



Written by on September 10, 2009

U.S. Amb. to Karzai: "Don't Declare Victory"

On September 7, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Lieutenant General Karl W. Eikenberry briefed Secretary of State Hillary Clinton about the status of that nation's presidential election. However, despite vote tallies indicating that incumbent President Hamid Karzai had passed the 50-percent mark needed to avoid a runoff, a report in the *New York Times* for September 9 noted that Eikenberry had given an unequivocal message to Karzai on the day he spoke with Clinton: "Don't declare victory."



Like most of the key U.S. players involved in Afghanistan, including Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and General Stanley McChrystal, the commander of U.S. and NATO forces in the troubled nation, Eikenberry is a member of the internationalist Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). Among many apt descriptions of the CFR was one made by journalist Michael Petrou in the article "Pakistan's last great hope" in the Canadian *Macleans* magazine for November 22, 2007: "The council [CFR] is the most influential think tank in the U.S., a virtual shadow State Department."

A logical assumption, therefore, is that America's foreign policy establishment is extremely uncomfortable with the prospect of Karzai claiming reelection amidst the many charges of fraud that have been lodged by his opposition with the UN-backed Electoral Complaints Commission.

The *Times* report cited senior Obama administration officials who stated that Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Eikenberry wanted to prevent Karzai or his supporters from attempted to solidify victory before an outside investigation of vote irregularities could be completed.

"We realize that the allegations have reached such a level that we need to be very careful to allow the process to breathe," the *Times* quoted an administration official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly about the matter. "The message was, Let's make sure that the electoral bodies do their work, and do it rigorously."

The world's political analysts have speculated about the ramifications of the Afghan election on the ongoing U.S.-led NATO military operations in that nation. A Reuters journalist wrote on September 9:

The election standoff could hardly come at a worse time for Obama, who has made Afghanistan the primary foreign policy focus of his presidency. He has already sent 21,000 extra troops to Afghanistan, ramping up an escalation begun at the end of last year by his predecessor George W.



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Bush.

"It will be very difficult to justify the support of the outcome of an election, for which hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent and NATO soldiers have died, ... (if) fraud decides the outcome, not the will of the people," Karzai's principle opponent, Abdullah Abdullah (whom initial vote counts give 28.3 percent of the vote to Karzai's 54.1 percent), told Reuters.

The Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) announced on September 8 that it had found "clear and convincing evidence of fraud" in the reported vote and ordered a partial recount.

Karzai, however, issued a statement the next day praising the "honest" and "impartial" vote.

AFP reported that the ECC has called for recounts of ballots it said were cast fraudulently and IEC officials said ballot boxes from 600 polling sites — each containing 600-700 ballots — may be "quarantined."

The ECC's Kippen said final results cannot be ratified until all complaints are investigated.

"Until we know how many polling stations and ballot boxes are involved, and where they are, we cannot possibly predict how long it will take," he said.

British MP and Conservative leader David Cameron (the equivalent of the U.S. House Minority Leader) made comments expressing skepticism about the Afghan election results on September 8 that were broadcast by the BBC (a transcript of which was reported in the British *Guardian* newspaper). The video captured a supposedly private conversation with William Hague, the shadow foreign secretary.

"The things that seem to have happened are so naked, you know, you just saw the number of voters and the number of people who actually turned up at polling stations, it just couldn't possibly be right," Cameron said.

During their conversation, Hague said that he remembered the same thing happening in an election in Nigeria in 1979. Cameron then said: "We should be very clear about that," adding: "We are very concerned about the widespread reports of irregularities and fraud in the elections in Afghanistan. It is very important for the success of what our troops are doing in Afghanistan that the Afghan people accept the legitimacy of the government."

Hague continued: "If the Electoral Complaints Commission requires some elections to be rerun, that should happen. Nor should a full second round of the election be ruled out if that proves necessary."

As Reuters News journalist Peter Graff asked on September 9: "Can President Barack Obama ask Americans to send more of their sons and daughters to die in Afghanistan to defend a government willing to steal an election?"

We would answer that yes, Obama can *ask*, but the American people, through their representatives in Congress, can — and should — deny the president's request, as they should have done with the previous president's similar request.

Photo of Hamid Karzai: AP Images



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