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UNCONVENTIONAL UNITED NATIONS PEACEBUILDING INTERVENTIONS IN THE 2014 AFGHANISTAN ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

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Abstract

Following a request by the Afghanistan Government for assistance to support the country's independent election body in conducting credible and acceptable election in 2014, a mandate was issued by the United Nations Security Council to support the democratic transition in the country. However, observers have described the outcome of the transition as unconventional. This study explored the core reasons for the unconventionality of the UN intervention in Afghanistan. Qualitative data were collected through interviews, observations and focus group discussions conducted in Kabul, Badakshan, Baghlan, Kunduz and Takhar provinces during the transition. The specific activities of the UN and its agencies in supporting the 2014 Afghan general elections and challenges encountered were unraveled. While a peaceful transfer of power did occur, the process that ended the transition was not democratic but political. The peculiarities of the country's local context hence determined the outcome of the transition. Therefore, the transition project cannot be a model for future UN initiatives.

Keywords: United Nations, Democratic transition, Insurgency, Peace building

Introduction

Following the end of the Cold War and the wave of democratic transitions which swept across the globe in the late 1980s and early 1990s, promotion of democratic ideals and human development assistance became key policy focus and core function of the United Nations (UN) (Boutrous-Ghali, 1996; Amartya, 1999). The focus of foreign policies of most of the western governments especially the United States, Canada and countries of the European Union (EU) was aligned with the policies of the UN. Consequently, multilateral organizations, national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) expanded their commitments to international engagements to support democracy globally (Beetham, 1993).

The United Nations have been involved in development activities in Central Asia generally and more specifically in Afghanistan since 1946, when the country joined the UN General

Assembly as a sovereign nation (Barfield, 2010). However, Afghanistan experienced protracted turbulent political history with interventions of foreign powers at various times, most especially during the cold war era. Ethnic, religious, political, drug-related and other varieties of fratricidal violent conflicts, which spanned the entire period of the Cold War characterized the political firmament of the country for decades (Goodson, 2001; Ewans, 2002). The country remained in anarchical situation with the various parts being administered by different war lords and insurgent groups. These conflicts negatively affected the developmental pace and trends in the country, making it to remain at the bottom in the global ranking of Human Development Indexes (HDI). In recent history, the intervention of the UN in Afghanistan development and democratic transition dates back to March 28, 2002 when the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) was established by the UN Security Council Resolution 1401. The resolution was unanimously adopted after the Council recalled and harmonized all previous resolutions regarding the situation in Afghanistan, such as Resolutions 1378 (2001), 1383 (2001) and 1386 (2001).

The UNAMA was established at the request of the Government of Afghanistan to assist the country in laying the foundations for sustainable peace and development. Though its original mandate was to support the Bonn Agreement of December 2001, the UNAMA mandate was subsequently reviewed annually to reflect the needs of the country (Ludwig, 2004). The core focus of the mandate was the coordination of international efforts to assist Afghanistan in its democratic transition, guided by the principle of reinforcement of sovereignty, leadership and ownership. The mission's specific focus was to support the country in various elections, including presidential, parliamentary, provincial and district council elections. The highpoint of the UN democracy assistance, or put differently, its role in democratic transition in Afghanistan was, therefore, support for the conduct of the 2014 Presidential and Provincial council elections.

After the elections, it was clear that Afghanistan has moved away from conventional electoral processes, the international standards for conducting elections and the principles set out by all international instruments in terms of what needs to be adhered to, including the principles of credibility and transparency (EU-EAT, 2014). What took place and the way the election was concluded was actually trying to resolve a political impasse or stalemate by using a democratic process. Afghan political leadership was, in fact, encouraged to craft a technical framework on the platform of the election to implement an agreement and political decision that was used to resolve contending issues in order to prevent the country from regressing into another civil war. Since the circumstances that arose were abnormal, relevant legal frameworks for the election was set aside in favor of a political solution on the platform of the democratic transition process (Coburn, 2015). This paper intends, therefore, to explore the extent of the unconventionality of the UN interventions and the reasons why the intervention, even though successful, cannot be recommended for replication in other member states because of the

peculiarities of the Afghan political situations and its intricacies. The pertinent questions in this paper, therefore, are: What is the nature of UN intervention in Afghanistan 2014 elections? What are the challenges faced during the transition? Did the transition process justify the outcome?

