

Afghan Anger as Taleban Get Out of Jail

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Rather than contributing to reconciliation process, many of those freed return to violence, officials claim

Politicians and analysts in Afghanistan have condemned a series of releases of Taleban prisoners, arguing that such moves have failed to bring the insurgents any closer to peace talks.

In the latest release, 41 detainees, including three local Taleban commanders, were freed by presidential decree from a prison on Ghazni province on July 18.

Mohammad Ali Ahmadi, the deputy governor of Ghazni province, south of Kabul, said two former prisoners had been killed in clashes with security forces. He named another detainee as Mullah Karim, arrested on suspicion of killing 17 policemen, who he said had already returned to his work as a Taleban judge in Khugiani district.

Ahmadi went on to condemn the government's strategy, supported by the country's High Peace Council and some Islamic scholars, of freeing prisoners as a means of fostering reconciliation with the armed insurgents.

"Since these people have not given up [violence], why should they be released by the justice system?" he asked, calling for those found guilty of planting bombs or carrying out fatal attacks to be sentenced to death.

Ghazni security chief Zar Awar Zahid told IWPR that his office had intelligence indicating that recently-released prisoners had returned to fighting. He named a number of militants released in July who he had already returned to fighting in various districts around the province.

Nadir Gerwal, a member of the Ghazni provincial council, agreed that freeing prisoners would not deter the insurgents from pursuing their objectives.

"Taleban who are released from prison are welcomed back by their comrades and rejoin them the same night," he said.

According to a report on Tolo television, 520 insurgents have been released from prisons around the country in recent years.

Efforts to secure a peace deal between the Afghan government and the Taleban have been given further impetus by next year's withdrawal of NATO troops from the country.

Mir Samad Haq, head of the Ghazni provincial appeals court, said he supported the prisoner release programme and insisted it did not include anyone suspected of "kidnapping, terrorism, planting mines or using of weapons".

"Mullah Karim, who was arrested by the government in connection with the deaths of 17 policemen, was released because there was not enough evidence to prove him guilty," he added.

High-profile detainees in other parts of Afghanistan are also accused of returning to violence after they get released.

Sharafuddin, police chief in Badghis province in western Afghanistan, said that a former Taleban official called Mohammad Zaman, released from the detention facility at Bagram air base last year, had rejoined the insurgents and was commanding a group of 400 fighters who were responsible for killing and injuring many government soldiers.

Critics of the policy say it reflects the lack of a coherent strategy for dealing with the Taleban.

Hamidullah Danish, a member of the provincial council in Ghazni, condemned the prisoner release in his own province.

"Karzai must know that they will never consent to peace talks," he said. "The government needs to change its policies towards the Taleban and stop giving them further leverage."

The Afghan government has pressed neighbouring Pakistan to release Taleban prisoners held there to boost the chances of peace talks. More than 30 have been released over the last year, including seven who were freed after President Hamed Karzai visited Islamabad last month.

This week, Pakistan finally acceded to Kabul's request to free Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the former deputy leader of the Taliban who was arrested in Karachi in 2010.

Political analyst Wahid Mozdah argues that such prisoner releases are an important confidence-building measure.

"Now that peace talks are beginning, and Pakistan has also shown it's willing to have peace talks, releasing prisoners is way of creating trust," he said.

So far, though, releasing insurgents appears to have done little to move the peace process forward. A Taliban political office which opened in Doha was shut down earlier this year after the Karzai administration objected to its portrayal as a diplomatic mission.

Political analyst Ahmad Sayed said the prisoner releases were fundamentally a sign of weakness by Kabul.

"The government cannot tell who is friend and who is enemy," he said.

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Location: [Afghanistan](#)

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