

Washington praises Afghan election fiasco to justify war escalation

Bill Van Auken
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President Barack Obama spoke to reporters on the White House lawn Friday, declaring that the August 20 presidential election in US-occupied Afghanistan was “an important step forward in the Afghan people’s effort to take control of their future.”

On Thursday, in a radio interview, he praised what he termed “a successful election in Afghanistan despite the Taliban’s effort to disrupt it,” while vowing that his administration would stay “focused on finishing the job in Afghanistan.”

Whether Obama knew it or not, his remarks echoed those delivered by one of his predecessors, who heaped similar praise on a vote that had taken place in a country thousands of miles away, while promising that US troops there would soon “finish the job.”

The year was 1967, the president was Lyndon B. Johnson and the election was in Vietnam. Johnson described the Vietnamese going to the polls as evidence of “dramatic progress” and invoked it as a legitimization of the steady escalation of the US war—now supposedly in defense of an “elected government.” Within months, the Vietnamese liberation movement launched the Tet Offensive and Johnson was forced to foreswear a second term.

Clearly, there are major differences between Vietnam 42 years ago and Afghanistan today. There are, however, also striking similarities in the nature of the two elections and the way in which they have been manipulated to provide a democratic façade for colonial-style wars of aggression.

Both elections were carried out under the guns of US-led occupation forces. In both countries, any candidate opposing the US military presence in the country was prevented from running. And in both cases, the leading candidates were a collection of corrupt puppets who

carried out wholesale ballot stuffing and electoral fraud.

The response of the US media, and particularly the editorial boards of the two most influential papers in the country, has been far more slavish in response to the Afghan elections than they were four decades ago in Vietnam.

The *New York Times* Friday lauded the corrupt charade in Afghanistan: “Millions of Afghans, determined to shape their own future, defied Taliban threats and voted Thursday...”

The editorial neglects to mention that millions more—apparently the majority of the electorate—abstained from the entire process. That those who voted did so out of a determination to “shape their own future” is hardly self-evident. In many cases, particularly in the rural areas containing nearly three-quarters of the population, voters were coerced by local warlords or cast their ballots strictly along ethnic lines.

A more accurate assessment of the electoral exercise in Afghanistan was put succinctly by one of the opposition candidates, former planning minister Ramazan Bashardost: “This is not an election. This is a comedy.”

The *Times* editorial quickly gets to the main purpose of the election: “President Obama has rightfully defined success in Afghanistan as essential to America’s struggle against Al Qaeda. He has backed that up with more troops—60,000 now with 6,000 on the way...” The paper goes on to commend the US commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley McChrystal for being “candid about how badly the war is going—and how hard and costly it is likely to be even to start turning things around.”

The meaning of this is clear. The voice of establishment liberalism is fully behind the war in Afghanistan and is pushing for it to be escalated. The

war is likely to be even more “hard and costly” as McChrystal is preparing to request even more US troops—another 20,000 to 60,000 according to military sources—and many billions of dollars more in funding to double the size of the Afghan puppet forces.

The *Times* urges on the US military campaign, demanding that American soldiers “dislodge Taliban guerrillas from the strategic mountain passes and towns they have retaken in recent years (without recklessly placing local residents in the line of fire).” This parenthetical appeal for a “humane” counterinsurgency campaign is merely an attempt to assuage the consciences of more gullible readers. The escalation of the US intervention is already resulting in a steady increase in the slaughter of innocent men, women and children, the inevitable outcome of fighting insurgents defending their own homeland against foreign occupation.

The editorial goes on to upbraid the probable winner of the election—either incumbent President Hamid Karzai or his principal opponent, former foreign minister Abdullah Abdullah, both of whom claimed victory. They have “presided over a government whose systematic corruption has consumed its credibility and the country’s limited financial resources.” The *Times* cites the puppet regime’s dependence on warlords for support, as well as the flourishing of opium cultivation and drug trafficking under the protection of government officials and, reportedly, Karzai’s own brother.

It demands that the government emerging from the election “turn these disastrous trends around,” but then adds, understandingly, that “not all unsavory alliances with warlords can be liquidated immediately” as the country would become “ungovernable.”

Pointing to similar “disastrous trends” as well as the evidence that the results of the election would be determined not by the voters but by corrupt deals with warlords and massive fraud, the *Washington Post* declared Wednesday: “For all that, the Afghan election represents another advance for a nation whose progress must necessarily be measured in small increments.”

The *Post* editorial also moves swiftly to the bottom line: “Success will require considerable time and patience—and, almost certainly, more troops and other resources than the Obama administration has yet committed to.”

What emerges from these responses to the fraudulent election in Afghanistan is a consensus within the American ruling establishment behind the escalation of the US war in Afghanistan. The claim that this war, soon to enter its ninth year, is aimed at defeating Al Qaeda or protecting the US from terrorism is a patent lie. The original pretense that the intervention was aimed at hunting down Osama bin Laden was long ago abandoned, with the former arch terrorist (and CIA asset) becoming a non-entity in the affairs of official Washington.

Tens of thousands of US and NATO troops are in Afghanistan as part of a drive by US imperialism to secure hegemony in Central Asia, a geo-strategically vital region that contains much of the world’s energy reserves. While reproducing the vicious methods of colonial counterinsurgency campaigns, the broader aim of the war is to use America’s military might to offset its relative decline relative to its principal rivals in Europe and Asia.

The plans to escalate this war will soon be announced under conditions in which multiple polls show that the majority of the American people oppose what Obama and the Democrats have tried to sell as the “good war” or “war of necessity,” and by a two-to-one margin are against sending still more troops to Afghanistan.

Obama may also find himself following in the footsteps of LBJ in confronting mass opposition to war. However, under conditions of the most profound crisis of US and world capitalism since the Great Depression, this opposition will emerge most powerfully in the working class and will inevitably become fused with the eruption of class struggle against the profit system, the source of militarism.

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