Methodology

The case study research design was employed in this study and qualitative data were collected through participant observations, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted in Kabul, the country's capital, and in northeastern provinces of Badakshan, Baghlan, Kunduz and Takhar. These areas were more volatile than other provinces prior to the 2014 general elections and during the elections. The study population included officials of Afghan Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), officials of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), local religious leaders, tribal leaders, officers of the UN office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), selected members of Afghan National Defence Force (ANDF) and staff of the United States Consulate in Afghanistan. They were purposively selected based on their direct and indirect involvement in the 2014 general elections in Afghanistan. Further data were collected from field reports published by the UNDP and UNAMA, publications of Afghan government and other local and international non-governmental organizations working in Afghanistan during the elections.

The Political Context

The 2014 Presidential and Provincial council elections took place ten years after Afghanistan's first Presidential election which produced President Hamid Karzai in 2004; they were the fifth consecutive elections since the exit of the Taliban rule in 2001. The election was a notable milestone because the Presidential polls paved the way for the country's first ever democratic transfer of power, since the constitution barred the incumbent President, Hamid Karzai from standing for re-election after his second term (see ICG, 2014). The role of the UNDP in the electoral processes did not however, go beyond provision of electoral administrative assistance and security. The organization also assisted in conducting the wall to wall 100% election result audit when the initial poll result became controversial. The entire process took place under the close scrutiny of international civil society organizations and was monitored closely by the media and followed by the entire world. According to Tomsie Priscilla Dhlamini, a UN official who operated in Kabul during the transition project, "Afghan owned, Afghan ran and Afghan managed the elections with the Internationals providing technical assistance and playing coordination roles" (*Interview conducted in Kabul, June 25, 2015).*

Specific Contributions of the UN to Afghanistan 2014 Political Transition

The UN has been operating in Afghanistan since the country's first democratic election in 2004. The mandate given to the UN Secretariat by the Security Council stated clearly that upon

the request of the Afghan Government, the UN could support the country's independent electoral body to conduct credible and acceptable elections. During all the elections, therefore, there were heavy involvement of the UN in the country and there were lots of experiences to tap from. However, there were evidences that after the first election, the UN gradually scaled down its activities. The 2014 election marked the first transfer of power in the country's history from one elected president to another and it was heavily supported by the UN despite the on-going insurgency and internal security threats by non-state groups, especially the Taliban, whose activities marred the preparation and execution phase of the elections.

Security was the major concern during the 2014 elections. People were not allowed to cast their votes in the rural areas, in provinces and even in the cities by warlords. Some people who disobeyed the directive of AGE not to vote had their fingers cut off. (*Alhaji Mohammad Zahir, a political leader expressed this concern during an interview in Kwajamadzai on Khoja Mashai, May 28, 2015.*)

The interventions in the 2014 elections were made within the mandate given to UNAMA by the United Nations Security Council Resolutions. The scope of the intervention in the electoral processes and the democratic transition can therefore be viewed from two broad perspectives - the political mission undertaken by UNAMA and the peacebuilding roles played by the United Nations Development Programs (UNDP).

Political Mobilization: Afghanistan is a deeply divided country in terms of ethno-religious, cultural and political differences. Tribalism, nepotism, conflicting perceptions of political, tribal and religious groups were major issues in the country's politics. The rhetoric and differing positions of the stakeholders in the political environment constituted significant concerns to managers of the electoral processes. Arguably, the democratic transition in Afghanistan would not have been successful unless and until the views of the different political players in government bodies, in the country's national assembly, among the political, religious and tribal leaders, youth groups and civil societies were harmonized and constantly engaged in discussions to nurture the political process (Democracy International, 2013). The UNAMA therefore engaged the key stakeholders in the election and in the democratic transition by providing the platform for discussions, dialogues and linkages prior to the elections (UNAMA 2014).

Public Information and Awareness Campaign: The UNAMA facilitated public information dissemination and awareness campaign across the country prior to the elections. This role was very important given the fact that the political situation in Afghanistan was very volatile and there was need to ensure that information about the electoral processes was properly understood by all stakeholders such as community groups, religious groups, tribal leaders, as well as observers and members of the international community.

