



AFGHANISTAN REVIEW

Inside This Issue

[Economic Stabilization](#)
[Governance & Participation](#)
[Humanitarian Assistance](#)
[Infrastructure](#)
[Justice & Reconciliation](#)
[Security](#)
[Social Well-Being](#)

This document is intended to provide an overview of relevant sector events in Afghanistan from 22 September– 28 September 2010. More comprehensive information is available on the Civil-Military Overview (CMO) at www.cimicweb.org. Hyperlinks to original source material are highlighted in blue and underlined in the embedded text.

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ECONOMIC STABILIZATION

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[Back to top](#)

Afghanistan's *Tolo News* has announced that the Afghan Ministry of Mines ([MoM](#)) re-launched the tender for the rights to the Hajigak iron ore deposit in [Bamian](#) province, which is considered to be one of the largest and economically most important [mineral sites](#) in Afghanistan. Extraction of the high-quality iron ore from Hajigak is expected to create up to [50,000 jobs](#) for Afghans, according to a separate report from *Tolo News*.

The rights to the Hajigak deposit had previously been put up for tender in early 2009, but *Business Week* and the *Washington Post* noted that the process was cancelled as a result of [limited private-sector interest](#), a decline in the [market value](#) of iron ore and concerns that leading officials involved in the tender were [corrupt](#). The delay in the tender process is likely to result in additional income for the Afghan government given a [significant increase](#) in iron ore prices over the past 18 months.

The transport of iron ore and other minerals from the mines at Hajigak to international markets will eventually benefit from the initiation of concrete planning for a [cross-country rail line](#), which will extend from the Afghan-Pakistan border at Torkham to the Afghan-Uzbek border at Hairatan. This rail linkage is considered by the Afghan Ministry of Commerce and Industry ([MoCI](#)) to comprise one dimension of a broader regional infrastructure project aimed at resurrecting the ancient '[Silk Route](#)' linking Asia and Europe via Afghanistan (see the [Infrastruc-](#)

[ture section](#) of this newsletter for further details on the railway plans).

Iron ore was not the only natural resource in Afghanistan to receive media attention this past week. *Pajhwok Afghan News* highlighted a [natural gas](#) well in [Jowzjan](#) province which recently began supplying a factory site in neighbouring [Balkh](#) province. The governor of Jowzjan suggested that the well will contribute to the local economy and may enhance the energy supply by fuelling a [thermal power](#) station in the future. A separate report in *Pajhwok* noted the tripling of profits at a [coal mine](#) in [Samangan](#) province, also in northern Afghanistan.

Despite such promising economic developments, [rising food prices](#) in Afghanistan continue to pose a challenge. The *Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN)* reported [concerns](#) that wheat prices 'could rise in the coming months, placing an additional burden on poor people in a country considered one of the most food insecure in the world'. Adding evidence to such concerns, *Pajhwok* notes that the price of a 50 kg bag of flour has increased from AFN 700 (approx. USD 15.95) to AFN 1,020 (approx. USD 23.25) over the past six months. The *Pajhwok* article also notes increases in the prices of sugar, tea and oil; only the price of [rice](#) has decreased in recent months. ([Comments? Click Here](#))

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GOVERNANCE & PARTICIPATIONAnne-Catherine Claude, anne-catherine.claude@cimicweb.org / +1 757-683-4368[Back to top](#)

The Independent Election Commission ([IEC](#)) released partial election results on 23 September 2010 for the country's parliamentary elections. As reported by the *Associated Press*, [Noor Mohammad Noor](#), the IEC spokesman, announced that, along with the partial results, the IEC released details on ballots that were kept out of the count due to suspicions of fraud. According to *McClatchy Newspapers*, [new data released](#) reveals evidence of serious fraud during the election, including voter turnout that exceeded 100% in many districts in the south-east as well as [video evidence](#) of ballot-stuffing.

The final results for the parliamentary elections are expected at the end of October, once the Electoral Complaints Commission ([ECC](#)) has investigated all the complaints received. However, the announcement of the final results may be further delayed as the IEC has ordered a [partial recount of votes](#) in seven provinces. The IEC also announced that it [invalidated all votes](#) cast at two polling stations in [Khost](#) province.

