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## Graft-Fighting Prosecutor Is Dismissed in Afghanistan

By Dexter Filkins, Alissa J. Rubin

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KABUL, Afghanistan — One of the country's most senior prosecutors said Saturday that President Hamid Karzai fired him this week after he repeatedly refused to block corruption investigations at the highest levels of Mr. Karzai's government.

Fazel Ahmed Faqiryar, the former deputy attorney general, said investigations of more than two dozen senior Afghan officials — including cabinet ministers, ambassadors and provincial governors — were being held up or blocked outright by Mr. Karzai, Attorney General Mohammed Ishaq Aloko and others.

Mr. Faqiryar's account of the troubles plaguing the anticorruption investigations has been largely corroborated in interviews with five Western officials familiar with the cases. They say that Mr. Karzai and others in his government have repeatedly thwarted prosecutions against senior Afghan government figures. An American official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Afghan prosecutors had prepared several cases against officials suspected of corruption, but that Mr. Karzai was "stalling and stalling and stalling."

"We propose investigations, detentions and prosecutions of high government officials, but we cannot resist him," Mr. Faqiryar said of Mr. Karzai. "He won't sign anything. We have great, honest and professional prosecutors here, but we need support."

Earlier this month, Mr. Karzai intervened to stop the prosecution of one of his closest aides, Mohammed Zia Salehi, who investigators say had been wiretapped demanding a bribe from another Afghan seeking his help in scuttling a corruption investigation.

Neither Mr. Karzai nor Mr. Aloko responded to requests to their offices for comment on Saturday. Mr. Salehi could not be reached for comment.

Mr. Faqiryar made his allegations amid a growing sense of alarm in the Obama administration and in Congress over Mr. Karzai's failure to take action against officials suspected of corruption, but also as the administration debates whether pushing too hard on corruption will alienate a government whose cooperation they need to wage war.

Awash in American and NATO money, Mr. Karzai's government is widely regarded as one of the most corrupt in the world. American officials believe the corruption drives ordinary Afghans into the arms of the Taliban.

In a two hour interview at his home, Mr. Faqiryar said he and the other prosecutors in his office were demoralized and exhausted by the repeated refusal of Mr. Karzai and Mr. Aloko to allow them to move against corrupt Afghan leaders.

Mr. Faqiryar said his prosecutors had opened cases on at least 25 current or former Afghan officials, including 17 members of Mr. Karzai's cabinet, 5 provincial governors and at least 3 ambassadors. None of the cases, he said, has gone forward, and some have been blocked on orders from Mr. Karzai. He did not elaborate on each case, and it was not clear whether Mr. Aloko or Mr. Karzai were involved in all of the cases.

Mr. Karzai said he had intervened in the case of Mr. Salehi, an official on the National Security Council, because the American-backed anticorruption agencies were violating the civil rights of those they detained. He blamed foreign contractors for the corruption, and threatened to take control of the agencies, summoning the head of the one that arrested Mr. Salehi to the presidential palace for questioning.

Under intense Western pressure, Mr. Karzai appeared to back off, saying he would allow the anticorruption units to do their jobs.

Mr. Faqiryar, a 72-year-old career prosecutor, was fired Thursday by President Karzai after sending a mid-level prosecutor to speak about public corruption on an Afghan television station. After Mr. Karzai watched the broadcast, he called for the papers to authorize the dismissal, Mr. Faqiryar said.

But the television appearance by the prosecutor was only the immediate cause of his firing, Mr. Faqiryar said. The dismissal, he said, was the culmination of a long-running tug-of-war between him and his prosecutors on one side, and Mr. Karzai and Mr. Aloko on the other.

The dispute began last year, Mr. Faqiryar said, when he went before the Afghan Parliament and read aloud the names of at least 25 Afghan officials who were under investigation for corruption. The list included some of the most senior officials in Mr. Karzai's government, including Interior Minister Hanif Atmar and Rangin Spanta, who is now the national security adviser.

When Mr. Faqiryar returned from Parliament, he said he was summoned by Mr. Aloko, who told him that Mr. Karzai was furious. "He told me the president was not happy about this," Mr. Faqiryar said. "He said, 'I told you not to divulge this.'"

Some of the corruption cases involved relatively minor transgressions. Mr. Atmar, for instance, is suspected of claiming to have a master's degree without having obtained a bachelor's degree first.

But Mr. Faqiryar said his prosecutors had unearthed serious allegations of corruption against several senior Afghan officials. In many of those cases, he said, the prosecutors had substantiated the claims with ample evidence.

