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Afghanistan

One Year Since Taliban's Takeover

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It has been a year since Taliban's takeover of Kabul after the ignominious fall of Western-backed regime of Ashraf Ghani. The so-called democratic experiment of American imperialism and allied Western countries, built by militarily overthrowing Taliban back in 2001, came to an end after twenty years of colossal military expenditures. The democratic regime which the West hailed as the epitome of democracy, human rights and above all women empowerment proved to be a house of cards led by the former criminal Jihadis who were nurtured by the same Western powers against the Saur revolution. Despite a huge expenditure of more than a trillion USD they could not build a viable and functioning state, a strong army and other infrastructure.

The whole political and democratic processes were always occupied by the warlords and former jihadis. On the other hand, the US and its allies miserably failed in containing the Taliban insurgency that had now more regional allies than they had in the 90s. The combination of these factors led to the demise of the regime. But, misery continues for the Afghan masses. The new Taliban regime has proved to be a disaster for the masses on all fronts especially in the economic front. With no economic prospect, the new regime is emphasizing more on moral policing than the real economic woes of the masses. Thus, Afghanistan is on a fast track to becoming rubble.

In the last four decades, reactionary and counter revolutionary insurgencies have been plaguing Afghanistan. In order to crush the nascent revolutionary government formed in the wake of Saur Revolution of 27th April 1978, American and Western imperialism along with their regional stooges nurtured and promoted the counter revolutionary Mujahideens and a narco-economy was created to fund them. This operation was called "Operation Cyclone" and millions of dollars were poured into it to fight the revolutionary regime led by People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) who dared to overthrow capitalism and landlordism from Afghanistan and build a prosperous society. Thousands of counter revolutionary mercenaries (Jihadis) were recruited from Pakistan and all across the world, trained and dispatched to Afghanistan. The decline and economic crisis of Soviet Union and the internal strife of PDPA ultimately resulted in the demise of revolutionary government. Despite all their short-comings, the revolutionary government withstood the entire Jihadi onslaught. It was the collapse and ultimate disintegration of Soviet Union which proved detrimental to the revolutionary government as it cut off the necessary economic lifeline of the country.

After the fall of PDPA regime in 1992, the different factions of Mujahideens, supported by different regional powers, fiercely fought amongst themselves over the control of Kabul. This civil war turned Afghanistan into debris. Such state of affairs was not even in the interests of American imperialism as it was greedily drooling at the untapped natural resources of newly separated states of central Asia. Taliban emerged out of the same Mujahideens in 1994. With the strategic backing of Pakistan and tacit support of America, the Taliban soon overwhelmed other Mujahideen groups and captured Kabul in 1996. In order to extract the riches of Central Asian countries, a strong central government in Kabul was necessary as it would guarantee the safe passage of resources from these countries through Afghanistan into Pakistan and then from Arabian sea to the international market. The American oil and gas exploration company Unocal, eyeing the gas pipeline contract, supported Taliban's ascent. However, the conflicting interests of various regional and imperialist powers rendered the project unsuccessful. Using the 9/11 bombing of twin tower in New York as a pretext, USA invaded Afghanistan to, apparently, punish Taliban and Al-Qaeda for the attacks and build democracy in the country.

While invading Afghanistan, American imperialism had some explicit and implicit goals. The explicit goals were the overthrow of Taliban, crushing of fundamentalism, building democracy, human rights, women empowerment etc. while the implicit goals were the containment of Chinese influence, keeping an eye on Russia, threatening Iran and

the plunder of vast mineral resources of Afghanistan. After twenty years of occupation of Afghanistan US imperialism and its allies miserably failed in all these objectives. It is an irony that America wanted to build 'democracy' and crush Islamic fundamentalism with the help of the same Mujahedeens whom they trained and armed to overthrow the revolutionary government of the PDPA. These Mujahideens, warlords and drug lords were the face of western democracy installed in the country.

American imperialism started this process of "nation-building" in Afghanistan at a crucial historical juncture when the neo liberal economic model of world capitalism was reaching its limits. The last major expansion in productive forces under global capitalism was during the postwar boom, that also owing to the colossal destruction of productive forces in the war. However, that boom soon came to an end in 1973 oil crisis. Since then, in order to increase the declining rate of profit, world capitalism has resorted to neo liberal recipes of cuts, austerities, privatizations, downsizing, rightsizing, deregulations and reduction of state intervention in the economy. This new model of 'trickle down economics' has been a disaster even for the masses of advanced capitalist countries. All the major sectors of the economy were relinquished to private sector to maintain the rate of profit. This neo-liberal economic recipe unleashed a new breed of monster billionaires while subjecting hundreds of millions of people in abject poverty around the world.