International coordination: So many countries and international organizations had stakes and interests in the Afghanistan political transition. The United States, United Kingdom, European Union, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and so on, provided financial, strategic, as well as humanitarian support to Afghanistan, specifically during the elections and during the democratic transition period generally. To avoid clashes of interests, of views and of intentions among the various countries and international stakeholders, it was necessary for UNAMA to provide coordination in order to avoid infighting among the international stakeholders which could result into violent conflicts among the Afghan groups who were lined behind the international stakeholders. The UNAMA acted as the clearing house for the delivery of aids during the transition period and harmonized the contending interests on the field during crucial activities (UNAMA, 2014).

Political Mediation: The United Nations Secretariat used its good offices to mediate in the political crisis that followed the Afghan presidential run-off election of June 2014 (Agin, 2015). This platform was used to engage all political stakeholders, including the two leading presidential candidates and stakeholders from the international community to discuss and find a political solution to the crisis that threatened to throw Afghanistan into another civil war. Discussions between the two leading presidential candidates, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, were mediated by UNAMA, with the involvement of the members of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and other government representatives. The talks led to an agreement consummated by the visit of the United States Secretary of State, John Kerry on 11 and 12 July 2014 to Afghanistan to encourage the mediation process. The agreement involved a full audit of the election results covering all the 23,000 polling stations across Afghanistan. At this point, the role of the UN shifted from provision of technical assistance and advisory, to supervisory in order to ensure a comprehensive audit exercise (UNAMA, 2014). The candidates were further committed to forming a government of national unity upon the declaration of the final results of the Presidential election.

The UNDP Peacebuilding Initiatives

Capacity building: The UNDP has been in Afghanistan for long time before the elections. For a while, its various development projects were actually transferred to UNAMA for security reasons. Nevertheless, its commitment to free, fair and credible elections remained unwavered and it led the UNDP to establish the Enhancing Legal and Electoral Capacity for Tomorrow (ELECT) project. The Phase 1 of the ELECT project was operated between 2006 and 2011. The ELECT II project operated between January 2012 and December 2015. The UNDP ELECT II project provided key supports to Afghan institutions during the 2014 elections. Many of the staff of the electoral body, IEC, were trained in election management procedures and the support staff were also involved in the various trainings. Experts were brought from various parts of the world on the ELECT II project to assist the electoral body in the management of

processes and activities leading to the elections.

Provision of Technical Support: The specific responsibility of the ELECT II project was to focus on and strengthen the activities of the two Afghan electoral institutions – the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and the Independent Election Complaints Commission (IECC). While the IEC performed the task of conducting the elections, the IECC dealt with election related complaints, adjudicated and provided recommendations to the IEC who carried out the necessary actions to address such complaints. The main activity of the UNDP was to build the capacity of the two institutions through seminars and workshops and provision of technical supports to their activities. Though the IEC had been in existence since 2006, capacity building remained a major challenge to it. The ELECT II advisors worked closely with the IEC staff throughout the election year, helping to build knowledge and skills and assisting in the development of key electoral plans. The project assisted the IEC with refining the body's electoral regulations and procedures in line with the extant law. The ELECT II Advisers deployed to the various provinces were able to identify the needs of the IEC in different localities and provided the needed assistance to them. With regard to the IECC, the UNDP solicited for the services of International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) to provide technical support for the electoral institution especially in the areas of adjudication on election related complaints.

The UN provided logistic support and technical advice in the preparation for the Provincial Movement Plan (PMP) in support of the election. Given the vast area and rough geographical terrain of Afghanistan, accessibility to local communities was very difficult. In view of the security threats, there was need to properly determine the particular type and number of vehicles and animals such as donkeys and camels which would be used to deliver election materials to provinces and rural locations. Areas where air services would be needed also had to be identified and mapped out. There were about 65 Districts in Afghanistan, many of which were inaccessible by road due to their occupation by Anti-government Elements (AGEs) and Taliban insurgents. As such, the International Assistance Force (ISAF) and the Afghan Air Force support was needed to deliver and retrieve electoral materials from such Districts. The ELECT II also provided substantial technical support to enable the IEC to successfully accomplish a voter registration 'top-up' of 3,842,504 eligible voters out of which 1,334,847 were females (34.74%). Following the 2014 elections, ELECT II resumed liaison with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Afghan Ministry of Interior (MoI), during the development stage of *e-tazkira* (electronic national identification cards that generates a voter register by polling centre) as a long-term solution for sustaining voters' registration for future elections.