The ECC registered [3,138 complaints](#) related to irregularities on election day. *Pajhwok Afghan News* reports that in a [statement from the Presidential Palace](#), President Hamid Karzai urged the IEC and the ECC to continue their work without ceding to domestic or international pressure. Indeed, an article by the *Christian Science Monitor* underlined that the members of the ECC at the regional level, the Provincial Election Complaints Commissions (PECCs), are likely to experience pressure from powerful can-

didates, who might lose votes as a result of the quarantine of suspicious ballots and may lobby the members of the PECCs to get the votes restored. Some international observers have expressed concerns about how much pressure PECCs will be able to manage, especially in less secure provinces. According to Martine van Bijlert, co-director of the Afghanistan Analyst Network ([AAN](#)), the members of the PECC "are going to be under a lot of pressures and they will be more or less on their own for it."

[US Vice President Joseph Biden](#) declared to *MSNBC* that Afghanistan "will fail" unless President Hamid Karzai takes up his responsibility and ensures appropriate measures are taken to fight corruption, train the Afghan security forces and pursue reconciliation talks with the Taliban. Biden further added that "Karzai must deal with the most virulent types of corruption which causes populations, villages and provinces to turn to the Taliban for justice instead of corrupt officials. And he must deal with the larger pieces of corruption that exist within the society."

In an interview with *Tolo TV*, [Afghanistan's Attorney General](#), Mohammad Ishaq Alako, said that corruption is widespread in Afghan Ministries and that in most cases top ministry officials are involved. A special court is currently being formed so that the cases of nine ministers can be brought to trial. [\(Comments? Click Here\)](#)

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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCEErin Foster, erin.foster@cimicweb.org / +1 757-683-4233[Back to top](#)

Two aid workers employed by Development Alternatives International ([DAI](#)) – a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) contractor – and two drivers were [kidnapped](#) in [Kunar](#) province on Sunday, 26 September, the *New York Times* reports. The two vehicles were travelling from Jalalabad to Asadabad when armed gunmen reportedly stopped them and took them into the nearby mountains. The British Embassy confirmed that one of their citizens was missing while the [Taliban have denied](#) their involvement, according to *BBC*. This kidnapping comes just a month after the death of 10 aid workers in [Badakhshan](#) province and demonstrates the ongoing dangers facing humanitarian workers in Afghanistan (*for more information on this subject see the CFC Humanitarian Assistance Report 1/10, [Humanitarian Security in Afghanistan](#)*).

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network ([FEWS NET](#)) September report on [food security](#) in Afghanistan forecasts a gap of 700,000 tons of wheat for 2010. Provinces in the south, east and central parts of the country are reported to be the most affected due to poor harvests and flooding. Kazakhstan has agreed to export wheat to Afghanistan, alleviating fears that arose following the initial announcement of wheat export bans from Russia and Kazakhstan. The *Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN)* reports that [demand for wheat](#) is typically higher during the months of September through November as winter food stocks are gathered by many Afghans. The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has warned that a [global food crisis](#) is possible due to the recent environmental disasters involving flooding and fire that

destroyed massive acres of agricultural land paired with the speculation of food markets, according to a recent *Guardian* article.

A new [food aid project](#) is currently underway to prevent food insecurity for 1,440 residents of the districts of Behsud I and Behsud II in [Wardak](#) province, according to the Mission d'Aide au Développement des Economies Rurales – Afghanistan ([MADERA](#)). MADERA is a French non-governmental organisation (NGO) partnering with the Comité Interministériel sur l'Aide Alimentaire ([CIAA](#)) and the Embassy of France to provide relief to those facing food instability. MADERA chose Wardak province for its food aid

project based on a food security and needs assessment conducted in November 2009 and following the destruction of agricultural land, equipment and homes by flooding in April and May 2010. A food-for-work model will be used to employ locals for the repair of equipment and land with the goal of attaining food security in 2011. ([Comments? Click Here](#))

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INFRASTRUCTURE

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[Back to top](#)

Railway linkages within Afghanistan re-emerged as a major issue this past week with NATO's International Security Assistance Force ([ISAF](#)) releasing a [statement](#) announcing the completion of a 75 km rail line connecting the Uzbek city of Termez with Mazar-e Sharif, the capital of [Balkh](#) province in Afghanistan. The line cost [USD 165 million](#), which was contributed by both the United States and Japan.

The northern railway project is anticipated to connect Afghanistan with a broader, cross-country railway network which the Chinese government had committed to building more than two years ago. The [agreement](#) was entered into by a Chinese state-owned corporation, the Metallurgical Group Corporation (known as [MCC](#)), as part of a proposal to acquire the rights to the Aynak copper mine. Nearly three years later since the Chinese offer was extended, *Politics Daily* notes that [limited progress](#) had been made.

