 536 villages over 188 districts nation-wide. While most of the poppy is still under the ground, this assessment gives the first indication of what Afghanistan's opium harvest may look like in 2010.

The assessment reports that this is the year to consolidate gains made in the struggle against Afghan opium. Opium cultivation in Afghanistan has decreased by one third (36%) over the past two years, from a record high of 193,000 ha in 2007 to 123,000 ha in 2009. In 2010 cultivation will stabilise, sending a clear message that "in order to further reduce the biggest source of the world's deadliest drug, there must be better security, development and governance in Afghanistan" said UNODC Executive Director Antonio Maria Costa.

While cultivation remains static across Afghanistan, the number of opium-free provinces is projected to rise, from 20 in 2009 to as high as 25 this year with effective intervention and assistance. Of the 20 provinces that were poppy-free last year, 17 are expected to remain so. Three provinces in the north (Baghlan, Faryab and Saripul) show signs of losing that status, due to a small increase in cultivation in districts prone to high insecurity. Conversely, 5 provinces that cultivated opium last year may attain poppy-free status in 2010 (Kunar, Nangarhar, Kabul, Laghman and Badakhshan).

"I urge the Afghan government and the international community to focus special attention on the eight provinces where opium cultivation is negligible, though not poppy-free", said Mr Costa.

Since 2007, market forces have played a major role in influencing farmers' decisions against opium cultivation. In the south-west of the country, where most of the opium is grown, a quarter of farmers cited low prices and low yields as the main reasons for not growing opium this year. However, price trends are starting to reverse. The price of licit crops, like wheat (down 43%) is falling faster than the price of opium (down 6%) which makes poppy a more attractive crop to poor farmers.

At the same time almost two thirds of the villages which are expected to cultivate opium in 2010 had not received agricultural assistance in 2009. "Development assistance is badly needed to help Afghan farmers find income alternatives to opium", said Mr. Costa.

The head of UNODC also underlined the need for good governance as there is a strong correlation between insecurity and cultivation. The UNODC assessment shows that almost 80% of villages with very poor security conditions grew poppy, while opium grows in only 7% of villages unaffected by violence. Where the government is more able to enforce the law, a large percentage of farmers (61%) said that they did not cultivate opium because it is banned.

"The Afghan authorities must lead and own the drug control strategy: the rest of the world has a vested interest in its success," said Mr. Costa.

[\(Click here to access the 'UNODC Afghanistan Opium Survey 2010'\)](#)

ECONOMIC STABILIZATION

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Reuters reports that US Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke have discussed the importance of providing [Afghan farmers](#) with legitimate alternatives to poppy cultivation. Holbrooke speculated that agricultural reforms could result in an increase of up to one million jobs, including those in the area of marketing and packaging agricultural products. In a local Afghan *Tolo TV* broadcast, university lecturer Hamidollah Faruqi cites reports estimating between USD 3 and 4 billion per year is earned through [drug smuggling](#) in Afghanistan, primarily heroin. To put the figures in perspective, the World Bank places the country's 2007 [Gross Domestic Product \(GDP\)](#) at USD 11.6 billion.

According to *Ariana TV*, Uzbekistan reopened its [border](#) with Afghanistan on 08 February following negotiations between officials from both countries. The border was closed by Uzbekistan five months

earlier due to fears of swine flu contamination. The reopening of the border is important for Afghan merchants who sell their goods in the neighbouring country.

Agence France-Presse (AFP) reports that insecurity in Afghanistan is increasing [gold prices](#), making the commodity too expensive for most Afghans. According to the report, the price increase has had negative effects on local gold merchants, who are finding it hard to identify buyers.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industries has announced its plans to [privatise](#) the Afghan state-run Fuel and Liquid Gas Enterprise (FLGE), according to a *Tolo TV* news broadcast. The company's assets are reportedly worth USD 2 billion. The Ministry told *Tolo TV* that the privatization plan is designed to increase efficiency by reducing waste and embezzlement. [\(Comments? Click here\)](#)

