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Times online

Sacked UN official Peter Galbraith accuses Karzai of running second poll fraud

10/31/2009

The American who was sacked as the deputy head of the UN mission in Afghanistan after alleging a cover-up of election fraud accused President Karzai yesterday of masterminding another massive operation to steal next week's run-off contest.

Peter Galbraith, who left Afghanistan abruptly last month after accusing the UN of failing to prevent Mr Karzai rigging August's presidential election, said there was no doubt that the Afghan President was organising another massive fraud for the run-off against Abdullah Abdullah, his opponent, next Saturday.

He said that UN workers overseeing the latest poll run-off had contacted him in recent days to say that nothing had changed and that the second-round vote will again involve fraud on a grand scale.

"It's a sure thing," Mr Galbraith said. "It is beyond blatant. This is in your face. It has become clear that Karzai has no intention of instituting reforms. He simply intends to repeat the same fraud. It is the same exercise as before. At some point enough is enough."

Mr Karzai's victory was annulled after an investigation of numerous fraud allegations resulted in millions of votes being thrown out, and reducing his support to below the 50 per cent he required to secure a first round victory. After enormous pressure from the US and Britain he finally agreed to a run-off election.

Yet Mr Galbraith points out that the Afghan Independent Election Commission (IEC), a body filled with Mr Karzai's cronies that runs the elections, is rehiring the very men accused of participating in August's electoral fraud.

"The UN had announced that 200 of these guys were going to be fired, now it turns out they are being rehired," Mr Galbraith said.

Mr Karzai's main political rival, Abdullah Abdullah, has set a number of conditions to reduce fraud in the run-off, including reform of the IEC.

UN election staff are also threatening to end support for the second round contest after the IEC, instead of refusing to close hundreds of polling stations where there were irregularities in the first round, announced that it will increase the number instead.

"This makes the Afghan war close to unwinnable," Mr Galbraith said.