

March 10, 2003: Karzai's Quest for Support - The Washington Times

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March 10, 2003 Afghani President Hamid Karzai returned home this weekend after visiting Japan, Malaysia, the United States and India. Although Mr. Karzai won some new pledges of support, a difficult road lies ahead. America and the rest of the world have a large stake in Afghanistan's recovery. Mr. Karzai asked Washington for funds to establish a national army, and for irrigation and power projects and the repair of dams and canals. Washington increased Afghanistan's line of credit from the Overseas Private Investment Corporation from \$50 million to \$100 million in the wake of Mr. Karzai's trip. The United States has contributed more than \$700 million in humanitarian and reconstruction aid, according to the U.S. Agency for International Development. More than 65 nations last year pledged \$6.6 billion in aid for Afghanistan. Afghanistan has made some noteworthy strides since it was liberated from the Taliban. A new currency has been established, 2 million Afghan refugees have returned, 100 media outlets have been opened and 3 million children have returned to school. But along the border with Pakistan, Pashtun nationalist and former Mojahedin fighter Gulbuddin Hekmatyar appears to be fortifying his power with former Taliban forces. The U.N.'s chief spokesman in Kabul, Manoel de Almeida e Silva, said last month that aid programs had to be discontinued in parts of the northern and southern regions of the country due to fighting between militias. Two cabinet members have been assassinated. Of the 3,000 recruits already trained for Afghanistan's national army, approximately half appear to have deserted due to ethnic rivalries or insufficient pay and housing. And in some tribal areas, local leaders are enforcing Taliban-style repression of women, according to the government-funded U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. Some of these problems could be countered with increased aid. To bring Afghanistan's remote provinces into Kabul's fold, Mr. Karzai needs funds to pay military and police salaries, provide critical services to the people and build basic infrastructure. But, Afghanistan's future will also be determined by the effectiveness of U.S. diplomacy. Washington must press Afghanistan's neighbors, such as Pakistan, India and Russia, to discontinue past practices of bolstering their influence by buying the support of provincial warlords. Although this strategy may secure short-term goals, the region stands to benefit most by supporting a cohesive Afghanistan. Ultimately, Afghanistan's future will depend on its own people. The Bush administration has done yeoman work in mobilizing support for Mr. Karzai's efforts to establish stability by working with Kabul to establish a unified Afghan military force. But, much more must be done in the coming months and years to assist in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and ensure that it will never again become the haven for international terrorism that it was under the Taliban.