At this stage of world capitalism, the 'reconstruction' and installation of democracy in Afghanistan was bound to be doomed. Global capitalism had lost its historical progressiveness. Neither they had envisaged such 'reconstruction' nor was there any possibility for such endeavor. They had their own designs in which they completely failed. Despite all their huge expenditures on reconstruction, they could not transform Afghanistan into a modern state, just as the Americans had done in South Korea, Hong Kong and other island states around China during postwar boom to contain the spread of left movements. All their constructions and infrastructural projects were designed for military and strategic purposes.

As far as democracy is concerned, the same warlords and ex-Mujahedeens were brought to power whether Hamid Karzai or Ashraf Ghani. The rhetoric of human rights or women rights only benefited certain sections of urban middle classes who emerged as a result of global aids and NGO-tic investments, while the rest of Afghanistan continued to suffer. The black economy around drug trade continued to thrive which is, even today, the economic lifeline of Taliban. Even the personnel of American embassy in Kabul were involved in the illicit drug trafficking. An estimated 90 per cent of Afghanistan's economy was (and still is) undocumented or informal of which poppy cultivation and drug trade is the largest part. The presence of such economy ultimately breeds corruption and chaos in the formal hierarchy of the state institutions. During the two decades of democracy in the country, neither the Afghan government nor the Americans could contain this informal economy, rather the Afghan government officials were involved in the profitable black economy. Ultimately, their "nation-building" project failed miserably.

Meanwhile, despite all their state-of-the-art military equipment and military superiority, the NATO forces could not contain the Taliban insurgency. Taliban had their safe houses in Pakistan and had the uninterrupted strategic and military support from the Pakistan's deep-state. Unlike the 90s, Taliban had now increased their regional outreach by forging cordial relations with Iran, Russia and China. When the Americans had failed in curbing Taliban, they promoted IS-K (Islamic State-Khorasan) against it by causing defections in Taliban ranks and importing ISIS mercenaries from Iraq and Syria. Taliban's outreach to Iran and Russia came to a limelight when the then Emir of Taliban Mullah Akhtar Mansoor was killed in Pakistan near Iran border by a US drone strike. It was later revealed that Mullah Akhtar Mansoor was actually returning from his visits to Iran and Russia to garner support against America and the IS-K.

As per the estimates of Aljazeera reports, US made a colossal 2 trillion USD military expenditures in Afghanistan in the last two decades. Despite this, the Americans had to negotiate with Taliban for a graceful exit from Afghanistan. The Qatar agreement with Taliban was basically an instrument of surrender on the part of America. They had completely failed in all their objectives. Neither they could crush Islamic fundamentalism and reconstruct Afghanistan

nor could they contain Iran, Russia and China. During the whole process of negotiation with Taliban, the Americans kept their handpicked Afghan government led by Ashraf Ghani aloof from the talks which says volumes about their view of the government and regime they had built in the last two decades. They knew the degree of relevance and potential of Afghan government and the real powers-that-be in the country.

As soon as the Americans started their withdrawal, the Afghan government started to crumble like the house of cards. The almost 300,000 Afghan army and security forces could not present any formidable resistance in face of Taliban's offensives. On the one hand, the massive corruption and mismanagement had long rendered the Afghan army impotent. Half of the army personnel were simply ghost army i.e. they were present only on papers. On many occasions, the army surrendered due to non-arrival of supplies. The soldiers had to bribe the authorities to provide them food and other vital supplies. On the other hand, the political leadership (the warlords and ex-Mujahideens) and government had no plan of offering any resistance. They had their own plans of negotiating with Taliban. They were simply the proxies of different regional powers. For example, Herat's warlord Ismail Khan initially offered some resistance but ultimately upon the instructions of his masters in Tehran surrendered to Taliban. Later he fled to Iran. The swift fall of provinces owes much to the backdoor diplomacy of warlords and tribal chiefs with Taliban. In this mayhem, the president Ashraf Ghani was utterly clueless in face of Taliban offensive. What else can be expected from an ex-official of international financial institutions who was trained only in clerical duties? In the absence of a centralized leadership and vital supplies, the commanders and high-up officials of one province after another surrendered to Taliban. On the fateful day of 15th August 2021, President Ashraf Ghani boarded a plane and fled with, reportedly, millions of dollars in brief cases. Taliban entered and captured Kabul even before the completion of American withdrawal scheduled for 31st August.

