

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپائی

The New York Times

Afghan Killing Bares a Karzai Family Feud

By James Risén

12/20/2009

WASHINGTON — On Oct. 16, four sport utility vehicles barreled into Karz, Afghanistan, the hometown of the country's president, Hamid Karzai, and pulled up to the home of one of his cousins, Yar Mohammad Karzai.

Teams of armed guards blocked the street and herded passers-by into a nearby mosque while seizing their cellphones, then removed the front door of the house, according to Karzai family members and several people from the mosque. A man in traditional white Afghan robes, accompanied by two security guards, walked inside and found two of Yar Mohammad Karzai's children, 18-year-old Waheed and his 12-year-old sister, Sona, doing their schoolwork in their bedroom.

The girl later said that she remembered the robed man raising a pistol and shooting Waheed three times as she shouted: "Don't kill my brother! Don't kill my brother!"

As the intruders fled, firing their weapons, a cousin, Zalal Karzai, 25, came running from elsewhere in the house and saw Waheed stagger from the bedroom. "What happened to you?" Zalal Karzai recalled asking.

" 'Hashmat shot me!' " he said the youth screamed back.

Waheed Karzai, who relatives say provided the same account to other family members before dying two days later at an American military hospital in Kandahar, was referring to Hashmat Karzai, 40, a first cousin of President Karzai and the owner of a private

security company that has close ties to the Afghan government and millions of dollars in contracts with the United States military.

The murder in Karz, the identity of the man accused of being the killer and the fact that the episode involves Afghanistan's most prominent family make for a dramatic — and divisive — tale, one that has not been previously reported. The killing has set off a bitter split within the family in Afghanistan and the United States, with charges, countercharges and claims of a cover-up by Afghan officials.

Some relatives said they believed that the death was vengeance for an “honor killing” of Hashmat Karzai's father nearly 30 years ago by Yar Mohammad Karzai. For his part, Hashmat Karzai denies any role in Waheed's death, instead saying that the boy was shot by drug dealers intending to harm someone else.

“They mixed up the houses and killed the boy by mistake,” Hashmat Karzai said in a telephone interview from Dubai, where he is staying with his family. “I had nothing to do with it.”

There has been no investigation of the shooting by the Afghan government nor any mention of it in the press. The F.B.I. questioned Hashmat Karzai a month ago, he acknowledged, but it is not clear whether American investigators are pursuing the matter. An F.B.I. spokesman declined to comment.

While some family members accuse the Karzai government of stonewalling, they do not claim that the president played an active role in blocking an investigation. Instead, they blame several of his brothers, including Ahmed Wali Karzai, the political boss of Kandahar and southern Afghanistan, for trying to hush up relatives and forestall an official inquiry, perhaps with the president's knowledge.

“Not a single soul has come to investigate,” Yar Mohammad Karzai, 62, said in a recent telephone interview. “I told one local official, what do you want me to do, knock on Obama's door?”

Noor Karzai, 40, a cousin who lives in Maryland, expressed similar disappointment. “They are protecting Hashmat,” he said. “He is sitting in Kabul getting money from the U.S. government. No one will touch him. We are sending billions of dollars of U.S. taxpayer money to Afghanistan, and this is how the government operates.”

A spokesman for the Afghan president said that the case was a criminal matter and denied that the president sought to interfere. Reached by telephone on Saturday, Ahmed Wali Karzai declined to comment on the matter, as did officials at the United States Embassy in Kabul.

Frustrated by the seeming inaction on the killing, nearly a dozen family members agreed to be interviewed for this article. Some, including Yar Mohammad Karzai, Sona Karzai and Zalal Karzai, who witnessed aspects of the shooting or its immediate aftermath, also

provided documents about the killing. They include a complaint that Yar Mohammad Karzai filed with the Dand district police in Kandahar Province naming Hashmat Karzai as Waheed's assailant, the boy's hospital records and a death certificate stating that he died of gunshot wounds.

Other family members, saying they feared retribution, agreed to speak only on the condition of anonymity, as did three witnesses from the Karz mosque. All three said they heard the shooting across the street; one identified Hashmat Karzai as the robed man he saw exiting the house.

The death of Waheed Karzai came after the Afghan election in August, in which President Karzai's government was widely accused of electoral fraud and attacked for corruption.

The activities of the president's family have fed some of the criticism. Afghan and American officials, for example, have said that Ahmed Wali Karzai has been involved in or benefited from drug trafficking, while another brother, Mahmoud, has been accused of exploiting his family name to get lucrative business deals. Some relatives said they believed that news of the fatal Karzai family feud would have been an embarrassment for the president.

According to family members, the roots of the dispute go back to when Yar Mohammad Karzai was about 5, and his father arranged a marriage between him and another Karzai cousin. But when the girl grew up, she left Karz, became a teacher, married another man and eventually settled in the United States.

Relatives say Yar Mohammad Karzai was angered by the woman's rejection and her family's failure to make amends by offering a formal divorce or an apology. To punish her family, relatives said, Yar Mohammad Karzai fatally shot Khalil Lula Karzai, the girl's brother, in 1982 or 1983 in Quetta, Pakistan, where both men were then living.

