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## Karzai Annuls Afghan Court Reviewing 2010 Polls

By Alissa J. Rubin, Abdul Waheed Wafa  
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KABUL — In a startling reversal on Wednesday, President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan annulled a special court that he had set up to review the results of the 2010 parliamentary elections.

The decision, which came after months of pressure from Western diplomats, reaffirms the authority of Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission, which finalized the results of the election last November only to have its authority undermined by the creation of the special court. It was also an acknowledgement that President Karzai's effort to change the makeup of the new parliament through the court was hurting his administration more than helping it.

Under the decree issued by Mr. Karzai's office on Wednesday, the election commission will have authority to make final decisions in all cases where election results are in dispute. Some members of the parliament elected last year could still be disqualified once the commission completes its review, but the number of seats remaining in doubt would be few, compared with the more sweeping changes proposed by the special court, according to commission officials.

Members of Parliament almost immediately decried the possibility of even a few changes to their membership.

The special court, which was created under the auspices of the Afghan Supreme Court with its

members appointed by Mr. Karzai, ruled in June that 62 candidates for the 249-seat lower house of Parliament who had been deemed losers or disqualified by the commission should be reinstated and declared elected. That decision created a constitutional crisis.

The decree issued on Wednesday appeared to take an important step toward ending doubts over the legitimacy of the lower house, known as the Wolosi Jirga. It reinforced the stature of the Independent Election Commission, which has been battered by charges of corruption from the attorney general and criticism from candidates whom it ruled against.

“All other entities who were working on electoral issues for the election of the Wolosi Jirga are nullified, including the special court for overseeing the electoral complaints,” said Ahmad Zia Syamak Herawi, the deputy spokesman for Mr. Karzai.

Fazil Ahmad Manawi, the chairman of the Independent Election Commission, said little publicly about the decree. Mr. Manawi and Abdullah Ahmadzai, the chief electoral officer, have been under intense pressure over the past 10 months, facing charges of corruption and threats of indictment. “We will follow our procedures based on the law and the regulations that we have,” Mr. Manawi said on Wednesday.

Both men said they would now re-examine only one kind of complaint, those lodged by candidates over rulings of the Electoral Complaints Commission, a temporary body set up to sort through complaints about fraud for a brief period around each election. Of the 62 candidates whom the special court had ruled should be reinstated, 17 were involved in decisions by the complaints commission, Mr. Ahmadzai said.

Sitting members of Parliament applauded Mr. Karzai’s decision to nullify the court, but deplored how long it took. Parliamentary elections were held almost 11 months ago, but no legislative work has been possible while complaints, protests and then the special court’s review of the results dragged out. Mr. Karzai has yet to announce a cabinet or to nominate three justices to fill vacancies on the Supreme Court.

“The victory is for the Afghan Parliament and for the I.E.C. that have stood against many pressures from Karzai and people around him,” said Fatima Aziz, a member of Parliament from Kunduz. Ms. Aziz is one of a group of 80 members who agreed to fight any effort to displace any members, and who rallied a majority of lawmakers to their side. They also won support from Mr. Karzai’s Western patrons.

“This issue has wasted nine months for the Afghan people and the Afghan Parliament,” Ms. Aziz said, adding that President Karzai and his aides had finally realized “that they can’t force their own people into the parliament.”

An official close to the process said that Mr. Karzai came reluctantly to the realization that not having a fully functional parliament was hurting him. “Karzai has come up with this decision because time is not in his favor anymore,” said the official. “It took a very long time, but he did not get anything out of it.”

Ms. Aziz and others warned that the commission would face pressure in the next few days to make more changes in the Parliament. Haji Zaher Qadir, who leads the opposition to Mr. Karzai in the Parliament, threatened a strike.