Just three of the 25 Afghan officials have been charged, he said, and none of them has gone to trial. The cases of the other 22 have either been blocked or are lying dormant for inexplicable reasons, he said.

One of the most serious cases involves Khoja Ghulam Ghaws, the governor of Kapisa Province, who was appointed by Mr. Karzai in 2007. According to Western officials, Afghan prosecutors compiled a dossier against Mr. Ghaws that included telephone intercepts and sworn statements from Americans and Afghans working in the province.

According to these officials, prosecutors have enough evidence to charge Mr. Ghaws with colluding with insurgents and demanding kickbacks from contractors working on American- and Afghan-financed development projects. Mr. Ghaws is also a suspect in the killing of five members of a provincial reconstruction team last year.

Prosecutors turned over the Ghaws case to Mr. Aloko, the attorney general, four months ago, according to a Western official who spoke on condition of anonymity. Mr. Aloko has refused to sign either the warrant to arrest Mr. Ghaws or the warrant to search his house, the official said. "He's the president's ally," the official said of Mr. Ghaws. "Obviously, Karzai doesn't want the case to go forward."

In an interview earlier this week, Mr. Ghaws said he was innocent of any wrongdoing.

The case against Mr. Ghaws was raised last week by Senator John Kerry, the Massachusetts Democrat, who traveled to Kabul in part to urge Mr. Karzai to take action against corrupt officials.

In the interview, Mr. Faqiryar confirmed the Western official's account, saying that Mr. Ghaws has been allowed to remain free at Mr. Karzai's insistence.

“Mr. Karzai has not agreed,” Mr. Faqiryar said of the Ghaws case. “Aloko said to me, ‘You have to follow the president.’”

Mr. Aloko signed the arrest warrant of Mr. Salehi, the Karzai aide who was later released, but only after Western officials insisted that he do so, Mr. Faqiryar said.

Mr. Salehi was arrested as part of the investigation into New Ansari, a money transfer firm that American investigators say has shipped billions of dollars out of the country for Afghan politicians, insurgents and drug smugglers.

Mr. Aloko is also blocking the arrest of Hajji Rafi Azimi, the vice chairman of the Afghan United Bank and a key figure in the New Ansari case, Mr. Faqiryar said.

According to Western officials, Mr. Azimi is suspected of helping pass tens of thousands of dollars in bribes to Mohammed Siddiq Chakari, the former Minister for Hajj and Islamic Affairs. Prosecutors say Mr. Chakari extorted the bribes from tour operators who arrange travel for Afghan pilgrims to Mecca in Saudi Arabia in exchange for steering business to the tour operators.

Mr. Azimi was out of Afghanistan and could not be reached for comment. Mr. Chakari fled the country last year as prosecutors prepared to arrest him and is believed to be in Britain. Afghan officials have filed an arrest warrant with Interpol.

American officials in Kabul say that Afghan prosecutors have tried to arrest Mr. Azimi but have been prevented from doing so by key figures in the Karzai government. In his interview, Mr. Faqiryar said Mr. Salehi had emerged from his office in the presidential palace and asked Attorney General Aloko to block Mr. Azimi’s arrest.

“The reason Mr. Aloko does not sign the arrest warrant for Mr. Azimi is because Salehi told him not to,” he said.

Mr. Faqiryar listed three cases of corruption among the Afghan ambassadors to Canada, Germany and Britain. In each case, he said, the ambassadors were suspected of stealing public money. None of them has been prosecuted.

Reached Saturday, an official at the Afghan foreign ministry confirmed that those three ambassadors had in fact taken public money. But, the official said, at least two of them “paid the money back.”

After a career spanning 48 years, Mr. Faqiryar said he was looking forward to retirement.

“It’s good to be away from them and not held accountable for their wrongdoings,” he said.

## Afghans Deny C.I.A. Payments

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Afghanistan's presidential office on Saturday condemned American news media reports that Afghan government officials have received payments from the C.I.A. in return for information.

A statement from the spokesman's office called the reports part of an attempt to divert attention from the greater priorities of fighting terrorism, preventing civilian casualties, and disbanding private security companies.

"Afghanistan believes that making such allegations will not strengthen the alliance against terrorism and will not strengthen an Afghanistan based on the law and rules, but will have negative effects in those areas," the statement said.

"We strongly condemn such irresponsible allegations which just create doubt and defame responsible people of this country," it said.