GOVERNANCE & PARTICIPATION

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According to the Afghan website *Benawa*, an Advisor to the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics, Mustafa Khan Wardak, has been fired from his position and sentenced to three years in jail over [accusations of corruption](#) and illegal distribution of land plots. The article states that Wardak was sentenced for illegally selling government land in Ghazni province. In a similar story, *National Public Radio (NPR)* reports that the brother of President Karzai, Ahmed Wali Karzai, who heads the Kandahar Provincial Council and has [reportedly been associated](#) with the illegal drug trade, has been accused by US and Afghan officials of being [at the centre of illegal land grabs](#) in Kandahar. The article quotes a top US corruption investigator in Afghanistan, saying that illegal land grabs have become a recurring corruption scheme. According to local *Radio Arman*, the Afghan Ministry of Commerce and Industries has [launched a new programme](#) to fight administrative corruption which involves the prosecution of ministry employees

engaged in graft. *Tolo TV* reports that a number of religious scholars in Kabul have also [spoken out against corruption](#), calling for a serious fight against graft based on Islamic codes.

Reuters reports that the Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC) has [banned 6,000 election staff](#) from working in the upcoming parliamentary poll, for failing to abide by the body's "*mechanisms and procedures*" in last year's presidential election. The 6,000 banned individuals will be prevented from working on any future elections according to IEC spokesman Noor Mohammad Noor. Banning corrupt IEC employees is seen as part of a long list of necessary steps to reform the country's electoral system ahead of the parliamentary poll scheduled for September 2010. [\(Comments? Click here\)](#)

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE[\[CLICK HERE FOR DISCUSSION BOARD\]](#)Valeria Davanzo, valeria.davanzo@cimicweb.org / +1 757-683-4271[Back to top](#)

In a statement released by the Afghan Ministry of Defence on 09 February, officials confirmed at least 28 people died and hundreds were trapped after a [series of avalanches](#) blocked a tunnel in the northern part of Afghanistan. A deputy presidential spokesman informed *Tolo TV* that a rescue force of 600 soldiers and other police units managed to [evacuate 2,500 people](#), including 70 injured, while rescuers continued to dig out vehicles stuck on the snow-blocked [Salang Pass](#). As of 10 February, *Tolo TV* reports that the death toll has risen to 60. According to the *Reuters*, days of heavy snow generated the avalanches which blocked the 1.6 mile tunnel. Heavy snowfall and rain have also caused flooding in other parts of the country, blocking roads and causing a number of deaths. According to the Deputy Minister of Public Welfare, [165 specific points in 21 provinces](#) have been listed as vulnerable areas, and are being closely monitored to allow for assistance interventions.

Various media sources report that [hundreds of families are fleeing](#) Marjah in the Nad Ali District of Helmand province in anticipation of a joint NATO-Afghan military operation. The operation, known as Moshtarak ('Together' in Dari) is expected to be the biggest military push since the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan. *IRIN News* was informed by a Helmand provincial spokesman that an

emergency commission has been set up by the authorities to provide assistance to displaced families. [According to AFP](#), the local government has also set up reception centres where food and shelter is being made available to fleeing families.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) reports that between [400 and 500 families](#) have already arrived in Helmand's capital Lashkar Gah. The displaced families are being registered by the emergency commission and will be moved to a refugee centre located at a local school facility. Despite these preventive measures, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has raised concerns about access to healthcare for the conflict-affected population. The ICRC Communications Officer in Kabul informed *IRIN* that the organisation fears that people in need of healthcare will be [denied access](#) to the appropriate facilities due to checkpoints, road blocks and the broader effects of an overall sense of insecurity. In an attempt to inform the population, the ICRC has communicated the location of the only first-aid post in Marjah to all parties to the conflict. Meanwhile, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) are pre-positioning food and non-food items for up to 3,000 conflict-affected families. **(Comments? [Click here](#))**

INFRASTRUCTURE[\[CLICK HERE FOR DISCUSSION BOARD\]](#)Matthew Hall, matthew.hall@cimicweb.org / +1 757-683-5273[Back to top](#)

The *Associated Press* reports that delays in ongoing attempts to upgrade the [Kajaki dam](#), resulting from high levels of insecurity in Helmand province, have led to major setbacks in the electrification of neighbouring Kandahar province. In addition to providing electricity to residents of Kandahar City, the subsequent boost in electricity would allow for 90 factories that are currently idle to resume production, resulting in the creation of thousands of jobs.

