

**Joan Shorenstein Center
on the Press, Politics and Public Policy**
Discussion Paper Series

#D-76, January 2013

**Podium Wars:
President Hamid Karzai, the Foreign Press,
and the Afghan War**

By Joshua Partlow
Shorenstein Fellow, Fall 2012
Foreign correspondent, *The Washington Post*



Licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/3.0/).

Introduction

On Oct. 4, 2012, President Hamid Karzai stood behind a podium and addressed reporters inside the presidential palace in Kabul. In his televised remarks, Karzai recounted a video-conference he had held recently with President Obama, where he asked Obama “why their media had embarked on a psychological war and propaganda campaign against a country and nation which they consider as their ally?”

Karzai was specifically angry about the suggestion that Afghanistan’s security would deteriorate when American troops withdrew. “I do not want to say much about the Western media because we now know them, though did not know them in the past,” he went on:

At first, we were not very familiar with the activities of *The New York Times*, the BBC and CNN and their political approaches to achieving their objectives. However, now that we have worked together with them, we know each other quite well. We do not know whether they know us or not, but we know them very well. We know that they have embarked on psychological warfare to show to us that we will suffer again if they leave our country.¹

The comments revealed just how much had changed for a man who had been a world media darling—a Nobel peace prize candidate known for his dapper dressing—when he first took charge in Afghanistan 11 years earlier. The intervening decade, with its worsening war against the Taliban and the struggles of his government to improve services to the people or substantially confront official corruption, had left him widely criticized in the Western press and critical of their coverage in return.

Karzai would be far from the first politician to blame the messenger and divert attention from the serious problems his government faced. Questions of the future stability of Afghanistan spoke directly to his legacy, and he had every incentive to cast the situation in as positive a light as possible. But the vehemence of Karzai’s criticism of the media—a criticism that has been a staple of his second term—raised questions for me about why he expressed such deep antipathy towards the foreign press. How much was bluster? Did he have legitimate grievances? How did the news stories affect his government’s relationship with the United States? And why—in a country with some of the highest illiteracy rates in the world—did he seem to care so much about what was written about him in *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*?

I come at these questions from the perspective of a participant, having covered Karzai and his government from 2009, during his second election, through early 2012, for *The Washington Post*. To answer them, I chose to look at both how the tenor of the coverage of Karzai changed over the course of the war, and how President Karzai reacted to the

changing thrust of these stories. The issue went beyond whether feelings were hurt or reputations unfairly maligned, because reporting on Karzai's government, I believe, has often served as an independent source of diplomatic tension between the U.S. and Afghanistan. Diplomats, U.S. military officials, and aides to the president say that Karzai's close attention to the Western press coverage, and his sensitivity to the portrayal of himself, his government, and his family, added fresh layers of complication to the already troubled partnership between the United States and Afghanistan. Since Karzai tended to view the American press as manipulated by its government, his aides said, he saw criticism in the press as a type of proxy war against him. When President Obama came to power, he reduced the amount of direct communication with President Karzai, curtailing the frequent visits and video-conferences that President Bush shared with Karzai. In its place, Karzai tended to see press coverage as one way the Obama administration chose to communicate with him, and it was often not a message he wanted to hear.

The ground realities of the war: an increasingly powerful Taliban insurgency, the waste and fraud in the multi-billion dollar aid industry, growing frustration with the slow pace of improvement of Afghan governance, were all central to the deterioration of the relationship between the U.S. and Afghanistan. But the role of the Western press coverage—due in part to Karzai's strong reaction to it—also played a discrete role in the difficulty America had finding common ground with him.

The purpose of this paper is to trace the history of Karzai's attitude towards the press and press attitudes towards his presidency. The paper seeks to explore the roots of their conflict and to show the ways that this has contributed to the diplomatic tension between the United States and Afghanistan.

What was the coverage like?

To give a sense of how the depiction of President Karzai to Western readers changed over the years, I looked at all the Karzai-related opinions and editorials in four major American and European papers (*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Guardian*) during two periods of the war where reporting on him spiked. In this sample, the quantity of Karzai coverage (in both news and editorials) spiked early in the war, 2002-2003, followed by a period of relative quiet as American and European attention swiveled to Iraq, then another sharp rise during the 2009-2010 period, when Afghanistan had presidential elections and President Obama dispatched 30,000 more American troops there.

In 2002-2003, Karzai was mentioned in at least 125 editorials, op-eds, and letters to the editor in these four newspapers.² The Karzai that appears in the opinion pages bears little resemblance to the figure in the writing of the later period of the war. Among the American papers, the editorials and op-eds struck several common notes. Karzai, many

writers concluded, was ultimately a good choice to lead the interim administration established in December 2001 after the ouster of the Taliban regime, and that he was off to a good start. In the early days, he “has shown impressive political skills while reaching out to disparate factions in shaping his government.” (NYT editorial; Jan. 5, 2002). He has a “deft political and diplomatic touch.” (NYT editorial; Feb. 16, 2002). He was described as the “courageous new Afghan leader,” (WSJ op-ed; April 4, 2002)³; or the “fiercely independent Afghan leader,” (NYT op-ed; Dec. 8, 2002)⁴; or “Afghanistan’s caped hero” (NYT op-ed; Feb. 5, 2002)⁵; an “elegant and eloquent” figure (NYT editorial; April 28, 2002); a “Western favorite,” (WaPo editorial; June 21, 2002); a “brave, even heroic” man who was a candidate for a Nobel Peace Prize (WSJ op-ed; Oct. 8, 2003⁶) and in charge of a government with “good intentions.” (NYT op-ed; Aug. 23, 2002⁷).

Mary McGrory typified the prevailing sentiment towards Karzai in an editorial in *The Washington Post*. Karzai, she wrote, was the “role-model U.S.-installed leader of Afghanistan. He is, in fact, a dream. He speaks excellent English, has an exemplary attitude and has a brother in Baltimore who owns a restaurant. His beard is neatly trimmed and he wears colorful woven scarves. And he does not whine. Even with skeptical and sympathetic senators inviting him to speak candidly about his problems, beginning with nation-building funds far short of ‘a Marshall Plan for Afghanistan,’ he does not wince or cry aloud.”⁸

In retrospect, Karzai’s interim administration, which lasted until 2004, seems an extended honeymoon period. “This was the time when we used to joke about if we could only get a Karzai for Iraq,” one former U.S. military commander who served in Afghanistan told me. “He was admired and revered around the world. He was treated as a world leader wherever he went. He had a lot of positive reinforcement.”

One common characteristic of the opinion pieces in this period was that Karzai typically appeared in the service of the author’s arguments in favor of some shift in U.S. policy in Afghanistan. When writers pointed out his weaknesses in 2002-2003, they often did so as part of an argument for more support—U.S. troops and aid money—to bolster his government. The Bush White House and Rumsfeld Pentagon initially opposed an aggressive nation-building effort after the Taliban fled and they opposed expanding the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) outside of Kabul, as Karzai and other Afghan officials were requesting. A series of writers across publications argued that Karzai’s government was tenuous, its authority confined to the capital, and that he needed more American support. Taken mostly for granted was the assumption that more U.S. involvement would ultimately improve Afghanistan.

“This is a travesty,” wrote Thomas L. Friedman in *The New York Times* after interviewing Karzai. “Afghanistan needs a quick infusion of cash.”⁹ “American troops are desperately needed,” his *Times* colleague Nicholas D. Kristof asserted. “Yet the White House keeps stiffing the interim Afghan leader, Hamid Karzai, as he pleads for more troops as part of

an international security force to keep that country from disintegrating again.”¹⁰ American opinion writers were listening to Karzai, whom they tended to view as sincere, and urging their government to help him.

The *Post*'s editorial-page editor, Fred Hiatt, wrote that “Karzai is isolated and in danger. Promised aid has not arrived.”¹¹ “The Afghan government of Hamid Karzai has no forces and no practical authority of its own in the region, and, thanks to the refusal of the Bush administration to support the deployment of peacekeeping forces outside of Kabul, neither does the international community,” *The Washington Post* wrote in an Aug. 30, 2002 editorial. “The United States cannot impose Mr. Karzai’s government on the country,” the *Post* wrote in another editorial that same summer. “But it can, and must, tip the balance of power in his favor.” Paul Krugman summoned a quote from Karzai’s half brother Ahmed Wali Karzai (who would later become the war’s avatar for avarice and corruption) to make the same point in a *Times* opinion piece: “What was promised to Afghans with the collapse of the Taliban was a new life of hope and change. But what was delivered? Nothing. Everyone is back in business.”¹²

Prominent Democrats and diplomats joined in the chorus pushing for greater involvement in Afghanistan. “We have not given the government of Hamid Karzai even a fraction of the help it needs to make Afghanistan a permanent terrorist-free zone,” former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright wrote in *The New York Times*.¹³ Then-Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. argued in the *Times* that “we have fallen short in demonstrating the staying power necessary to achieve stability.”¹⁴ Driving out the Taliban regime and other battlefield victories against al Qaeda “will be worth little in the long run if they are not followed up by a successful nation-building effort” wrote diplomat Richard Holbrooke, who would die nine years later while trying to bring the war to a close as the U.S. envoy to the region. “This will undoubtedly be lengthy, costly and difficult, but given the stakes in Afghanistan, we must succeed in this larger mission or face what could ultimately be a failure, no matter how well the military campaign goes.”¹⁵

A wider range of views on Karzai came from the British press, which followed the war closely as the U.K. played an important role from the beginning, leading the ISAF contingent and the fight against opium trafficking. Public opinion in the UK was generally supportive of the “war on terror” in the beginning. In 2002, 69 percent of respondents in Great Britain supported the U.S.-led campaign, according to the Pew Global Attitudes Project, although more than half (52 percent) said the U.S. disregards British views when it came to carrying out its foreign policy.¹⁶ Opinion writers in *The Guardian* tended to express a bit more skepticism about Karzai and the prospects of the American and British efforts in Afghanistan in the first years. “Oblivious perhaps to the big picture, Mr. Bush should be told that Afghanistan’s much heralded democratic age has yet to dawn and money alone will not make it do so,” *The Guardian* wrote in a Jan. 22, 2002 editorial. “Mr. Karzai’s government, unable to offer redress, could soon forfeit popular respect.” In an op-ed in the paper, Neil Clark wrote that “You can try to

subjugate a people by sanctions, subversion and bombs. You can, if you wish, overthrow governments you dislike and seek to impose your will by installing a Hamid Karzai...But do not imagine that you can then force a humiliated people to pay homage to them.”¹⁷ Writers in *The Guardian*, however, also urged more help for Karzai. He “is one of the more important leaders of the post Sept. 11 world,” the paper wrote in a June 9, 2003 editorial. “Mr. Karzai’s symbolic and practical role in providing a bulwark against these forces of reaction and intolerance is vital. The U.S. needs Mr. Karzai to succeed if its gains in the ‘war on terror’ are not to be squandered....All of which begs the question why the West is not doing more in practical terms to assist him.”

