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The Big Question: How should the White House handle Karzai?

By Sydelle Moore - 04/07/10 01:02 PM ET

Some of the nation's top political commentators, legislators and intellectuals offer insight into the biggest question burning up the blogosphere today.

Today's question:

How should President Barack Obama deal with Afghan President Hamid Karzai in light of his recent threat to join the Taliban and his other anti-American comments?

Damon N. Spiegel, entrepreneur and writer, said:

We have lost the lives of too many young children to walk away from Afghanistan. Clearly, the rhetoric on both sides needs to temper down. The International community needs to tone down the accusations of a fraudulent election and Karzai needs to continue down the process of reforming the country. Going down this path of alienating each other will make the last several years a worthless experiment. Obama should welcome Karzai into the Whitehouse and have a simple discussion around the future of the relationship and remind Karzai for several years it was the US special forces that protected him and the entire country without that support there might be a very different outcome for him and the country that he leads. Afghanistan is a very unique country and to think that a non-fraudulent election will every occur is a dream.

Ted Galen Carpenter, Vice President for Defense and Foreign Policy Studies at The Cato Institute, said:

President Obama's decision to escalate the U.S. military effort in Afghanistan was based on a crucial premise: that Washington would have an effective, credible Afghan partner in the war. Hamid Karzai's increasingly confrontational and erratic behavior, culminating in his threat to join the Taliban's insurgency if U.S. officials did not end their pressure on him to root-out corruption, has shown how faulty that premise was. Indeed, Karzai's recent actions have led observers to wonder whether he is sampling Afghanistan's principal export: opium.

But administration policymakers have only themselves to blame for this emerging debacle. Karzai was never the honest, democratic leader portrayed in Washington's propaganda. He is a cynical political operator in a chronically dysfunctional country. Karzai can't obey the Obama administration's admonition to wage an anti-corruption campaign. If he did so, he would alienate dozens of key local and

regional players—the very people who keep him in power.

Washington needs to abandon its fantasy that American arms and American dollars can transform Afghanistan into a well-governed society. Instead of the ongoing escalation, we have to scale back our objectives. Our only legitimate security interest in that country is to prevent it from again becoming a sanctuary for al-Qaeda. Who governs in Kabul, or even whether the Taliban make a resurgence, is not a vital American concern. The administration needs to pursue a withdrawal strategy and let Karzai sink or swim.

John F, McManus, president of The John Birch Society, said:

It's long past the time when the United States should bring our troops home from Afghanistan. That's how President Obama should deal with Hamid Karzai. Nation building and fighting the Taliban is not what our military should be doing. Sealing our southern border would be a good use of the forces.

Bernie Quigley, Pundits Blog contributor, said:

With Bill Clinton operatives like James Carville working for a candidate in opposition to Karzai and Hillary as secretary of state, the Obama admin unfortunately does not have a leg to stand on. Karzai has a point. I don't see how Obama can obtain legitimacy with China, Israel, Afghanistan and elsewhere without bringing in new adults and professionals into State. It needs a full overhaul. They need to bring in someone with some cred as they did with Paul Volker on the economy — Winston Lord maybe or Jon Huntsman Jr.

Bill Press, host of the "Bill Press Show" and a contributor to the Pundits Blog, said:

After everything the United States has done for Hamid Karzai and Afghanistan over the last eight-plus years, his latest comments are totally indefensible. President Obama should simply tell Karzai: "If you don't want us here, we'll pack up and go home tomorrow. If you still want our help, you'd better shut up and clean up your own government."

Peter Navarro, professor of economics and public policy at U.C. Irvine, said:

We've been pushing on him. Why wouldn't he push back on us??? We are dealing with people barely out of the Stone Age and don't belong in Afghanistan anyway. The failure of American foreign policy is that it assumes everyone else is as rational and civilized as we are.

Justin Raimondo, editorial director of Antiwar.com, said:

Although his comments are being cast as "anti-American," here is what President Karzai actually said, according to the *Guardian*:

" 'There is no doubt that the fraud was very widespread, but this fraud was not committed by Afghans; it was committed by foreigners,' said Karzai in yesterday's televised speech.

“The Afghan president also accused foreign governments of trying to influence parliamentary elections later this year. UN and Western officials have been pressing for greater protections against fraud.

" 'They want parliament to be weakened and battered and for me to be an ineffective president, and for parliament to be ineffective,' said Karzai.

He also questioned the role of foreign forces in Afghanistan, saying: ‘In this situation there is a thin curtain between invasion and cooperation assistance.’ If coalition troops came to be seen as occupiers, the Taliban-led insurgency ‘could become a national resistance’, Karzai added.”

The idea that the U.S. was engaged in an effort to get rid of Karzai — who has more than once been characterized as an “unreliable partner” by the warlords of Washington, is hardly far-fetched. Of course, the whole idea of having “free and fair” elections under conditions of military occupation is absurd to everyone but the U.S. government and its media amen corner.

As for the contention that there is “a thin line” between occupation and assistance, who can dispute this?

For the past year, Karzai has been denouncing the carelessness of U.S. forces as they inflict “collateral damage” on his people. He has also refused to be bullied by the U.S. embassy. No doubt the U.S. has a plan in hand to put this obstreperous sock-puppet in his place — much as they did to their Vietnam-era puppet, Ngo Dinh Diem, who was killed for talking back to Uncle Sam.

If I were Karzai, I’d watch my back ...

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