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Karzai Agrees to Afghanistan Runoff

The incumbent President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, announced at a Kabul press conference on October 20 that he had accepted the findings of the country's Independent Election Commission (IEC) — which had reduced his margin of victory to 49.67 percent of the vote — and has agreed to a runoff election. (Afghan law requires a runoff when no candidate passes the 50-percent mark.)

The runoff election between Karzai and his leading challenger, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, the former Foreign Minister, will be held on November 7. VOA news observed that international officials in Kabul say there is a sense of urgency to proceed with the next round before the country's harsh winter limits access to certain polling stations.



At the conference, Karzai stood between U.S. Senator John Kerry, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and Kai Eide, the top UN official in Afghanistan. "I call upon this country to take this as an opportunity to move this country forward and participate in this new round of elections," Karzai said. "I hope that the international community and the Afghan government and all others concerned will take every possible measure to provide security to the people so that when they vote that vote is not called a fraud."

Senator Kerry, a former U.S. presidential candidate who is a member of both the internationalist Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and Yale's secretive Skull and Bones society, said: "The international community is 100 percent committed to helping to carry out this election. NATO is committed, ISAF [the International Security Assistance Force] is committed — in every way possible in order to make the runoff a success. We know that it will be difficult and it will require sacrifice, but we are committed to this effort."

AP news reported that Kerry said the agreement on a second round had transformed the crisis into a "moment of great opportunity," and praised Karzai for "genuine leadership in the decision he has made today."

Kerry said that Karzai's decision to accept the IEC's fraud findings and agree to a run-off indicated that Afghanistan "recommits to the democratic process." The Senator complimented Karzai for his "openness to finding ways of resolving differences."

Back on September 17, speaking at his first press conference since the August 20 election, Karzai denied that massive fraud had taken place to win him a second term in office and blamed the West's media for the controversy surrounding the charges of vote irregularities. "Let's find out exactly if there was the kind of fraud committed that was reported in the international press," said Karzai. "I believe firmly, firmly in the integrity of the election and the integrity of the Afghan people and the integrity of



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the government in that process," said Karzai. "Fraud — if it is committed — it has to be investigated, but investigated fairly and without prejudice," he added.

Senator Kerry and associates apparently presented Karzai with a very persuasive argument in favor of showing his "genuine leadership in the decision" to accept a runoff. A reporter for the *New York Times* observed: "Mr. Karzai's capitulation came after an all-out push by Obama administration officials and their European allies."

The *Times* report noted: "During a hastily arranged two-hour meeting with Senator Kerry ... and the United States ambassador, Lt. Gen. Karl W. Eikenberry at the presidential palace in Kabul on [October 19], Mr. Karzai, after initially hesitating, agreed to accept the findings, American and European officials said."

Eikenberry, like Kerry, ISAF and U.S. Forces Afghanistan commander General Stanley McChrystal, and U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, are all CFR members. One wonders if Karzai appreciates the significance of the fact that so many of the Americans directing operations in his country share that common "fraternal" bond.

A report in the British *Times* also noted that Senator Kerry, Kai Eide, the top UN official in Afghanistan, and Mark Sedwill, the British Ambassador had all "spent long hours with [Karzai] last night [October 19] urging him to act like 'a statesman.' "

The *Times* also quoted Fazel Sangcharaki, Dr. Abdullah's spokesman, who welcomed the runoff: "We had hoped the president would accept the second round and we are ready and fully prepared."

An AFP news report quoted from a written statement issued by President Obama on October 20: "I welcome President Karzai's statement today accepting the Independent Electoral Commission's certification of the August 20 election results, and agreeing to participate in a second round of the election. This is an important step forward in ensuring a credible process for the Afghan people which results in a government that reflects their will."

The ongoing election dispute in Afghanistan made Obama's decision concerning whether to honor Gen. McChrystal's request for additional U.S. troops more difficult, since support for the war is already waning, and selling the U.S. public on sending more troops to die to restore order in a nation without a legitimate government would have been politically untenable. Most of the opposition to a troop build-up has come from Obama's own Democrat Party.

A Reuters news report noted that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also congratulated Karzai's acceptance of a runoff election. "I commend President Karzai for the leadership he has displayed and for his commitment to ensuring full respect for Afghanistan's constitution and its democratic processes," Ban told reporters at UN headquarters.

Ban also issued an admonition against holding another fraudulent election in Afghanistan: "We must not repeat what they have done last time," he said. "We knew that there was fraud. We reported that there was fraud."

If anything positive has come from the electoral dispute in Afghanistan, it is that the international community's transparent use of pressure to keep Karzai in line will shed more light on who is really calling the shots in Afghanistan.

Photo of (l to r) Kerry, Eide, Karzai: AP Images



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