2009-2010: An older war, and a different Karzai.

By 2009, when President Obama came to office, opinion writers at these newspapers had fallen deeply out of love with Karzai and the deteriorating war in Afghanistan. During this period Karzai appeared in at least 401 op-eds, editorials and letters to the editor, or more than three times the frequency than the earlier period.¹⁸ But the well-intentioned, if ineffectual, ruler had been replaced by a venal and corrupt figurehead perched atop a criminal narco-state. The caped hero had now become, in Maureen Dowd’s formulations, the “caped capo,” “colicky Karzai,” and “our corrupt puppet.” (NYT op-ed; May 12, 2010 and NYT op-ed; June 23, 2010). In Frank Rich’s, he and his country were “ticks on our body politic,” with his administration being a “corrupt narco-thug government” (NYT op-ed; June 27, 2010; NYT op-ed; Aug. 22, 2010). After eight years in power this man was “unsteady Mr. Karzai,” (WSJ)¹⁹, a “wily survivor in a snakepit of feuding warlords, druglords, and Taliban” (*Guardian*)²⁰, who was a “loose cannon,” (NYT)²¹, “untrustworthy,” (NYT)²², “inconstant as a zephyr” (WaPo)²³, and “afflicted with grave paranoia” (WSJ).²⁴

His government is “riddled with corruption,” (WaPo)²⁵ “pervasively corrupt” (WaPo)²⁶, “breathtakingly corrupt” (NYT)²⁷, and “terminally corrupt” (NYT)²⁸; seen by its people as “feckless and corrupt” (WaPo)²⁹, or “corrupt, ineffective, and illegitimate,” (*Guardian*).³⁰ His confrontational rhetoric towards the United States had been “brazen to the point of vulgarity” one op-ed writer argued, and “unlike the third world clients of old, this one does not even bother to pay us the tribute of double-speak and hypocrisy.” (WSJ).³¹ “He has refused to root out corruption. He prefers cronies to competent managers. He has wasted far too much time railing at his American protectors,” *The New York Times* wrote in an editorial.³²

There is little dispute now that Karzai’s administration failed to live up to the initial expectations of both the coalition countries involved in Afghanistan as well as many members of Karzai’s own government. With hindsight, some of those expectations seem unrealistic, particularly the lofty notions of building, in a handful of years, a prosperous representative democracy with institutions functioning at Western standards in a country whose government had been so thoroughly dismantled by decades of war and

poverty. From one perspective, Karzai has managed for more than a decade to keep together a fractious coalition of ethnic groups that were engaged in bloody civil war during the early 1990s, a period Afghans describe as their darkest days in recent history. Many of Karzai's colleagues in government give him credit for balancing forces that could have been tremendously destructive. But they also point out that his shortcomings as a leader became clearer over the years, in particular a lack of managerial skill, a preference for compromising with powerful and corrupt political actors, and a lack of vision about where to lead Afghanistan.

"People lost faith," said one former Afghan official who served for several years in Karzai's government. "And people saw this as the golden opportunity that was squandered. They're losing international support. They've given Afghanistan a bad name credibility-wise. They created a divide between our leaders and the international community. These were major consequences, and there was no need to do this. If they'd taken the cleaner route, people would have stood next to them."

In the spring of 2009, the Obama administration was reviewing its Afghanistan policy with an eye to sending more troops. With the election for Karzai's second term approaching in August of that year, and with U.S. officials regularly voicing their discontent with his first term, the debate in the editorial pages revolved around how bad he actually was: a disappointing president or a fundamental obstacle to success. The question became whether or not the U.S. should push aside the leader they helped install. Some writers urged the U.S. to find and promote alternatives to Karzai before the 2009 election. Ann Marlowe, writing in *The Wall Street Journal*, wrote that Ambassador Holbrooke should "make it clear to the Afghan people, if necessary through a blunt announcement, that the U.S. prefers Mr. Karzai not seek another term."³³

Others warned that a direct confrontation with Karzai could ultimately undermine American chances at improving Afghan governance if they succeeded in his ouster and winning meaningful cooperation with Karzai if they failed. In this debate several writers evoked Ngo Dinh Diem, the former president of South Vietnam who died in a U.S.-backed coup in 1963, as an example of how getting rid of one bad leader does not necessarily mean he will be replaced by a better one. The problem, Jim Hoagland wrote in *The Washington Post*, was a familiar one in American foreign policy: "what to do with once-useful indigenous allies who gradually become more of a problem than a solution as war aims shift and public support ebbs in the bigger power?"

"Obama now runs the classic risk of trying to beat something with nothing—of completely undercutting Karzai, democratically elected in 2004, before a credible alternative can be developed and put in place," he said.³⁴

The *Wall Street Journal's* Bret Stephens, in a Nov. 10, 2009 article, called "In Defense of Hamid Karzai," did not so much defend him, referring to Karzai as "feckless, warlord-

backed, corruption-tainted and dubiously re-elected,” as argue that he was better than many of the alternatives, and that NATO should own up to its own mistakes. “None of this means that Mr. Karzai is a saint or even much of a statesman. But neither is he a despot, a fanatic, a sybarite, or an uncouth bigot—qualities that typify the leadership of countries for which the U.S. has also expended blood and treasure in defense of lesser causes. Our failures in Afghanistan so far have mainly been our own, and they are ours to fix. To blame Mr. Karzai is to point the finger at the wrong culprit in the pursuit of disastrous, dishonorable defeat.”

Other writers, such as Fareed Zakaria, also defended Karzai as part of arguments against withdrawal of American troops. “It’s time to get real about Afghanistan. Withdrawal is not a serious option,” Zakaria wrote in *The Washington Post*. “U.S. officials should stop trashing Karzai. We have no alternative. Afghanistan needs a Pashtun leader; Karzai is a reasonably supportive one....does anyone really think his successor would be any more honest and efficient?”³⁵ Rather than pushing for a sharp increase in troops, as the Obama administration chose to do, Zakaria was urging a shift from nation-building to deal-making, in particular negotiating with the Taliban. *The Washington Post* editorial page, warned of the consequences of all the Karzai bashing, warning at one point that “it is hard to see how tearing down Karzai through statements and leaks will accomplish” U.S. goals.

Afghan writers, excluding those who worked for Karzai’s government who made it onto Western editorial pages, tended to be even more critical than their Western colleagues. “This democracy was a façade, and the so-called liberation a big lie,” wrote Malalai Joya, a former Afghan parliament member, in *The Guardian*. “You must understand that the government headed by Hamid Karzai is full of warlords and extremists who are brothers in creed of the Taliban.”³⁶ One of Karzai’s opponents in the 2009 election, Ashraf Ghani, wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* that “over the past five years, President Hamid Karzai has turned Afghanistan into one of the world’s most failed and corrupt states. Instead of leading our country toward democracy, he has formed alliances with criminals...he has turned a blind eye to a multibillion-dollar drug trade that has crippled growth and enabled the insurgency to flourish.”³⁷ An Afghan historian, Amin Saikal, wrote in *The Guardian*, after the first round of voting in the 2009 Afghan presidential election did not produce conclusive results, that “it is time for Pres. Hamid Karzai to bow out gracefully, even if he is declared the winner of last month’s election...his regime is tainted by allegations of corruption, maladministration and electoral fraud to the extent he is no longer capable of leading Afghanistan for another term.”³⁸

As with the editorial page coverage in the earlier period, in the latter years his merits were once again debated in the context of changing U.S. foreign policy. Rather than calling for more troops and money to support Karzai, this time it was often the opposite. The writers that portrayed Karzai’s government as hopelessly corrupt tended to do so as a means for advocating an end to the war and a withdrawal of U.S. troops. The writers

making these arguments most forcefully, such as columnists Eugene Robinson in *The Washington Post* and Bob Herbert in *The New York Times*, tied the failings of Karzai's regime to larger questions about the purpose of America's continued intervention in Afghanistan. On April 3, 2010, Herbert wrote about Karzai's corruption and his brother's alleged links to "all manner of nefarious activities, including money-laundering and involvement in the flourishing opium trade....Is that what American service members are dying for in Afghanistan? Can you imagine giving up your life, or your child's life, for that crowd?"

