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AFGHANISTAN REVIEW

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This document is intended to provide an overview of relevant sector events in Afghanistan from 10 February - 17 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.

ECONOMIC STABILIZATION

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The US announced USD 100 million in [agricultural development aid](#) for Afghanistan and Pakistan during a tri-lateral meeting in Qatar, as reported by the *Associated Press of Pakistan*. The story notes that the US views this aid as instrumental in providing Afghan farmers with alternatives to poppy cultivation. In a related *Pajhwok Afghan News* story, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) provided 50,000 [apple tree seedlings](#) worth AFN 2.5 million (approx. USD 53,000) to farmers in Ghazni province. *Pajhwok* also reports that the European Union (EU) will spend EUR 1 million on [agricultural programmes](#) in Samangan province. The programmes will be implemented by the German Technical Corporation (GTZ) in Dara-i-Sauf Bala and Payeen districts, and will benefit 34,500 families and increase yields for an estimated 2,500 farmers. EU member-state [Italy will also reportedly spend](#) EUR 25 million on Afghanistan's development in the first six months of 2010, according to a separate news item in *Pajhwok*. The money will be routed through the Afghan government to improve agriculture, healthcare and rural development.

Afghan *Aina TV* reports that [food prices](#) in Takhar province are increasing due to the damaged Kokcha

Bridge. Alternate routes mean goods are taking longer than usual to reach marketplaces and shops, driving up the transportation costs which are passed on to the consumer. In a related piece, *Pajhwok* reports that residents in the northern part of Ghor province are experiencing significantly higher [fuel prices](#) caused by recent road blockages due to heavy snowfall.

Two news items indicate that Pakistan is growing increasingly concerned about lost revenue to smuggling. By virtue of the existing Afghan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA), goods transiting Pakistan bound for Afghanistan are not subject to customs duties. However once these goods enter Afghanistan, they are reportedly often smuggled back into Pakistan and resold, resulting in lost revenue for the Pakistani government. *The News of Pakistan* reports that [Pakistani Customs](#) recently seized a large supply of electronic items smuggled from Afghanistan into Karachi. *Ausaf* of Pakistan quotes an official Pakistani government notification that details items to be confiscated in an attempt to [curb the smuggling](#). ([Comments? Click here](#))

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GOVERNANCE & PARTICIPATION

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Prior to the joint international-Afghan military *Operation Moshtarak*, Afghan Minister of Interior Hanif

Atmar and a number of central government officials visited Helmand province to engage in [talks with](#)

[local elders](#), as reported by the *Afghan Islamic Press*. The *shura*, held in Helmand's capital Lashkar Gah, included elders from the Nad-e Ali, Babaji and Nawzad districts. According to the *Wall Street Journal (WSJ)* the reaction of the tribal elders was mixed, with [some pledging cooperation](#) while others remained skeptical. The *WSJ* also quoted a tribal elder saying that Taliban control over Marjah was the result of central government policy, which abandoned the area several years ago. Widespread corruption was also blamed for local mistrust of Kabul.

The British Ministry of Defence [published an article](#) claiming that governance is at the forefront of *Operation Moshtarak*. A strong emphasis is reportedly to be put on extending the authority and influence of the Afghan government after the area is cleared of insurgents. NATO Senior Civilian Representative Mark Sedwill is quoted as saying that the success of the operation will not be determined in the military phase, but rather by the benefits of better governance provided to the local population over the weeks and months to come.

According to *Kabul Weekly*, the Afghan Supreme Court has started to [review electoral complaints](#) from the 2009 presidential and provincial council elections, following a presidential decree calling on the Court to look into the cases. The article claims

that election candidates who were unsatisfied with the final decisions of the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) lobbied parliament for further investigations. *Kabul Weekly* writes that a meeting between President Karzai, the Chief Justice and the Speaker of the Lower House resulted in the decree. ECC officials and legal experts claim that the decree violates Article 52 of the [electoral law](#), which gives the ECC responsibility to investigate complaints and make final decisions.

