

## **Karzai, Hamed**

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Hamed Karzai, born December 24, 1957, in Kandahar, Afghanistan, the fourth of seven sons to a chief of the Popalzai tribe, was a leader in efforts to reconstitute Afghanistan after the demise of the Taliban in 2001. After being educated in Kabul he earned a postgraduate degree in political science in Shimla, India. During the war against the Communist regime (1980-1992) Karzai was an active supporter of the opposition, contributing money and serving as political advisor to certain resistance leaders. In 1992 he served as deputy foreign minister in the government of Burhanuddin Rabbani but resigned in 1994. Soon after the Taliban arose as a force in Kandahar that year he began to support them, donating \$50,000 and a large hoard of weapons in hopes they would quell the fighting among the various commanders. The Taliban leadership wanted him to be their envoy to the United Nations but he refused. He came to believe that the Taliban were mere proxies for Pakistani and Arab radical Islamists, and in 1997 he joined family members in Quetta where he worked for the reinstatement of former King Zahir Shah. The next year he collaborated with other Pushtun chiefs in inciting an anti-Taliban movement and in response, in 1999, the Taliban murdered his father. Elected chief of the Popalzai tribe in his father's place, Karzai immediately defied Taliban warnings by organizing a 300-vehicle convoy of Pushtun mourners to carry his father's remains back to Kandahar, an act that won him wide respect. Soon after the September 11, 2001, attacks against the United States he began to organize a tribal militia to fight the Taliban. His request for help from the American ambassador in Islamabad was refused but he won support from the British. On October 8, 2001, one day after the United States started bombing the Taliban, he led a militia into the Kandahar area. The Taliban almost captured him but he was rescued by American helicopters. The Americans, in fact, only reluctantly came to see him as a key Pushtun leader. When a body of prominent Afghans assembled in Bonn to constitute a new regime, the Americans and representatives of the Northern Alliance, now the main political instrument of American policy in the country, induced the attendees to name him leader of a provisional administration. Installed on December 22, 2001, his task was to organize a loyajerga (national assembly) that would elect a temporary head of state who would form a permanent government. In summer, 2001, the loyajerga elected him President of the Afghan Transitional Authority, commissioning him to draft a new constitution, form a national army, and set up a national election by 2004. As Transitional President his main achievement by summer, 2003, was the securing of commitments from other countries of more than \$4 billion for reconstruction (although little of it was yet delivered). His greatest difficulty was the incorrigibility and truculence of local commanders, many of whom were paying no remittances to the Kabul government. There were several attempts on his life, the most notable on September 5, 2002, when a gunman missed him at point blank range.