

Afghan President Hamid Karzai's younger brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, was killed in Kandahar on July 12 during a gathering in his house, Kandahar Governor Tooryali Wesa confirmed. Initial reports remain sketchy but it is believed that the Afghan leader's brother was killed by multiple gunshots to the head and chest with a AK-47 fired by Sardar Mohammad, a former bodyguard to Karzai's older brother Qayyom. Unconfirmed reports say that the assassin was immediately killed and Ahmad Wali's body has been taken to Mirwais Civil Hospital. One of the two official spokesmen for the Taliban, Qari Yousuf Ahmadi, told the German News Agency Deutsche Presse Agentur that Ahmad Wali Karzai was killed by a Taliban sleeper agent. This particular Karzai brother has escaped assassination attempts in the past. His death comes as a major blow to President Karzai who depended on Ahmed Wali for creating a social support base for the president in Kandahar province, the homeland of the Taliban. Ahmed Wali's official position was head of the legislative council in Kandahar, but he wielded a disproportionate amount of influence in the province and the country at large, claiming close relations with a wide array of players including the CIA, local Taliban elements and even drug lords. Despite his close dealings with U.S. intelligence, American officials openly criticized Ahmed Wali in 2009, accusing him of corruption and being involved in the drug trade. For President Karzai, the death of Ahmed Wali couldn't have come at a worse time. The senior Karzai was already confronting the fact that U.S.-NATO forces have begun working toward a withdrawal from the country and have engaged in talks with the Taliban as well as neighboring Pakistan. The loss of his influential sibling further weakens President Karzai's position in the south of Afghanistan and complicates efforts to try and reach a negotiated settlement with the Taliban. ♦