

Karzai Snubs Warlord Running Mate

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By Ahmed Rashid in Kabul

President Hamid Karzai snubbed a key warlord yesterday as he declared himself a candidate for the presidential elections.

In his boldest move since becoming interim president after the defeat of the Taliban, Mr Karzai failed to reappoint Mohammed Fahim, the Tajik warlord and current defence minister, as his running mate. Gen Fahim has blocked major institutional reforms, given protection to warlords, refused to disarm his militia and is intensely unpopular due to rumours of corruption, land-grabbing and involvement in the drugs trade.

Instead, Mr Karzai has nominated as a running mate another Tajik, Ahmed Zia Masoud, the brother of Ahmed Shah Masoud, who was assassinated by al-Qa'eda three days before September 11.

More than 20 candidates are due to run against Mr Karzai, including Gen Rashid Dostum, the Uzbek warlord, Mohammed Mohaqiq, the Hazara warlord, and even a female doctor, Masuda Jalal.