The *Washington Post* reports that the Afghan government has [drafted proposed changes](#) to the electoral law. The proposal suggests removing all three foreign members from the ECC and introduces a series of requirements for presidential candidates, including the possession of a Bachelor's degree and the ability to deposit AFG 5 million (approx USD 100,000), to be refunded only if the candidate wins or receives more than 20% of the vote. The draft is also said to limit the number of female representatives in the lower house to two per province. Presidential spokesman Wahid Omar confirmed that the amendments have passed through the cabinet, and the proposal is now with the Ministry of Justice.

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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

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The number of deaths resulting from a series of avalanches last week along the Salang Pass in Parwan province has risen to [185 people](#), according to official government sources reporting to *Al Jazeera*. While landslides and avalanches in this mountainous area of Afghanistan are relatively common, Member of Parliament (MP) Shukria Barakzai told *IRIN News* that the tragedy illustrates [another institutional failure](#) in Afghanistan's disaster management system. The Director of the National Meteorology Authority (NMA) explained that avalanches are highly unpredictable and the population was informed of upcoming heavy snowfall in the area. Despite this, he conceded that the NMA lacks scientific competence, funds and basic tools to prepare reliable weather forecasts. *Quqnoos* reports that the families of the victims will receive [USD 2,000](#) from the government as compensation.

Pajhwok Afghan News has been alerted by the head of the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA) in Kandahar of flash flooding caused by heavy rainfall and snow. The floods have left 108 tent-dwelling nomad families living on the river bank between Kandahar and Helmand prov-

inces without homes. The families have also lost a significant part of their livestock as a result of the flooding.

Helmand provincial spokesman Daud Ahmadi informed *AFP* that more than [1,240 families have fled](#) the military offensive against the Taliban in Marjah. According to Ahmadi, most families left the town to seek refuge with relatives and friends in the provincial capital Lashkar Gah. Ahmadi explained that to prevent the situation from becoming permanent, local authorities and aid agencies deliberately decided not to set up refugee camps for the displaced. As of 17 February, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced the arrival of 1,573 families in Lashkar Gah, reporting that there was [no significant shelter problem](#). The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) informed *IRIN* that food and non-food items and shelters have been organized for families arriving in the capital, and that distributions are ongoing. Local NGOs and government bodies have already distributed aid to some 800 displaced families, and stocks are available to respond to the immediate needs of additional internally displaced per-

sons (IDPs). According to the second [OCHA update on Helmand displacement](#), 110 families have fled to Helmand's Nawa district, with 300 families reportedly crossing the provincial border into Khashrod

district in neighbouring Nimroz province. **(Comments? [Click here](#))**

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INFRASTRUCTURE

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Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and acting Afghan Minister of Energy and Water Ismail Khan met to discuss cooperation on multiple [power line projects](#), including a 220 kilovolt power line between the two countries and a 500 kilovolt line between the two nations and Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan. [In a related story](#) aired on Uzbek TV's *Channel One* about electricity production in Uzbekistan, it was noted that Uzbekistan exported 25 megawatts of electricity to Afghanistan in 2009 and expects to export 150 this year. An estimated 85% of urban households and 94% of rural households in Afghanistan have [no access](#) to electricity according to the US Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. *McClatchy News* also reported that a contract for a USD 300 million [power plant](#) in Afghanistan, funded by USAID, is being investigated for having been improperly awarded. According to the article, the power plant project has previously been criticized for delays and cost overruns.

During a visit to Balkh province, US Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry announced that the US will provide USD 5 million for continuing construction on a [railway line](#) between Mazar-e Sharif and Hayratan on the border with Uzbekistan. This connection would, according Afghan *Arzu TV*, facilitate better trade between Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Aina TV reports that the Minister of Communications and Information Technology announced the implementation of thousands of relatively inexpensive [internet-capable phone lines](#) in the capital. According to the article, the government plans to lower the cost of internet service by providing 250,000 capable phone lines in urban areas throughout the country.

