

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



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Electoral Malpractices: As a Major Barrier to Democratic Consolidation in Afghanistan

It is a universally accepted fact that elections have become a tool for the eliminating authoritarianism; in other words, it is an instrument for a transition to democracy in the countries which have been governed by an authoritarian governance system. On the other hand, the credibility of the electoral system is of equal importance for determining the integrity and legitimacy of a democratic regime, an issue that most of the developing countries more or less face it as a challenge. As a result, credible elections is only ensured by a free and fair conduct of elections and in that case the people and the international community would appreciate and accept the result of the elections.

As the electoral experience of the democratic countries show, acceptability of election results by the people and the international community increases the opportunities of consolidation of democracy in a given context; while weak acceptability of election results by the relevant stakeholders would increase the chances of failure of democracy.

Our electoral results, regardless of their scopes, have nearly always been a matter of serious concern and even social conflicts in more than one and half last decade. What counts here for is that, we shall learn from our past in order not to repeat our mistakes and at the same time build on our successful lessons. As a ground reality, the legitimacy of the Afghan governments most often has been questioned due to electoral fraud and subsequent violence that have led to "deconsolidation" of democracy in Afghanistan. Such challenges are one of the main source of concern of the people, civil society and international community; leading to questioning democracy in our country dramatically. As a result, it is necessary to identify the causes and consequences of electoral malpractices and address them properly.

There are two basic approaches that are used to identify practices undermining electoral practices; inclusive and restrictive. The inclusive approach identifies fraud, malpractice and manipulation. And restrictive approach that only focus on the provisions of the law. This helps a context specific approach to tackle different types of electoral fraud, and it makes obvious sense for the electoral bodies to use the laws as benchmarks in its fraud.

As our electoral experience show, Afghanistan needs to combat incumbency, violence, corruption and impunity, as the causes and drivers of electoral malpractices, in order to improve the electoral practices. It is necessary to ensure that the political leaders, strictly adhere to the application of law in Afghanistan, support constitutionalism and democratic values, pursue the legitimacy of government and consociation of democracy. Doing so, they will ensure a fair election that can benefit all the Afghan citizens and will pave the way to strengthening the democratic practices that can end to various conflicts in the country. It is the duty of the government and the Afghan leaders, to enable the Afghans to vote and practice their civic responsibility for reason of expediency. They shall support elections become completely competitive in Afghanistan and the electorates be free to make a choice between alternatives and that a liberal political system is put in place; this enables Afghanistan to put an end to its conflicts stemming out of religious, ethnic and language differences. It is time to make a bold decision to ensure this by preventing the corrupt politicians who seek to legitimize the illegitimate practice of coercing the Afghan citizens into voting for those they want on the backdrop of rampant electoral rigging in the country.



Repeated Clashes in the Vicinity of Durand Line

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Armed Clashes and missile volleys have been frequently reporting in few last years from the vicinity of Durand Line provinces. Last Sunday, again a deadly fighting broke out between Afghan and Pakistani border guards in eastern Paktia province. Both sides gave death tolls and accused each other of opening fire along the disputed 2,430-kilometer long border region known as the Durand Line, which was named after the British colonial officer Sir Mortimer Durand drew it in 1896. According to Pakistani media two Pakistani border troops were killed and six others injured in the clash. They accused Afghanistan of opening fire on Pakistani troops in the country's Kurram Agency when they were carrying out routine surveillance along the Pak-Afghan border and making necessary preparations to start fencing of that area.

However, Afghan security officials rejected the Pakistani claims, saying that the clash was allegedly initiated by the Pakistani side. According to media reports, the clashes started after the Afghan and foreign troops tried to close a Taliban transit route close to the Durand Line but the Pakistani forces started shelling the Afghan security forces. It is said that the route across the Durand Line was being used by Taliban insurgents and that a joint military operation between Afghan army and commandos, accompanied by US forces, were carrying out an operation to protect the route and establish check posts then they came under fire from Pakistani forces.

As quoted by Tolo news, the 203rd Thunder Corps Commander, General Shaur Gul, said that the battle started when Pakistani soldiers started shooting at a check post close to Jandighar area in Zazi Maidan district. The Jandighar check post is located on top of a hill but the Pakistani military has tried on several occasions to capture the check post. So, on Sunday when they again tried to take control, local residents retaliated. "At eight o'clock Pakistani military started attacking our local people and security forces fired back, killing three Pakistani soldiers. Three others were arrested, and our two Afghan civilians were killed, and two others were wounded," Gul said.

Afghan authorities on Monday handed over a Pakistani border guard and the dead bodies of Pakistani troops who had been killed during the clashes. Speaking at a news conference in southeastern Khost province, Governor Hukum Khan Habibi said the captured guard and five bodies were handed over to Pakistan "with full respect and in line with the standard protocols". "Situation [in the ZaziMaidan mountainous area where clashes broke out] is normal now after a cease-fire agreement was reached between the two sides," Habibi said.

Although the clashes have eased off, Afghan security forces and residents in the area are on high alert and will retaliate if attacked by Pakistan again, officials

said. "Any movement which is taking place at the border should be reported to the opposing side; you (Pakistani military) have shed the blood of innocent people and it is not a good approach," said colonel Faraidoon Fayaz, the commander of Afghan border police in the eastern zone at the press conference. "You (Pakistani military soldiers) serve on the zero point at the border and must respect the international law; you (Pakistan side) argue that ten meters does not make a difference, but you should stay 50 meters away from the zero point at the border," said Colonel Osman Janbaz, the commander of the second division of the Afghan border police.

