

## **Coalition Seeks to Challenge Karzai**

**Author:** [Salima Ghafari](#)

Parties band together to field a slate of candidates in the upcoming election.

A leading politician who ran against Hamed Karzai in last year's presidential election has announced the creation of a new coalition that hopes to win a majority of seats in the national legislature this autumn, and create a parliamentary form of government.

Mohammad Yunus Qanuni, who ran for president last October, said that the National Understanding Front (Jabha-ye-Tafahhum-e-Milli), made up of 11 political parties, would act as an opposition to the Karzai government.

Once in parliament, the bloc will seek to amend the constitution to replace the current system of government, which it believes gives the president too much power. Instead, the coalition favours a system in which "the prime minister is chosen by parliament, and power is shared between the president and the prime minister", said coalition spokesman Sayed Ali Jawed, of the Hezb-e-Wahdat-e-Islami party.

"As long as power is concentrated in one person, it is our intention to form a shadow government," he said, adding that the new opposition force will publicise its plans "so the people can compare and see which is better".

Qanuni, formerly of the Jamiat-e-Islami mujahedin faction, has set up his own group called the New Afghanistan Party which is part of the coalition.

He has held several government posts, and finished a distant second to Karzai in the October 2004 presidential election. He has a power base among ethnic Tajiks in northern Afghanistan and helped United States-led Coalition forces overthrow the Taleban in 2001.

The 11-member coalition also includes parties led by two other contenders in last year's election, Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq and Ahmad Shah Ahmadzai.

Citing the results from the October presidential election, Jawed predicted that the bloc could win more than 2.5 million votes for its candidates. Of the more than eight million ballots cast last year, Karzai took 55 per cent while Qununi got 16 per cent and Mohaqiq 11 per cent.

However, few independent observers give the coalition much chance of achieving its goal of winning a majority in the 249-seat Wolesa Jirga or National Assembly.

More than 10,000 candidates are expected to apply to stand for election in the registration process that ends on May 19. By early May, more than 70 parties had registered.

Karzai spokesman Jawed Ludin called formation of the group a step toward democracy, and urged it to put the national good above particular interests.

"May God grant them success in being able to perform their duties as a responsible opposition," he said.

Several people both inside and outside the parliamentary process viewed the coalition with suspicion, some believing it was in fact set up with the blessing of Karzai. They noted that some of its leaders, including Qanuni himself, previously worked in government.

Shukria Barakzai, a member of the commission that drafted Afghanistan's constitution, said, "In my view, the real and strong opposition against the government is a free press, which is several times stronger than Jabha-ye-Tafahhum."

Salima Ghafari is a staff reporter for IWPR in Kabul.

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Jabha-ye-Tafahhum-e-Milli (National Understanding Front)

\* Hezb-e-Afghanistan-e-Nawin (New Afghanistan Party) – leader Yunus Qanuni

\* Hezb-e-Iqtedar-e-Milli Islami Afghanistan (Afghanistan Islamic National Authority Party) – leader Ahmad Shah Ahmadzai

\* Hezb-e-Wahdat-e-Islami Afghanistan (Islamic Unity Party of Afghanistan) – leader Sayed Ali Jawed

\* Hezb-e-Milli Islami Afghanistan (National Islamic Party of Afghanistan) – leader Ustad Mohammad Akbari

\* Hezb-e-Wahdat-e-Islami Mardum-e-Afghanistan (Islamic Unity Party of the People of Afghanistan) – leader Haji Mohammad Mohaqiq

\* Hezb-e-Islami Nawin-e-Afghanistan (New Islamic Party of Afghanistan) – leader Sayed Jawad Husseini

\* Hezb-e-Solh wa Ukhwat-e-Islami Afghanistan (Afghanistan Islamic Peace and Brotherhood Party) – leader Qadir Imami Ghorri

\* Hezb-e-Harakat-e-Ingelab-e-Islami Afghanistan (Islamic Revolutionary Movement of Afghanistan) – leader Ahmad Nabi Mohammadi

\* Hezb-e-Wahdat-e-Aqwam-e-Afghanistan (Afghanistan Ethnic Unity Party) leader Nasrullah Barakzai

\* Hezb-e-Iqtedar-e-Milli Afghanistan (National Authority Party of Afghanistan) – leader Qarabig Ezatyar

\* Hezb-e-Isteqlal-e-Milli Afghanistan (Afghanistan National Independence Party) – leader Taj Mohammad

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