In an interview, Yar Mohammad Karzai declined to say whether he had killed Khalil Karzai, who was Hashmat's father. He was never charged in the death, though he said he was briefly arrested in 1997 or 1998 when Hashmat Karzai pressed the Taliban government to detain him. Because the crime occurred in Pakistan, however, the Taliban soon released him. Both men went to Quetta, where family members pressed Hashmat to drop the matter and mediated a peace deal between the men.

But, Yar Mohammad Karzai said, he knew it was not over.

"I never felt comfortable with the closing of this story," he said. "And neither did Hashmat."

Hashmat Karzai disputes that. "The father killed my father, we captured him more than 10 years ago and brought him to Pakistan, and we chose to have forgiveness," he said. "In Islam, I have the right to kill him, but I chose not to do so."

After Khalil Karzai's murder, his family moved to the United States and settled in Maryland. Hashmat, the oldest son, became an American citizen, and until 2007 worked at a Toyota dealership in Virginia.

He returned to Afghanistan, where his younger brother, Hekmat, 36, runs the Center for Conflict and Peace Studies, a Kabul-based research organization that supports the Karzai government. Before the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, Hekmat was a student and worked in restaurants in the Washington area.

After the American invasion of Afghanistan, he served as a political officer at the Afghan Embassy in Washington. In 2006, he moved back to Kabul to start his research group. He said he briefed American military officials on his research. Several family members described him as an informal adviser to President Karzai and said they believed that his influence helped his brother's rise in Kabul.

Soon after arriving in Kabul, Hashmat Karzai took over the Asia Security Group, a company that now employs 500 to 600 guards, he said. In recent months, Asia Security has been awarded \$16.2 million in five contracts with the United States military to provide security for five American bases in Afghanistan, according to Col. Wayne M. Shanks, an American military spokesman.

According to its Web site, Asia Security also has other major American customers in Afghanistan, including DynCorp International, a Virginia-based firm with large contracts with the American government in Afghanistan. Hekmat's Karzai's research center is also an Asia Security client, the Web site said.

This year, Hashmat Karzai began building a large house in Karz, near Yar Mohammad Karzai's home. Some relatives say they believe that Waheed Karzai was singled out as a way to inflict deep pain on his father.

"If he had killed Yar Mohammad Karzai, it would have been wrong, but we would have understood," said Mohammad Karzai, a cousin from Maryland. "The family would have been silent about it. But instead, he killed an 18-year-old boy who had nothing to do with this feud."

Hashmat Karzai agrees that Waheed was an innocent victim, but he attributed his death to drug dealers. He said that Yar Mohammad Karzai and his brothers were involved in the drug trade — an allegation that Yar Mohammad rejects — and that one brother cheated some dealers. Intending to kill that man's son, they mistakenly shot Waheed, Hashmat Karzai said.

He said he told President Karzai and Ahmed Wali Karzai that he played no part in the crime. He added: "Why would I do a killing there, right where I am building a house? That would be stupidity."

The village of Karz is in Kandahar Province, about three miles outside the city of Kandahar, where Ahmed Wali Karzai, one of the president's brothers, wields enormous political power. But after Waheed's killing, government officials in the Kandahar area were strangely unhelpful, according to Yar Mohammad Karzai and other family members.

Immediately after the shooting, Yar Mohammad Karzai said, he called the nearest police station. But no one answered the phone, he recalled. He soon realized that the convoy had come to the shooting scene and gone without having to stop at a police checkpoint on the road into Karz.

Frantic to get help, Zalal Karzai said he called a friend working for President Karzai in Kabul, who gave him a private number for Ahmed Wali Karzai in Kandahar. Reaching someone in that office, he reported the killing. Later that night, some police officials went to the scene of the shooting, collected some shell casings and left. Yar Mohammad Karzai said they had not returned since then.

Meanwhile, at least three of President Karzai's brothers — Ahmed Wali, Mahmoud and Qayum — have been urging family members to allow relatives to deal with the killing privately without bringing in the police, said Noor and Mohammad Karzai, the brothers from Maryland.

“My mom talks to Qayum and Ahmed Wali every day,” said another family member in the United States, who asked not to be identified. “They have both told her, ‘Why don't you keep quiet and we will take care of it?’ ”

Yar Mohammad Karzai said that Ahmed Wali Karzai had come to his house to offer his condolences. “But he never mentioned what had happened or who did it,” he said. “Later, when a family member asked him about the killing, he said, ‘You know who did this, why do you need to hear it from me?’ ”

Some family members in the United States have become so Americanized that they are unwilling to abide by Afghan traditions and have gone to the United States authorities about the case. Mohammad Karzai said he contacted the F.B.I. Later, he said he got an angry call from Hashmat Karzai, who reported that an F.B.I. agent had interviewed him. Hekmat Karzai, who also said his brother did not kill Waheed, acknowledged that he was questioned by the F.B.I. as well.

The shooting has left the family badly shaken, especially Sona, Waheed's sister.

“I can't sleep in my room anymore,” she said in a telephone interview from Karz. “I sleep with my parents now.”