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Mass Defections: Afghan Diplomats Just Not Coming Back

By Jason Ditz

June 24, 2013

This weekend was supposed to be a major reshuffle at the Afghan Foreign Ministry, where 105 diplomats deployed abroad were supposed to return from foreign postings to receive new assignments. Only five came back.

Though exact splits on the other 100 aren't clear yet, many of them are reportedly planning to formally defect and apply for asylum in whatever countries they are deployed to, while others are just calling their stays an unscheduled "extension."

For some the fear is what will happen to them after the inevitable NATO drawdown in 2015. For many though, the fear is more immediate, that the spring presidential election will replace Karzai with one of his rivals and leave them on the outs with the new government. In Afghanistan that's a deadly risk.

The diplomats are mostly the relatives highly positioned Karzai government figures, and when his term comes to an end, so may their usefulness. A lot of the relatives of the Karzai government's leadership are looking to head abroad before the vote, and the diplomats are just the first stage of that exodus.