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U.S. puppet cuts his strings

Thwarted by the American government on compromise with Taliban, Karzai has begun openly defying his patrons

By ERIC MARGOLIS, QMI AGENCY
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Henry Kissinger once observed that it was more dangerous being America's ally than its enemy.

The latest example: the U.S.-installed Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, who is in serious hot water with his really angry patrons in Washington.

The Obama administration is blaming the largely powerless Karzai, a former CIA "asset," for America's failure to defeat the Taliban. Washington accused Karzai of rigging last year's elections. True enough, but the U.S. pre-rigged the Afghan elections by excluding all parties opposed to western occupation.

Washington, which supports dictators and phoney elections across the Muslim world, had the chutzpah to blast Karzai for corruption and rigging votes. This while the Pentagon was engineering a full military takeover of Pakistan.

The Obama administration made no secret it wanted to replace Karzai. You could almost hear Washington crying, "Bad puppet! Bad puppet!"

Karzai fired back, accusing the U.S. of vote-rigging. He has repeatedly demanded the U.S. military stop killing so many Afghan civilians.

Next, Karzai dropped a bombshell, asserting the U.S. was occupying Afghanistan to dominate the energy-rich Caspian Basin region, not because of the non-existent al-Qaida or Taliban. Karzai said Taliban was “resisting western occupation.” The U.S. will soon have 100,000 soldiers in Afghanistan, plus 40,000 dragooned NATO troops.

Karzai even half-jested he might join Taliban.

Washington had apoplexy. A vicious propaganda campaign was unleashed against Karzai. The New York Times, a mouthpiece for the Obama administration and ardent backer of the Afghan war, all but called for the overthrow of Karzai and his replacement by a compliant general.

An American self-promoter, Peter Galbraith, who had been fired from his job with the UN in Kabul, was trotted out to tell media that Karzai might be both a drug addict and crazy.

Behind this ugly, if also comical, spat lay a growing divergence between Afghans and Washington. After 31 years of conflict, nearly three million dead, millions more refugees and frightful poverty, Afghans yearn for peace.

For the past two years, Karzai and his warlord allies have been holding peace talks with the Taliban in Saudi Arabia.

Karzai knows the only way to end the Afghan conflict is to enfranchise the nation’s Pashtun majority and its fighting arm, the Taliban. Political compromise with the Taliban is the only — and inevitable — solution.

But the Obama administration, misadvised by Washington neocons and other hardliners, is determined to “win” a military victory in Afghanistan (whatever that means) to save face as a great power and impose a settlement that leaves it in control of strategic Afghanistan.

Accordingly, the U.S. thwarted Karzai’s peace talks by getting Pakistan, currently the recipient of \$7 billion in U.S. cash, to arrest senior Taliban leaders sheltering there who had been part of the ongoing peace negotiations with Kabul.

It was Karzai’s turn to be enraged. So he began openly defying his American patrons and adopting an independent position. The puppet was cutting his strings.

Karzai’s newfound boldness was due to the fact that both India and China are eager to replace U.S./British/NATO domination of Afghanistan. India is pouring money, arms and agents into Afghanistan and training government forces. China, more discreetly, is moving in to exploit Afghanistan’s recently discovered mineral wealth that, says Karzai, is worth \$1 trillion, according to a U.S. government geological survey.

Russia, still smarting from its 1980s defeat in Afghanistan, is watching America’s travails there with rich enjoyment and not a little yearning for revenge. Moscow has its own ambitions in Afghanistan.

This column has long suggested Karzai’s best option is to distance himself from American tutelage and demand the withdrawal of all foreign occupation forces.

Risky business, of course. Remember Kissinger's warning. Karzai could end up dead. But he could also become a national hero and best candidate to lead an independent Afghanistan that all ethnic groups could accept.

Alas, the U.S. keeps making the same mistake of seeking obedient clients rather than democratic allies who are genuinely popular and legitimate.