

# UN official fired over criticisms of Afghan election fraud

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Peter Galbraith, the second-ranking official in the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), and the agency's top-ranking US official, was dismissed on Wednesday over his criticisms of the August 20 Afghan election.

Galbraith was an outspoken critic of President Hamid Karzai, charging major vote fraud in the elections. In the weeks following the election, as evidence of fraud became widespread, Galbraith had a public falling out with the top UN official in Afghanistan, Kai Eide of Norway.

His dismissal comes amid signs that the US and Europe have decided to support Karzai for another term. An article in the *Washington Post* on Monday reported that US and NATO foreign ministers "told President Hamid Karzai's government that they expect him to remain in office for another five-year term." (See "US, NATO reach 'consensus' to sanction rigged election in Afghanistan")

The moves to sanction Karzai's claims to victory come after a debate within the Obama administration over how to respond to the Afghan vote. As evidence of massive fraud came out, some saw it as an opportunity to sideline Karzai, who has clashed with the US over his criticism of civilian casualties. The election fraud, combined with Karzai's outright corruption and unpopularity, was also viewed as a liability for the occupying forces.

Sections of the political establishment favored a deal that would lead to a diminishing of Karzai's powers, perhaps as part of a power-sharing deal with his principal challenger, Abdullah Abdullah. At the time, Galbraith's charges of fraud served to increase pressure on Karzai.

In the end, however, it was decided that continued uncertainty over the election results could do more

harm to the US occupation, particularly as the Obama administration considers sending up to 40,000 additional troops into the country to suppress popular opposition. A recount might have to wait until the spring, which would mean uncertainty about the stability and legitimacy of the Afghan government for months. Supporting Karzai became the least bad option for escalating the occupation.

The *New York Times* noted Wednesday, "With American officials increasingly accepting the idea that Mr. Karzai will be the next president despite many well-documented irregularities in the election, Mr. Galbraith's stance put him at odds with both the Obama administration and the United Nations."

According to the *Washington Post*, Eide said he has "'unanimous' support from the United States and other nations involved in the region." Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton declined to criticize the dismissal, calling it "a United Nations matter."

Galbraith's continued charges of fraud evidently clashed with the shifts in the political winds. On Monday, he sent a letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon charging the UN with direct complicity in the Afghan election fraud:

"Given our mandate to support 'free, fair, and transparent' elections," Galbraith wrote, "I felt UNAMA could not overlook the fraud without compromising our neutrality and becoming complicit in a cover-up."

Galbraith states that in the month before the election he began to call attention to "ghost" polling stations—"polling centers sited in areas so insecure that the centers would never open." He writes: "The Afghan Ministers, whose continued tenure in office was to depend on the fraud, complained about my intervention and Kai ordered me to drop the matter. As it turns out,

most of the electoral fraud occurred in these ghost polling centers,” he claims.

UN data showed that turnout was extremely low in many of the key southern provinces of Afghanistan, which reported huge votes in favor of Karzai. Galbraith writes that Eide “ordered the staff not to share the data [on turnout] to anyone...” He continues by stating that shortly after the elections, “Kai told President Karzai that “I am biased” in your favor and that “those who are out to get you are also out to get me.”

Supporters of Karzai’s main challenger, Abdullah Abdullah, to whom the US looked as a possible alternative, have called for a criminal investigation into the election, pointing to Galbraith’s charges as evidence that the UN oversight was tainted.

From the beginning, the Afghan elections—trumpeted by the Obama administration as a great advance for democracy—have been a highly undemocratic affair. Anyone opposed to the occupation has been prohibited from running, thereby disenfranchising the vast majority of the population.

After first praising the elections, the Obama administration responded to the evidence of fraud, seeing it as a means of pursuing its own ends in altering the puppet government in Kabul. Once this threatened to interfere with US plans by destabilizing the government, the US has switched back to supporting Karzai. Allegations of fraud are now to be quickly suppressed.

The overriding concern is to establish a suitable stooge regime to continue and expand the US-led war. The administration is presently in discussions with top military generals over a proposal to send more troops beyond the initial escalation announced by Obama earlier this year.

The attitude of the American media and political establishment to the election in Afghanistan stands in sharp contrast with the massive campaign over alleged fraud in Iran earlier this year. While there was no real evidence that fraud determined the results in Iran, it became the occasion for a destabilization operation aimed at unseating president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and putting in place a government more accommodating to US interests, led by his opponent, Mir Hossein Moussavi.

Publications on the “left” and right rushed to back the “green” opposition, denouncing the Iranian government

for organizing a “stolen election.”

This media campaign continues months after the elections, and the Obama administration is using a deliberate provocation over Iran’s nuclear program in part to strengthen domestic opposition.

Voicing the positions of many commentators, Robert Kagan—an adviser to the US commander in Afghanistan, Gen. Stanley McChrystal—writes in the *Washington Post* on Wednesday that the focus of the demand for new sanctions should be on the Iranian government’s “instability.”

“Sanctions will not persuade the present Iranian government to give up its nuclear weapons program,” Kagan writes. “Ahmadinejad and Khamenei see the nuclear program and their own survival as intimately linked. But the right kinds of sanctions could help the Iranian opposition topple these still-vulnerable rulers.”

There is no such comparable outrage over the elections in Afghanistan, nor any calls for aid to Karzai’s defrauded opponents. The decision by Obama to back Karzai has occasioned no comment from liberal backers of the president such as the *Nation* magazine. In contrast, the publication devoted pages of coverage to promoting the “green revolution.”

What links these two apparently contradictory reactions is the interests of US imperialism in the Middle East and Central Asia. When allegations of fraud further these interests—as in Iran—Washington and the American media are in the forefront of the struggle for “democracy.” When genuinely wholesale and proven fraud—as in Afghanistan—are determined to serve these same interests, democratic pretensions are cast aside in the interests of stability.



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