

GRAFT-SHARING AGREEMENT SIGNED, GHANI AWARDED AFGHAN PRESIDENCY

On Sunday, Ashraf Ghani was declared the new President of Afghanistan. Despite months of “auditing” the votes cast in the runoff, we have not yet had an announcement of actual vote totals. That is because Abdullah Abdullah, who won the first round of voting by over a million votes still disputed that he could have then lost by over a million votes in the runoff. Abdullah had refused to play along with the plan to announce vote totals at the same time as awarding the presidency to Ghani. Ghani will be sworn into office on Monday.

In this morning’s New York Times, Michael Gordon transcribes the State Department’s elation over the planned signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement shortly after Ghani is sworn in:

A new security agreement authorizing the presence of American forces in Afghanistan after 2014 will be signed just days after the nation’s new president is inaugurated on Monday, a senior State Department official said Wednesday.

Both Ashraf Ghani, Afghanistan’s new president-elect, and his chief opponent, Abdullah Abdullah, indicated during their election campaign that they supported the security agreement. And both men recommitted themselves to the agreement in recent weeks as they worked out the terms of a power-sharing arrangement, American officials said.

“We expect that it will be fully signed in a matter of days after the new administration starts,” said the State Department official, who spoke on

condition of anonymity under the agency's rules for briefing reporters. "No one has talked about reopening the issues."

Though widely anticipated, the signing of the agreement is an important step that would provide a legal basis for American forces to advise Afghan forces after 2014.

Abdullah is reported as "optimistic" about the new national unity government and is saying all the right things about Afghanistan appearing to have avoided a violent resolution of the election conflict.

As a full-time skeptic, though, I can't help wondering if at least a part of the prolonged process of negotiating the national unity government was just haggling over how much cash will be in Abdullah's monthly bag from the CIA. After all, Karzai's take is known to have been at least tens of millions of dollars.

Details of the "power-sharing" agreement are beginning to come out:

Dr. Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, the president-elect of Afghanistan and the chief executive officer Dr. Abdullah Abdullah have shared the key government institutions almost on equal basis among themselves.

According to documents obtained by 8am newspaper, the ministry of interior and finance has been taken by Dr. Ashraf Ghani while the ministry of defense and foreign affairs have been taken by Dr. Abdullah.

Other key ministries and government institutions have also been equally shared among the two teams, according to the documents.

So although Ghani is to be President, it is very

significant that Abdullah will have control of the defense ministry. Returning to my link above about the bags o' cash that Karzai got, those payments are mere pocket change compared to the real cash that Afghan officials are able to siphon out of the firehose of US cash flowing into the country. As noted there, in 2011 the US committed around \$11 billion to the Afghan Security Forces Fund alone and in that same year, SIGAR quoted the Congressional Research Service finding that around \$4.5 billion in cash left the country through the Kabul airport.

Not quite as much cash will be there for the taking in 2015 and beyond, but by being in charge of the defense ministry, Abdullah would appear to be first in line for siphoning off parts of the \$4.1 billion in funds from the US and one billion Euros from the EU plan for ANSF support next year.

By controlling the ministry of finance, Ghani also will have access to vast sums that can be siphoned off, so their graft-sharing appears on the surface to be fairly equitable. Also, one would presume that the interior department will be in line for bribes relating to Afghanistan's reputed vast mineral wealth.

It appears that both Ghani and Abdullah are very well cared-for in their carefully negotiated graft-sharing agreement.

Postscript: There is one more aspect of Gordon's transcription this morning that can't be left unchallenged:

The signing of the agreement would not end the debate over the continuing American role in Afghanistan. Given the escalation of violence that followed the withdrawal of the last American forces from Iraq in 2011, some critics, including former ranking officials in the Obama administration, have urged the White House to adopt a more flexible approach toward removing troops from Afghanistan.

As I pointed out in this post, a full 18 months passed between the withdrawal of the last US troop from Iraq and the surge in violence there. Those 18 months are now being purged from the collective memory of the hive mind of the DC village.