

# Karzai Blames Outsiders for Afghan Strife; Officials say groups used anti-U.S. protests to try to undermine the government. Fourteen people have been killed in five days of violence.

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## ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

Haji Asadullah Khalid, the governor of Ghazni province, where one police officer and three protesters were killed during riots Friday, blamed the unrest on the forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a renegade warlord who is wanted by the U.S. government for planning attacks on American troops and the Afghan government.

The protests began Tuesday in Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar province. Students at the Nangarhar University medical school were angered by a report in Newsweek magazine that said U.S. interrogators at the Guantanamo detention center had desecrated the Koran, Islam's holy book, by placing it on toilets, and in one case, by flushing a Koran down the toilet in an attempt to demoralize detainees.

ACCUSATION: "Foreign hands are trying to disturb our parliamentary elections," President [Hamid Karzai] said.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Farzana Wahidy AFP/Getty Images; AFTERMATH: Cleanup work begins after a demonstration wrecked the offices of a women's development center in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. Protesters denied bringing in outsiders, but officials said involvement by Taliban militants could not be ruled out.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Farzana Wahidy AFP/Getty Images

## FULL TEXT

After five days of anti-American protests that left 14 people dead, Afghan officials charged Saturday that outside forces had hijacked many of the demonstrations in a bid to destabilize the government.

The officials said anti-government factions used the protests, which erupted over a report that Americans at the Guantanamo Bay detention center in Cuba had desecrated the Koran, to incite people already leery of U.S. policies in Afghanistan.

"Foreign hands are trying to disturb our parliamentary elections and are against the strengthening of the peace process," President Hamid Karzai told reporters Saturday.

Karzai did not specify which country or countries he believed the instigators were from, but the Ministry of Defense said it could not rule out involvement by Taliban or Al Qaeda militants.

Many Afghan officials accuse Pakistan, which had backed the Taliban government, of allowing Taliban militants to operate along the border with Afghanistan. But Pakistan says it is cracking down in those areas.

The anti-American protests spanned more than 12 provinces and were the worst the country has seen since the

fall of the Taliban in 2001.

Haji Din Mohammed, the governor of Nangarhar province, which borders Pakistan, said there were "signs that the protests in some of the provinces were planned by anti-government groups that wanted to create chaos and violence in the name of the protesters."

Haji Asadullah Khalid, the governor of Ghazni province, where one police officer and three protesters were killed during riots Friday, blamed the unrest on the forces of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a renegade warlord who is wanted by the U.S. government for planning attacks on American troops and the Afghan government.

Hekmatyar is believed to be hiding in northern Pakistan, and his loyalists are active in several southern provinces, including Lowgar, Wardak and Nangarhar – all of which experienced violent demonstrations last week.

"Hekmatyar's forces are active in some of the key provinces that have had violent protests," the Ghazni governor said.

The protests began Tuesday in Jalalabad, the capital of Nangarhar province. Students at the Nangarhar University medical school were angered by a report in Newsweek magazine that said U.S. interrogators at the Guantanamo detention center had desecrated the Koran, Islam's holy book, by placing it on toilets, and in one case, by flushing a Koran down the toilet in an attempt to demoralize detainees.

Security officials claim that some of the protesters were armed in Jalalabad, Ghazni and Wardak. They say blurring the lines between protester and rebel is an insurgent tactic.

"It is a kind of confusion that insurgents want to create to get people emotionally charged," Din Mohammed said.

But some Afghans said insurgents didn't need much fuel to feed the fire. Anti-American sentiment was already seeping out.

"The U.S. military has searched my house twice in the last two years, they barge in and blindfold all of the men and tie our hands. They are scaring our children and embarrassing us in front of our families," said Habibullah, a Jalalabad resident.

Habibullah, who did not want to give his last name for security reasons, said he was imprisoned twice by the U.S. military and later released without charges.

Many families whose homes were searched and family members taken away still don't know where they are.

"It's been over a year, and I still don't know where my cousins are. The U.S. military doesn't give us any information," said another man whose house had been searched. He declined to be identified. "Do you see why we are angry?"

Other protesters took the opportunity to denounce recent discussion about allowing permanent U.S. military bases in Afghanistan.

