

Afghanistan: A Litmus Test of Democracy

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Afghanistan received an exported form of democracy from the United States after the fall of the Taliban.

The exported form of democracy did not fit Afghan culture and way of life because it was not a homegrown political system. Where many scholars miss the point in case of Afghanistan is that democracy is not just a political system but a cultural system. One reason American democracy has been a failure in Afghanistan is because not only western cultural democratic values undermined Islamic traditional values, but also the double standards policies by the US that supports Afghanistan financially and militarily caused chaos and confusion. Consequently, the nation has suffered with more problems. Famine, unemployment, suicide bombing, misogyny, drug epidemic, kidnapping and tribalism are on the rise due to Karzai and Ghani's ethnic affiliation to the extent that they brought back Gulbudin Hekmatyar, a notorious figure who millions of Afghans consider as the butcher of Kabul. People of the world are after war criminals and strive to bring them to justice but the Afghan government brings this criminal and accommodates him with a luxurious lifestyle!! Ashraf Ghani's government is also accused of favoritism and nepotism based upon his ethnic and family affiliations. The full majority of Afghan top officials are Pashtuns. He appointed his uncle as ambassador of Afghanistan to Russia. More importantly, Ghani signed a cultural agreement with Saudi Arabia opening the door for more radicalization and Islamic division among Afghan Muslims. Saudis spend millions of dollars to convert Afghan youth to Wahhabism, a puritanical form of Islam that compromises human rights, gender equality or freedom of expression. Many religious figures who are active in the mosques are absorbed in this radicalization and preach puritanical Islam around the country. This has faced American exported democracy with harsh challenges. From dawn of history, the full majority of Afghanistan practiced the Hanafi school of thought in Islam, the most liberal religious school among all religious denominations in Islam. That is not the case anymore.

In Afghan society, the whole cultural fabric has fallen apart and it is hard to fix it unless a homegrown form of democracy replaces the imported one and Hanafi school is taught around the country. Even so, Afghanistan will still have her problems with the Taliban, the soul agents of Saudi Arabia's agenda in the region who feed the Taliban financially to propagate Wahhabi brand of Islam. The Taliban are supported financially by the Saudis and other Arab sheikdoms and since Saudis are an ally of the United States, Americans keep quiet about their advances as they did in the case of Jamal Kashoggi's assassination. The Taliban operations are carried out by the regional broker, Pakistan, who is also an ally of both the Saudis and Americans. The war is not about Islam or democracy because the Taliban don't know anything about Islam or democracy. The war is about political dominance of the Saudis in the region. The double standard policies of the United States, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan caused enormous damage to the Afghan nation. Not only have billions of dollars been wasted, but also this has brought Afghanistan into the edge of partition between Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns. As a matter of fact, ethnocracy was cemented by Zalmay Khalilzad, a special representative of the United States, in the Bonn conference. He was the one, himself a Pashtun, who proposed that a Pashtun should be the head of the state in Afghanistan after Mr. Abdul Sattar Sirat, a Tajik, and representative of the late king Zahir Shah won the majority vote to be the head of state.

Khalilzad derailed a democratic process and replaced it by an ethnocratic system of government. Sirat, who was very loyal to the king, also a Pashtun, kept silent. So Sirat because of his loyalty to the king has also contributed to ethnocracy in Afghanistan.

Scholars of Afghanistan wonder about a true peace settlement in Afghanistan. It is more than forty years that this country has been in a state of war, which is the longest international involvement of America in history.

Afghanistan is the heart of Asia. Her peace and stability is the peace and stability for the whole region, and her turmoil is the turmoil of the region. Eqbal Lahouri, a Farsi poet of the subcontinent of India, once said:

“Asia is a body of water and mud,
Afghan nation is the heart of that body,
Corruption of it is the corruption of Asia
Ample of it, is the ample of Asia.”

Afghanistan's strategic location has great impact in Central Asia and the Middle East. Remember, Afghan independence in 1919 had a great impact on India's independence movement. India obtained her independence in 1947 from the British Empire, 28 years later. The war against the Soviet Union caused the collapse the Soviet Empire (although westerners give different reasons of the collapse). The reason the war continues in Afghanistan is because, if a true democracy is established in the country, it will have a huge impact in the region. This means that all sheikdoms including Saudi Arabia will collapse because of democratic aspirations. The Arab spring did not succeed but Afghan homegrown democratic values will. That is why it is not in the agenda of Saudi Arabia to allow a democratic government to flourish in the region, just as they toppled the Egyptian elected democracy and brought to power a dictator.

Iran and Russia support the Taliban against the United States' presence in the region. Neither Iran or Russia feel comfortable with the presence of American troops at their doorstep. There is a Kabuli/Farsi proverb that fits this political situation very well. The proverb says, “The snake does not like mint, but it grows at its grotto!” Both Russia and Iran are threatened with Afghan-US military alliance at their doorstep. So the unrest continues.

Solution:

It was 2010 when I was invited to the US Congress by David Kucinich (D), then a US representative from Ohio, for a Congressional briefing over a peace plan on Afghanistan. After almost ten years, I still stand with what I proposed then: A neutral and non-aligned Afghanistan. All world and regional powers declare Afghanistan as a neutral state without any political or military affiliation, just as the Swiss did in Europe after World War II. Afghanistan is a small country with around thirty million people. Afghans neither can afford nor have the potential and capability to be in any pact but as a neutral nation focusing on proper reconstruction, education, civic life, gender equality, and tribal equality. 99% of Afghans are Muslims. Shia and Sunni should be declared equal. All tribes should be equal before the law. No superiority of one tribe over another should exist. Both men and women should be declared equal, and harsh punishment should be established for abusing women and for domestic violence against women. Afghanistan should invest in civic education and illiteracy program and treating drug

addiction. What Afghanistan needs is a social Islamic democracy not a capitalist democracy. In SID (Social Islamic Democracy), religion will not be imposed. According to the Qur'an, religion cannot be imposed, but justice will be established, especially for taking care of the poor, the sick and the destitute. The purpose of an Islamic government is not to control people's minds or to interfere in their privacy. The purpose, according to the Quran, is to establish peace and security, economic prosperity and mass education. At the same time cultural and religious values shall be preserved and people will not be alienated from their cultural values.

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