

Tensions mount between Washington and its puppet in Kabul

Patrick Martin
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Thursday's warning by Afghan President Hamid Karzai that US and other NATO troops could be regarded as "invaders" in his country provided a rare glimpse into the political realities in Afghanistan—and called forth a furious reaction from the Obama administration and the American media.

Karzai denounced those in the Washington and the Western media who have criticized the corruption and incompetence of his regime, complaining, "They wanted to have a puppet government. They wanted a servant government."

The outburst came one day after the Afghan parliament voted to strip Karzai of the power he had claimed to name all five members of the country's election commission, which is to oversee parliamentary elections in the fall. The decision came under heavy pressure from the US ambassador.

Karzai declared, "In this situation there is a thin curtain between invasion and cooperation-assistance." He warned that if the people concluded that those in the Afghan government were simply mercenaries for the Western powers, the Taliban-led insurgency "could become a national resistance."

What Karzai warns of as a possible outcome for the US-led war in Afghanistan has already largely come to pass, as an extraordinary report in Sunday's *New York Times* makes clear.

In a front-page dispatch from Marja, the district recently conquered by the US Marines in the first major offensive since Obama ordered an escalation of the war, *Times* correspondent Richard A. Opiel, Jr. writes that the Marines have no control in the region outside their own bases, the Taliban are resurgent, and those collaborating with the US occupation are isolated and targeted for retaliation. Most US-funded reconstruction work has been forced to shut down.

Opiel concludes: "In Marja, the Taliban are hardly a distinct militant group, and the Marines have collided with a Taliban identity so dominant that the movement appears more akin to the only political organization in a one-party town, with an influence that touches everyone. Even the Marines admit to being somewhat flummoxed."

"We've got to re-evaluate our definition of the word 'enemy,'" Brigadier General Larry Nicholson, commander of the Marine expeditionary brigade in Helmand Province, told the *Times*. "Most people here identify themselves as Taliban."

Those fighting the occupation of Afghanistan are invariably described in the Western media as "Taliban," in an effort to provide a "democratic" and "progressive" cover for the US-led military intervention. What Karzai suggests, and the *Times* report in effect confirms, is that the US-NATO war is directed against virtually the entire population of the country.

Karzai's speech lifts the veil over the real nature of the US war in Afghanistan, sold to the American people over nearly nine years as a response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The US is engaged in a brutal colonial war aimed at propping up a puppet regime that will serve US interests in Central Asia—one of the largest suppliers of oil and gas to the world market.

It is unusual for the head of a government sustained entirely by US arms and dollars to issue such a public rebuke to his master. This is to be explained by two factors: the growing hostility of the Afghan people to the occupation, in which thousands of innocent people have been killed by American bombs, rockets, night-time commando raids and outright massacres; and the desperation of Karzai, who feels himself increasingly marginalized in his nominal role as head of the Afghan

state.

The Afghan president's speech, to a gathering of election officials, came four days after the visit by Barack Obama to Kabul, where the US president had a confrontational meeting with Karzai. Published reports said that Obama berated Karzai over the corruption in his regime and the vote-rigging in last year's presidential election. No doubt the topic of Karzai's recent overtures to Iran and China was also raised.

Karzai's remarks provoked an immediate response from Washington. White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs called his statement "troubling" and "cause for real and genuine concern." State Department spokesman Philip Crowley described Karzai's intervention as "preposterous."

US officials sought to contain the political uproar over Karzai's comments, with Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, the real political power in Kabul, calling on the Afghan president to "clarify" his remarks, which he promptly did the next day in a long phone conversation with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

But the blast from their Afghan puppet has left American officials in a difficult position. To dismiss Karzai's diatribe as lunacy—the *New York Daily News* editorial was headlined "Cuckoo Karzai"—means that 1,000 US soldiers and tens of thousands of Afghans have lost their lives to keep a madman in power.

The *New York Times*, in an editorial April 3, called Karzai's criticism "delusional" and warned that his statement could have political repercussions in the United States, because "it undermines the fragile public support for President Obama's strategy" of pouring 30,000 more US troops into the Afghan war.

"Mr. Karzai is encouraging those who want the United States out of Afghanistan," the editorial concluded. "He risks boiling down a more complicated policy debate to the notion that American lives are being sacrificed simply to keep him in power. It's hard to think of a better way to doom Afghanistan's future, as well as his own."

The last phrase has a sinister ring, harking back nearly 50 years to when a previous US puppet ran afoul of Washington—in 1963, when President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Vietnam, facing similar criticism for corruption, incompetence and vote-rigging, was overthrown and murdered in a US-backed military coup, setting the stage for a decade of even deeper US

military intervention.

The *Times* returned to the subject again in an article posted on the front page of its web site Sunday afternoon, noting that Karzai had intensified his criticism of the US in a meeting with his parliamentary faction. "If you and the international community pressure me more, I swear that I am going to join the Taliban," he reportedly said.

The *Times* article mulled over possible options for US policy towards Karzai, listing three options: "threaten to withdraw, or actually withdraw, troops; use diplomacy, which so far has had little result; and find ways to expand citizen participation in the government."

The last "option" is meaningless in an occupied country where all such "participation" is dictated by the occupying powers. It is perhaps a euphemism for the one action which has been the most commonly used weapon in the arsenal of American imperialism—a coup engineered and facilitated by Washington.

Sections of the former Northern Alliance, based in the Tajik minority, are certainly capable of carrying out such an action with the proper encouragement from the Obama administration. There is no doubt that discussions about that possibility are under way in the White House, Pentagon and CIA—as well as how to package it as greater "citizen participation" in the Kabul regime.

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