Five months later, Robinson wrote in the *Post*: "At this point, it's impossible to avoid the conclusion that U.S. soldiers are fighting and dying to prop up a government willing to tolerate—and, allegedly, eager to profit from—corruption on an epic scale, including vast commerce in illegal drugs. It's also hard not to conclude that billions of dollars sent to Afghanistan by U.S. taxpayers—intended for worthy projects such as roads and schools—have been stolen by wealthy, well-connected power brokers who spend much of their time luxuriating on the beaches of Dubai." In a later article, he quoted Karzai saying: "The time has come to reduce military operations." Robinson concluded: "All right, then, let's save American lives and a ton of money. Let's oblige him."

Perhaps reflecting the more pervasive unpopularity of the war in the United Kingdom, *The Guardian*, pressed hard on the folly of the war. On the day of the Afghan election, Simon Jenkins wrote: "A bombastic crusade has mutated into a long, hard slog, and now into a state of despair. The daily ritual of soldiers' deaths should be acceptable to a nation at war. But there comes a point in the rhetoric of heroism when the pointlessness of it all bursts the shackles of jingoism. Surely an election, the ultimate moment of political realism, is the time to stop mouthing insincerities and call a mistake a mistake."

Karzai's response to the press

The predominantly supportive coverage in the Western press in the early years was not lost on Karzai or his aides. From the earliest days of the post-Taliban Afghan government, Hamid Karzai and his ministers were highly attuned to the depiction, in the American and European press, of their country and themselves. Several factors help explain their close attention to the coverage, and sensitivity to their image abroad.

In the first years after the Taliban, there were few alternative sources of information in Afghanistan than the coverage by the Western press. Just before Karzai came to power in 2001, there was one domestic radio station, the Taliban's Radio Sharia, and one newspaper in Afghanistan (the media landscape would expand dramatically during the next decade, to more than 70 TV stations, 175 FM radio stations by 2012).³⁹ Domestic readership in Afghanistan tends to be limited, particularly outside the major cities, due to one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world. A survey of the Afghan media landscape in 2005 found that the most common source of information was foreign radio

stations (led by the BBC, Voice of America, and Radio Free Europe-Afghanistan) .⁴⁰ Even as the local press expanded, with private television stations such as Tolo TV leading the way, Afghan journalists still relied heavily on material from the Western press in their reports. Katherine Brown, in her doctoral research at Columbia University, interviewed Afghan journalists about the reverberation of American news in their country.⁴¹ She found that Afghan reporters regularly include material from U.S. news outlets in their coverage, in order to shield themselves from potential retribution from the government or warlords who might be angered if they broke controversial investigative stories themselves. “Afghan journalists habitually look to U.S. elite news media sources, especially the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, to become informed and to aid in their own reporting. These American newspapers were singled out because they are seen to be influential with the U.S. government—and their investigative reporting about Afghanistan has a particularly large impact on the leaders within the Afghan government,” Brown wrote.

One journalist explained the papers’ power as having an impact on Afghanistan’s leadership. ‘If the *New York Times* or *Washington Post* says it,’ he said, ‘then Afghan officials and powerbrokers react strongly.’ The Afghan citizen most aware of U.S. coverage on Afghanistan, many agreed, was President Hamid Karzai. President Karzai routinely complains about the U.S. press’s narratives about his administration and of Afghanistan as a whole—and he sees the U.S. press as a proxy for U.S. government criticism.

Another reason for the close attention was that the Afghan government was almost completely dependent on foreign support—both military and economic—for its survival. Fleeing Taliban mullahs had looted Afghan banks on their way out, leaving the nation of 25 million people with \$30,000 in reserves. The initial estimate by foreign donors, that Afghanistan would need \$15 billion over 10 years, proved woefully low. “This government has quite literally empty coffers,” Mark Malloch-Brown, the head of the United Nations Development Program, said in January 2002 in Kabul. And so Afghan officials knew their survival depended on largesse from abroad and tracked with great interest how the war was portrayed and spoken about by U.S. officials.

On a personal level, many of Karzai’s early advisors and cabinet ministers had spent years abroad—during the Soviet war in the 1980s, the early 1990s civil war that followed, or the late 1990s Taliban regime. Many spoke English and were familiar with domestic politics in the U.S. and Europe. Among those were top aides such as Sayed Tayyab Jawad, an early Karzai spokesman and chief of staff, who left his law practice in San Francisco to join the government. Finance minister Ashraf Ghani, who received his doctorate in cultural anthropology from Columbia University, had worked for many years at the World Bank. And the national security advisor, Zalmay Rassoul, earned his

medical degree in Paris in the 1970s and was a member of the American Society of Nephrology.

Karzai had also lived in exile for many years. His earlier jobs as a spokesman for a mujahedeen faction during the Soviet war and a diplomat in the mujahedeen government, had savvied him to dealing with the foreign press corps. After finishing graduate studies at Simlanchal University, in the garrison town of Simla, India, in the early 1980s, Karzai had worked with one of the three moderate Afghan rebel groups fighting the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. Based at different times in the Pakistani cities of Peshawar and Quetta, Karzai served as a spokesman, translator, and advisor for Sebghatullah Mojadeddi's Afghan National Liberation Front (ANLF). In this capacity, he came into frequent contact with members of the foreign press corps and diplomats exchanging tips and gossip on the war across the border. He spoke several languages, including English and Urdu in addition to the Afghan languages. "He was among the group who were easy for people from abroad to talk to, he was eloquent," recalled one former senior U.S. official who used to meet Karzai in Pakistan and Washington during his exile years. "He was well known in the diplomatic and media community." At the U.S. embassy in Islamabad during the Soviet war, there was a constant stream of visiting cabinet members, congressional and staff delegations. "So we had to often bring Afghans to them," recalled another senior U.S. official in Pakistan in those years. "And Hamid was always available and he was articulate, somewhat knowledgeable, and presentable. He wouldn't say horrible egregious things in front of them like some of them would. So he was oftentimes someone who would be fronted to these visitors." While he never lived in the U.S., Karzai was no stranger to America. He visited his relatives on several occasions, many of whom lived in Maryland, and talked of his enjoyment of Thanksgiving and Nashville's country music. Before the Sept. 11th attacks, Karzai would come to Washington to keep abreast of the political situation and advocate against the Taliban regime and push for more American support for Taliban opposition groups. He testified before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in July 2000 about the miseries of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

Karzai is described by several people who have known and worked with him as a news junkie. From the beginning of his tenure, he read Western newspaper coverage of Afghanistan widely. His aides scoured the Internet to prepare daily clips for his perusal. In the evenings, Karzai liked to watch CNN, BBC, and Pakistani news channels in his residence, current and former aides recalled. From early in his administration, aides were dispatched to collect articles about Karzai and Afghanistan in the foreign press for him to read on a daily basis.

Even before his interim administration ended and elections took place in 2004, Karzai sought to professionalize his press office. He allowed USAID contractors from the DC-based firm, the Rendon Group, to work inside the presidential palace to improve his communications capabilities. Media monitoring for Karzai became more sophisticated in

this period, the daily bulletin included clips from Afghan newspapers and wire services, local radio and television transcripts.

Few articles escaped the palace's notice. "He's interested in what people write about him and what they say, and what his legacy will be," said an Afghan advisor who served in Karzai's press office at the time. One of the former Rendon Group advisors, a British citizen, described the president as fixated on how he was portrayed by foreign correspondents. "He's too sensitive to media, to criticism," said the advisor, who spent several years working with the Afghan government.

Another American advisor at the palace in 2004 was Nick B. Mills, a Boston University journalism professor who advised the press office. After this job, Mills came back to Kabul in 2005 to interview Karzai extensively as he was intending to be Karzai's ghostwriter for an autobiography. Karzai later decided not to participate in the autobiography, and Mills assumed authorship under his own name and published a biography of the president.⁴² When he returned to Boston University, Mills gave an interview to the student paper, the *Daily Free Press*, about the experience. He praised Karzai, calling him "a charismatic and personable guy with great stories to tell," but the article also reported Mills' shock at Karzai backing out of the autobiography deal. Mills was surprised later that the *Daily Free Press* did not escape the palace's notice. One of his aides called Mills after the story appeared to complain. "I got scolded by the palace," Mills said. "Karzai was not happy with the *Daily Free Press* story." When it came to foreign coverage of Karzai, no matter what the source, "they paid attention."

Part of the reason, Mills said, was that the foreign press coverage, and personal treatment Karzai received, particularly in the early years, was usually better than his portrayal in the rough-and-tumble realities of Afghan domestic politics. "He just loved traveling outside the country where he was treated like a rock star, whereas inside the country he was fighting for his life."

Over the years, the thrust of the foreign coverage changed, but Karzai's keen interest in it did not. In an extensive profile of Karzai in Aug. 2009 in *The New York Times Magazine*, Elizabeth Rubin also noted Karzai's close attention to the foreign press. He "studies the press clippings, CNN, the BBC, the local news channels, ravenously and angrily. They blame him and his brothers and his ministers for the country's corruption, for the insurgency eating away at the nation, for running a narco-state (in Hillary Clinton's phrase) and even for the food shortages facing eight million Afghans," she wrote.

The British Ambassador to Afghanistan from 2007 to 2009, Sherard Cowper-Coles, wrote in his memoir, *Cables from Kabul: The Inside Story of the West's Afghanistan Campaign*, about Karzai's close reading of coverage:

Every morning he had a Palace official print off the Internet everything about Afghanistan and about him in the British and American media. The official would then helpfully highlight passages of interest, particularly anything critical of Hamid Karzai. The president would read through the pile of print-offs before and during breakfast. On the days when there was anything critical or damaging—something that happened with increasing frequency—he would often be upset for much of the day. Like many Eastern politicians, he was convinced that the British and American media were controlled or at least heavily influenced by the governments in London and Washington respectively. [U.S. ambassador] Bill Wood's and my efforts to convince him otherwise made little impact.