The US military plan to spend money on projects in areas where Afghan tribes are taking a stand against the Taliban has been, according to *Reuters*, [conditionally accepted](#) by the Afghan government. The plan promoting local militias known as District Protection Shuras (DPS) appears to have been experimentally proposed to the [Shinwari Tribe](#). In contrast to international media, *Ariana TV* reports that the Afghan [government has actually rejected](#) the plan, demanding more government control in project implementation.

Noor TV reports that a US Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded [radar system](#) has been installed at Kabul International Airport. According to officials at the Ministry of Transport and Civil Aviation, the USD 10 million system is expected to increase efficiency and safety at the airport. The report indicates that Kabul International Airport has previously been operating without the use of radar technology.

According to *National TV Afghanistan*, the installation of poles for anticipated [electrical power lines](#) has begun. The initiative, funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), is expected to transfer 220 kilowatts of electricity from Tajikistan to Afghanistan. In late January, [Tajik engineers](#) urged their Afghan counterparts to speed up construction efforts on their side of the border to complete the project on time.

Pajhwok Afghan News reports that several [uplift schemes](#) have been inaugurated in the northern

part of Samangan province. The projects are expected to benefit 10,000 families and were funded by the World Food Programme (WFP) Food-for-Work programme.

A [Japanese-funded canal](#) in the Khiva district of Nangarhar province has been inaugurated, reports the *Afghan Islamic Press* of Pakistan. The canal is

24 km-long and reportedly costs USD 14 million. The Japanese NGO Peshawar Kai Medical Services, headquartered in Peshawar, Pakistan, has also built a large mosque and madrassa in Khiva, according to the Nangarhar Governor Gul Sherzai. **(Comments? [Click here](#))**

JUSTICE & RECONCILIATION

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Following President Karzai's visit to Saudi Arabia (refer to [03 February CFC Afghanistan Review](#), Justice & Reconciliation section), presidential advisor Masoom Stanekzai [denied rumours](#) that the Saudi visit brought the Afghan government into contact with militants, reports the *Christian Science Monitor*. Stanekzai told reporters that the trip was intended to gather international support for Karzai's new reconciliation programme. The Presidential Palace in the Saudi capital Riyadh [issued a statement](#) after the visit saying King Abdullah assured Karzai of his support for ongoing peace initiatives in Afghanistan. *Daily Afghanistan* highlighted the potential [role of Saudi Arabia](#) in Afghanistan's reconciliation efforts, stressing Saudi Arabia's political clout in the Muslim world. According to the *Daily Times* of Pakistan, the [Pakistani Foreign Office](#) also declared the country's support for reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan, stating that Pakistan could play a significant role and would help in whatever way it is asked to. Denying rumours that the US is engaged in direct talks with the Taliban, US Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke rejected media reports that his country held [secret meetings with Taliban](#) representatives, as reported by *Voice of America*.

In a related reconciliation development, insurgent leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has released a [new video message](#) affirming his openness to talks with the Afghan government. He has placed the

condition that the Afghan government distances itself from the influence of foreign forces, as reported by the Afghan website *Larawbar*. According to the report, Hekmatyar's son met with Afghan Members of Parliament (MPs) in late January in the Maldives as part of efforts to promote reconciliation and peace talks in the country. Meanwhile, the Afghan *Hasht-e Sobh* [doubts Hekmatyar's intentions](#) to reconcile with the Afghan government. The daily writes that according to a Hezb-e Islami (Hekmatyar's political movement) spokesman, there has been no change in the position of the group. Previous conditions included the release of all Taliban prisoners, a permanent ceasefire and the formation of a new interim government.

