

Senior Police Official Ousted

Author: [IWPR](#)

Reformist interior minister slices away at power of police strongman.

Afghan interior minister Ali Ahmad Jalali ordered a shake-up of his ministry last week, undercutting the authority of a powerful police official.

Local analysts see the move as part of Jalali's desire to strengthen his control over the ministry and streamline its bureaucracy, as part of a wider reform.

The reshuffle did away with two departments and demoted three senior officials. But the main casualty was Din Mohammad Jurat, who was in charge of the Department for National Public Security.

That department has now been abolished. It held considerable power as it was responsible for security in major cities and highways across Afghanistan, and controlled four special battalions of police, totalling 5,000 men. Their job was to intervene in clashes, demonstrations and major disturbances.

By eliminating the public security office, the interior minister reduced the influence of Jurat, widely viewed as one of the most powerful men in Kabul. Jurat will continue to control two police battalions, although they will now have the less controversial task of helping out in natural disasters and other emergencies, and will operate under a temporary new department. The other two battalions will serve as reserve police.

Interviewed by IWPR, Jurat said that despite the reshuffle, "The people I controlled before are still under my command. And the government has promised me that all these staff will be employed again."

He expressed pride in what he had accomplished in the interior ministry.

"At the time when I lifted the curfew, no one agreed with me, and I took responsibility for it. The security of Mazar-e-Sharif is under my command. And as for Faryab, Paktia and Kunar – in all those areas my forces solved all the problems," he said.

Jurat's record goes back to the war against the Soviets in the 1980s. He was a mujahedin commander and later intelligence officer under Ahmad Shah Massoud, who led the Jamiat-e-Islami faction's resistance north of Kabul. He remained with Jamiat through the 1990s, and joined in its resistance – as part of the Northern Alliance – to the Taliban.

When the new administration came into being following the Bonn Agreement, Jurat joined the interior ministry along with many other former Jamiat soldiers and commanders. The first minister was Yunus Qanooni, a Northern Alliance leader.

In July 2002, Qanooni was replaced by Taj Mohammad Wardak, who was in his eighties. Wardak was widely regarded as ineffective in reforming the ministry.

Under Wardak, police commonly said, "We don't have a minister. Our minister is Din Mohammad Jurat."

Last year, President Hamed Karzai publicly named Jurat as one of three possible suspects implicated in the murder of aviation minister Abdul Rahman – but he was never charged. The minister was reported to have made enemies among the Northern Alliance faction to which Jurat belongs.

Members of a police battalion under Jurat’s command shot at student demonstrators last November, killing several and wounding others.

In the interview Jurat shrugged off the criticisms, saying, “Some people hold personal opinions about me, but I have set a standard and shown the importance of the police.”

People fear him and respect him, he said, because of his “honesty and loyalty to the job”.

During the interview Jurat was surrounded by police officers. He asked for a cigarette, and it was brought to him already lit.

When Jalali replaced Wardak as minister in January, he made it clear he was going to shake up the ministry and build a police force that would be professional and apolitical and would fairly reflect the country’s ethnic balance. He affirmed his support for central government in extending its reach and clamping down on rogue regional leaders. The reforms he has started follow a plan outlined by German advisers, which Wardak was unable to carry out.

The minister was out of town and unavailable for comment, but his deputy administrator Fazil Ahmad Azimi told IWPR that the reshuffle had not been designed to get rid of Jurat. It was part of making the ministry more efficient, and had been in the works for some time, he said.

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