

Beat: Politics

Afghanistan presidential election to be held in April 2014

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USPA News - Afghanistan will hold presidential and provincial elections in April 2014, just several months before all remaining foreign combat troops are due to leave the war-torn country, the Independent Election Commission (IEC) announced on Wednesday. Fazel Ahmad Manawi, the head of the Independent Election Commission, announced in a press conference that both elections will be held on April 5, 2014. The provincial elections were originally to be held in the summer of 2013, and the delay had raised concern that President Hamid Karzai would also postpone the presidential vote.

But in a statement released by his office, Karzai welcomed the announcement. "President Karzai has instructed the Office of Administrative Affairs (OAA) to formally communicate the Presidential order to all relevant government bodies including security forces to make all preparations and to fully cooperate with the IEC Commission to ensure a free, fair and inclusive election across the country," it said. The elections are certain to be a significant event as they will take place only months before troops with the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) are due to leave the country. There are currently more than 112,500 ISAF troops in Afghanistan, including some 74,400 U.S. troops, and some fear the country could fall apart after their departure. Karzai won re-election with 49.67 percent of the vote in August 2009 but the presidential election was largely overshadowed by allegations of fraud. He is constitutionally barred from seeking a third term as president and has repeatedly denied speculation that he would attempt to do so. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen welcomed Wednesday's announcement and Karzai's commitment to inclusive, transparent and credible elections. "This is a key point we discussed with our Afghan partners during a recent visit to Kabul," he said. "The elections present an historic opportunity for Afghanistan." The U.S. Embassy in Kabul said it was also encouraged by the IEC's pledge to increase the inclusiveness of Afghan women in the electoral process. "[The election date is] more than a day on the calendar," said U.S. Ambassador James B. Cunningham. "It is symbolic of the aspiration of Afghans for elections which will be crucial for Afghanistan's future stability."

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