

Karzai bows to US pressure on Afghanistan runoff

By Patrick Martin
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In an action that was as predictable—and as degrading—as a serf prostrating himself before his master, the president of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, bowed to relentless pressure from the Obama administration and agreed Tuesday that a runoff election will be held to decide the outcome of the presidential election.

The press conference to announce Karzai's "decision" had to be postponed for several hours because he continued to object to a US ultimatum to accept the ruling of a UN-sponsored election commission that disqualified one-third of his total vote as fraudulent. It required a lengthy session with Senator John Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—the fifth Karzai-Kerry meeting since Friday—to cement the result.

"While the world waited, Karzai and Kerry took a long walk through the secluded palace ground," the *Washington Post* wrote. "At 4:30, an unsmiling Karzai finally appeared before the waiting cameras to endorse a Nov. 7 runoff between him and former foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah."

As Karzai made the announcement—other press accounts described him as "visibly pale"—he was flanked by Kerry, UN special envoy Kai Eide, the US ambassador, Lt. Gen. Karl Eikenberry, and the French and British ambassadors. When Eide followed him to the podium, calling for a fair contest in the runoff, Karzai interrupted: "And then we must reach a result."

The *New York Times* published a detailed account of the Kerry-Karzai meetings, clearly based on high-level US sources, including Kerry himself. It described what the *Times* called an "extraordinary" campaign to browbeat the Afghan president involving US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, White House national security adviser Gen.

James Jones, and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

One passage in the *Times* account gives the flavor of the discussions:

"A senior administration official described the international pressure on Mr. Karzai as a 'full court press' that also included not-so-subtle threats delivered by telephone to Mr. Karzai's defense minister, Gen. Abdul Rahim Wardak. Gen. James L. Jones, the national security adviser, and Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates both called General Wardak to press him to persuade Mr. Karzai to concede, a senior administration official said. 'Wardak wants more American troops,' said this official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was discussing private conversations. 'They both told Wardak that this would affect the decision-making process on the troops.'"

Perhaps the "not-so-subtle threats" included reminding Karzai that without the additional US troops, his regime would collapse and he could face the fate of the last president of Afghanistan to be captured by the Taliban. The Soviet-backed Najibullah was dragged from his sanctuary inside a UN compound in Kabul in 1996, savagely beaten, castrated and hung from a lamppost.

British Prime Minister Brown joined in the bullying, speaking to Karzai three times over the weekend, according to European diplomats who spoke with the *Times*. He told Karzai he had to accept the election commission report, one diplomat said, or he "would no longer be a partner of the West."

Karzai will face the runner-up in the August 20 first-round vote, former foreign minister Abdullah, in a vote tentatively set for Saturday, November 7, the last possible date before winter weather makes such an

exercise physically impossible in much of rural Afghanistan. Abdullah immediately endorsed the runoff and said he would participate in it.

These events—the writhing and squirming of the puppet president, followed by his begrudging capitulation—demonstrate the reality behind the claims that the Obama administration is engaged in a war to defend “democracy” in Afghanistan. The country is occupied by imperialist military forces, primarily from the United States. Washington exercises the real power, using the increasingly discredited Karzai as its front man.

The runoff is the result originally desired by the US authorities, according to press reports during the summer. They saw no alternative to Karzai’s reelection, but wanted to take him down a peg by forcing him into a runoff, perhaps compelling him to enter into a coalition government with Abdullah or the US favorite, former finance minister Ashraf Ghani, who failed to attract significant support.

Given the massive violations of election law documented by the report of the International Election Commission and other observers, Karzai and his top aides could well have faced criminal charges of election fraud. There was also evidence that Abdullah’s camp engaged in similar practices in the predominantly Tajik-speaking areas.

Instead of indictments, the two would-be election riggers will face off against each other in a runoff which seems likely to be an even greater travesty than the first election. Prospective voters will face violence from Taliban and other insurgents, intimidation and ballot-stuffing by pro-Karzai or pro-Abdullah local officials, depending on where they live, and weather conditions, particularly in the mountainous Hindu Kush, that could be savage.

President Obama telephoned Karzai as soon as he announced the runoff, then issued a hypocritical statement calling the decision “a commitment to rule of law and an insistence that the Afghan people’s will should be done.”

If the will of the Afghan people were to actually be done, American and other foreign troops would board planes and evacuate Afghanistan as quickly as possible. Both the occupying powers and their corrupt stooge in Kabul are widely hated throughout Afghanistan.

And in the United States, according to poll numbers

reported Wednesday by the *Washington Post*, the majority opposes any escalation, despite the nonstop media propaganda linking the war in Afghanistan to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The poll found particularly strong opposition to sending additional troops among those who voted for Obama and the Democrats. Some 61 percent of Democrats opposed more troops, 51 percent describing themselves as “strongly opposed.”

The scheduling of the runoff is likely to be portrayed by the Obama administration as “political progress” that justifies the decision, likely already made, to send tens of thousands of additional US combat troops to Afghanistan.

This was the line already taken in the editorial in the Wednesday *Wall Street Journal*, headlined, “Afpak Progress.” The leading voice of the US ultra-right demanded that Obama stop the publicized deliberative process in the White House and send the troops.

In a display of cynicism that is hard to top, the *Journal* editorial described Karzai’s enforced consent, after weeks of battering, in the following terms: “Afghanistan yesterday demonstrated political maturity by moving to resolve a dispute over a fraudulent election.”

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