This comes after Ghani Samim, Kunar governor's spokesman, said last week that in only a few days nearly 1,500 missiles had been fired on Kunar province from Pakistan. He said after a break of two days, shelling started up again last Monday night. Almost 400 missiles landed in Kunar province overnight, he said. In February last year, the Ministry of Defense (MoD) warned that Pakistan's missile attacks on the eastern regions of the country would have serious consequences, suggesting that a diplomatic solution to the issue between the two neighbors was needed. However, Pakistani officials rejected the aggressions from their side and said that they targeted only terrorist groups by firing off the missiles but residents said the missiles hit their houses and the surrounding forests.

In reaction to the attacks by the Pakistani military, lawmakers in Afghanistan's Wolesi Jirga (Lower House of Parliament) have slammed Pakistan for the attacks over the past two days. Some MPs said Pakistan is an enemy that does not want to see a peaceful Afghanistan. Lawmakers however, praised the residents, in Zazi Maidan, for having defended their country after Sunday's attack by Pakistan. "Pakistan's Punjabis once again carried out a heavy attack on ZaziMaidan district and the border regions," said one MP, Sahib Khan.

"It is a clear act of aggression and a violation by Pakistan and we strongly condemn this act of Pakistan. The Afghan security officials have the responsibility to defend Afghanistan's territorial integrity and they must have practical measures in place to do so," said the speaker of the Wolesi Jirga (Lower House of Parliament), Abdul Rauf Ibrahim.

Thus, the Afghan security officials, warned Pakistan against carrying out any further action along the Durand Line and said additional hostile moves would have serious consequences. Speaking at a joint press conference with Pakistani military officials in Dand-e-Ptan district, in Paktia, which is close to Zazi Maidan district in eastern Khost province, the officials said the Afghan people will not tolerate hostile action by Pakistan's military against their country anymore.

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Closing the Tech Sector's Gender Gap

By Gillian Tans

I am a woman, and I am proud to say that I work in technology. But I also recognize that the combination of those two facts puts me in the minority.

According to the World Economic Forum's most recent Global Gender Gap Report, progress toward gender equality eroded last year. For the first time since 2006, when the annual employment study was launched, the percentage of women working in most industries shifted "into reverse." The slide was particularly acute for women in software and technology development.

Tech is a key driver of social and economic change, and around the world, women like me are transforming businesses, industries, and communities. Sadly, our ranks remain a small fraction of the total workforce. Not only do we need more women in the technology sector; we also clearly need to refocus energy on improving gender equality in the global economy.

Among the many reasons to take this seriously is one any executive should understand: employing women is good for business. In 2013, the European Commission estimated that €9 billion (\$11 billion) could be added to the European Union's annual GDP if gender parity was achieved in technology companies. Similarly, a 2014 Credit Suisse report found that firms with greater gender diversity on governing boards performed better in the stock market, with higher valuations and dividends.

And yet, despite this economic rationale for gender parity, women remain underrepresented in technology firms. Across the EU, for example, among women aged 30 who graduated with a degree in information and communications technology (ICT), only 20% still work in the field. By age 45, just 9% are left. In this sense, ICT is falling into the same traps as old, established industries, which have long failed to do enough to create an environment in which women thrive.

To address this gender imbalance, it is imperative that organizations create environments that encourage diversity at all levels. Executives must strive to build businesses that women actually want to work for, which means, first and foremost, implementing non-discriminatory hiring policies and benefits packages and removing obstacles that women face on the

job. But it also means creating a flat structure and fostering a culture of care and confidence in which women can excel, where ideas can come from anywhere and are valued. Unfortunately, too few companies focus on this area.

There is a misperception among job seekers that opportunities for women in tech exist only for those with coding or engineering experience. To be sure, technology firms do need women with these skills, but they also need women with expertise in other areas, like marketing and finance. And, because having more women in non-technical roles can drive female engagement company-wide, corporate leaders should ensure that diversity extends beyond functional silos.

One of the comments I hear most frequently from women who are reluctant to enter the tech sector is that the industry lacks visible role models. As a female tech leader, one of my responsibilities is to share my story and to support, empower, and inspire others, and to ensure that talented women regard the industry as an attractive option.

One way my company is doing this is through female-only tech initiatives, including a new award that recognizes successful women in the field. The goal of the Technology Playmaker Awards is to empower female talent, and position women to lead the industry into the future.

My company has also partnered with Oxford University and Delft University of Technology to establish scholarship programs for women in technology; established women-in-tech mentoring opportunities; and supported digital skills and job-training programs in Europe.

Booking.com is not alone; many other companies across the technology sector are taking similar action. Accenture's chief leadership and human resources officer recently announced that by 2025, the company's workforce will be 50% female. And the American cloud computing company Salesforce recently launched a "mums in tech" program to bring more working mothers into the industry.

Great strides are being made to close the tech sector's gender gap, but, as with many other industries, parity remains a long way off. Leaders from across the sector must come together to champion and promote inclusivity. Only when we do will our organizations be able to attract and retain top female talent, a trend that will benefit both boardrooms and bottom lines.

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