

Afghan elections - Taliban exposed, U.S licked

Friday 23 October 2009, by [SULEHRIA Farooq](#) (Date first published: 1 September 2009).

Hamid Karzai or Abdullah Abdullah? It is not yet clear who will win the Afghan presidential election held on August 20. Both frontrunners, Hamid Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah, are claiming victory. The official announcement may take few more days. Most likely the pre-election opinion polls, predicting a run off, will prove wrong. Like his Iranian counterpart, the sitting Afghan president does not want to take the risk of a second round. The 'Independent' Election Commission will announce his victory. Abdullah Abdullah will make hue and cry. In fact, he already has started levelling corruption allegations.

An embarrassed White House will either dismiss the rigging charges or will avoid taking a stand.

Reportedly, U.S.' special envoy in the region Richard Holbrooke, on August 21, had a "difficult meetng" with Hamid Karzai. The British daily, *Telegraph* (August 28), reports "a stormy exchange over recent elections" during the meeting. The BBC Urdu, quoting sources at Presidential Palace, claims: Richard Holbrooke wanted Hamid Karzai to go for a run off in order to confer legitimacy on the electoral exercise. Meantime, talking about rigging cahrges, he told CNN: "That's politics Afghan-style. That happens in Western democracies as well. We have charges repeatedly in American elections by candidates that the other side is not allowing [would-be voters] to register. We should not be surprised that democracy is imperfect even in Western countries. And Afghanistan has had unique difficulties in holding this election. So let's see what happens".

In case Hamid Karzai declares his victory, he will try to silence Abdullah Abdullah through some bribe. But if a second round is staged, securing a majority for Hamid Karzai would not be an easy task. It will again need some doctoring of ballot boxes to engineer a victory.

This will, in turn, further de-legitimise the democratic façade U.S. imperialism had planned to shroud the occupation. Also, it will isolate the Afghan people. Already, they have no hope left in the political process initiated eight years ago. This was largely evident from the low turn out compared to 2004. In the previous presidential election, back in 2004, the turn out was 69 percent. This time, it has been reported between 40 percent to 50 percent (though the official figure is not available yet). Those who voted, did it under various considerations except democratic ideals.

This lack in US-sponsored 'democratic' process does not merely owes to five years of inefficiency and incompetence. That the karzais and their allies have emerged, in last five years, as Afghanistan's richest families is the fact engaging popular imagination and fuelling wide-spread indignation in the country. It was this realisation that the U.S media were careful this time in not presenting Karzai as the saviour of Afghan nation. In fact, almost entire Western media were lacklustre ahead of August 20 elections. But media were quick in declaring August 20 a success owing to Taliban's failure in securing any substantial hit.

True, Taliban were not able to seriously disrupt either the canvassing or the polling process. They were able to launch their attacks in 15 of 34 Afghan provinces while 73 incidents of violence across the country were reported, according to official statement, claiming 26 lives. Even in Kandhar, an

area where Taliban command a strong control, they resorted to firing rockets. Suicide bombers, a Taliban hallmark, were not able to penetrate the polling stations. In Kabul, two suspected suicide bombers were shot dead by Afghan police even before they could leave their hide out. Even important is the fact that millions of people went to polling stations (even if turn out was low. 40-50 percent of 17 million voters still constitute 7-8 million). This despite the Taliban threat that purple coloured fingers would be amputated.

In previous elections, Taliban appealed for boycott but did not resort to violence. "The attacks would have claimed innocent lives, therefore we refrained from attacks," a Taliban spokesperson told BBC back then. It was not the concern for innocent lives that Taliban desisted from violence. Back in 2004, a deal was struck between Taliban and their Pakistani bosses. Also, Taliban back in 2004 were too weak to create any mayhem. This time they were too confident, hence too proud, to agree on a truce. Wali Karzai, Hamid Karzai's brother, desperately negotiated with Taliban to neutralise them. But Taliban did not budge. Consequently, their (as well as their supporters') claim as a popular resistance force yet again exposed. A popular resistance force, in the first place, does not need to issue threats, dispatch suicide bombers or fire rockets to effect an election boycott. A boycott appeal should suffice. However, the Taliban strategy, or ideology, has never been either to win or engage mass support. They seek legitimacy through religious justifications. It was the Empire staging a political-stunt to shore up dwindling domestic support for Afghan adventure gone awry. The electoral feat marred by rigging charges, unfortunately, is rather proving a PR-disaster. Thus, the gravity of imperial loss is perhaps much severe than that of confessional failure.

P.S.

* Farooq Sulehria's ZSpace Page.