



Written by on November 2, 2009

Karzai Declared President of Afghanistan

VOA News reported on November 2 that Afghanistan's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) had declared President Hamid Karzai the winner of the country's disputed election, following the withdrawal from the race the previous day by Karzai's challenger, Abdullah Abdullah, the nation's former Foreign Minister. The runoff election that had been scheduled for November 7 has been cancelled and Karzai will remain as president for a five-year term.



The British *Times* reported this statement from the IEC:

"The Independent Election Commission declares the esteemed Hamid Karzai as the president ... because he was the winner of the first round and the only candidate in the second round," Azizullah Ludin, the Karzai-appointed IEC chief, told a packed news conference.

Asked if he was concerned that President Karzai did not have a legal mandate, he told reporters: "We are the commission and we have decided."

The *Times* noted that Karzai's aides had ruled out a coalition with Dr. Abdullah on November 1, but the President is now under increasing international pressure to bring Abdullah — who is Karzai's former Foreign Minister — back into his government for the sake of national unity.

?In his formal announcement, Abdullah cited fraud in the first round of elections held on August 20, and complained that Karzai had left the head of Afghanistan's election commission in place for the runoff. "I want this to be an example for the future so that no one again tries to use fraud to abuse the rights of the Afghan people," Abdullah told reporters.

Appearing on the CBS television program *Face the Nation*, President Obama's top White House adviser, David Axelrod, minimized the likelihood that Abdullah's decision might have any effect on the administration's Afghan policy review. ??Axelrod noted that Abdullah withdrew in the face of polls showing that he was likely to lose. ??"Mr. Abdullah has exercised his right as a candidate to withdraw," Axelrod said. "He has made a political decision to withdraw from this contest and that does not markedly change the situation."

VOA quoted White House counselor Valerie Jarrett, who said on ABC's *This Week* program that Abdullah's withdrawal will not complicate President Obama's efforts to revise his war strategy. However, Jarrett would not comment on exactly when the president would make an announcement on possible increases in troop levels. "He is looking for a strategy that leads to keeping our nation safe. And so the timing for that is completely up to the president," said Jarrett. "He will make the decision he has all the facts that he needs to make the right decision."

According to a CNN report, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon arrived in Kabul on November 2, shortly before the commission's announcement. Ban issued a statement welcoming the decision, congratulating Karzai, and reemphasized the UN's commitment to supporting the new government.



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"This has been a difficult election process for Afghanistan and lessons must be learned," Ban said. "Afghanistan now faces significant challenges and the new president must move swiftly to form a government that is able to command the support of both the Afghan people and the international community."

On November 2, Ban met in Kabul with both Karzai and Abdullah. He also met with UN officials, including Kai Eide, head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan.

Reuters News quoted a Kabul-based Western official who spoke on condition of anonymity: "The credibility of the Karzai government is not going to be simply decided by this election, it will now be decided by the actions the president takes over the coming days and weeks. The first test will be the formation of his cabinet. If he is serious about reform we need to see that."

Many analysts believe that the continuity of the Karzai government will lend stability to Afghanistan and strengthen President Obama's case for sending additional troops to the nation. It is worthwhile, however, to review Karzai's background and how he first came to power.

In December 2001, shortly after U.S.-led troops unseated the Taliban from power in Kabul, Karzai was named Chairman of a 29-member governing committee of Afghanistan's interim transitional administration and was sworn in as leader on December 22. Shortly thereafter, Iran's state-run *Tehran Times* reported on January 3, 2002 that Karzai had met the previous day with Iran's deputy foreign minister for Asia-Pacific affairs, Mohsen Aminzadeh, to request Iran's help in rebuilding the war-torn country. Karzai thanked Iran for its past support, saying: "We want to see our Iranian brothers involved in every aspect of the reconstruction of Afghanistan."

Less than a month after attending George W. Bush's January 29, 2002, "State of the Union" address, where he heard the president denounce Iran — as well as North Korea and Iraq — as a member of the "axis of evil," Karzai went to Iran, where he met Iranian President Mohammad Khatami and told a news conference: "Our presence here is like going to your brother's house, because Iran is our brother country. Iran is not only a neighbor, but also a friend."

That August, Khatami returned the courtesy by visiting Karzai in Afghanistan.

Karzai has shown a notable lack of discrimination in forging his political fortress. In addition to his propensity for extending overtures to the Iranians, almost immediately upon assuming office he granted key positions to members of the Northern Alliance, including Vice President Mohammed Fahim, who also served as Defense Minister. British journalist Robert Fisk once observed, "from 1992 to 1996, the Northern Alliance was a symbol of massacre, systematic rape and pillage."

Karzai's chief rival, Abdullah, also had past association with the Northern Alliance. Shortly the ouster of the Taliban, alliance leaders who had been in exile during Taliban rule met in Bonn, Germany in December 2001 and adopted the Bonn Agreement, which led to the installation of Karzai as President, a position that was confirmed by a presidential election in 2004. Following that election, Abdullah was one of the few people who kept his position from the Transitional Government and was re-appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the new Karzai government.

Abdullah's withdrawal from the race and Karzai's confirmation as President means business as usual in Afghanistan, a situation that may appear to make President Obama's job decision to send more troops somewhat easier. Nevertheless, opinion polls indicate an increasing weariness with the war among Americans. For example, a national telephone poll conducted for Fox News by Opinion Dynamics Corp. among 900 registered voters from October 13 to October 14 revealed that 43 percent of Americans



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disapproved of the job President Obama is doing on Afghanistan, an increase from the 32 percent who disapproved a month earlier.

Photo of Hamid Karzai with U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon: AP Images



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