

Columns

What's Happening in Afghanistan?

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A political tsunami has hit the Graveyard of Empires. Afghanistan's president fled the country as Taliban advanced on Kabul effectively holding power after it was ousted by the US-led invasion.

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The US President Biden confirmed the end of two decades of military presence in Afghanistan. Although the main waves have subsided by now, the situation is exceptionally fragile since the replacement of the US, UK and their imperialist 'allies' backed regime appears to be at the equal footing although it is endogenously generated.

A clear example as to how imperialists relegated the Afghan people was the comment made by Winston Churchill during the 1897 British battle against Afghanistan's Pashtun tribesman: "After today we begin to burn villages. Everyone. And all who resist will be killed without quarter. The Mohmands need a lesson, and there is no doubt we are a very cruel people."

Three phases of Modern Afghan History

Afghanistan is a land-locked country and its terrain itself has made a centralised authority substantially difficult. So, some locals have been almost always under the control of warlords. Modern Afghan history may be divided into three main phases: (1) Afghanistan prior to Taliban rule (1978- 96); (2) US backed Taliban regime (1996- 2001); and (3) the US backed regime (2001- 2021). In 1978, a liberation movement led by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) overthrew the dictatorship of Mohammad Daoud.

It was an immensely popular revolution. Reporters of international press in Kabul had found that 'nearly every Afghan they interviewed said [they were] delighted with the coup.' John Pilger, a film maker, reminded us the report of *The Washington Post* that had revealed: "Afghan loyalty to the Government can scarcely be questioned." 'Secular, modernist and, to a considerable degree, socialist, the Government declared a programme of visionary reforms that included equal rights for women and minorities. Political prisoners were freed, and Police files publicly burned'.

He added: Under the monarchy, life expectancy was 35; one in three children died in infancy. Ninety per cent of the population was illiterate. The new Government introduced free medical care. A mass literacy campaign was launched. For women, the gains had no precedent; by the late 1980s, half the

university students were women, and women made up 40 per cent of Afghanistan's doctors, 70 per cent of its teachers and 30 per cent of its civil servants. So radical were the changes that they remain vivid in the memories of those who benefited.

Saira Noorani, a female surgeon who fled Afghanistan in 2001, recalled: "Every girl could go to high school and university. We could go where we wanted and wear what we liked... We used to go to cafes and the cinema to see the latest Indian films on a Friday... it all started to go wrong when the mujahedin started winning... these were the people the West supported."

Imperialist intervention against PDPA

The West tried to portray without any evidence to substantiate the PDPA regime as a Soviet puppet regime and interpreted it from the perspective of the cold war. Hence, the regime of Jimmy As John Pilger has revealed: "Carter began its dirty role making effort to destabilise the PDPA Government. "On 3 July 1979, Carter authorized a \$500 million 'covert action' programme to overthrow Afghanistan's first secular, progressive Government in spite Cyrus Vance, the Secretary of State, later wrote in his memoirs: "We had no evidence of any Soviet complicity in the coup." Under Operation Cyclone, the US, the UK and the Pakistani intelligence trained young Muslims recruiting from many Muslim countries to fight against the PDPA Government.

One of the trainees was a Saudi engineer named Osama bin Laden. Pilger gives us a vivid picture what had happened in the next year or so. "In August 1979, the US Embassy in Kabul reported that "the United States' larger interests... would be served by the demise of the PDPA Government, despite whatever setbacks this might mean for future social and economic reforms in Afghanistan."

The United States was saying that a genuinely progressive Afghan Government and the rights of Afghan women could go to hell. It was in this backdrop that the Soviets made their fatal move into Afghanistan in response to the American-created jihadist threat on their doorstep. Armed with CIA-supplied Stinger missiles and celebrated as 'freedom fighters' by Margaret Thatcher, the mujahedin eventually drove the Red Army out of Afghanistan. Whatever the gaps and lacunas, any reasonable observer would agree that Afghanistan under PDPA may be named as the most progressive period in its contemporary history.

Northern Alliance rule

Without an iota of doubt, it may be concluded that the US, UK backed regime in Afghanistan marked the worst period of its contemporary history. When PDPA regime was overthrown and Soviet tanks were withdrawn, the basis for the common front between imperialist countries and religious fundamentalism was internally undermined. Prime Minister of the UK, Tony Blair explained the imperialist intention on the following words. "This is a moment to seize. The kaleidoscope has been shaken. The pieces are in flux. Soon they will settle again.

Before they do, let us reorder this world around us." On the other hand, Islamic fundamentalists were only interested in redesigning the comparatively free Afghan society according to the design and dreams of the fundamentalists. As a result, the democracy and freedom that Afghan people, especially women, had experienced for nearly two decades were totally evaporated.

None of the two parties involved were not concerned about the basic humane problems under which the Afghan people suffered for centuries. The antagonism between the two elements of the common front emerged when both parties needed to model Afghanistan and its people according to their

predetermined designs. The US and UK envisioned that pieces will settle so that the entire West and Central Asian map may be redrawn around the imperialist centre. Islamic fundamentalists were vehemently opposed to it and decided to hit back.

9/11 and Imperialist Attack

In response to 11 September attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, The US and its allies had decided to invade Afghanistan with the premise that 9/11 was a plan of Osama bin Laden and he was living in Afghanistan under the Governmental security. This story might be true. However, John Pilger thinks the reality was somewhat different. He writes: "The invasion of Afghanistan was a fraud.

In the wake of 9/11, the Taliban sought to distance themselves from Osama bin Laden. They were, in many respects, an American client with which the administration of Bill Clinton had done a series of secret deals to allow the building of a \$3 billion natural gas pipeline by a US oil company consortium." Pilger added: "In high secrecy, Taliban leaders had been invited to the United States and entertained by the CEO of the Unocal company in his Texas mansion and by the CIA at its headquarters in Virginia.

One of the deal-makers was Dick Cheney, later George W. Bush's Vice President." The second US backed Afghan puppet regime was no better from the Taliban regime a few formal democratic colorings notwithstanding. As it failed miserably to deal with basic socio-economic issues such as poverty, health and educational issues, and deep-rooted corruption. Eventually, Taliban was able to gain the control of the country finally entering Kabul. Afghanistan appears to have two proximate options. First is the democratic and progressive option reflecting on the PDPA experience.

However, the possibilities are remote and almost non-existent since even the memories have now evaporated. The second possibility is undemocratic Taliban or similar regime with big Chinese financial and economic assistance. China may see a friendly regime in Afghanistan would make its one road one belt strategy much easier.

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P.S.

• Ceylon Today. Published: 2:00 AM Sep 3 2021:
<https://ceylontoday.lk/news/what-s-happening-in-afghanistan>

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