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Pulling Karzai's Strings: Obama as Puppeteer

by Ron Jacobs

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In November 1963, the US-sponsored president of southern Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem, was murdered by members of that country's military. The murder was (at the least) tacitly supported by Washington and was partially due to Diem's attempts to operate independently of Washington in regards to the war his military was fighting against Washington's enemies – the National Liberation front and the northern Vietnamese army. After a series of political machinations that included a stint by Nguyen Cao Ky as prime minister, a general named Nguyen van Thieu was named president after a show election in 1967. He was chosen because he would do Washington's bidding. His administration was known for its corruption and acquiescence to Washington.

In the middle of March 1970, while Prince Norodom Sihanouk of Cambodia was out of his country, the United States government engineered his removal from power. He was replaced by military strongman and CIA puppet Lon Nol. Sihanouk had consistently refused to allow US troops to operate in Cambodia. Simultaneously, he ignored the presence of Vietnamese troops fighting the United States military in Vietnam. Of course, this angered the Pentagon. Indeed, the United States Air Force had been illegally bombing the country of Cambodia for close to a year without telling the US public and much of Congress. Within weeks of the CIA coup in Cambodia, Richard Nixon ordered a ground invasion of Cambodia. That invasion was met with a massive wave of public protest across the US and much of the rest of the world. The protests resulted in the deaths of six students in the United States, untold numbers of injuries, and a national crisis that was only calmed after Nixon agreed to withdraw the ground troops.

Since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, the United States has put in place a number of men to lead that nation according to Washington's desires. Some of these men were appointed and were clearly pawns of Washington, while others came to

power wearing a pretend cloak of legitimacy provided by elections controlled by Washington's occupation authority. All of their governments were known for their corruption. The current leaders exist at Washington's pleasure, even though they pretend otherwise. This is obvious from the backtracking done by the current Prime Minister al-Maliki regarding the withdrawal of US forces from his country. Back in December, much was made of the fact that he was insisting on a complete and unconditional withdrawal from Iraqi cities by June 2009 and a total withdrawal from the country by 2011. Recent statements by Mr. al-Maliki indicate that he is no longer insisting on this timetable.

I mention these governments and their fates in light of recent news coming out of Kabul, Afghanistan. According to many news reports over the past few months, Washington is growing frustrated with the regime of Hamid Karzai. If one recalls, the government of Mr. Karzai is a creation of Washington as much as those of Nguyen Van Thieu or Lon Nol. In other words, he owes his current position of power to powerful elites in DC, not to any people or factions in Afghanistan. Yet, he has spoken out repeatedly against US air raids in Afghanistan that indiscriminately kill civilians. Like the governments mentioned above, Mr. Karzai's government is rampant with corruption. History tells us that Washington is quite willing to look the other way when it comes to corruption as long as the crooks under their control do its bidding. Indeed, the very presence of US forces and money is part of the dynamic which encourages such corruption.

Apparently, Mr. Karzai is no longer considered to be playing by those rules and attempts to unseat him are growing. According to reports out of European capitals, Washington intends to create a new appointed position in the Afghan government – a chief of staff or prime minister – that will be given the real power to carry out Washington's goals for the Afghanistan it wants to create. By creating this position and filling it with a man willing to do Washington's bidding, Mr. Karzai's presidency will be rendered politically impotent. Reports about these and other changes in Washington's Afghan strategy are currently being dismissed by Obama administration spokespeople. As for Karzai, he responded by saying (without irony) "Afghanistan will never be a puppet state."

I suppose Mr. Karzai should be grateful that he isn't being murdered like Mr. Diem.