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- [Afghanistan](#)

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- [Climate Change](#)

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- [Egypt](#)

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- [Middle East](#)
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- [Migration](#)
- [Pakistan](#)
- [Philanthropy](#)
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- [Religion and Politics](#)
- [Rising Powers](#)
- [Russia](#)
- [Southeast Asia](#)
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- [The Arctic](#)
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- [U.S. Diplomacy](#)
- [U.S. Role in the World](#)
- [Venezuela](#)
- [War Crimes](#)
- [Women and Foreign Policy](#)



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Ballots & Bullets in Afghanistan

By [Joel Davis](#)

Monday, August 24 10:25 am EST



The election in Afghanistan is over and in an interesting twist, [both candidates are claiming victory](#) amid [charges of ballot fraud](#). Before departing for his vacation, [President Obama praised the election](#) as a sign of progress while noting the important work yet to be done:

President Obama hailed Afghanistan's election as an "important step forward" for the country. The president said in the Friday afternoon statement on the White House lawn that he was struck by the "courage" of Afghans who voted despite intimidation and violence perpetrated by the Taliban. [...] Mr. Obama also talked about the future of the country, and the continued presence of U.S. troops eight years after 9/11. "Our goal is clear: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda and their extremist allies," he said. "That goal will be achieved, and our troops will be able to come home as Afghans continue to strengthen their own capacity and take responsibility for their own future." As the war in Afghanistan is also becoming more unpopular in the U.S., Mr. Obama also defended the reasons for continuing the fight. "This is not a challenge that we asked for. It came to our shores when Al Qaeda launched the 9/11 attacks from Afghanistan. But America, our allies and partners and, above all, the Afghan people share a common interest in pursuing security, opportunity and justice," he said.

[This report](#) from CBS News indicates that the American public is growing increasingly concerned about the war in Afghanistan. Those concerns about the war are well expressed in [this commentary](#) from the Cato Institute that suggests that a war focused only on defeating Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan without considering the larger strategic relationships with neighbors India and Pakistan is doomed to fail:

Unless Washington addresses Pakistan's existential fear of India, and their military leadership's continued support for the Taliban in order to counter India's influence in Afghanistan, U.S. and NATO troops could fight for decades, win every discrete battle, and never come close to eradicating the militancy.

At a time when the probable U.S. response will be to [increase the number of troops](#) in Afghanistan, that strategic vision is timely. Adding India to the mix would be an important step in a comprehensive solution to the regional conflict. Indian concerns are well summarized in [this report](#) from Reuters. Perhaps India could be added to Ambassador Holbrooke's portfolio? Special Envoy to Afpakindi has a nice ring to it.

Photo Credit: The Washington Post

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- [February 2009](#)
- [January 2009](#)
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- [November 2008](#)
- [October 2008](#)
- [September 2008](#)
- [August 2008](#)
- [July 2008](#)
- [June 2008](#)

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