The defeat of American imperialism at the hand of the one of the most reactionary outfits was not possible were it not for the support of Pakistan, Iran, Russia and China. This time around, Taliban's capture of Kabul has been relatively bloodless due to the involvement and consensus of aforesaid regional powers. One of the implicit goals of American invasion of Afghanistan was the containment of Iran and Russia and besieging China. IS-K was the brainchild of American imperialism for this purpose.

The reactionary triumph of Taliban has unleashed a new era of misery for the Afghan masses. American imperialism with all its economic and military might could not build a viable state in Afghanistan; how can a group of reactionaries with no resources and economic program different from their predecessors transform Afghanistan into a better society? Ever since the advent of Taliban government in Kabul, Afghanistan has been blockaded economically. Sanctions have been imposed and the country has been cut off from the global market resulting in the winding up of the meager economic activity around legal economic infrastructure. Before Taliban's takeover in 15th August, Afghanistan's 75 per cent of economy relied on foreign aid. Immediately after the collapse of former regime, all these foreign assistance came to a halt resulting in mass unemployment due to nonpayment of salaries. As far as the regional powers (Iran, Pakistan, Russia and China) supporting new Taliban regime are concerned, they can't provide as much economic assistance as Afghanistan used to receive during the last two decades. For example, China has its eyes on vast mineral resources of Lithium, Copper and other elements. China has pledged to invest in the country but due to uncertainty they are hesitant. Iran, Pakistan and Russian are already reeling from economic crisis.

According to a UN report, more than half a million people lost their jobs in the last one year. It is estimated that 97 per cent of the population will sink below the poverty line in 2022. Social media is rampant with pictures of former journalists and media employees selling fruits on the streets of Kabul and other cities. The heart-wrenching scenes of people gathering around almsgiver for a piece of bread have become commonplace in Kabul. Queues of poor women outside bakeries for a loaf of free bread have become a new normality. The number of beggars has also increased in the country. 95 per cent of Afghan families are facing food insecurity. According to a survey by Save the Children in February 2022, "82 per cent of Afghan families had lost wages since August 2021 and almost one in five were sending children to engage in labor (for miniscule wages), while 7.5 per cent stated they were resorted to begging or requesting money or food from charity."

One Year Since Taliban's Takeover

On the one hand, with no economic resources and viable economic program the Taliban are trying to impose their reactionary misogynist morality on society. Girls have been barred from educational institutions. Women employees of different departments have been instructed to provide a male replacement for their jobs so they can perform their duties in their place. Those working in TV channels have been directed to cover their faces and wear Islamic Hijab.

On the other hand, the rifts between Taliban factions are also raising their heads. In the initial days of their power, there was a violent scuffle among Taliban leadership during a meeting in Kabul. Reportedly, the brawl happened in the wake of power sharing among different factions, the main among them the Haqqani network, led by Sirajuddin Haqqani, and Mullah Barader faction. Mullah Barader was reportedly injured during the scuffle and he fled to Kandahar. Haqqanis are considered to have close links with Pakistan's deep-state. Currently, Afghanistan's internal security and interior ministry is headed by them. Mullah Barader led the negotiation with America in Doha which resulted in US withdrawal. Reportedly, he wanted to strike a separate deal with USA in 2010 against the wishes of Islamabad, when he was arrested in Karachi and held till 2018. He is considered to be in favour of a more inclusive government in Kabul. In conditions of bleak economic outlook, more such brawls and internal rifts will be on the horizon.

Afghanistan has been in the throes of imposed civil wars in the last four decades. These chaos and mayhem have derailed all the political processes. Political activism has been replaced by the bullying of warlords, Mujahideens and now Taliban. It is literally a graveyard and debris which the Taliban has captured with no economic prospect. With each passing day the country is heading towards an ever greater humanitarian crisis. The masses will definitely resist such state of affairs. The protests against gender discrimination by women folk have shown the possibilities inherent in the situation. If Taliban tries to suppress such mass resistance it will further infuriate the masses and complicate the already volatile situation because Afghanistan is not like the theocratic state of Iran where economic opportunities and social progress is at a far higher level. Further repression can lead to a virtual disintegration of Afghanistan on ethnic lines. The so-called National Resistance Front (which is an alliance of reactionary former Jihadis) together with IS-K can launch deadly attacks on Taliban which can turn into a dangerous bloodbath. But things can go in other directions too. The war in Ukraine has exacerbated the crisis of already fragile state of Pakistan. The crisis of the state has blown up. Inflation of basic commodities has skyrocketed in Iran. This can lead to social explosions in these countries. Any progressive change in Islamabad or Tehran will be a beacon of hope for Afghanistan. Only such a revolutionary change in Pakistan or Iran can provide a sigh of relief for the suffering Afghan masses.

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