Cowper-Coles wrote that Karzai's strong reactions to such media coverage could ultimately impact important policy matters. He cited as an example Karzai's decision to not accept Paddy Ashdown, a British politician and diplomat who had been the United Nations envoy to Bosnia, as a UN envoy to Afghanistan. The U.S. and U.K. governments wanted Ashdown to take the job in early 2008 because he was considered a strong and forceful diplomat who could serve as "super-envoy" and help coordinate the chaotic international community presence in Kabul. Karzai was worried about increased foreign meddling and pressure but apparently agreed, in a video-conference with President Bush, and later in a meeting with Ashdown in Kuwait, according to Cowper-Coles. A Jan. 17, 2008 article in *The Times* of London announced his selection under the headline: "Ashdown called in to overhaul reconstruction of Afghanistan." The day before *The Times* of London published another article referring to Karzai as "a lonely Pashtun in a government made up largely of Tajik veterans of the Northern Alliance." Cowper-Coles wrote that "Karzai apparently found the references to ethnicity and to his loneliness deeply upsetting. Somehow this leading article combined with all the other pressures on him and caused the President to decide to retract his earlier agreement to Ashdown's appointment."

The subsequent United Nations envoy to Kabul, Kai Eide, wrote in his own diplomatic memoir that Karzai held "serious doubts in his mind for quite some time" about Ashdown, but "the media probably provided the pretext that he needed" to act.⁴³

In a pattern that would be seen during disputes with America as well, during this disagreement with the U.K., Karzai went public with strong criticisms about Britain's military strategy in Afghanistan. He told foreign journalists in Davos on January 24th that British forces in Helmand province had made the security situation worse. The story in *The Times* the next day, Cowper-Coles said, "set the British-Afghan political agenda for weeks to follow."

“Although we may not have realised it at the time, the worm had turned for ever in President Karzai’s relationship with Britain, and with America,” Cowper-Coles wrote. “And, in a sense, it was *The Times* wot did it.”

Karzai’s attention to the foreign press is also evident in the discussions he held with his cabinet. In meetings in the first years, Karzai, then chairman of the interim administration, and other cabinet members worried that the message of the world’s support for Afghanistan, and the early development projects, were not percolating out to rural Afghans, many of whom lived severed from electricity, television and the Internet. After a trip in late December 2002 to Oslo and Rome, where European donors pledged \$1.2 billion to help reconstruction in Afghanistan, Karzai seemed happy about his reception as a new statesman abroad, according to cabinet meeting notes. One of his ministers noted that the reaction in the foreign press to the trip was very good, and cited an article in *The New York Times* where the world “once again supported President Karzai and showed their intention to rehabilitate the country.”

The short, 330-word Dec. 19 article, by Walter Gibbs, reported that two dozen donor nations “rallied to the support of President Hamid Karzai” by “pledging \$1.2 billion in fresh relief aid and ceding control of the money to his increasingly robust government.” The donations had been coordinated by an organization called the Afghanistan Support Group, but that group dissolved itself at the Oslo meeting and turned responsibility over to a consultative group led by the Afghan finance minister.

Four days later, back at his palace in Kabul, Karzai expressed frustration that “the news of Afghanistan in the world community doesn’t reach the people of Afghanistan. The Internet is working but news coverage and the reach of the news coverage here is very weak,” he said, according to cabinet meeting notes taken by a participant. The ministers had a responsibility, he pointed out, to show “the international assistance to the people. It should be seen and felt in people’s hands.”

Not all the news was so good. The first allegations of corruption or criminality among members of Karzai’s government and family started early in the war. Reporting by the foreign press corps on these issues would only intensify over time, and from the beginning they played an important role in the relations between the United States and Afghanistan. These stories struck a raw nerve at the palace, according to interviews with Afghan officials and notes taken from meetings at the time. Karzai and his allies often considered such stories politically motivated attacks intended to pressure their administration or undermine their reputation domestically and abroad. They struggled over how to respond.

On Nov. 19, 2004, *The New York Times* ran a modest 1,148-word story about a United Nations announcement the day before that Afghanistan’s poppy crop was up for the year, and had reached the highest level in Afghan history. The story by Carlotta Gall ran

inside, on page 3. In the 15th paragraph, the story mentioned that the minister of tribal affairs, Arif Noorzai, and the governor of Helmand province, Sher Mohammad Akhund, “are widely believed to profit from the drug trade, although both have denied any involvement and voiced support for the government’s anti-narcotics stand. Diplomats say there are even reports linking Mr. Karzai’s brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, an influential figure in the southern city of Kandahar, to the trade,” although a palace spokesman denied this. These types of reports had surfaced before, in an Oct. 6, 2004 article by Scott Baldauf in *The Christian Science Monitor*, who quoted Kandahar police officials alleging Ahmed Wali Karzai’s involvement in the drug trade. Ahmed Wali Karzai had denied the charges and said they were lies propagated by political enemies.

Two days after the *Times* article appeared, at the weekly Sunday cabinet meeting at the presidential palace, Karzai and his ministers were upset. Although Karzai had made eradicating poppy a top priority during his first inaugural speech the month before, even declaring a symbolic “jihad” against opium, he had always been ambivalent about the issue. He was particularly opposed to aerial spraying of farmers’ fields, which he believed not only threatened livelihoods but posed a public health risk. Before his ministers, he mentioned reports of overnight spraying in the eastern city of Jalalabad that sickened children. He mentioned that he saw a “British hand” behind the *Times* article, according to meeting notes. The British had been involved from the beginning in the counter-narcotics campaign, including an early, and failed, effort to buy up and burn a large portion of the poppy crop. The Brits, Karzai speculated, had told the *Times* to “start a negative propaganda campaign against me.”

Other ministers were also concerned about the article. The minister of refugees, Enayatullah Nazari, spoke of how: “these are issues which are beyond the ability of one ministry or government media to deal with,” according to the notes. “*The New York Times* mentioned Ahmed Wali Karzai, Arif Noorzai, Mullah Sher Mohammed,” the minister said. “We should defend them. Some people should be put in jail.”

Arif Noorzai, one of the officials named in the story suspected drug traffickers, who also happened to be the brother-in-law of Ahmed Wali Karzai as well as the minister of tribal affairs, was attending the cabinet meeting. He insisted on his innocence and described himself as an honorable veteran of the jihad against the Soviet Union with humble means. “I have no bank account,” he insisted. “I don’t have an NGO. I don’t have a house.”

“*The New York Times* should be sued,” added another cabinet minister.

“This is a warning for you all. It is a threat. They have even brought your brother into this,” another of Karzai’s aides said. “These people are our national figures. This is animosity. I suggest that our embassy in Washington should be ordered to start the preliminary work of suing *The New York Times*. I consider this an insult to the people’s

will, the cabinet, and the people of Afghanistan. They should apologize. And they should compensate us. We should take a diplomatic and a judicial approach.”

Near the end of the discussion, Ashraf Ghani, one of the most accomplished technocrats in the Afghan government, who had lived in the U.S. and Europe for years before the war, called for discipline and unity among the cabinet, and tried to put things in perspective. “It would take us 10 years to sue America,” he said.

Sources of Conflict: Karzai’s second term.

Karzai’s government had been the subject of growing criticism in the media in the latter years of the Bush administration. But the volume and scope of that criticism increased dramatically during the Obama administration. The overall amount of coverage spiked as the Obama administration escalated the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, deploying about 50,000 additional troops, and making Afghanistan the most visible foreign policy problem at the time. In 2009, Afghanistan accounted for 4 to 5 percent of total news coverage on U.S. television, radio, newspapers and magazines. This was five times higher than the amount of Afghanistan coverage in 2007 and 2008.⁴⁴

Much of the tension between the Karzai and Obama administrations was the result of events on the ground going poorly: an intensifying Taliban insurgency, more casualties for U.S. and Afghan security forces, higher stakes—and therefore, higher demand for accountability and urgency—with the U.S. committing more troops, money, and political effort, as well as growing frustration among Afghan civilians for the extended foreign troop presence. But some aspects of how the U.S. government interacted with Karzai’s team also changed. The Obama White House curtailed the almost bi-weekly video-conferences that President Bush held with Karzai, and Obama chose to have fewer presidential visits to Afghanistan and allow fewer opportunities for Karzai to come to Washington.⁴⁵ The administration chose a new approach of working around Karzai by devoting more time and money to provincial governors and local officials who they hoped could improve the responsiveness of government to Afghan citizens. Afghan diplomats felt that the newly created Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, a position held by Richard Holbrooke, also limited their access to the administration.

Sayed Tayyab Jawad, the Afghan ambassador to the U.S. at the time, described to me the difficulty, from the Afghan perspective, with the new approach. “Holbrooke wanted to control not only the relationship [with Karzai] but also other American agencies, they have to go through him. He wanted to establish one point of contact. For us it was unusual,” Jawad said. “President Karzai would not understand why he had to deal with an ambassador. For Holbrooke, it was an issue of centralizing authority and making people go through him. He made that point many times: ‘those days are gone and don’t try to reach out to people directly.’ In past, President Karzai and I would reach out

directly. I would go to the White House to watch a movie or see Vice President Cheney for a meeting. I was not confined to seeing the Afghanistan desk at the State Department.”