Provision of Logistic support: Logistics was a major problem for the Afghan government in running the 2014 elections especially with regards to security and printing of ballot papers, fraud mitigation,

votes counting, distribution and retrieval of electoral materials, security of convoy movements, among others. Although the IEC was responsible for these assignments, the UN supported and filled the existing gaps that were noticed while the IEC was implementing the assignments. The ELECT II assisted the IEC with the designing and construction of six new provincial physical structures as well as building security infrastructure in 13 provincial offices. It also completed 26 security upgrades to the IEC's headquarters to protect staff and materials. In the area of transportation of election materials, especially to remote villages in the provinces where the IEC had established polling centers, the UN provided vehicles for the purpose. It also supported the IEC in the provision of about 4000 animals such as camels, horses and donkeys which were mainly used in remote areas like Badakhshan and Nuristan where there were few or no motorable roads. In the area where air services were needed, the UN facilitated such with assistance from ISAF and sometimes, the US Forces. The UNDP also contracted the services of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) to strengthen the logistic support for the IEC by establishing Provincial offices and ventilating the warehouses used for the audit process after the Presidential run-off election.

Voters' Education: The IEC, with ELECT II support, recruited and trained 1,450 Civic and Voters Educators (CVEs), of whom 33% were women, and staged 68 mobile theatre performances in remote communities to sensitize voters. In the run-up to the election in April, 2014, CVEs had reached out to more than two

million people, of whom 42% were women. In the period between the first and second round of the elections, CVEs activities reached more than 1.2 million people. The ELECT II also helped to improve the IEC's strategic communication activities to support the election.

Management of Donors Funds: The UNDP was responsible for managing all funds from the international donor community during the election. Basically, the 2014 election in Afghanistan was heavily dependent on donor funds. In order to mitigate fraud, reduce mismanagement of funds and ensure that all electoral expenses were appropriately paid for, the UNDP coordinated and managed all donor funds and finances coming from various sources in collaboration with the IEC. It was observed that donors did not want to give their funds directly to the IEC for the strong reason that Afghanistan is notable for corruption and it was the highest on the ladder of global corruption index. In order to ensure accountability and efficient management of funds, most donors preferred the UNDP-ELECT project to manage the funds donated towards the election. This much was confirmed by an official of a civil society organization on the ground during the election:

> Donors were not pleased to give their money to the Independent Election Commission for several reasons. Afghanistan is notable for corruption; in order to ensure checks and balances, the donors prefer the UNDP ELECT to manage the funds. (*Interview conducted with Sowa*

Augustine in Kabul, August 16, 2014)

Acceptability of the Transition Process among Afghans

The 2014 Afghan democratic transition ended with an extra-constitutional political deal in the form of a national unity government agreed to by local politicians. Part of the deal was that besides the office of the President, a new office of a Chief Executive was created to accommodate the opposition candidate in the presidential run-off election, Abdullah Abdullah, to form a government of unity. Hence, while Ashraf Ghani would be President, Abdullah would be the Chief Executive. This outcome, to a large extent was accepted by all stakeholders especially due to the realization that following the presidential run-off election and the political crisis it generated, Afghanistan was faced with two possibilities: it is either the stakeholders would accept the extra-constitutional political arrangement that culminated into the formation of a unity government, or the country would be plunged into another civil war. This latter possibility would further compound the already volatile security situation as a result of the activities of the diverse insurgent groups in the country. Even though the Afghan electorates did not expect the electoral process to end up in a power sharing agreement, it was an eventuality that they had to accept when they realized that it was better than the decades of fighting and insurgency activities in the country. Some of the electorates were however disappointed when the election deadlocked and culminated into the subsequent power sharing agreement. This was apparent in some of the focus group discussions with Afghan ordinary citizens and community leaders in selected communities. They felt that the political solution took away from them the rights to freely choose their leaders and the electoral processes were a waste of time and resources. In opinion polls conducted in parts of the country such as Kabul, Kunduz, Takhar, Badakhshan, and Baghlan, Afghans were not pleased that despite all the resources that went into the elections, the two leading candidates eventually shared power. The popular view was that if they knew the outcome was going to be like that, they would have insisted that there was no need for the election.

