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Afghan opposition leader talks civil war

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Kabul — Prominent Afghan opposition leader Ahmad Zia Masood has urgent advice for President Barack Obama in his second term - clean up Afghan politics before the next election or risk civil war. Masood said a number of factors could trigger another internal conflict after most NATO combat troops leave at the end of 2014, including growing fears of another Taliban takeover.



Most importantly, Obama must focus on ensuring that a 2014 election is free and fair after

President Hamid Karzai's re-election in 2009 was blighted by allegations of fraud. A marred poll could be the tipping point in a country where frustration is growing over corruption, poor governance, dilapidated infrastructure and high unemployment, said Masood. "On top of all these problems if the election is rigged then the people will lose patience and that opens up the door for a massive civil war," said Masood, leader of the National Front of Afghanistan, a major opposition party.

"If the political process is transparent here there won't be a reason for a civil war. We expect Obama to pressure the government for a free and fair election." Opponents of Karzai, who is constitutionally barred from seeking a third term, are worried he is trying to install an ally or relative as his successor to maintain a grip on power. Karzai has suggested foreign members be removed from the election watchdog, a step that could be seen as bolstering his influence. Karzai says he is committed to democracy.

The president's older brother, businessman Abdul Qayum Karzai, has said he is interested in running for president. There is also widespread speculation that Abdullah Abdullah, a former foreign minister who opposed Karzai in the 2009 poll, will make another bid. Masood's party brings together some former leaders of the Northern Alliance which toppled the Taliban. They include ethnic Uzbek General Abdul Rashid Dostum, who earned a reputation for brutality in Afghanistan's last civil war following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989.