While the information flow was more restricted at the highest levels, Jawad said, there was also less informal contact between lower-ranking diplomats. There were fewer chances before important meetings to “sit down the day before and have coffee and say ‘this is what we’ll talk about, so there are no surprises.’ If you take away that operating level of the working relationship, every meeting turns into a surprise.”

The relationship between the White House and the Afghan palace had changed in substance as well as process. Before Karzai’s first election in 2004, he was clearly America’s favorite. American diplomats and soldiers served, in effect, as campaign staff, arranging events around the country to increase Karzai’s exposure and highlight successful development projects. As the 2009 election approached, U.S. policy became strict impartiality. A June 11, 2009 diplomatic cable from the U.S. embassy in Kabul stressed this message: “achieving credible elections requires a proactive strategy of changing Afghan popular perceptions that elections will be inherently flawed and that the United States will determine the outcome of the election. In order to change this perception, we must aggressively implement a strategy of impartiality.” The cable from the Kabul embassy recommended “that all USG elements refrain from making predictions on electoral outcomes—both publicly, to President Karzai, and in private conversations. It is increasingly clear that statements implying the outcome is a forgone conclusion directly influence the behavior of political figures in Afghanistan.”

To this end, American diplomats appeared at press conferences with Karzai’s opponents and paid to fly these candidates around the country for appearances. A classified State Department cable stressed that “we need to do everything we can to rebalance a playing field increasingly viewed as tilted towards Karzai. Our policy must be to make the elections process as fair as possible, not to defend the status quo.”

From the perspective of Karzai’s government, the shift to impartiality was a shift away from him. And there were other signs of dissatisfaction. Karzai had not been invited to Obama’s inauguration, which disappointed him, according to aides. Ambassador Holbrooke encouraged other Afghan politicians to run against Karzai, which Afghan politicians viewed as another U.S. shift away from Karzai. During the White House review of Afghan strategy that spring, “muttering about ditching Afghanistan’s Hamid Karzai was rampant,” wrote Jim Hoagland in *The Washington Post’s* editorial page on April 19, 2009.

Eleven days before the election, *The New York Times Magazine* published “Karzai in his Labyrinth,” a 9,698-word cover story on Karzai by Elizabeth Rubin, the most extensive, detailed, and prominent profile to appear in the U.S. press. For Karzai and those around

him it was a devastating portrait. He came across as fumbling and almost incoherent. In one extended answer about why he wanted to run again for president, he made this answer, Rubin wrote:

'When needed, my extreme toughness with our allies is an asset I want the Afghan people to have if they choose so.' And, 'The second reason, I don't know how to put this. . . . I feel for the Afghan people, and they know that.' It all sounded so cryptic. As his train of thought neared its destination, he suddenly said: 'I'm a very, very, very simple person. I have no property. I have no money. I have no love for luxury. If I find someone tomorrow that will combine all these three. . . .' He sighed and took a deep breath. 'I'm an exhausted person. I've not begun this seven years ago. I've begun this when I was 22. I've not had a private life since then. I deserve one. I long for one.' He lingered on the O of his longing. 'The moment I get this choice, I would leave.'

He seemed frayed and frazzled to the point of collapse. "He always has a cold or a cough and takes effervescent vitamin-C tablets compulsively, which he did as we spoke. 'He is stressed, short of patience, short of temper,' a friend said. He snaps easily. Promotes flatterers. Kills the messenger. Hugs his enemies. Abuses his friends. And his twitching eye -- a nervous tic, they say -- is unusually active," Rubin wrote.

In this depiction, palace advice was a miasma of conspiracy theories; his suspicion of America and their British allies all-consuming. "The palace had become like a Shakespearean stage, its officials, like so many Iagos, filling Karzai's mind with plots and treachery," Rubin wrote.

Karzai and his opponents had no trouble reading such signs that Karzai had fallen out of favor in the diplomatic corps and in the press. Gul Agha Sherzai, the governor of Nangarhar province and a powerful rival to the president, told American diplomats he wanted to challenge Karzai in the upcoming election and asked for their blessing. U.S. support for Karzai had been critical for his path to the palace, Sherzai said, according to a January 2009 cable. "You were like an eagle that flew out of the sky and landed on his forehead. After that, everyone knew that this was who we needed to support," Sherzai said. "I am waiting for the eagle to land on my forehead."

Between voting day in August and his second inauguration three months later, Karzai and some of his aides seemed to become convinced that the U.S. had sought to invalidate enough of his votes to make him lose. During this period, when reports of widespread fraud were emerging, top U.S. officials also publicly questioned Karzai's viability as a president. White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel said on CNN's State of the Union program, that the big question in the Afghan war was not troop numbers

but “do you have a credible Afghan partner for this process that can provide the security and the type of services that the Afghan people need?”

Karzai seemed to conflate U.S. policy and the critical press coverage as part of one agenda to weaken his government. The drumbeat of critical stories and anonymous comments by U.S. officials in the foreign press about Karzai filled the communications hole left by the Obama administration’s decision to distance itself from Karzai. The election period was “the wound that never healed,” one of Karzai’s aides said, and the attitude coming from the palace in the months that followed often seemed an expression of wounded pride. From his perspective, Karzai and his family had endured a series of humiliations at the hands of the United States and been pushed from his perch as a respected world statesman. Karzai viewed the 2009 election period as an American effort at “delegitimizing his power forever and undermining the Afghan government,” one former aide said. Whether he had earned such criticism or not, by the time Obama’s military surge began, the relationship was characterized by mutual distrust and suspicion, and Karzai’s government attributed some of that to the way he was written about in the foreign press.

As a leader who followed the Western press closely and had years of exposure to Western reporters, Karzai was undoubtedly aware that journalists also regularly criticized their own governments. Why did he see the American press as an extension of U.S. policy, as many colleagues and western diplomats assert? Some of his aides suggest his views about the press were formed during his time in Pakistan, where the government exerts more direct pressure on the domestic press (including alleged involvement in killing reporters who write critical stories⁴⁶). But Karzai often distinguished between Western news outlets that covered his government and he favored some over others so this does not fully explain his views on the links between government and the press.

Post-election conflict intensifies

In the months after the election, events and coverage of the war led to fresh crises for the Afghan government on an almost weekly basis. The span of one week in February 2010—the same month NATO launched its largest operation to date, in Marja—showed the range of issues Karzai and the Americans were wrestling over. While some were generated by events on the ground, and others by news stories, both seemed equally capable of setting off high-level disputes between the U.S. and Afghan governments.

On Feb. 17, Karzai signed a presidential decree calling for sweeping reforms of the nation’s electoral law, in particular banishing the foreign representatives from the Electoral Complaints Commission, the watchdog organization that invalidated nearly a million votes from Karzai’s tally in the election. The American embassy saw this as vengeance on Karzai’s part. “The President evidently has used his decree on the

electoral law to settle outstanding scores from the 2009 Presidential election,” read a classified embassy cable on the subject. “In doing so Karzai has broken faith with his pledges to ‘work with us’ in applying the ‘lessons learned’ from the 2009 elections. His closest advisors claim to us that they disagree with Karzai’s measures and that they see the serious political problems he has risked reviving and exacerbating for himself both at home and in his relationships with us.” (The Obama administration had planned to invite Karzai to Washington in March, but postponed the visit after the decree. Karzai responded by inviting Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to Kabul.⁴⁷)

Four days later, just after Karzai had praised Gen. Stanley McChrystal for placing greater emphasis on preventing civilian casualties in a speech to parliament, a U.S. Special Operations A-team called in an airstrike that killed at least 15 civilians in Uruzgan province, a part of southern Afghanistan home to many of Karzai’s Pashtun supporters.⁴⁸ Gen. Stanley McChrystal went to Karzai’s palace to apologize the night of the strike and two days later went on Afghan television promising an investigation. The attack sparked a new confrontation with Karzai’s palace. “The repeated killing of civilians by NATO forces is unjustifiable,” Karzai’s cabinet said in a statement. “We strongly condemn it.”

The next morning, on the front page of *The Washington Post*, Andrew Higgins published the story about Kabul Bank, the first in-depth account of the profligate insider lending at the nation’s biggest bank. “The close ties between Kabul Bank and Karzai’s circle reflect a defining feature of the shaky post-Taliban order in which Washington has invested more than \$40 billion and the lives of more than 900 U.S. service members: a crony capitalism that enriches politically connected insiders and dismays the Afghan populace.”⁴⁹ The story revealed the outlines of what would become the most serious financial scandal of the war and a defining conflict between the Obama administration and Karzai. The Afghan central bank would ultimately take over the bank to stave off its collapse and bail it out with more than \$800 million. At the center of the story was another brother of the president’s, Mahmood Karzai, who was a bank shareholder and had received millions of dollars in loans and use of a Dubai villa from the bank’s chairman. The role of another sibling of the president in one of the main controversies of the war reinforced the siege mentality of the president and a perception that not only his government, but his family, was under attack from the Americans.

During this period diplomatic niceties were also being stripped away by unprecedented leaks of classified information. The release by the anti-secrecy website, Wikileaks, of 75,000 Army reports about the Afghan war in July 2010 and 250,000 U.S. diplomatic cables later that year revealed new and controversial details about how American officials viewed Karzai, his government and his family. They referred to Ahmed Wali Karzai as the president’s “drug-running brother” and urged American officials to press Pres. Karzai to remove him from Kandahar. They also revealed frank assessments of Karzai’s personality and reliability. In one cable from U.S. ambassador Karl Eikenberry

in July 2009, he discussed the “two contrasting portraits” of Karzai he observed. “The first is that of a paranoid and weak individual unfamiliar with the basics of nation building and overly self-conscious that his time in the spotlight of glowing reviews from the international community has passed. The other is that of an ever-shrewd politician who sees himself as a nationalist hero who can save the country from being divided by the decentralization-focused agenda of [presidential challenger Abdullah] Abdullah, other political rivals, neighboring countries, and the US. In order to recalibrate our relationship with Karzai, we must deal with and challenge both these personalities.”