According to *Pajhwok Afghan News*, [68 uplift schemes](#) have been completed in the south-eastern part of Khost province. The schemes cost AFN 36 million (approx. USD 760,000) and are anticipated to benefit almost 12,000 families. According to the article, more than 1,000 projects have been completed in Khost to date. In other news from *Pajhwok*, [three uplift schemes](#) were completed in the northern area of Balkh. The projects include the construction of roads, bridges and a cultural centre. The initiatives cost USD 140,000 and will benefit more than 1,000 families. The story also notes that in the western part of Herat, a clinic which will serve 30,000 families has also completed. **(Comments? [Click here](#))**

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JUSTICE & RECONCILIATION

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According to the *Guardian*, the Afghan government [quietly passed](#) an [amnesty law](#) in the weeks leading up to the 28 January London Conference, granting amnesty to insurgents willing to lay down their arms. The British daily reports that the law was passed by the Afghan National Assembly in 2007, but was not put into effect due to its controversial content. The law also reportedly guarantees immunity from prosecution for crimes allegedly committed by warlords during the civil war era of the 1990s. Local *Noor TV* reports that presidential spokesman Wahid Omar also confirmed during a [press conference](#) that those willing to join the reconciliation process will be guaranteed immunity. Domestic and international [human rights groups](#) have criticised the move and called on the Afghan government to suspend the controversial legislation.

According to the *Daily Telegraph*, presidential advisor Masoom Stanekzai, who is working on Afghanistan's revived reconciliation initiatives, considers Pakistan to be the [biggest obstacle](#) to national reconciliation. Stanekzai told the paper that Pakistan, with reported lines of communication to Taliban leaders and commanders, was an essential part of new reconciliation efforts. According to Stanekzai, Islamabad has not made any substantial progress to assist Kabul in reaching out to the insurgency. He stressed that while the Karzai administration has a good relationship with the civilian leaders of Pakistan, cooperation with the Pakistani military was "a different story."

A report by *United Press International* (UPI) points out that the position of Hezb-e Islami insurgent

leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (see [10 February CFC Afghanistan Review](#), Justice & Reconciliation sector) could [complicate Afghanistan's reconciliation](#) efforts. According to *UPI*, while the 'Quetta Shura' Taliban faction announced they would not enter peace talks with the Afghan government until international forces first left the country, Hekmatyar stated that his preconditions were the withdrawal of foreign forces within 18 months and the establishment of an interim government. The Pakistani *Daily Express* stresses the [significance of Hekmatyar](#) in reconciliation efforts, and the Afghan daily *Hasht-e Sobh* [quotes a former](#) insurgent saying that both the Taliban and Hezb-e Islami need to be given a role in any power-sharing agreement.

Raising concerns over ongoing reconciliation efforts, former presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah [warned donor countries](#) not to accept backroom peace deals with the Taliban. In an interview with the Canadian *National Post*, Abdullah claimed that secret negotiations with the Taliban would circumvent the Afghan parliamentary system and compromise the democratic achievements made over the last nine years. Speaking at a local gathering, Abdullah termed Karzai's reconciliation initiatives as "bribery." **(Comments? Click here)**

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SECURITY

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The military offensive on Taliban stronghold Marjah in Helmand province began on 13 February. [Operation Moshtarak](#) involves more than 15,000 International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Afghan troops, according to a *BBC Radio* daily report. The operation was [announced more than a week in advance](#) in an attempt to reduce the risk of collateral damage and persuade Taliban fighters to lay down their arms ahead of the offensive push. *BBC* reports that military officials have initiated [meetings with tribal elders](#) in the area with the intention of bringing in Afghan police and civilian experts at the earliest possibility to begin establishing government control. According to the Digital Video and Imagery Distribution System (DVIDS), as of 16 February ISAF and Afghan troops have seen [less resistance from the Taliban](#) with only a few small-scale attacks. DVIDS reports that the majority of the area's population centres are now under the control of the ISAF and Afghan troops.

