

## **Democracy as a foreigner ideology (Afghanistan)**

On 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021, when the Taliban entered Kabul and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan collapsed. For those who were into politics and especially expert in democracy studies might have asked a question, why democracy could not survive in Afghanistan? Besides all other aspects that usually hold a democracy alive in a country like institutions, NGOs, role of law etc., understanding the social and cultural aspect might be much more helpful in understanding how and why it did not survive. To understand how the social environment and public awareness were ready for seeding democracy in the country we need to go back to history and have some clues about what people were thinking about this type of governance.

In 1978 Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, defending communism and Afghans had fought for 11 years for what they believed as a holy war: defending from their religion, land, and honor. Afterward, Afghans saw foreigners again in their villages, equipped like Russian soldiers, but this time more developed weapons and more organized. And again, those soldiers were promoting something new, a new ideology: Democracy.

Memories of 11-year war were still in minds, even this time it did not produced a rebel against foreigners, but the new ideology still was threatening their social and personal lives order. Still presence of strangers in cities, in checkpoints, in bases close to their villages was creating a feeling of distrust, reminder of Russians.

For an Afghan who lives in rural parts of the country, terms like democracy, liberalism and human rights be some strange but what he or she is serious about is the religion to be respected. On February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012, reports came out of Bagram; biggest American base in north of Kabul that American soldier burned Quran. If democracy says we should respect other believes but the action of those soldiers was sending another message, we don't care about your religion.

Back in January 2012, a video went viral showing American Marines urinating on Taliban's killed bodies. It's true that most Afghan hated and still hate Taliban because of all losses they were undergone, also they might not understand much what human rights really is. But U.S and all countries that had sent soldiers to Afghanistan understand and they were their there for promoting human rights and democracy.

All these actions and other accusations that might have happened during the nightly operations created a big distance between local Afghans and

foreigner soldiers. General David Petraeus, former CIA president in a recent interview says that one the main failures of the U.S in Afghanistan was gaining the trust of locals. He adds that beside offering projects and supports to locals, it was the Taliban who had more credibility for locals. This part has some social structural differences that needs more research and other elements to be added for further understanding.

In 2002 when the transitional government as a democratic government formed, it was 24 years that educational institutions were not working. Public awareness, educational level and even basic understanding of democracy did not exist in Afghan community. Afghan warlords who helped Americans were those who fought against Soviet Union and were defending fundamentalism, only foreigners believed in democracy in time of forming the democratic government of Afghanistan.

After 11 years of Jihad and losing hundreds of thousands of people, there were formed and collapsed two fundamentalist government consecutively in 12 years. It was 13 years since the formation of first fundamentalist government of Mujahidin and right after Taliban. Social order, public and private life, women rights, human rights, capitalist system of economy; they were all concepts that were strange for Afghans. In a traditional society like Afghanistan, it could create strong sensitivity and distrust between locals and foreigners.

During the 20 years of U.S backed democracy, the concept and its value never entered inside society; as a concern in the public sphere. If it existed it would have been in classrooms, among those studied in the west and it was never turned into a collective request. In fact, for most people it was not clear whether it was good or bad for them. For what we believe as democracy in Afghanistan was an agreement between Afghan warlords and western political leaders. Referring to basic rule of democracy, democrat people build democracy.

As an example, how democracy was entered in Afghanistan as a foreigner and strange ideology, when the first republic was formed in 1973, an intellectual asks a farmer in Maidan Wardak province about Monarchy and republic. The man replies that he knew the King and was satisfied with his governance, but he has not heard of republic Khan, Khan in Persian refers to men. Not surprisingly, after 30 years of war and instability in 2004, voting for someone else was taboo except Hamed Karzai in Logar province. (Saeedi, 2022).

Democracy as it took centuries in the west to be as what we see today, in Afghanistan if not centuries, needs decades to be sustained. The way it was introduced, and how it was implemented was not only against democracy and its values but also it created a bad picture for people who were supposed to be democrats. For a sustainable democracy 20 years was too short and the inconvenience that were made by both Afghan politicians and foreigners it did not get enough attention to be as a collective request.

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