By the time these went online, none of these criticisms would have come as a surprise to Karzai, but they laid bare the increasingly confrontational nature of the relationship. A separate leak of two of Ambassador Eikenberry’s classified cables about his reservations of Karzai’s leadership also complicated the daily diplomatic work. News of the existence of the cables, and Eikenberry’s reservations, broke on Nov. 12, 2009, a week before Karzai’s inauguration, but it wasn’t until two months later that *The New York Times* obtained copies of the actual documents and published them on their website. In one cable Eikenberry wrote that “President Karzai is not an adequate strategic partner.” Karzai “continues to shun responsibility for any sovereign burden, whether defense, governance or development. He and much of his circle do not want the U.S. to leave and are only too happy to see us invest further.”

During this period, Karzai reacted to such events and critical news coverage with inflammatory anti-American public comments of his own, themselves becoming prominent news stories and diplomatic incidents prompting recriminations in Washington, high-level calls to explain and apologize, threats and concessions on both sides. The diplomatic roller-coaster was a constant backdrop throughout the most violent months of the war. During this period, Karzai made some of his most controversial public comments of the war. These speeches showed the degree to which he linked political pressure from the West with foreign media coverage.

In one instance, after *The New York Times* published a story about Karzai’s chief of staff receiving payments from Iran,⁵⁰ Karzai said at a press conference that the paper “came after” Umar Daudzai because he “strictly supported his president” over a separate issue of Karzai’s decision to ban private security firms. “*The New York Times* heard about [Daudzai’s support] and published the issue of Iran against him” Karzai said. He added that it was true that Iran gave the Afghan government cash.⁵¹

On another occasion, in a speech to members of the Independent Election Commission, Karzai blamed foreign officials for interfering in the election. He claimed that Philippe Morillon, the head of the EU election observation mission to Afghanistan, and Peter Galbraith, the deputy head of the United Nations mission, pressured Afghan election officials to refrain from announcing results in Karzai’s favor while they worked out some power-sharing arrangement with his opponent. There was “extreme, deep and

destructive foreign interference,” Karzai told the audience on April 1, 2010. “There is no doubt that there was very massive fraud, very massive, but not by Afghans. Foreigners carried out the fraud, Galbraith did it, Morillon did it, and embassies here did it.” He said Galbraith’s office sought to manipulate the results in conjunction with the media, Karzai said. “Fraud was carried out there, organized there and then made available to CNN and the BBC, *The New York Times*, *The Times* of London and all their media, which were at their service to publish the fraud and accuse us of fraud. Why they were doing all this is a separate issue; they wanted a puppet government, a mercenary government or wanted to impose some sort of situation in our country, but Almighty Allah was kind and the nation was smart and the commission was patriotic.”

“As the president of this land, my honor and prestige are attacked every day,” Karzai said. “*The New York Times* and other newspapers know well that the election was just but every day they describe me as a president who won a rigged election. This is a means of pressure and they want to press us psychologically. However, we have interests. Our people have interests.”

The emotional speech landed with a thud in Washington. Robert Gibbs, the White House press secretary, had called Karzai’s remarks “genuinely troubling.” The State Department spokesman, P.J. Crowley, said suggesting international community was responsible for electoral fraud was “preposterous.” When asked whether Karzai was still invited to Washington the following month, Gibbs said, “as of right now, yes.”

The consternation in Washington prompted Karzai to call Secretary of State Hillary Clinton the day after his remarks. The *Times* reported that Karzai expressed surprise that his remarks caused such a stir and that his real criticism was aimed at the Western news coverage of Afghanistan. Both sides seemed intent to move past the issue. “We’re prepared to stay focused on the work ahead,” Clinton told Karzai, according to Crowley. And yet the next day, April 3, Karzai told dozens of lawmakers in a private meeting that if Western meddling in Afghanistan didn’t cease, he might be compelled to join the insurgency, comments broke in a story in *The Wall Street Journal*. The suggestion of Karzai possibly aligning with the Taliban sowed further discord into the relationship. Even if only rhetorical hyperbole, as some Karzai aides who were present insisted, they seemed to confirm at least two fundamental characteristics of Afghan politics of that time: Karzai was struggling to appear to be a sovereign leader and not a foreign puppet, and that he was deeply exasperated with his Western partners and how he was portrayed to their publics.

“Few things make Karzai feel as angry and humiliated as when he or Afghans are victims of a lack of respect,” Kai Eide, a former U.N. envoy, wrote in his memoir. “His reactions stem from the core of his personality and his intense pride. These are the incidents that made him threaten to join the Taliban, an unwise statement that shocked many politicians and media outlets in April of 2010. I have heard him make similar

statements many times in private. What he is saying is that if you, as guests in my country, demonstrate such a lack of respect, then you also turn me into your enemy.”

Truth or Allegation?

No stories in the foreign press seemed to concern President Karzai’s government as much as those about his half-brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai. His brother was the head of the Kandahar provincial council and the dominant figure in southern Afghanistan—the Pashtun heartland home to the president’s tribe as well as the Taliban insurgency—and therefore a crucial political ally. The president also had a close personal relationship with Ahmed Wali and the two spoke by phone on a nearly daily basis, according to palace aides.

When the drug allegations about his brother first emerged in the foreign press in 2004, Karzai asked U.S. ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad to meet with his brother about the issue, and Ahmed Wali traveled from his home in Kandahar to the U.S. embassy in Kabul, where he professed his innocence and insisted he was the victim of a politically motivated attack. U.S. intelligence officials in Kabul at the time argued that there were numerous allegations against Ahmed Wali Karzai but no solid evidence. President Karzai saw the issue as an attempt by his domestic rivals to weaken his government by pushing his brother out of southern Afghanistan.⁵²

These types of news stories, with their allegations of corruption, drug trafficking, and other criminal behavior against members of Karzai’s government and family, occurred with ever-greater frequency as the war progressed and intensified. On January 9, 2006, Karzai met with U.S. ambassador Ronald E. Neumann and British Ambassador Rosalind Marsden, as well as British and American intelligence officials, and complained about a recent *Newsweek* story that raised fresh drug allegations against Ahmed Wali Karzai. The story that day, by Ron Moreau and Sami Yousafzai, veteran reporters in the region, quoted an unnamed veteran Interior Ministry official, saying that Ahmed Wali Karzai “is the unofficial regional governor of southern Afghanistan and leads the whole trafficking structure.” In the palace meeting, according to a U.S. embassy cable, Karzai was described as “flailing” and asked the intelligence officials “whether they had any evidence to back that up and repeated the question to the ambassadors. We all said that we had numerous rumors and allegations to the effect that his brother is corrupt and a narco-trafficker but that we have never had clear evidence that one could take to court. Karzai fulminated, talked about taking the case to court for libel,” the cable read.

The cycle of accusation and denial—particularly on the issue of Ahmed Wali Karzai and drugs—continued. On June 22, 2006, ABC News reported finding U.S. military documents on a flash drive sold at an Afghanistan street bazaar that identified Ahmed Wali Karzai as a “problem maker” in the pay of drug lords. The documents from Jan. 2005 said he “receives money from drug lords as bribe to facilitate their work and

movement.” “I was never in the drug business, I never benefited, I never facilitated, I never helped anyone with the transportation of any kind,” Ahmed Wali told ABC.

In an interview around this time in the Afghan paper *Kabul Weekly*, Ambassador Neumann was asked why there is so much anti-Afghan government coverage in the U.S. media. “There have been few articles. I would not say a large criticism,” Neumann responded. “Journalists write what they hear. I don’t think there is a large amount of criticism against President Karzai. There have been two to three articles, which talk about many problems, but President Karzai has very solid support in America. I think some people read these articles and think they are trying to make some conspiracy or they are trying to find a lead article on American government policy. That is not true, there is no American policy behind these articles and American government support for Karzai is very solid.”⁵³

On Oct. 4, 2008, the *Times’* James Risen published the most detailed account to date of allegations that Ahmed Wali Karzai was involved in the heroin trade, citing unnamed U.S. investigators and a jailhouse phone interview with an Afghan informant. The story focused on two drug shipments, from 2004 and 2006, where Ahmed Wali Karzai allegedly intervened to release trucks that had been stopped by Afghan authorities. Risen would write a series of articles over the years about the Karzai family’s business dealings and feuding that often drew strong reactions from the subjects. In response to these stories, President Karzai met again with Ambassador Neumann and others. And he once again demanded to see the evidence that his brother was involved in the drug trade while refusing to remove him from his position as provincial council chief in Kandahar. The U.S. was not able to provide any proof.

“You’re not going to build a formal state to state relationship with someone who doesn’t trust you, doesn’t like you, doesn’t think you have any respect for him,” one former military commander who served in Afghanistan told me. “By 2006 it was pretty evident sitting back here that we had a big, big, big problem working with Karzai.”

The growing criticism in the press angered the president, his relatives, and members of his inner circle. Sometimes this involved direct threats to the reporters involved. On May 8, 2009, Tom Lasseter, a reporter with McClatchy Newspapers, published a story about how Ahmed Wali Karzai had “yelled a litany of obscenities” and threatened to beat him after asking questions about drug allegations. Increasingly angered by Lasseter’s line of questioning, Karzai, according to the article, questioned whether he was really a reporter, “It seems like someone sent you to write these things,” he said. Then he pushed Lasseter out of the room and screamed at him, “Get the [expletive] out before I kick your [expletive].”

