

A Brief Biography of His Excellency Hamid Karzai

Hamid Karzai was born on December 24, 1957, in Karz, a small village near Kandahar in southern Afghanistan. His was a royal birth since members of the Karzai family, who belong to the Popalzai clan, have been rulers of the country for over 600 years. Karzai's grandfather, Khan Mohammad Khan was president of the national council under King Mohammed Zahir Shah (ruled 1933-73); and he served in Afghanistan's war of independence as Deputy Speaker of the Senate; his father Abdul Ahad Karzai was a Popalzai tribal elder and a significant political figure who served as a senator in the King's parliament.

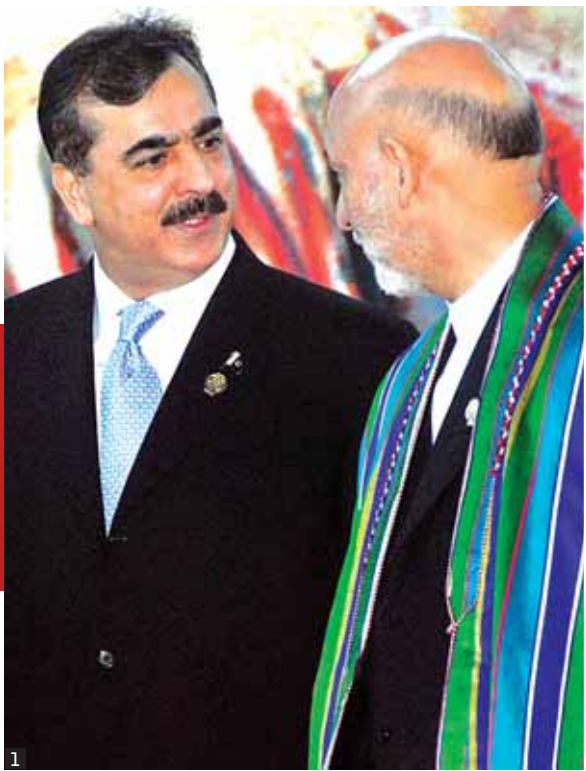
Karzai attended high school in Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan. He also attended the Habibia School in Kabul, where he earned a bachelor's degree in political science. In 1979, after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, the entire Karzai family fled the country and settled in Quetta, Pakistan. Meanwhile Karzai, as an exchange student, continued his education in political science at the Himachal Pradesh University in Simla, India. In 1985, the studious Karzai traveled to Paris, France, to study journalism at the Ecole Supérieure. By the age of 28, the future diplomat was fluent in seven languages and had racked up an impressive number of professional degrees.

During his years of self-imposed exile, Karzai retained close ties with his homeland. While living in Pakistan, he was director of the Afghan National Liberation Front and worked for the Mujahedin, a force of anti-Soviet guerillas resisting the soviet occupation of his homeland. In 1989, when Soviet forces were finally overthrown, the country was left in shambles. Various factions fought to gain control of the Afghan government and, in 1992, a coalition of Islamic groups known as the Seven Party Alliance named Burhanuddin Rabbani (1940-) president of the interim, or temporary, Islamic Council. The Taliban emerged from the fratricidal chaos to restore order to much of the

country in 1996, but then imposed its severe vision of a medieval Islamic paradise on the country. That prompted the Karzai father and son to organize several loya jirgas in exile, first in Bonn and then in Istanbul. In August 1999, Abdul Ahad Karzai, who was organizing resistance to the Taliban from his base in Quetta, Pakistan, was assassinated by the Taliban and their foreign supporters. The meetings attracted the favorable attention of the international diplomatic community while drawing the ire of the Taliban.

President Hamid Karzai with UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon (left) and NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer (right).





Karzai took over the role of tribal leadership, picking up where his father left off.

For most of his life Hamid Karzai has dedicated himself to bringing peace and unity to his homeland of Afghanistan, a nearly impossible task because the country has been plagued by internal tensions and external threats for decades.

Afghanistan did eventually find itself the focus of international attention, but unfortunately it was because Taliban extremists, who had taken control of the country, were linked with the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. Karzai rallied internal forces and joined with U.S. troops to oust the Islamic faction from power. After the fall of the Taliban, Karzai served as both the Chairman and interim President of the transitional government. Hamid Karzai returned to Uruzgan province in October 2001 and worked to coordinate local efforts to rid Afghanistan of the Taliban and their supporters. On December 5, 2001, while he was still in Afghanistan leading these efforts, he was elected Chairman of the Interim Administration of Afghanistan by participants at the UN-sponsored Bonn Conference. He, along with the appointed cabinet, took oath of office on December 22, 2001.

His role as leader of the country was confirmed by members of the Emergency Loya Jirga when he was elected President of the Transitional Government on June 13, 2002. In Afghanistan's first presidential election on October 9, 2004, despite prediction to the contrary, Hamid Karzai won the majority of votes, beating the 17 challengers. Karzai was elected to a five-year term



as President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, making him the first democratically elected President.

The 2009 election saw Hamid Karzai's administration blamed for the failures that plagued the reconstruction of Afghanistan after the toppling of the Taliban government, wide spread corruption, the resurgence of the (neo-) Taliban and the explosion of the poppy trade. The election saw him securing more than 50% of votes. However, there was a call for a second round run-off vote with the first runner-up, former foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah, as the first election was marred by accusations of massive fraud. Still,

President Hamid Karzai secured a second term when his only challenger, former Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, dropped out of the race saying that the vote would not be free and fair.

Karzai, till date, has survived four assassination attempts.

In 1999, he married Dr. Zeenat Quraishi, as obstetrician by profession. Their son, Mirwais, was born in 2007.

Hamid Karzai has been awarded many honors, among them a Honorary Knighthood from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth (2003), the Philadelphia Liberty Medal (2004), & then American Bar Association Asia Rule of Law Award (2003). ■

1. President Karzai with Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani, Prime Minister of Pakistan.

2. President Karzai with Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa and the First Lady Shriranthi Rajapaksa.

3. President Karzai with Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India.

4. President Karzai with Indian President Pratibha Patil.

5. President Karzai with US President Barack Obama in the Grand Foyer at the White House.

6. President Karzai with Jigmi Y. Thinley, Prime Minister of Bhutan.

7. President Karzai with US Secretary Hillary Clinton.

