

## Karzai Warns of Anti-Taliban Purge



Adam Ferguson for The New York Times

President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan, right, with an elder on Sunday in the restive city of Kandahar, where he spoke to about 400 local leaders.

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KANDAHAR, Afghanistan — President [Hamid Karzai](#) flew to this restive city on Sunday and told a gathering of local leaders to prepare themselves for sustained operations to rid the area of [Taliban](#) insurgents — and for the pain those operations would exact.

“This operation requires sacrifice, and without sacrifice you cannot restore peace to Kandahar,” Mr. Karzai told the gathering of about 400 leaders from around the province.

“Will you help me?” Mr. Karzai asked.

And many, if not most, stood up and declared they would.

The speech by Mr. Karzai was his most demonstrative effort to date to sell the people of Kandahar on the police and military operations planned for the area over the coming months. Securing Kandahar, the most important city in southern [Afghanistan](#), and the surrounding area is considered vital in reversing Taliban dominance and forcing the group to consider making peace.

But starting the Kandahar operation has proved to be the most difficult task [NATO](#) and the Afghan leaders have faced in many months. Weary of fighting, many Kandahar leaders oppose military operations. American and NATO commanders say they are determined to press ahead.

Until Sunday, Mr. Karzai himself [appeared ambivalent](#). At a similar gathering in April, he told local leaders that he would start no operation if they opposed one. The president's lack of enthusiasm drew criticism from at least one member of his own government, who accused Mr. Karzai of giving up.

American commanders themselves stopped using the word "operation" to describe the activities they had planned for the area. And they agreed to slow it down. Gen. [Stanley A. McChrystal](#), commander of American and NATO forces, [said this past week](#) that the operation would take longer than he had originally planned, perhaps many months.

The Sunday trip to Kandahar by Mr. Karzai appeared to be a show of resolve on the part of NATO and the Afghan government — and on the part of Mr. Karzai himself. In his previous trip to the city, Mr. Karzai drew many negative responses from local leaders. This time, he kept the feedback to a minimum. Like it or not, he suggested, the operation is coming.

"We will launch a kind of purification operation," Mr. Karzai told the crowd. "First in the city, and then the surrounding areas."

A native of Kandahar, Mr. Karzai dressed for the occasion in a traditional black Kandahar turban with a decorative red bow. Local leaders sat on pillows on the floor. Mr. Karzai stood between enormous portraits of himself.

Mr. Karzai acknowledged the woeful state of security and governance in Kandahar, including Taliban violence, rampant public corruption and the unregulated militias and private security guards roaming the city.

“If we don’t improve our governance and administration, I swear we won’t see peace and stability in the country,” he said.

General McChrystal, who had accompanied Mr. Karzai to Kandahar, told reporters afterward that operations inside the city would be carried out by the police. Military operations, he said, will be reserved for the surrounding areas, and operations directed at insurgents will begin “in a month or two.”

“Counterinsurgency takes time,” General McChrystal said. “Some of these areas have been under Taliban control for years.”

The question hanging over American and NATO forces is how much time they have. [President Obama](#) has promised to assess Afghanistan progress at the end of the year, and to begin withdrawing at least some troops by July 2011.

“We have to show clear, demonstrable progress by the end of the year, and I think we can do that,” General McChrystal said.

Conversations with local leaders after Mr. Karzai’s speech suggested how difficult making progress would be. One Afghan after another said more or less the same thing: that Afghans harbored no love for Taliban insurgents, but that the local Afghan administration was ineffective and spectacularly corrupt.

Haji Mahmood, a tribal leader from west of Kandahar, told a typical story: Three months ago, he bought a plot of land near his home and invested several thousand dollars to build shops on it. He bought the land from the local government, he said.

A few weeks ago, he said, government agents bulldozed his shops and reclaimed the land.

Finishing his story, Mr. Mahmood shook his head.

“Not many people support the Taliban, because they don’t really have a program,” Mr. Mahmood said. “But believe me, if they did, many people would.”