The debate over Ahmed Wali’s actions was not resolved and no one—reporters or otherwise—has proven publicly whether or not he was involved in the drug trade. In

the months before he was killed in July 2011 by one of his aides, U.S. military and civilian officials in Afghanistan decided, ultimately, to ignore the question. The U.S. military was launching a series of offensives in the first half of 2010, first in Helmand and then in Kandahar. Military commanders saw these southern provinces as essential to disrupting the Taliban's momentum in Afghanistan. Before the planned move on Kandahar in the summer, American officials debated what to do about Ahmed Wali and whether they should push President Karzai for his removal from his position as head of the provincial council, and from the area. Gen. Stanley McChrystal asked his subordinates to produce all the intelligence the United States had on the allegations relating to Ahmed Wali Karzai. In a meeting on March 8, 2010 at NATO military headquarters in Kabul, briefers presented McChrystal and others watching via video-conference about their results. They did not have anything approaching hard evidence on the drug allegations. According to a participant, McChrystal concluded: "So there's nothing." After that meeting, U.S. military and civilian officials resolved to cooperate with Ahmed Wali rather than push for his removal and use his political influence to further their aims in Kandahar and manage tribal conflict. "He was clearly exonerated. He was clearly part of the solution after the March meeting," the official said. "The more you got to know about Kandahar the less anti-AWK you were. Because what you needed to achieve was stability. AWK could bring stability."

Whether he was involved in the drug trade or not, the fact that American officials for so long trafficked in these rumors, and yet could not summon evidence to support them, gave some vindication to President Karzai. The whiplash on Ahmed Wali policy, from treating him as the enemy to part of the solution, must have also sent mixed signals to the palace, and undermined whatever moral high-ground the U.S. had in calling for a fight against corruption. This also likely added to the president's sense, and that of other Karzai relatives, that they were unfairly treated both in diplomatic circles and in the press. These were intensely personal stories for the Karzais and they took them seriously as they went to the heart of their reputations as political leaders and as a family.

Karzais Comment

The Karzais—the president as well as his brothers—did not accept allegations of corruption and drug trafficking silently, but regularly used the local and foreign press to broadcast their denials. Ahmed Wali Karzai was categorical in his denials in the press not only about the drug allegations, but that he confiscated government land, orchestrated voting fraud in Kandahar, was on the CIA payroll, or owned any business interests at all.

After the Oct. 4, 2008 front page story in the *Times* about Ahmed Wali's alleged involvement in the drug trade, Ahmed Wali threatened to sue the paper. A year later Dexter Filkins, Mark Mazzetti and James Risen published a story in the *Times* reporting that Ahmed Wali was said to receive regular payments from the CIA, and had for much

of the past eight years. Ahmed Wali held a press conference to denounce the report as “absolute libel.” “*The New York Times* has shamed itself with this report. This newspaper has no credibility among Afghans,” he said. Although in subsequent interviews he tempered his position. “I work with the Americans, the Canadians, the British, anyone who asks for my help,” Ahmed Wali told the *Associated Press*.

The Washington Post’s SpyTalk blogger Jeff Stein, on Aug. 22, 2010, cited an unnamed former CIA official saying Ahmed Wali Karzai flew cash in burlap bales from Kandahar to Dubai. “It is totally baseless and meaningless. How did I transfer the money? Please provide at least very small evidence,” Ahmed Wali responded, and cited President Karzai’s decision to shut down private security companies as the incentive behind the allegation.

On March 12, 2009, Mahmoud Karzai, the president’s older brother, held a two-hour news conference in Kabul, asserting that a *New York Times* article from the week before about his growing business empire involved “political smear tactics against President Karzai.”⁵⁴ He denied that he had used family connections to enrich himself and he accused an Afghan station, Tolo TV, of “causing sedition, conflict between tribes, airing baseless reports and carrying out character assassination” for broadcasting information based on the *Times* report.⁵⁵ When the scandal at Kabul Bank broke open in the late summer of 2010, Mahmoud Karzai criticized the coverage in *The Washington Post*—where he had been identified as a bank shareholder in several articles—and said on Afghan television that he had requested the government revoke the visas of the Kabul-based staff of the *Post* for two or three months “so that they could realize that such acts against the Afghan people and investments and banks are not good.”⁵⁶ Visas of the *Post’s* journalists were not revoked.

The Karzais sometimes responded in writing themselves. On Sept. 18, 2010 the *Post* published an editorial called “Are the U.S. and Hamid Karzai on the same side in fighting Afghan corruption?” where they argued that the problem was so serious it might prevent Karzai’s government from ever prevailing over the Taliban. “There’s no question that members of the Afghan leader’s family have been plausibly accused of improperly enriching themselves and that he has protected them, as well as other political allies, from Western-backed investigations.” The editorial also placed some blame on the Obama administration for failing to coordinate its anti-corruption teams with Karzai’s palace. Four days later, Mahmoud Karzai and Ahmed Wali Karzai wrote a letter to the editor to defend themselves. “We are outraged by this charge and challenge the *Post* to show one credible instance in which our brother, President Karzai, has ‘protected’ us. Show one investigation that has been stopped because we are Karzais. Instead, the historical record is filled with a staggering amount of evidence of how both of us have been unjustly maligned by the Western press over recent years, our reputations savaged by innuendos and aspersions.”

“And what of the *Post's* charge that President Karzai’s family members have been “improperly enriching themselves”? When? How? Neither of us has enriched ourselves in Afghanistan, much less “improperly.” The loose use of this language is irresponsible,” the brothers wrote.

The next month, Ahmed Wali Karzai wrote a letter to *The New York Times*, responding to a story where Afghan officials said he had participated in voting fraud during the parliamentary elections. “Fixing the Afghan election is impossible, even if someone were foolish enough to try,” he wrote, adding: “Millions of voters braved death threats from the Taliban to exercise their right to vote. In a country that has never had a functioning democracy in its 5,000-year history, elections in Afghanistan may not satisfy American journalists. But I am proud of what we have achieved in only nine years, while fighting a war at the same time.”

In interviews with the foreign press, President Karzai also defended his family and referred to his repeated requests to a series of ambassadors and military commanders to bring him proof of the allegations. In 2008, Karzai said in an interview with the German newspaper, *Der Spiegel* that he had looked into the allegations against his brothers Mahmoud and Ahmed Wali and found nothing. “I investigated it thoroughly: naturally, none of it is true.”

“Mahmoud was a businessman in America for many years, he also has an American passport. He was very successful there and made a lot of money,” Karzai said. He added: “The situation was similar with Ahmed Wali: this story that he is involved in drug smuggling came from 2004, shortly after the presidential election. It appeared in *The New York Times*. I immediately called the U.S. ambassador and the American secret service, the Britons, the Europeans. I asked them five times, 10 times what there was to the story. They told me: ‘Mr. President, these are rumors, probably propaganda.’ No one provided proof.”

The Bully Pulpit

The foreign press served as a source of fascination and frustration for President Karzai, but the medium also proved an effective outlet for his political views. He used this bully pulpit with increasing effectiveness in his second term to push for more Afghan control over foreign private security firms, NATO air strikes and raids on Afghan homes, and U.S.-run detention centers. Some of Karzai’s most dramatic political moves came in speeches or interviews broadcast internationally that caused reaction in foreign capitals beyond what he seemingly could have accomplished by raising them in private diplomatic channels.

Over the years Karzai had regularly complained publicly about U.S. and NATO troops killing civilians during combat or errant bombings. But during his second term he began

making categorical statements to the press ordering a stop to such incidents—as well as broader condemnations of the overall military approach to the war—and using Afghan support for NATO's presence as leverage. He tended to cast his demands in the context of defending Afghan sovereignty but they were seen by Western officials in Kabul as unrealistic and overly confrontational. Because of these hard-line statements attacking fundamentals of NATO's military strategy in Afghanistan, he was often characterized as erratic, but the public outbursts slowly brought about real changes in the dynamic between his government and those of donor nations. The comments also seemed an attempt to protect himself from accusations from domestic rivals that he was an American puppet.

In Nov. 2010, at a time when Obama's military surge was at full throttle, Karzai said in an interview with myself and two editors at *The Washington Post*, that "the time has come to reduce military operations" and end the U.S. Special Operations night raids that had become a centerpiece of Gen. David Petraeus' counter-insurgency strategy. "The raids are a problem always. They were a problem then, they are a problem now. They have to go away," Karzai said. The comments prompted Petraeus to raise the possibility that his position as commander in Afghanistan would be untenable if Karzai could not refrain from such public criticism of the strategy.⁵⁷

President Obama weighed in on Karzai's criticism as well, telling reporters that partnership is a "two-way street." He said that "'we have to be sensitive to his concerns and the concerns of the Afghan people. We can't simply tell them what's good for them... We have to listen and learn."

"On the other hand," Obama said, "If we're putting in big resources, if we're ponying up billions of dollars, if we're expecting that our troops are going to be there and to help secure the countryside and ensure that President Karzai can continue to build and develop his country, he's got to listen to us, as well."

At a presidential palace press conference on May 31, 2011, Karzai, in what he called his "last warning," demanded that NATO cease all airstrikes on civilian homes, despite the fact that more than 100,000 foreign troops remained in Afghanistan and combat operations were in full swing during the spring and summer fighting season, or face "unilateral action" from the Afghan government. "I warn NATO forces that a repeat of airstrikes on the houses of Afghanistan's people will not be allowed," Karzai said. "The people of Afghanistan will not allow this to happen anymore, and there is no excuse for such strikes." He added that foreign forces are close to "the behavior of an occupation" and that "history is a witness [to] how Afghanistan deals with occupiers."

