

UN Peacekeeping and the International Electoral

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International Electoral Assistance and Its Purpose

Free, fair and transparent election and referendum are an indispensable process in establishing a democratic government or determining the status of local populations. Indicating individual interests through polls is globally recognized as one of the basic human rights¹.

International electoral assistance is the assistance for post-conflict and developing countries to hold elections with a global standard². Since these countries establish democratic governments with international assistance, they are able to appeal legitimacy of state authority³.

Legitimacy of the International Electoral Assistance and Major Actors

Throughout the Cold-War era, only a few electoral assistances were conducted due to the fact that there was a possibility that assisting elections, fundamentally a domestic jurisdiction, was seen as an intervention. However, since the significance of international electoral assistance with respecting sovereignty was ensured in UN resolutions in 1988⁴, the assistance was positively accepted⁵ and gained its popularity, especially with the end of the Cold War.

There are two major actors in UN -led electoral assistance; Electoral Assistance Division (EAD)⁶ in the Department of Political Affairs, UN Secretariat, and UNDP⁷. Other than UN, regional organizations, such as EU, and international NGO s also provide electoral assistance. Donor countries often contribute to elections through bilateral cooperation. For example, Japan contributed ¥135 million (\$1.69 million) for electoral materials to Timor-Leste to support national elections held in 2012⁸.

Electoral Cycle Approach

International Electoral Assistance has been transformed from event-based support to process support including pre- and post-electoral period, known as the "Electoral Cycle Approach."⁹ This approach is currently a main stream of the international electoral assistance

In this approach, electoral assistance is separately considered between three periods, namely pre-election, election, and post-election. The most emphasized among the three periods is pre-election. Wide range of activities including civic/voter education, voter registration, development of legal system, capacity building of political parties and further assistance are implemented and provided in this period.

Electoral Assistance in Peacekeeping Mandate

When the Cold War came to an end in the late 1980s, UN peacekeeping operations showed its transformation¹⁰, extending electoral assistance mentioned above. The two factors showed that electoral assistance was involved in the UN peacekeeping mandate.

The first case was the UN Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) in Namibia. In UN Resolutions 632 (1989)¹¹, Security Council ensure conditions in Namibia which allow the Namibian people to participate freely and without intimidation in the electoral process under the supervision and control of the United Nations leading to early independence of the Territory."¹²

Since then, electoral assistance has been included in peacekeeping mandate in accordance with its necessity. In most cases, states where peacekeeping operations are deployed are post-conflict states or fragile states. In this respect, significance of electoral assistance by UN peacekeeping increased rapidly¹³.

In current 'integrated' peacekeeping missions, electoral assistance is conducted under the collaboration of peacekeeping and UN agencies to ensure effectiveness and efficiency. In Timor-Leste, UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) and the electoral assistance unit in UNDP were integrated as " UN Electoral Support Team" (UNEST).

As we have seen, international electoral assistance is now a significant part of the UN peacekeeping mandate, and partnership between peacekeeping missions and UN agencies is seen to be further enhanced.

End Notes

¹ The Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines in paragraph 3 of the Article 21 that "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures." This provision is recognized as a legitimacy of the international electoral assistance.

² International election observation operation is a part of the international electoral assistance

³ Shinoda, Hideo. "Post-reisenjidainiokeru Kokusaishakaino Kokunaisenkyosien: Minshushuginokinou soshite heiwa, jinken" [International Assistance to Domestic Elections in Post-Cold War Era]. Hiroshima Heiwa Kagaku22 (1999-2000): 20.

⁴ G.A. Res 43/157 (8 December 1988), and Commission on Human Rights Res. (7 March 1989).

⁵ Hashimoto, Keiichi. "Kokusaishakainiyoru Minshukashiennenno Shitsutekihenkan: Senkyoshienno ichizukenikansuru kousatsu" [Qualitative Transformation of Assistance toward Democratization by International Community: Consideration on the status of electoral assistance]. Kokusaikyoroku Kenkyu22 no. 1 (2006): 34.

⁶ United Nations. "Department of Political Affairs: Electoral Assistance." United Nations official web site (accessed 21 May 2012).

⁷ United Nations Development Programme. "Electoral Systems and Processes." UNDP official web site (accessed 21 May 2012).

⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan "Minshutekina Kokuseisenkyoniyoru Heiwakouchikukeikaku; UNDP Renkei (Project for Peacebuilding through democratic national elections; Cooperation with UNDP)." MOFA of Japan official site. (accessed 21 May 2012).

⁹ It is generally acknowledged that the core of electoral cycle approach was formulated in 2004.

¹⁰ Tochibayashi, Norimasa. "Expansion of UN Peacekeeping" @ PKO Now! no. 4 (July 2012).

¹¹ It was decided to establish UNTAG by UNSC resolution 435 (1979), but the mission was actually established when the resolution 632 (1989), confirmed the decision above, was adopted.

¹² S.C. Res. 632, U.N. Doc. S/RES/632 (16 February 1989).

¹³ Tochibayashi, Norimasa. "Contribution of the International Electoral Assistance towards Consolidation of Peace: Violence to poll, dissemination of political settlement through civic/voter education."