



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on March 14, 2013

Faltering War in Afghanistan Continues

In a report published online on March 11, Jason Ditz, research editor at [Antiwar.com](#), used the strained meeting on Monday between Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel as the backdrop to assert that the U.S. occupation of the war-torn nation “is flying apart at the seams, with [insider attacks](#) and popular opposition once again on the rise.”



Among the recent incidents that Ditz says have damaged the credible execution of the war effort are the public statement by Afghan university student [Abdul Qayum](#) on March 10 that he was kidnapped and tortured by an apparent CIA strike force; and protests held in [Wardak Province](#) on March 10 directed against U.S. Special Forces who have ignored a deadline to withdraw from the province after locals alleged that the troops engaged in a campaign of violent intimidation against them, attacking villages, beating locals, and detaining them without charges.

Ditz also addressed the U.S. policy of canceling the transfer of detainees at the [Bagram Theater Internment Facility](#), a U.S.-run prison located next to Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan’s Parwan Province.

[That policy change was reported in the New York Times on March 9:](#)

The ceremony and the transfer of the last of nearly 4,000 Afghan prisoners from American to Afghan custody was called off by the American military commander, General Joseph F. Dunford Jr., at the last minute late Friday after President [Hamid Karzai](#) the day before rejected several important provisions in the transfer agreement.

The impasse was an embarrassment to both allies and came during the first official visit to the country by the new defense secretary, Chuck Hagel, who arrived Friday as officials scrambled to respond to Mr. Karzai’s objections. As recently as Jan. 11, at a news conference with President Obama in Washington, Mr. Karzai had said the issue of detention had been solved finally and that the transfer would occur soon.

In his report, Ditz had noted that Secretary Hagel’s press conference with President Karzai, originally scheduled for March 10, had been cancelled, with the United States attributing the cancellation to “[security concerns](#),” while the Afghan government said a “scheduling conflict” was responsible. But Ditz bought neither of those official explanations, citing speculation that the delay was related to Karzai’s condemnation of the United States in a televised speech earlier in the day. In that speech, Karzai



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accused the United States of plotting with the Taliban to make the security of Afghanistan appear worse than it is to help U.S. efforts to convince the Afghan government that U.S. and NATO occupation forces need to remain in large numbers beyond the scheduled 2014 departure date.

During a pause in his meetings with Karzai on March 10, Hagel held a [press conference in Kabul](#). A reporter named Lita asked him the following question:

Mr. Secretary, obviously, there's been a lot of attention with some of the comments that President Karzai made today about the U.S. and the Taliban being — working in concert on violence to show the Afghan people — there will be trouble — when — (inaudible) — U.S. forces leaving. What did he say to you about those comments? Did you ask him about them? And do you think this signals a fracture in U.S.-Afghan relations?

Hagel replied:

We did discuss those comments. I told the president it was not true that the United States was unilaterally working with the Taliban and trying to negotiate anything. The fact is, any prospect for peace or political settlements — that has to be led by the Afghans. That has to come from the Afghan side.

Obviously, the United States will support efforts, if they are led by the Afghans, to come to some possible resolution, if that eventually evolves. I don't know. I've always believed that it is wise for nations to engage, to reach out. That doesn't mean you are prepared to negotiate. It may never get to that point. But I think it's far preferable than war. And these are complicated issues. These are not easy issues to deal with.

So, yes, we talked about it, and that essentially summarizes what I said to the president.

During his introductory remarks to the members of the press corps, Hagel, who was a U.S. Senator from 1997–2009, said that he has “known President Karzai for many years, since I think December 2001. I think I'd mentioned that I was the coauthor of the Afghan Assistance Act.... So I became familiar with Mr. Karzai back in those days and known him since and always had a good relationship with him. We talked about everything, all the big issues. You all know what they are. I thought it was a very direct conversation.”

Hagel continued: “Past friendships and relationships, I think, are always helpful in these cases. John Kerry has had a long friendship and relationship with President Karzai.”

A common affiliation of several key Americans who have interacted with Karzai over the years makes for an interesting historical footnote. It seems more than coincidental that Secretary Hagel; Secretary of State John Kerry; former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice; former Secretary of State Colin Powell; former Defense Secretary (in both the Bush and Obama administrations) Robert M. Gates; Ambassador to Afghanistan James B. Cunningham; former Ambassador to Afghanistan (2011-1012) Ryan Crocker; former Ambassador to Afghanistan (2009-2011) Karl W. Eikenberry; former USCENTCOM Commander General David H. Petraeus; and former Commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley McChrystal have all been members of a single policy organization with only about 5,000 members: the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). (An article in [Wikipedia](#) notes: “A critical study found that of 502 government officials surveyed from 1945 to 1972, more than half were members of the Council [on Foreign Relations].”

A similar case could be made of other undeclared prolonged wars in which the United States has



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invested billions of dollars and thousands of lives, starting with the military action in Korea beginning in 1950. In the overwhelming majority of such cases, the Cabinet officials directing national policy during those wars (especially secretaries of state and defense) have been members of the CFR.

Photo of U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan



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