Tajikistan has [handed over 81 Afghan prisoners](#) to Afghan officials, *Arzu TV* reports. The prisoners, all Afghan citizens, were handed over to Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) by officials from the Tajik Consulate in Kunduz province. According to the report, officials from the Afghan Ministry of Justice have said that the cases would be investigated and the detainees held in Afghan detention centres for the remainder of their sentences. *Arzu TV* quotes a spokesman from the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs saying that approximately 250 Afghan citizens are still being held in Tajik prisons, and that their transfer is expected in the near future. **(Comments? [Click here](#))**

SECURITY

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At an [informal meeting](#) of NATO Defence Ministers in Turkey, Commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan General Stanley McChrystal told *BBC* reporters that the situation in Afghanistan is [no longer deteriorating](#) at the same rate as in the summer of 2009. According to McChrystal, improved coordination with Afghan troops has aided in producing positive results and he expects to see additional progress in 2010. McChrystal did, however, explain that the situation remains

extremely serious and he is not yet ready to say a "corner has been turned." Prior to the Defence Ministers meeting and following the 28 January London Conference on Afghanistan, NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said [more personnel were needed](#) for 21 international teams to train the Afghan National Army and upwards of 100 for the Afghan National Police. *TIME* magazine has revealed information about preparation for [Operation Moshtarak](#) ('Together' in

Dari), to be jointly conducted by NATO and ANSF. The offensive push will focus on regaining control of the town of Marjah, a Taliban stronghold in [central Helmand province](#) close to the provincial capital Lashkar Gah. According to *TIME*, last summer US and NATO troops recaptured much of the Taliban territory in the volatile southern region, however due to troop shortages were unable to take control of the town of Marjah. The region around Marjah is mainly agricultural and much of the infrastructure was built by the United States to make use of the agricultural opportunities in the Helmand River valley. With the many irrigation

canals and small bridges, the terrain is highly conducive to planting Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Unlike previous military operations, [Operation Moshtarak has been announced](#) to the local community in advance in an attempt to prepare the civilian population and allow sufficient time for those who choose to leave the area. Alternatively, the announcement also gives Taliban fighters time and space to set up a solid defence. According to the Pakistani daily *Dawn*, the Taliban have indicated they [do not intend to give up](#) this strategic stronghold. **(Comments? Click here)**

SOCIAL WELL-BEING

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Compared with only 56 functioning schools in Helmand province in 2008, today the province recognises 116 active educational facilities. According to a spokesperson from the Ministry of Education (MoE), within the past year 60 [schools have been reopened](#), resulting primarily from informal agreements with the Taliban. The MoE representative told journalists from *IRIN News* that this achievement is the result of a joint effort between MoE officials and local tribal and religious elders who helped convince Taliban insurgents. Taliban conditions for reopening the schools, accepted by the MoE, included following a curriculum that is in full compliance with Islamic values and requiring all female students to wear the 'hijab.' However, the majority of the reopened schools are for boys and only a few girls schools are currently operational. Most of the schools available for female students are in the capital Lashkar Gah, outside of the main sphere of Taliban control.

According to a USAID news release, millions of people across Afghanistan receive daily news updates on development and progress in their country through radio [programmes broadcast by Internews](#), a US-funded news agency. *Internews* employs approximately 40 Afghans, from technicians to reporters, and finances start-up radio

stations, providing equipment and staff training for the first six months of operation. According to the USAID press release, after the first six months the stations are financed through public service announcements paid for by NGOs, the UN and other civil society organisations. Producing news in both local languages (Dari and Pashto), the aim of the media programme is to build capacity among local journalists and other media professionals, while focusing on a provincial audience. In a similar news item, *Azadi Radio* reports that the Ministry of Information and Culture has announced that it will hold [two national conferences](#) that will involve Afghans living in the country and abroad. The conferences will focus on (i) democracy and the future of Afghanistan and (ii) the scope and purpose of media in Afghanistan.

In Baghlan province, 150 women received USAID-funded [training in gabion weaving](#) from Mercy Corps, according to *Pajhwok Afghan News*. Gabions are bottomless baskets or metal frameworks filled with rocks that are used as a low-cost solution to erosion. The programme is designed to financially empower head-of-household women who will receive AFN 300 (USD 6.33) for each gabion produced. **(Comments? Click here)**

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