

WITH CLOCK STILL TICKING, AFGHANISTAN NO CLOSER TO RESOLVING ELECTION CRISIS

Reuters reminds us this morning that under one previous set of plans, today was to have been inauguration day for Afghanistan's new president. Karzai is now insisting that the candidates must work out the vote audit and their power sharing agreement very quickly because he intends to stand by September 2 as the definite inauguration day. But that doesn't look like a realistic deadline, either, according to Reuters:

But officials from the rival camps, as well as from the election commission, doubt that the Sept. 2 date would be met.

"Honestly, I cannot come out with something definite on that, but I hope. It's Afghanistan. Things are unpredictable," said Abdullah's spokesman, Mujib Rahman Rahimi.

An official for Ghani's campaign, who declined to be identified, said little progress had been made in interpreting the framework for a power-sharing deal.

"Nothing yet has added to the political framework and the commission couldn't reach an agreement in most of the areas," the official said, adding that the candidates were meeting to try to break the deadlock.

Many Western diplomats also say the process is unlikely to be resolved in time.

"I don't see how there will be any space

for compromise, because the pie is too small and there are too many people who want a piece," said one Western official.

BBC chimes in with a report today that the small pie is getting even smaller:

Afghanistan's finance minister has said deadlock over the disputed presidential election has cost the economy \$5bn.

Omar Zakhilwal told the BBC he would have to cut salaries and lay off government workers if the crisis was not resolved by the end of the month.

Foreign investment is at a standstill and government revenues have fallen sharply since the April vote.

Khaama Press adds that in addition to the \$5 billion in lost revenues, Afghanistan also has seen around \$6 billion in capital flight due to the election dispute.

The final process of invalidating votes is apparently underway this afternoon in Kabul, but as Carlotta Gall noted Saturday in the New York Times, the math of the audit is daunting:

The huge scale of the fraud – involving perhaps more than two million ballots out of roughly eight million reported cast, according to independent international estimates – has stymied efforts to achieve a democratic transition. Secretary of State John Kerry has intervened twice to keep the campaigns in agreement on a unity government and a complete audit of the vote, but the process has repeatedly broken down in disputes.

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Mr. Abdullah was the clear leader in the first round, with a 900,000-vote margin

over Mr. Ghani. But the preliminary results of the runoff showed a gigantic improvement for Mr. Ghani – an “impossible” one, according to one Western official – of 1.9 million votes.

Hmm, some dirty hippie had come up with very similar math on the dramatic change in vote numbers—back on July 8.

Oh, and even if by some miracle, a new “final” vote tally does appear before September 2, don’t look for an agreement on the structure of the power sharing government any time soon.

With the NATO summit still planned for September 4, that looms as the real deadline for the West to decide if the zero option on troop deployment after the end of this year becomes the only option.