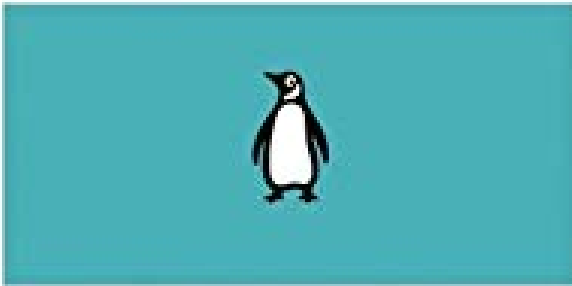


Ballots, Bullets & Kabulshit: An Afghan Election



BALLOTS, BULLETS & KABULSHIT AN AFGHAN ELECTION

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Ahead of the 2009 presidential elections in Afghanistan, Australian electoral advisor and Gruen Planet panellist Toby Ralph joined a UN team to assist local authorities unused to free and fair democratic processes – and in some cases, not keen on adopting them. Amid the 'War on Terror', resistance ranged from corruption and bureaucratic ineptitude to lethal violence. Ralph's diarised account is a rare glimpse into the day-to-day experiences of those charged with delivering the freedom and democracy Western leaders promise the disenfranchised. With the wry humour of a seasoned politico (or someone trying to distract themselves from the very real dangers of their situation), he provides snapshots of life in Kabul, a primer in the political shambles of a failing state, and the reflections of a non-combatant working in a war zone in a suit and tie. He is whisked between meetings in armoured cars, tries to avoid sitting on the AK-47 down the back of the couch at his lodgings, dines with colleagues in sandbagged candlelit restaurants, and attempts to convince the Electoral Commission chairman – and friend of President Hamid Karzai – that having an election is a good idea. That the poll ended in farce, with Karzai's reinstatement by default, means the UN will be sending another group of advisors when next an election is reluctantly called.