Afghanistan’s
gunpoint election

By James Cogan

Afghan national army soldiers prepare a machine gun at a vehicle check point in Kandahar province August 19, 2009.

By any measure, today’s presi-
dential election in Afghanistan is a travesty. The poll will underlie conditions of a continuing foreign military occupation to prop up a puppet government that is notorious for its human rights abuses, corrup-
tion and failure to provide for the basic needs of the vast majority of the population.

The incumbent president and leading contender, Hamid Karzai, who was installed in office in 2002 by the US, is widely despised by the Afghan people. Excluded from the field of major candidates is anyone who opposes the US NATO occu-
pation, despite the fact that it is op-
posed by a large majority of the population, particularly in the south-
ern Pashtun region, where Taliban influence is strong. Karzai’s leading
t rival and former foreign minister, Abdullah Abdullah, was previously a spokesman for the Northern Al-
liance militias that helped the US

uphold the Taliban.

Despite the boosting of US and NATO troop numbers, the Taliban and its allies hold sway over large areas of eastern and southern Afghanistan and are call-
ing for an election boycott. In at least 60 percent of the country, polling stations are at risk of at-
tack. Some 440 out of 7,000 sta-
tions will not be open at all as
they cannot be protected. Around 100,000 foreign troops and
180,000 Afghan government army and police personnel are being deployed to secure the vote.

The Taliban and other insurg-
gen groups, such as Gulbaddin
Hekmatyar’s Hezb-e-Islami move-
ment, are intensifying their efforts to drive US and NATO
forces from the country and over-
throw the pro-US government.

All of the leading presidential candidates are promising peace talks and even power-sharing
with the insurgents, but, with their support growing, the Taliban and Hekmatyar have stated that they will not enter into talks under condi-
tions of foreign occupation.

To prove their reach, the insurg-
gents have carried out high-pro-
file attacks over the past week against the nerve centres of the occupation. The NATO headquar-
ters and the nearby US embassy in Kabul were targeted by a mas-
ive vehicle bomb on August 15.

On Tuesday, Taliban fighters man-
aged to position mortars within range and fire shells into the ground of the heavily guarded presidential palace in the heart of
the capital.

Numerous other attacks on US and foreign troops, Afghan secu-

9 The US and its allies appear to be aiming at preventing Karzai from winning outright in the first round. The British ambassador in Afghanistan, Mark Sedwill, told the Australian Broadcasting Cor-

munications on Tuesday night that a second round of voting would help
“convince people the process was fair.”

Even if Karzai does win the poll, his position is hardly secure. David Kückel, a leading advisor to US military commanders, described Karzai in the hardest language ear-
lier this month and ominously compared him with South Viet-
name President Ngo Dinh Diem, whom the Kennedy administration had assassinated in 1963.

Washington is quietly pushing a plan to stipulate the president of many of his powers by installing an un-accredited “chief executive officer” to take over the day-to-day opera-
tions of the Afghan government. Among the possible candidates is Ashraf Ghani, who has worked for the foreign policy wing of the Brookings Institute, World Bank and the United Nations.

Once the election is out of the way, the Obama administration and the Pentagon will push ahead with plans for a major escalation of the war. Tens of thousands of additional US troops have been put in place, and US commanders are preparing to call for many more to be sent to kill and be killed in this brutal neo-colonial war.

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