

AFGHANISTAN MISSES DEADLINE FOR CABINET FORMATION

Back in September, I called the final agreement between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah a graft-sharing agreement when it paved the way for Ghani to take office as President while Abdullah would assume the extra-constitutional and John Kerry-created role of Chief Executive Officer. An arbitrary deadline of 45 days had been set for establishing the new cabinet based on the divvying-up of departments under the September agreement. However, as with everything in this painful process, the deadline has passed and there is scant evidence of progress.

ToloNews summarizes the situation:

The 45-day period President Ashraf Ghani hoped it would take to form the new cabinet ended on Thursday without an announcement of appointments. The spokesman for Chief Executive Officer Abdullah Abdullah said that while full agreement on the look of the government's top leadership remains elusive, at least some of the cabinet will be formed prior to the London Conference in early December.

Though the spokesperson for the CEO and those close to the president have indicated the negotiations over the National Unity Government's cabinet have been time-consuming and arduous, they have disputed rumors that there are major disagreements.

Ghani and Abdullah were said to have had a long meeting Wednesday night, perhaps in hopes of making a last-minute deal before the deadline expired, but concluded it without any suggestion of progression.

After quoting a few more sources providing a rosy picture of “progress” toward developing a cabinet, the article ends with this:

Other sources on condition of anonymity have said that there are still serious differences between Ghani and Abdullah over the new cabinet and so far the two sides have only agreed on general power sharing principles.

That doesn't sound very promising at all.

At the New York Times, Rod Nordland adds to the pessimism:

Some Western diplomats are worried that continued disagreements between Mr. Ghani and his election rival, Abdullah Abdullah, in forming a unity government could push completion of a cabinet to the end of the year or beyond. That is a troubling state of affairs after a protracted election that had already consumed most of the rest of the year.

One diplomat thought that even seating a cabinet by year's end was optimistic. “By the end of which year?” he said, “Gregorian or Persian?” The Persian year, which Afghanistan uses, ends on March 20.

Given the history of the electoral battle between Ghani and Abdullah, I wonder if even March is too optimistic. Perhaps in June John Kerry will put a cabinet in place by decree...