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Americans pull strings in Afghan election

By Ahmad Eric Margolis

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Henry Kissinger once observed that being America's ally can be more dangerous than being its enemy.

Take poor Hamid Karzai, the amiable former business consultant and CIA "asset" installed by Washington as Afghanistan's president. As the U.S. increasingly gets its backside kicked in Afghanistan, it has blamed the powerless Karzai for its woes and bumbling.

You can almost hear Washington rebuking, "bad puppet! Bad puppet!"

The U.S. Congressional Research service just revealed it costs a staggering \$1.3 million per annum to keep an American soldier in Afghanistan. Costs for Canadian troops are likely similar. This huge expense can't go on forever.

The U.S. government has wanted to dump Karzai, but could not find an equally obedient but more effective replacement. There was talk of imposing an American "chief executive officer" on him. Or, in the lexicon of the old British Raj, an Imperial Viceroy.

Washington finally decided to try to shore up Karzai's regime and give it some legitimacy by staging national elections in August. The UN, which has increasingly become an arm of U.S. foreign policy, was brought in to make the vote kosher. Canada eagerly joined this charade.

No political parties were allowed to run. Only individuals supporting the West's occupation of Afghanistan were allowed on the ballot.

Occupation army

The vote was conducted under the guns of a foreign occupation army -- a clear violation of international law. The U.S. funded the election commission and guarded polling places from a discreet distance. The Soviets were much more subtle when they rigged Afghan elections.

As I wrote before the election, it was all a great big fraud within a larger fraud designed to fool American, Canadian and European voters into believing democracy had flowered in Afghanistan. Cynical Afghans knew the vote would be rigged. Most Pashtun, the nation's ethnic majority, didn't vote. The "election" was an embarrassing fiasco.

To no surprise, Washington's man in Kabul, Hamid Karzai, won. But his supporters went overboard in stuffing ballot boxes to avoid a possible runoff with rival Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, another American ally. The Karzai and Abdullah camps were bitterly feuding over division of U.S. aid and drug money that has totally corrupted Afghanistan.

The vote was discredited, thwarting the Obama administration's plans to use the election as justification for sending more troops to Afghanistan. The White House's Plan B: Forcing its two feuding "assets," Karzai and Abdullah, into a coalition. But two puppets on a string are no better than one.

Washington just arm-twisted Karzai into agreeing to a run-off vote that will likely be as bogus as the last one. In Afghanistan, ethnicity and tribe trump everything else. Karzai is a Pashtun, but has almost no roots in tribal politics.

The suave Abdullah, who is also in Washington's pocket, is half Pashtun, half Tajik. But he is seen as a Tajik who speaks for this ethnic minority which detests and scorns the majority Pashtun. Tajiks will vote for Abdullah, Pashtun will not. If the U.S. manages to force Abdullah into a coalition with Karzai, Pashtun -- 55% of the population -- won't back the new regime which many Afghans will see as western yes-men and Tajik-dominated.

Abdullah also has some very unsavoury friends from the north: Former Afghan Communist Party bigwigs Mohammed Fahim and Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostam -- both major war criminals. Behind them stand the Tajik Northern Alliance and resurrected Afghan Communist Party, both funded by Russia and backed by Iran and India.

Ironically, the U.S. is now closely allied with the Afghan Communists and fighting its former Pashtun allies from the 1980s anti-Soviet struggle. Most North Americans have no idea they are now backing Afghan Communists and the men who control most of Afghanistan's booming drug trade.

If Hamid Karzai really wants to establish himself as an authentic national leader, he should demand the U.S. and NATO withdraw their occupation forces and let Afghans settle their own disputes in traditional ways.