

War to escalate after Afghan election

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In the wake of last Thursday's election in Afghanistan, the US establishment is proceeding with plans for a further expansion of the war. Regardless of which candidate is ultimately installed as the president, their primary task will be to collaborate in stepped-up attempts to crush the growing armed resistance to the US-led occupation in Afghanistan and the border regions of Pakistan.

The election itself has been a debacle for US imperialism and its NATO allies. The majority of people in the ethnic Pashtun southern and eastern provinces followed the directions of the Taliban and boycotted the ballot altogether. While fear may have been a factor, it cannot be denied that the insurgency has broad popular support. The Pashtun population hates both the foreign forces and the puppet regime in Kabul, which have inflicted eight years of repression, corrupt officials and police and ongoing economic deprivation.

The turn-out in the capital and the ethnic Tajik, Uzbek and Hazari regions in the north, which are controlled by the warlords of the pro-occupation Northern Alliance, pushed overall participation to just 40 to 50 percent, compared with 70 percent in 2004—though the head of the Afghan Election Commission has described even that estimate as “optimistic”.

The official result, when it is finally announced on September 17, will be widely regarded by Afghans as illegitimate. Independent organisations that monitored the voting have reported widespread ballot-stuffing and other irregularities. Both President Hamid Karzai and his main rival, Abdullah Abdullah, have already claimed they won over 50 percent of the vote, setting the stage for legal challenges, factional in-fighting and a likely second round run-off in several months.

While President Obama described the election as

“successful”, top US military commanders and officials are not even pretending that the vote will help bring the country more firmly under occupation control. The corruption of Karzai's government and its dominance by the ethnic-based warlords of the Northern Alliance have been factors in the growth of the insurgency.

An unnamed US official told the British *Telegraph* on Friday: “If Karzai wins, we want to see a marked improvement in his performance. The situation in Afghanistan is too serious for endless excuses. If Karzai wants to be president for a second term, then he needs to start behaving like one.”

In an interview with the BBC on election day, General David Petraeus, the commander of the surge in Iraq and now the overall head of US Central Command, bluntly stated: “There has to be a development of governance that is seen as worthy of support by the people”.

The steady stream of critical comments directed at Karzai is clearly aimed at fashioning a new Afghan administration more in line with the needs of the US and NATO occupation—regardless of who wins the presidency. The main task of the next president, however, will be to provide tens of thousands more Afghan soldiers and police for the imperialist powers to use as cannon fodder in their efforts to stabilise the country as a client state.

NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen declared on Thursday that NATO “should aim at building up the Afghan security forces to a level around 400,000”—more than double the current number. Reaching this level would take five years at least. In the interim, additional US and NATO forces will be needed.

The commander of US and NATO forces, General Stanley McChrystal, is scheduled to present Obama with his review of the war's progress in the next several weeks. In advance of his report, the Pentagon is

waging a steady campaign to condition public opinion for the dispatch of tens of thousands more American troops to Afghanistan.

On Sunday, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, stressed to CNN that McChrystal's "guidance from me and the Secretary of Defense was to assess where you are and tell us what you need". He declared that the occupation was facing a grim military situation due to the growth of resistance: "I think it is serious and it is deteriorating.... The Taliban insurgency has gotten better and more sophisticated in their tactics."

Currently there are some 60,000 US and 32,000 NATO personnel in the country, with some 8,000 more on the way. The *New York Times* reported today that all four regional commanders in Afghanistan told Obama's envoy Richard Holbrooke over the weekend that troop numbers "remain below what commanders need".

Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, who is advising McChrystal, wrote earlier this month that as many as nine more combat brigades, or more than 60,000 additional troops, were required to defeat the Taliban.

As part of the efforts to justify such an escalation, the US media is running regular articles for the military to voice its concern that it does not have enough "boots on the ground" to win the war. Yesterday, for instance, the *New York Times* reported from Helmand province, where US marines are currently conducting a major offensive against the Taliban.

The article declared: "[T]he military lacks the troop strength even to try and secure some significant population centres and guerilla strongholds in central and southern Helmand. And they do not have nearly enough forces to provide the kinds of services throughout the region that would make a meaningful difference in Afghan's lives, which, in any case, is a job that American commanders would rather leave to the Afghan government."

Alongside the calls for more US and NATO forces in Afghanistan, the Pakistani government is coming under intense pressure from Washington to deploy thousands of troops into the tribal agencies of South and North Waziristan, where Afghan insurgents have safe havens and training camps. (See: "US presses Pakistan for offensive in South Waziristan")

On Friday, a US Predator drone carried out another missile attack inside Pakistan, reportedly in an attempt to assassinate Siraj Haqqani, a principal leader of a powerful Pashtun tribal network that is fighting the occupation alongside the Taliban. Twelve people were allegedly killed, including three women.

The occupation of Afghanistan and the war in the tribal areas of Pakistan does not have the support of either the Afghan or Pakistani people. It is also opposed by the majority of the population in all the countries that have dispatched troops to assist US imperialism transform Afghanistan into a base of operations in Central Asia and the Middle East. Millions of people no longer believe the crude attempts to justify this neo-colonial war with lies about "stopping terrorism" and "bringing democracy".



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