"We don't need the U.S. to occupy Afghanistan, especially if they have no respect for our religion," said Wali Ahmad, a Kabul University student.

Some observers believe that the protests were evidence of growing religious conservatism among young men, particularly in the southern areas. Others, though, say there is simply a growing distaste for foreigners.

"Many Afghans have pent-up resentment [about] the slow pace of reconstruction, wealth being concentrated in the hands of few businessmen, drug barons and foreigners' high salaries," said Paul Barker, director for CARE International in Afghanistan, one of the largest aid organizations working in the country.

The student protesters, however, insisted that their intentions were peaceful.

"After we heard the news on local radio stations, we gathered students at the nearby mosque and elected 26 people to plan a peaceful protest for the next day," said Fazil Mileallah, a fourth-year medical student and an organizer of the Jalalabad protest.

The students chanted "Death to Bush!" and blocked the main road to Kabul, but there were no clashes with police or reported injuries.

"Now we have found out that busloads of people were being brought in from surrounding villages and districts for the Wednesday morning protest," said Din Mohammed, the governor.

The students denied bringing in outsiders.

"We are poor students with very little money. Where would we get funds to pay for transportation for other protesters?" said Najibullah Zakhilwal, another student organizer.

But Zakhilwal acknowledged that the student organizers had less control over the Wednesday protest. He said as the students started to move from the medical school to the city center, other protesters quickly began to join them.

Concerned about armed aggressors infiltrating the group, Mileallah said he informed the general security commander of Jalalabad about non-student protesters forcing their way into the lines.

As the demonstrators continued to march to the city center, witnesses said, other protesters emerged from various parts of the city. The situation turned chaotic as the groups merged and began hurling stones at U.S. and Afghan security forces.

Four protesters were reportedly killed in clashes with security forces in Jalalabad on Wednesday. Several government buildings and United Nations locations were also set ablaze.

Protests erupted in several parts of the country again Saturday, but apart from some stone-throwing, there was no violence, officials said.

### **Illustration**

Caption: PHOTO: ACCUSATION: "Foreign hands are trying to disturb our parliamentary elections," President Hamid Karzai said.; PHOTOGRAPHER: Farzana Wahidy AFP/Getty Images; PHOTO: AFTERMATH: Cleanup work begins after a demonstration wrecked the offices of a women's development center in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. Protesters denied bringing in outsiders, but officials said involvement by Taliban militants could not be ruled out.;

PHOTOGRAPHER: Farzana Wahidy AFP/Getty Images

Credit: Special to The Times

## DETAILS

|                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>Subject:</b>                 | Violence; Anti-Americanism; Demonstrations & protests – Afghanistan   |
| <b>Location:</b>                | Afghanistan   |
| <b>People:</b>                  | Karzai, Hamid   |
| <b>Publication title:</b>       | Los Angeles Times; Los Angeles, Calif.  |
| <b>Pages:</b>                   | A.9   |
| <b>Number of pages:</b>         | 0   |
| <b>Publication year:</b>        | 2005  |
| <b>Publication date:</b>        | May 15, 2005  |
| <b>Dateline:</b>                | KABUL, Afghanistan  |
| <b>Section:</b>                 | Main News; Part A; Foreign Desk   |
| <b>Publisher:</b>               | Los Angeles Times Communications LLC  |
| <b>Place of publication:</b>    | Los Angeles, Calif.   |
| <b>Country of publication:</b>  | United States, Los Angeles, Calif.  |
| <b>Publication subject:</b>     | General Interest Periodicals--United States   |
| <b>ISSN:</b>                    | 04583035  |
| <b>Source type:</b>             | Newspaper   |
| <b>Language of publication:</b> | English   |
| <b>Document type:</b>           | News  |
| <b>ProQuest document ID:</b>    | 421974623   |
| <b>Document URL:</b>            | <a href="https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/karzai-blames-outsiders-afghan-strife-officials/docview/421974623/se-2?accountid=14523">https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/karzai-blames-outsiders-afghan-strife-officials/docview/421974623/se-2?accountid=14523</a> |
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**Last updated:** 2017-11-15

**Database:** U.S. Major Dailies

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