International media announced the arrest of [Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar](#), the Afghan Taliban's second in command, more than a week ago in Karachi, Pakistan. According to US officials and analysts, this is the most significant capture since the 11 September 2001 attacks, and could represent a significant step in degrading the Taliban's leadership structure. A senior Pakistani source told *CNN* that Baradar is

being held in joint custody by both US and Pakistani officials. The Executive Director of the Asia-Pacific Foundation told journalists that if anyone has information on the whereabouts of senior al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders, it would be Baradar. Taliban spokesmen have denied the reports, saying that Baradar is currently operating in Afghanistan and these "rumours" are intended to demoralize Taliban fighters.

In response to recent requests from the international community for additional troop support in Afghanistan, *CNN* reports that the [Spanish government](#) has announced it will deploy more than 500 more troops to Afghanistan, boosting their contribution to 1,600. The troop increase is still pending approval from the Spanish parliament, however expectations are that many of the troops will be used to train the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the Afghan National Police (ANP), who are expected to take over responsibility for the country's security as soon as possible. According to the *CNN* article, 23 Spanish soldiers have died in Afghanistan since 2002, with one of those deaths occurring last week when a military vehicle struck a mine. **(Comments? Click here)**

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SOCIAL WELL-BEING

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According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, [civilian casualties](#) resulting from *Operation Moshtarak* in Helmand province have attracted particular attention due to the recently implemented international

military strategy focused on protection of the local population. As reported by the *Wall Street Journal*, Commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan General Stanley McChrystal has recognised that the

conflict cannot be won by military means alone, which has led to coalition forces outlining new rules of engagement intended to [gain Afghan support](#). While special consideration has been placed on the civilian population by international military forces, numerous international organisations and Afghan officials have voiced concern over repeated human rights violations by the Taliban. Afghan Brigade Commander for Marjah Mohiudin Ghori told the *Associated Press* that Taliban insurgents are increasingly [using civilians as human shields](#). In addition to planting a large number of mines in the countryside surrounding Marjah, Ghori accuses the Taliban of attracting combat to areas largely populated by women and children. Amnesty International has also informed *Agence France-Presse* that the Taliban have [prevented civilians from leaving the area](#) to seek shelter elsewhere. Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific Director states that the Taliban have a history of deliberately endangering civilian lives. The organisation has also called on NATO and ISAF forces to do more to protect civilians by setting up a mechanism to investigate civilian casualties to ensure accountability.

The Ministry of Public Health informed *IRIN News* that the three-day sub-national polio immunization campaign which started on 14 February was unable to reach [170,000 children](#) in the Nad Ali district of Helmand due to the ongoing military operation. The

campaign targeted 500,000 under-five children for polio immunization. Two cases have been recorded in the district since January, leaving the health authorities concerned about the further possible transmission of the virus.

Badakhshan female provincial council member Gulalay Akbari has alerted *Pajhwok Afghan News* of an alleged [increase in heroin addiction](#) in the province, particularly among women and children. Several locals were cited by *Pajhwok* explaining how their addiction was brought on by the use of the drug for pain. Akbari says the number of women and children addicted to heroin has increased well beyond 10,000, mainly in districts bordering Pakistan and Tajikistan. Last year, Akbari helped convince local authorities and aid agencies to construct a rehabilitation centre in the province, however work on the building has not yet begun.

The Afghan national cricket team defeated the United Arab Emirates, qualifying the team for the [World Twenty20 Championship](#) in the Caribbean in late April. This win is considered a historic day for the Afghan team, whose players are mostly composed of former refugees who learned to play cricket in camps in neighbouring Pakistan. **(Comments? [Click here](#))**

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