While Karzai's government didn't take unilateral action, or prevent airstrikes from killing all civilians, and it wasn't his last warning, such resistance gradually led NATO to take steps to limit their use of airpower. A year later, Gen. John R. Allen, the top

American commander in Afghanistan at the time, responded to the latest civilian casualties incident—a bombing in Logar province that killed 18 civilians—by adding new restrictions on the use of such strikes on insurgents who hide in civilian homes.

In 2012, at Karzai's behest, the Obama administration signed a memorandum of understanding agreeing to give up control of night raids and the detention center at Bagram Airfield, which they had run throughout the war. While issues remain unsolved on both topics, Karzai has won more authority for the Afghan government in the prosecution of the war. For all the criticism he has claimed to suffer at the hands of the press, Karzai has also aggressively used the megaphone of the foreign press to advance his own political goals.

Endnotes

- ¹ Hamid Karzai press conference aired live by state television on Oct 4, 2012. Translation from the Pashto by BBC Monitoring South Asia service. BBC Monitoring provides English transcript of both Dari and Pashto remarks by Pres. Karzai from this press conference.
- ² Searches using databases in Lexis-Nexis and Factiva found the following breakdown in 2002-2003: NYT 49 articles; WaPo 48; WSJ 12; *Guardian* 16.
- ³ Albert R. Hunt. "A Presidency in Disarray." *The Wall Street Journal*. April 4, 2002.
- ⁴ Christina Lamb. "Old Fears in the New Afghanistan." *The New York Times*. Dec. 8, 2002.
- ⁵ Nicholas D. Kristof. "The Wrong Lessons of the Somalia Debacle." *The New York Times*. Feb. 5, 2002.
- ⁶ Michael Gonzalez. "Paya Should Win the Peace Prize, but Won't." *The Wall Street Journal*. Oct. 8, 2003.
- ⁷ James P. Rubin. "What is America's Commitment to Iraq?" *The New York Times*. Aug. 23, 2002.
- ⁸ Mary McGrory. "Not a Week for Reality." *The Washington Post*. March 2, 2003.
- ⁹ Thomas L. Friedman. "The Talk of Kabul." *The New York Times*. Jan. 13, 2002.
- ¹⁰ Nicholas D. Kristof. "The Wrong War." *The New York Times*. Feb. 19, 2002.
- ¹¹ Fred Hiatt. "Proving Ground for a Just War." *The Washington Post*. Sept. 9, 2002.
- ¹² Paul Krugman. "Conquest and Neglect." *The New York Times*. April 11, 2003.
- ¹³ Madeleine K. Albright. "Where Iraq Fits in the War on Terror." *The New York Times*. Sept. 13, 2002.
- ¹⁴ Joseph R. Biden Jr. "Don't Forget Afghanistan." *The New York Times*. Oct. 1, 2003.
- ¹⁵ Richard Holbrooke. "Rebuilding Nations..." *The Washington Post*. April 1, 2002.
- ¹⁶ Pew Global Attitudes Project. "What the World Thinks in 2002." <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2002/12/2002-Report-Final-Updated.pdf>. British views towards the U.S.-led war on terror declined slightly over the years (in 2003, 63 percent were in favor of the American approach. By 2009, that number was 64 percent; in 2010, 58 percent).
- ¹⁷ Neil Clark. "The quisling of Belgrade: The murdered Serbian prime minister was a reviled western stooge whose economic reforms brought misery." *The Guardian*. March 14, 2003.
- ¹⁸ Searches using databases in Lexis-Nexis and Factiva found the following breakdown in 2002-2003: NYT 108 articles; WaPo 156; WSJ 52; *Guardian* 85.
- ¹⁹ Bret Stephens. "Afghanistan: Eyes Wide Shut." *The Wall Street Journal*. June 29, 2010.
- ²⁰ Simon Jenkins. "At Last We Get It—This War is Vietnam For Slow Learners." *The Guardian*. March 25, 2009.
- ²¹ Bob Herbert. "An Overdue 'Welcome Home.'" *The New York Times*. May 15, 2010.
- ²² Frank Rich. "Kiss This War Goodbye." *The New York Times*. Aug. 1, 2010.
- ²³ Eugene Robinson. "Defense on a Diet." *The Washington Post*. Nov. 16, 2010.
- ²⁴ Fouad Ajami. "Wikileaks and the Art of Diplomacy." *The Wall Street Journal*. Nov. 30, 2010.
- ²⁵ Eugene Robinson. "Defense on a Diet." *The Washington Post*. Nov. 16, 2010.
- ²⁶ Eugene Robinson. "A War's Cycle to Nowhere." *The Washington Post*. Dec. 17, 2010.
- ²⁷ Bob Herbert. "The Courage to Leave." *The New York Times*. June 12, 2010.
- ²⁸ Bob Herbert. "An Overdue 'Welcome Home.'" *The New York Times*. May 15, 2010.
- ²⁹ Jackson Diehl. "For Obama, Three Afghanistan Tests." *The Washington Post*. March 29, 2009.
- ³⁰ Peter W. Galbraith. "The Leaks That Change the Game." *The Guardian*. July 27, 2010.
- ³¹ Fouad Ajami. "Karzai and the Scent of U.S. Irresolution." *The Wall Street Journal*. Oct. 27, 2010.
- ³² "Mr. Obama and Mr. Karzai, Take Two." Editorial. *The New York Times*. May 13, 2010.

- ³³ Ann Marlowe. "The Surge Afghanistan Needs." *The Wall Street Journal*. Feb. 14, 2009.
- ³⁴ Jim Hoagland. "Our Man in Kabul." *The Washington Post*. Feb. 15, 2009.
- ³⁵ Fareed Zakaria. "Time to Deal in Afghanistan." *The Washington Post*. Sept. 14, 2009.
- ³⁶ Malalai Joya. "The Big Lie of Afghanistan." *The Guardian*. July 25, 2009.
- ³⁷ Ashraf Ghani. "Afghanistan Needs New Leadership." *The Wall Street Journal*. Aug. 8, 2009.
- ³⁸ Amin Saikal. "Afghanistan's Election: Karzai's regime is tainted, it is time for him to go." *The Guardian*. Sept. 3, 2009.
- ³⁹ Cary, Peter. 2012. "An Explosion of News: The State of Media in Afghanistan." *Center for International Media Assistance*. Washington, DC: National Endowment for Democracy.
- ⁴⁰ "Afghan Media—Three Years After." Report by Altai Consulting for USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives. <http://www.altaiconsulting.com/docs/media/2005/>
- ⁴¹ Brown, Katherine. *Journalists as De Facto Diplomats: The Reverberation of American News in Afghanistan*. Communications Doctoral Program, School of Journalism, Columbia University. 2012.
- ⁴² The book, published in 2007, is: "*Karzai: The Failing American Intervention and the Struggle for Afghanistan*" by Nick B. Mills.
- ⁴³ Eide, Kai. "Power Struggle Over Afghanistan: An inside look at what went wrong—and what we can do to repair the damage." Skyhorse Publishing. 2012.
- ⁴⁴ Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism. 2010. "The State of the News Media in 2009 – Afghanistan." (March) <http://www.stateofthemedias.org/2010/year_overview.php>. Cited in Brown, Katherine. *Journalists as De Facto Diplomats: The Reverberation of American News in Afghanistan*. Communications Doctoral Program, School of Journalism, Columbia University. 2012.
- ⁴⁵ See, for example: Rajiv Chandrasekaran. "Administration Is Keeping Ally at Arm's Length; Skepticism of Afghan leader Shapes Policy." *The Washington Post*. May 6, 2009.
- ⁴⁶ See, for example, Dexter Filkins' story on the killing of Pakistani journalist Syed Saleem Shahzad in *The New Yorker*: http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/09/19/110919fa_fact_filkins?currentPage=all
- ⁴⁷ "Afghan leader is seen to flout influence of U.S." Dexter Filkins and Mark Landler. March 30, 2010. *The New York Times*.
- ⁴⁸ "Anatomy of an Afghan War Tragedy." David S. Cloud. *Los Angeles Times*. April 10, 2011.
- ⁴⁹ I contributed reporting to the story.
- ⁵⁰ Dexter Filkins. "Iran Said to Give Top Karzai Aide Cash by Bagful." *The New York Times*. Oct. 24, 2010.
- ⁵¹ "Afghan President Defends Aide For Receiving Money From Iran." Partial transcript of Oct. 25, 2010 press conference by BBC Monitoring South Asia.
- ⁵² Interview with a former U.S. official in Afghanistan.
- ⁵³ "We are One Family, US Ambassador says of Karzai, NATO and America." *Kabul Weekly*. Sept. 6, 2006.
- ⁵⁴ Press conference reported in "Elder Karzai Defends Ties to Business." By Abdul Waheed Wafa and Carlotta Gall. *The New York Times*. March 13, 2009. The story Karzai was responding to was "Another Karzai Forges Afghan Business Empire." By James Risen. *The New York Times*. March 5, 2009.
- ⁵⁵ Text of a report from Tolo TV, March 12, 2009, as recorded by BBC Monitoring South Asia. March 13, 2009.

⁵⁶ Text of a report from Tolo TV, September 4, 2010, as recorded by BBC Monitoring South Asia. Sept. 5, 2010.

⁵⁷ Joshua Partlow and Karen DeYoung. "Karzai's Remarks Concern Petraeus." *The Washington Post*. Nov. 15, 2010.