Reuters notes that China has just launched a two-year [feasibility study](#) concerning the construction of Afghanistan's first major railway, which is anticipated to cost between USD 6 billion and USD 7 billion. As *Reuters* suggests, however, all estimates of time and cost are subject to modification given the potential for insecurity to complicate large-scale infrastructure projects such as this. Another source of uncertainty is the lack of clarity surrounding the use of private security companies (PSCs) in Afghanistan. While Afghan President Hamid Karzai issued a [ban on PSCs](#) in August 2010, which was to take effect within four months, *Reuters* recently reported that he decided to allow [PSCs](#) to continue protecting select infrastructure projects and embassies.

Progress was also reported on a number of smaller infrastructure construction and rehabilitation projects, including those outlined below:

- The United States Agency for International Development ([USAID](#)) completed rehabilitation work on a 24 km [irrigation canal](#) in [Kunar](#) province, according to *Pajhwok Afghan News*. The article notes that improvements to the canal, which provides water to 20 villages and irrigates 3,500 hectares of land, were accompanied by training on [modern techniques](#) to grow fruits and vegetables'.
- *Pajhwok* also reported on the construction of a 7.7 km road in [Faryab](#) province by an Afghan firm at a cost of [USD 2.4 million](#). The project is noteworthy given that, while being announced, the Afghan Minister of Public Works warned the company that a [guarantee](#) – funds given to the Ministry of Public Works ([MoPW](#)) by the contractor as a form of collateral – would be kept by the Afghan government if evidence of [misappropriation](#) was uncovered.
- In [Parwan](#) province, [24 mosques](#) were rehabilitated by a team from the United Arab Emirates ([UAE](#)) working with the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), reports *Pajhwok*. The rehabilitation projects were part of a broader [assistance package](#) offered to mosques and religious leaders, which also included the distribution of food, religious books, computers and the construction of a solar energy plant. ([Comments? Click Here](#))

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JUSTICE & RECONCILIATION

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[Back to top](#)

The Afghan government announced on 28 September, during a celebration marking Literacy Day, the names of the 70 individuals who will become members of the [High Council for Peace](#) (See [09 September CFC Weekly Afghanistan Review](#), Justice and Reconciliation section), aimed at fostering reconciliation talks with the Taliban. At the event, President Karzai urged Afghans to “[come to their senses](#)” and support the reconciliation talks that are set to begin soon. He also renewed calls for the [Taliban to lay down their arms](#) and join the peace process. *The Guardian* reports that the [council will be composed](#) of two former presidents and at least two ex-Taliban officials, as well as civil and religious leaders and representatives of women and ethnic groups from across the country. Their nomination followed discussions with tribal chiefs and powerbrokers, some of whom allied with the US in the fight against the Taliban and took part in the June 2010 *Peace Jirga* which set up the council. According to [CNN](#), 60 men, eight women and two other females yet to be named will serve on the council. However, Rachel Reid, an analyst for [Human Rights Watch](#) (HRW), regrets that the list contains “too many names that Afghans will associate with war crimes, warlordism and corruption.” Indeed, some of the new peace council’s members are former warlords who were involved in the civil war in the 1990s and spent

years fighting the Taliban. According to [Ian Pannell](#), the *BBC’s* correspondent in Afghanistan, these associations may hamper efforts to bring an end to the conflict. The first meeting of the High Council for Peace is expected to take place in Kabul in the near future.

The [New York Times](#) and [Tolo TV](#) both report that General David Petraeus, the Commander of US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, said that some Taliban leaders have started talks at the highest levels of the Afghan government. He added that the United States is committed to supporting peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban. According to presidential spokesman [Waheed Omar](#), “in the past there have been no negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban – only there were some contacts and some signs from both sides. There have been different levels of contact – sometimes direct and sometimes indirect. Any future contacts, talks or negotiations will be handled through the peace council.” The Taliban, however, denied General Petraeus’ statement and called it “[baseless](#),” arguing that they will not take part in any negotiations as long as foreign troops remain in Afghanistan. ([Comments? Click Here](#))

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SECURITY

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[Back to top](#)

The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) jointly [commenced the combat phase](#) of “*Operation Dragon Strike*,” initiated to push the Taliban out of Kandahar and interrupt their ability to operate in the province, reports the *Associated Press*. The operation will close in on Kandahar from several directions to prevent insurgents from escaping. NATO spokesman Brigadier General (BG) Blotz stated “we expect heavy fighting” and also mentioned the operation will be supported with air assets. BG Blotz added that “Afghanistan and coalition forces are destroying Taliban positions so they will have nowhere to hide.” The article suggests that insurgents are returning fire with small arms and Rocket-Propelled Grenades (RPGs) but no coalition casualties have been reported. *Operation Dragon Strike* is considered a key part of the US strategy to turn the conflict around in Afghanistan, according to the article.