International organizations such as the European Union (EU), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Asian Network for Free Elections (ANFREL), Democracy International (DI), civil society organizations such as Afghanistan Civil Society Election Network (ACSEN), and domestic observers were of the opinion that the transition process was successful, even though the election was not fraud-free and perfect. Notwithstanding that it failed the international benchmark for a standard and credible election, the 2014 election was still adjudged to be successful given the prevailing circumstances and the fact that democracy was new to Afghanistan. The international stakeholders conceded that the election was successful based on the fact that it was the first time political power would be peacefully transferred from one elected government to the other in that volatile environment.

The international community, including the United Nations, accepted the

outcome of the "democratic" process in order to avoid the threat posed by the politically charged environment. Forming a national unity government presented an opportunity to stabilize the transition and preventing further slide into a state of chaos, even though it led to the abandonment of the democratic path. The circumstance that Afghanistan found itself after the run-off round was beyond normal. What the UN and the international community tried to do was to solve a political impasse by using a democratic process. It needed to resolve the issues so that the country would not regress into another civil war. In this circumstance, it was prudent that the voices of the electorates had to be put aside and the outcome of their votes no longer considered. The UN wisely implemented a political agreement which was basically different from what one would have expected from a purely democratic process. Hence, it was no longer what the electorates wanted but what was convenient for the two candidates and their political parties in order to maintain peace. At the end, an election was conducted, results were not officially released by the IEC and yet, Afghans were told that one candidate had won and the other lost. The UNDP Electoral Adviser for Afghanistan Northern Region, Mikyong Kim aptly described the situation thus:

> Following the audit, Abdullah Abdullah accepted the fact that he was the defeated candidate but he did not agree to the extent that he lost the votes. In his view and that of his supporters, the audit did not fully capture all the frauds for various reasons, like changing the

invalidation criteria throughout the audit process to accommodate the needs and demands of both candidates. He did not agree with the breakdown of the results either and this prevented the publishing of the final result till date (*Interview conducted in Kabul, June 4, 2015*)

The only information the IEC formally released after the conclusion of the election was inscribed on an engraved wooden plaque that was presented to Ashraf Ghani, congratulating him for receiving 55.27 per cent of the 7.12 million valid votes.

Challenges faced on UN Interventions

The UN faced various challenges in the discharge of their support for the 2014 election and democratic transition in Afghanistan. The peculiarities of the terrain and the political situation in the country characterized many of the challenges identified during the process.

Security: This was perhaps the biggest of all the challenges. The UN recruited many local and international staff during the transition period and providing security for them was a big task. The UN compound and offices were heavily fortified while staff on various assignments had to be heavily protected with armored vehicles and armed security personnel while on motion. In spite of these, there were several attacks and threats of attacks which prevented UN officials from performing their tasks before the elections, during the elections when materials were being moved around and after the elections when election materials were being retrieved. There

were many attacks on staff, materials and on warehouses where election materials were kept in provincial offices. One of such attacks took place in Nangahar. The UN technical and electoral advisers could not visit certain places to carry out their works because of security risk. In the same vein, international observers could not visit many places to observe elections and confirm the fairness and credibility of elections in polling stations and centers due to security risks. Hence, investigating some of the reported electoral fraudulent cases in risky regions and provinces became a difficult task because there were reported cases of attacks and killings of local and international personnel engaged in the elections by the UN and IEC. Several Afghan electoral officials, civilians and security personnel were also killed and properties destroyed as a result of insurgent attacks while others were caught in the crossfire between security forces and insurgents. There were reports of Taliban militants and anti-government forces cutting off index fingers of voters who attempted to vote in order to discourage others from voting. This created fear among the electorates which led to low turnout of voters in some regions.

Low Capacity of Key Partners: The key partner of the UN in the election was the IEC whose work force were mainly Afghans. However, the technical competence of IEC personnel was very low; but in order to work smoothly together with the UN staff, there was need to invest in the technical capacity building to bring the IEC staff to the expected level of performance. This was a major challenge for the UN as it had to invest a lot of resources initially into local capacity

development and confidence building in local partners. Even though the electoral processes was designed to be Afghan owned, Afghan led and Afghan managed, the UN had to provide technical expertise for the process to be successful.

