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Former UN envoy blasts new Hamid Karzai cabinet as 'corrupt'

Peter Galbraith launches withering salvo at latest government shake-up in Afghanistan

Peter Beaumont

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The former deputy UN envoy to [Afghanistan](#) has launched a withering attack on President [Hamid Karzai](#)'s latest effort to reinvent his government, saying the shake-up would do little to ameliorate the country's worsening crisis.

The bleak assessment by Peter Galbraith – controversially fired by the UN in September after drawing attention to fraud in elections that returned Karzai for a second term – follows the presentation by Karzai of a list of proposed new ministers to parliament.

Galbraith's criticism of the cabinet, half of whose members are new, came at the same time as he warned that the entire UN mission in Afghanistan, present since the Soviet invasion in 1979 and throughout Taliban rule, was in danger of "failing" through lack of credibility and the "weak and spineless bureaucratic leadership" of its secretary-general, Ban Ki-moon.

Galbraith's caustic comments mark the latest salvo in a series of increasingly bitter exchanges between the US diplomat and his former UN employers over the lack of legitimacy of the Karzai government, which Galbraith claims the UN has chosen to cover up.

Karzai's unveiling of his new cabinet yesterday follows intense international pressure on him to reform a government he has packed for the last seven years with warlords and regional and ethnic power brokers who have shored up what little authority he has in the country, largely

centred on Kabul. The 23 nominees must be approved by parliament before the cabinet can be approved. Yesterday one parliamentarian described many of the new faces proposed by Karzai as being "puppets" of warlords.

While the new cabinet has a number of well-educated technocrats – as demanded by the international community – the most visible change has been the removal of two ministers most heavily implicated in corruption. Significantly, Karzai has retained as a cabinet member the notorious warlord Ismail Khan while excluding any members of the opposition.

Galbraith has accused Karzai of retaining power through a landslide of fraudulent votes, many produced in "ghost polling stations" which Galbraith tried to have shut down. On Friday, he added that he had received credible reports that businessmen had been "shaken down" for millions in contributions although he had not be able to prove it at the time.

"Karzai has been in power for eight years. He has been at the head of an ineffective and corrupt government," said Galbraith. "He is in office because of fraud. Why should one believe that things are going to be different now? If I was Obama or Brown with over 100,000 troops in Afghanistan I would do what I can [to insist on change]. But this is a country in which it is impossible to monitor corruption."

Galbraith's critique was echoed by the Afghan political analyst Waheed Mujda, who said that, despite the alterations, "we do not see new figures or faces in this cabinet to give us any expectation for a major change for the country's future". Instead, observers suggested that many of the new figures in the cabinet appeared to be proxies for powerful Afghan figures, a view that is endorsed by Khaled Pashtun, an MP from Kandahar.

The list of 23 names for the new cabinet was read out to parliament by Anwar Khan Jigdalik, the minister for parliamentary affairs, after a stormy session during which a number of politicians questioned the legality of the process. Despite the dismay among many Afghan parliamentarians, the new cabinet received a cautious welcome from the UN mission in Kabul.

The chaos in the UN mission since the election deepened further amid accusations from Galbraith that his former boss – UN envoy Kai Eide – had been sacked as well. Eide, who was criticised by Galbraith for covering up the scale of fraud in the summer's elections, has insisted he was not renewing his contract. Sources say, however, that he has also been removed.

Describing the disarray in the UN mission – known as Unama – Galbraith, who is suing his former employer for unfair dismissal and damage to his reputation, said: "The UN mission in Afghanistan was in one of the few places in the world where it was really relevant. There was a lot of advantage to be had out of having an effective UN there. Now it is in total disarray and it is not going to recover. Since I was fired, seven out of 10 people in the political section have left.

"It has no credibility with the opposition and is not respected by Karzai. A guy like Karzai does not respect someone he feels is in his pocket." He added that the UN's authority in Afghanistan was set to be further undermined by the appointment by Nato of its own civilian envoy, further militarising the state rebuilding efforts in the country.

