

US, NATO reach “consensus” to sanction rigged election in Afghanistan

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The US and NATO countries involved in the occupation of Afghanistan have signaled their willingness to recognize the re-election of Afghan President Hamid Karzai despite evidence of massive ballot-stuffing and fraud in the August 20 elections.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and NATO foreign ministers met with their Afghan counterpart Rangin Dadfar Spanta at a so-called “Friends of Afghanistan” meeting in New York last Friday. According to the *Washington Post*, the US and NATO foreign ministers “told President Hamid Karzai’s government that they expect him to remain in office for another five-year term.”

The *New York Times*, reporting on the same meeting, wrote that “the ministers agreed that Mr. Karzai would likely prevail, either by his current victory margin of more than 50 percent, or by winning a runoff against his main competitor, Abdullah Abdullah, the former foreign minister.

“The ‘assumption’ of a Karzai victory,” the *Times* continued, “did not erase a deep uneasiness about Afghanistan’s governance among the participants, according to a senior administration official. If a runoff were required and not held before a brutal winter starts in November, the consequences of a delay would be ‘catastrophic,’ said this official...”

Thus, for the sake of political and military expediency the US and its NATO allies are prepared to rubber-stamp the rigged election. Nothing must stand in the way of preparations for a major escalation of military violence aimed at suppressing popular opposition to foreign occupation and a notoriously corrupt and dictatorial puppet government.

Obama administration officials fear that a protracted recount process—which would delay any runoff until the

spring—would be exploited by the Taliban and other anti-occupation forces, which already control at least 60 percent of the country, and further undermine support for the war in the US and Europe.

Nothing could more clearly expose the neo-colonial character of the war and the cynicism behind the pretense that the bloodletting is motivated by concern for “democracy” and the “sovereignty” of Afghanistan.

The Obama administration is currently reviewing plans to expand counterinsurgency operations to highly populated cities, such as Kandahar, and is likely to approve a sharp increase in the number of US troops in the Central Asian nation.

Over the weekend, the US and NATO commander in the country, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, reportedly requested up to 40,000 more troops, which would bring the total number of US troops to nearly 110,000. McChrystal submitted a report on August 30 in which he argued that the US could lose the war if more troops were not deployed in the next 12 months.

The decision to sanction Karzai’s reelection follows a protracted debate within the administration over the fate of the Afghan president. US officials have long considered Karzai a liability because of his corruption, family ties to the opium trade and periodic criticisms of civilian deaths caused by US bombings. Military analysts attribute much of the Taliban’s recent gains in previously secure areas of the north and west to growing anger over the regime’s corruption and failure to provide any relief to improve the desperate conditions of the Afghan people.

Within weeks of coming into office, the Obama administration ordered the deployment of an additional 21,000 US troops to Afghanistan in an effort to stanch the military setbacks and provide security for the August elections. The elections, which the US hoped

would provide a measure of legitimacy to the puppet regime in Kabul, only served to further discredit it. The European Union Observation Mission to Afghanistan says that a large majority of the 1.5 million suspicious votes cast in the elections—about 1.1 million—went to Karzai, whose election officials openly stuffed ballot boxes and intimidated anti-Karzai voters.

The election fiasco—which Obama first declared “an important step forward in the Afghan people’s effort to take control of their future”—produced a crisis in the Obama administration. Unable to ignore the overwhelming evidence of fraud, elements within the administration sought to use the results to further efforts to shunt Karzai to the side by forcing him to accept a power-sharing agreement with his rival, former foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah, or by installing a chief executive who would hold de facto political power.

There were numerous suggestions in the media and within foreign policy circles that Karzai might meet the same fate as South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, who was overthrown and murdered in 1963 in a US-backed military coup organized by the Kennedy administration.

It appears, at least for the moment, that the administration has chosen to stay with Karzai as its figurehead.

In a comment entitled “Why Karzai May be Obama’s Best Bet in Afghanistan,” *Time* magazine noted that there were few alternatives to the Afghan president, who, in any case, had “several assets” which the US could use to divide and weaken opposition to the occupation.

Time wrote: “It is worth remembering a few of his assets: he is a Pashtun from the respected Popalazi tribe, credentials that may assist him in trying to negotiate with the predominantly Pashtun Taliban. (These recent elections reopened old schisms between the Pashtuns and the Tajiks, and if Abdullah, who is widely perceived as a Tajik leader, were to somehow win the runoff, the Taliban’s ranks would almost certainly be swelled by masses of angry young Pashtuns.)”

The US and NATO plan to work with Karzai on “an expanded campaign to turn insurgent fighters against the Taliban and other militant groups,” the *Washington*

Post reported, hoping to reproduce what was done in Iraq, where the US bought off sections of the Sunni elite. The US military is “developing programs to offer monetary and other inducements to insurgents it thinks are only loosely tied to the Taliban and other militant groups,” the newspaper said.

And despite its criminality and corruption, *Time* magazine wrote, Karzai’s regime had created lucrative opportunities for US multinational corporations and an aspiring Afghan bourgeoisie, even as half of the 30 million people in the country live in grinding poverty. “[T]here are plenty of new millionaires whose fortunes were not necessarily made from trafficking opium, but from bricks and mortar, cell-phone towers and trade,” the magazine noted.

National Security Advisor James L. Jones, a retired general, recently told the *Washington Post* that the only thing holding the administration back from making a decision on increasing troops was uncertainty over how to deal with the August 20 election debacle. Obama wants “to make sure this comes out as a legitimate election,” Jones said.

The final arbiter of the election result is a UN-backed panel, which includes two Afghans and three appointees from the US, Canada and the Netherlands—all countries with troops in Afghanistan. On Friday, the panel reversed its previous decision to order Afghan officials to audit and carry out recounts at all 3,063 polling stations where results were suspect. Instead, the panel said it will limit its review to a 10 percent sample, saying a broader recount could take months and put off any final decision until spring, leaving a power vacuum for the Taliban to fill.

The plans to sanction the stolen election in Afghanistan stand in glaring contrast to the insistent and unproven charges of fraud regarding the June election in neighboring Iran, which have been used to destabilize the regime in Tehran and escalate US provocations against the country.



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