Socio-Cultural constraints: Events and circumstances rooted in the local socio-cultural environment of Afghanistan, which were beyond the control of the UN limited its performances in the democratic transition. Even though the UNDP ELECT II project encouraged women participation in the electoral process which resulted in female turnout of 36% in the first round and 37% in the run-off round of the elections, female voters' registration and voting were a big challenge especially in the more culturally conservative and insecure provinces such as Helmand, Zabul, Uruzgan, Kapisa, and Logar. The *ELECT II 2014 Annual Progress Report* shows that the lowest number of female registration in Afghanistan was recorded in Kapisa, Logar and Zabul, with only four women registered in each of the provinces, which reflects a high level of religion-cultural influence and conservatism. Across Afghanistan and most especially in areas of the north east region, electoral activities that required women involvement such as female voters' registration were disrupted for cultural and religious reasons. For example, one problematic area during the voters' registration process was in taking passport photographs for voters' identity cards. This process became very challenging for IEC officials as taking photographs of women was against the cultural sensibilities of native Afghans. This cultural constraint made it difficult for the UN to fully support the IEC in

ensuring the conduct of an all-inclusive and credible voters' registration.

Coordination of donors: Various embassies, consulates and NGOs were present in Afghanistan during the elections and they made contributions to support the transition process. Some of them such as United States, United Kingdom, Canada and the European Union countries were very powerful and influential and would not hesitate to flaunt their influences because of their financial contributions. Coordinating all these interests became very challenging most especially when it became necessary to manage clash of interests, clash of views and intentions among the powerful donor groups. Sometimes, instead of seeing Afghans fighting, what were witnessed were the Internationals fighting among themselves as a result of clash of interests. The UNAMA had to devote a lot of attention to the coordination of the international bodies by bringing them together to manage some of their joint activities and moderating discussions and interactions in order to come up with common fronts. This was necessary to ensure uniformity of views and messages coming from the internationals in order not to hamper activities that were being carried out during the democratic transition process.

Non-availability of baseline demographic data and updated voters' register: There were no accurate and appropriate baseline demographic data in Afghanistan that could form the basis for the compilation of voters' register at the commencement of the transition program. This was a big technical challenge because the relevant bodies did not keep the records of the data

of previous elections which was partly due to the chaotic and violent situations that pervaded in the country. Moreover, no population census was carried out for a long period prior to the democratic transition. Therefore, electoral activities had to commence from an uncertain baseline and assumptions in compiling the voters' registers. One of the strategies adopted for voters' registration in the 2014 elections was that anyone who could present any of the old voters' cards issued since 2004 election or any other relevant evidences was registered and allowed to vote. This lack of reliable and updated voters' register contributed to the electoral integrity issues during the 2014 elections. It impaired proper allocation of polling stations and did not allow for adequate verification of voters' turnout.

Prior to the 2014 elections, the UN recommended a full-fledged nationwide voters' registration and re-validation exercise, noting that it was only after such registration had been done that the country could conduct credible election. The proposal was pushed through the Afghan Parliament and Ministerial Council but was rejected. Rather the IEC was directed to produce a national electronic identity card known as *e-tazkira,* which however had many challenges, including problems of timeliness, budgeting, security and risk of disenfranchisement of those who have turned 18 years since the previous election. Moreover, there were no specific polling center lists for voters. In essence, anyone with a registered voters' card could vote anywhere, which resulted in a lot of mix ups in the voting process.

Difficulty in Staff Recruitment: While attempting to recruit personnel into vacant

positions, vacancy announcements and advertisements were placed for recruitment on international platforms. With the popular knowledge of the nature of the conflict in Afghanistan, it was either people were not willing to come to the country because it was a dangerous place to work, or they wanted to play the brave game at the risk of their lives. There were instances when individuals have been recruited and all paper works concluded, but when travelling ticket was ready and the prospective staff was to pick up the ticket to travel to Afghanistan, excuses started coming, such as the mother of the applicant was sick and he had to take care of her. Eventually, such staff would never come. In other instances, recruited staff got to the airport in Afghanistan and was whisked into the armored vehicle and driven into the heavily fortified UN compound. Not long after, as a result of the prevailing volatile situation, he started asking whether he was in the right place. After about one week, he went back to his country. When a newly recruited staff goes to Afghanistan with that kind of fear, his performance and efficiency would ultimately drop. In essence, generally, the staff performance was not always at full capacity because of the security situation that was always discouraging people from going to work in Afghanistan.