A [coalition air assault](#), conducted Friday, 24 September, resulted in the death of at least 30 insurgents, says *CNN*. The assault took place in the Alisheng

district of [Laghman](#) province and was orchestrated to end local insurgent activities. The coalition force consisted of more than 250 soldiers and police, says the article. In a separate attack, in [Paktika](#) province, a precision airstrike killed the Taliban commander responsible for attacks during the parliamentary elections on 18 September.

[Insurgents attacked](#) Forward Operating Bases (FOBs) Goode, Lightning and Thunder, near Gardez in [Paktya](#) province, on Saturday, 25 September, reports *Defense Video and Imagery Distribution System (DVIDS)*. The three FOBs were fired upon by small arms fire and RPGs. The attacks resulted in the death of an Afghan security contractor and five insurgents. The remaining insurgents fled to a *wadi*, or a dried-up riverbed. Continuous firing went on for about 20 minutes followed by sporadic firing for another hour. According to the article, no coalition troops were wounded during the attacks. ([Comments? Click Here](#))

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The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) [Summit](#) was held 20-22 September, ten years after international leaders signed the [Millennium Declaration](#) to meet eight goals by 2015 to address poverty and hunger, climate change, maternal and child health, global partnerships, HIV/AIDS and other diseases and universal education. [Afghanistan became a signatory](#) to the declaration in March 2004 adding a ninth goal to 'enhance security' and extending the deadline to 2020. Afghan Foreign Minister Dr. Zalmi Rassoul stressed the need to attain [peace and security](#) in the country to fully meet the MDGs, according to *Pajhwok Afghan News*. He went on to add that the country was experiencing 40% unemployment while 36% of the population was living in poverty. Afghanistan is also facing an ongoing gender gap in education and relies solely on foreign aid for development projects. As the MDG summit came to a close, [social inequality](#) emerged as the main stumbling block for nations to confront in the coming five years, reports the *Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN)*.

In related news, the Government of Afghanistan, World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) issued new statistics about [child and maternal mortality](#) in Afghanistan, [MDG 4 and 5](#) respectively. Maternal mortality has decreased from 1,600 annual deaths per 100,000 live births in 2001 to 1,400 in 2010 and child mortality for those under the age of five has decreased from 257 annual deaths per 1,000 live births in 2001 to 161 in 2010. Acting Minister of Public Health Dr. Suraya Dalil attributed the decrease in mortality rates to expanded health services and concerted child immunization campaigns. In spite of the

decrease, Afghanistan still has a long road towards bridging the gaps in access to healthcare and disease prevention, reports *IRIN*. UNICEF ranks Afghanistan the [worst country](#) out of 202 listed for maternal, infant and child mortality in 2009. Afghanistan is committed to reducing maternal mortality to 800 per 100,000 live births by 2015 and 400 by 2020 to achieve MDG 5 and reduce under-five mortality to 127 per 1,000 live births in 2015 to meet MDG 4.

The Washington Post reports the creation of a [new comic book](#) featuring a disabled Muslim boy superhero. The 'Silver Scorpion' is scripted to have lost his legs in a landmine accident and discovers his ability to control metal with his mind. This is the first in a series of international superheroes that will be developed by the company Liquid Comics as a result of the [Open Hands Initiative](#) that brought together disabled children from the United States and Syria.

The Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE) reports a [soaring number](#) of applicants to religious schools in Afghanistan. According to a *Pajhwok* article, seminaries and Koran memorisation centres as well as students enrolled in these schools have more than doubled since 2001 to 581 centres and 143,000 students in 2010. Many hopeful students are currently denied admission due to a lack of space. The Ministry estimates that 200 religious schools have been established this year alone with the goal of establishing 1,000 seminaries by 2014. **(Comments? [Click Here](#))**

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