When the electoral processes went into the Audit stage, the whole exercise put a strain on the UN both financially and in capacity. The UN already had a budget for the election, but suddenly there was need to cover the added expenses brought about by the full auditing of the votes. There was therefore need to recruit professional audit supervisors from outside the country within a short time as there were little number of people that could carry out the auditing within Afghanistan. These constituted a big challenge; nevertheless, the UN was able to bring in about 128 audit supervisors to compliment the ones on ground to carry out the task. The cost of this extra task was however paid for by the international community under the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF) Agreement, which guaranteed full support for the Afghan democratic transition if the country met certain benchmarks, including having an approved electoral law, inclusiveness in the process and commitment to electoral integrity.

The principle adopted during the Afghan election by the UN was unique because of the complex situation in the context. Part of the questions that came up was that: in view of the significance and magnitude of the 2014 election and transition, should the UN be strict on modalities and principles and in the process dis-enfranchise many Afghan people? Or should it go for inclusiveness and get more people involved to participate in the transition process? This was not a dilemma that could be resolved easily with the prevailing circumstances. However, when the question of inclusiveness versus integrity of the process came up strongly, it was concluded that the country should go for inclusiveness so that everybody could participate in the transition to engender sense of belonging and enhance peacefulness.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Afghanistan is a country still undergoing democratic transition. It faces numerous challenges on its democratic

journey, most of which are rooted in its diversities, divisions and long period of violent conflict experience. In order to consolidate its democratic gains, the UN needs to encourage the country to pursue genuine processes of electoral and broader constitutional reforms. Accordingly, a number of suggestions are made to strengthen the democratic process.

There is an urgent need to develop an effective voters' registration system. This is a basic foundation for guaranteeing integrity in future elections and in assuring the credibility and public confidence in the democratic process. Lack of a credible voters' registration list was an important factor that increased the opportunity for electoral malfeasance during the 2014 Afghan elections and which nearly ruined the outcome of the election. This process should also be extended to development of polling stations specific voters' list to prevent over-voting in designated polling stations during future elections.

Fraud mitigation efforts should be strengthened in future elections. The strategy for this must be based on deterrence, detection and mitigation. The Afghan experience during 2014 elections showed that fraud could be detected during elections and votes could be disqualified as a result. However, if frauds are not deterred it would cast doubt on the entire election process and the credibility of electoral body. Therefore, no effort should be spared to find out where and how fraud could occur while strict deterrence and mitigation measures should be instituted to maintain integrity of electoral processes.

If logistics and infrastructures are not readily available or inadequate in future elections, the IEC should consider rolling or phased elections in order to avoid resource overstretch as witnessed in 2014 elections. In such situation, the IEC could conduct elections in sequential or regional cycles which would allow sufficient time to plan and employ the limited infrastructure, security and logistics effectively and efficiently. Such phased election would also enable the electoral body to organize, plan and effectively conduct and evolve monitoring procedures for electoral process.

Post-election tallying, recounting and auditing process should be strengthened in future election in Afghanistan. If it is not possible to avoid presidential or other election run-offs, institutional capacity building should then be a priority for the IEC in the area of post-election tallying, recounting and auditing. The assistance of the UN and other international electoral bodies could be sought in this wise. Lack of expertise and poor preparedness in auditing processes constituted a major challenge in the 2014 presidential election run-off. To avoid such challenges, the electoral body should develop and strengthen rules and procedures for tallying, recounting and auditing which should be publicized and understood by contestants and the electorates before the election process begin. The electoral law should not be adjusted to suit circumstances arising after election and therefore, it should be standardized, interpreted and implemented in the spirit of which it was drafted. In essence electoral procedures should not be swayed to suit contestants' need or to implement their desire, which could set democracy on the path of disaster. Once there is a coherent electoral law and rules that anticipates emergency circumstances that covers all phases of elections, the IEC

should stick to them and the judicial body should be allowed to interpret them. Such situation would enable aggrieved candidates to seek redress and get justice when dissatisfied with outcome of elections.

It was very glaring during the 2014 election in Afghanistan that the level of neutrality and independence of the electoral management bodies was very low. Several factors could be adduced for this, including the volatility of the operating environment and dependence on other bodies, especially foreign organizations that assist the bodies in carrying out their functions. The influence of the government was also pervasive because of direct resources coming from government to support the elections. It is suggested that legislations should be passed to strengthen the independence and neutrality of Election Management Bodies (EMBs). Specifically, there should be transparency in the appointment of key electoral officials, while EMBs should be insulated from political interference and influences from government. Also, internal control measures based on global best practices should be introduced into the management structures of electoral institutions in Afghanistan.

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