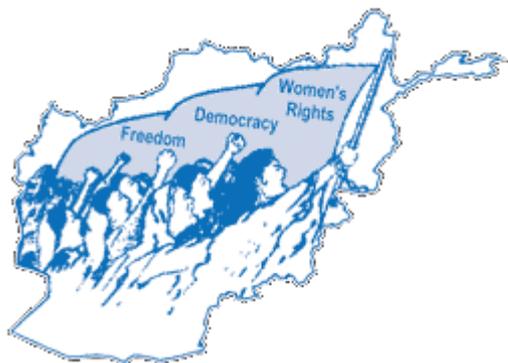


RAWA Responds to the Taliban Takeover

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Afghan Women's Mission has been in touch with RAWA to address their needs at this urgent time. In this brief Q&A with AWM Co-Director Sonali Kolhatkar, RAWA explains the unfolding situation on the ground as they see it. Click [HERE](#) to donate to RAWA now.

Sonali Kolhatkar: For years RAWA spoke out against the U.S. occupation and now that it has ended, the Taliban are back. Could President Biden have withdrawn U.S. forces in a manner that would have left Afghanistan in a safer situation than currently? Could he have done more to ensure the Taliban were not so quickly able to take over?

RAWA: In the past 20 years, one of our demands was an end to the US/NATO occupation and even better if they take their Islamic fundamentalists and technocrats with them and let our people decide their own fate. This occupation only resulted in bloodshed, destruction and chaos. They turned our country into the most corrupt, insecure, drug-mafia and dangerous place especially for women.

From the very beginning we could predict such an outcome. On the first days of the US occupation of Afghanistan, RAWA declared on October 11, 2001:

“The continuation of US attacks and the increase in the number of innocent civilian victims not only gives an excuse to the Taliban, but also will cause the empowerment of the fundamentalist forces in the region and even in the world.”

The main reason we were against this occupation was their backing of terrorism under the nice banner of “war on terror”. From the very first days when the Northern Alliance looters and killers were installed back into power in 2002 to the last so-called peace talks, deals and agreements in Doha and release of 5000 terrorists from prisons in 2020/21, it was very obvious that even the withdrawal won't have a good end.

The Pentagon proves that none of the theory invasion or meddling ended up in safe condition. All

imperialist powers invade countries for their own strategic, political and financial interests but through lies and the powerful corporate media try to hide their real motive and agenda.

It is a joke to say values like “women’s rights”, “democracy”, “nation-building” etc. were part of the US/NATO aims in Afghanistan! US was in Afghanistan to turn region into instability and terrorism to encircling the rival powers especially China and Russia and undermining their economies via regional wars. But of course the US government did not want such a disastrous, disgraceful and embarrassing exit that left behind such a commotion that they were forced to send troops again in 48 hours to control the airport and safely evacuate its diplomats and staff.

We believe the US left Afghanistan out of its own weaknesses not defeated by its creatures (Taliban). There are two significant reasons for this withdrawal.

The main reason is the multifold internal crisis in the US. The signs of the US system decline was seen in the weak response to Covid-19 pandemic, attack on Capitol Hill and the great protests of the US public in the past few years. The policy-makers were forced to withdraw troops to focus on internal burning issues.

The second reason is that the Afghan war was an exceptionally expensive war whose cost has gone into trillions, all taken from taxpayer money. This put such a heavy dent on the US financially that it had to leave Afghanistan.

The war-mongering policies prove that their aim was never to make Afghanistan safer, let alone now when they are leaving. Furthermore, they also knew that the withdrawal would be chaotic yet they still went ahead and did it. Now Afghanistan is in the limelight again due to the Taliban being in power but this has been the situation for the past 20 years and everyday hundreds of our people were killed and our country destroyed, it just was rarely reported in the media.

Sonali Kolhatkar: The Taliban leadership are saying they will respect women’s rights as long as it complies with Islamic law. Some Western media are painting this in a positive light. Didn’t the Taliban say the same thing 20 years ago? Do you think there is any change in their attitude toward human rights and women’s rights?

RAWA: The corporate media is only trying to put salt on our devastated people’s wounds; they should be ashamed of themselves the way they try to sugarcoat brutal Taliban. The Taliban spokesperson declared that there is no difference between their ideology of 1996 and today. And what they say about women’s rights is the exact phrases used during their previous dark rule: implementing Sharia law.

These days the Taliban have declared an amnesty in all parts of Afghanistan and their slogan is ‘what the joy of amnesty can bring, revenge cannot’. But in reality they are killing people every day. Just yesterday a boy was shot dead in Nangarhar only for carrying the tricolored Afghan national flag instead of the white flag of Taliban. They executed four former army officials in Kandahar, arrested a young Afghan poet Mehran Popal in Herat province for writing anti-Taliban posts on Facebook and his whereabouts is unknown to his family. These are just a few examples of their violent actions despite the “nice” and polished words of their spokespersons.

But we believe their claims may be one of the dramas being played by the Taliban and they are just trying to buy more time till they can organize themselves. Things happened so fast and they are trying to build-up their government structure, create their intelligence and make the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, which is responsible for controlling the little details of people’s daily lives like the length of the beard, the dress code and having a Mahram (male

companion, only father, brother or husband) for a woman. Taliban claim that we are not against women's rights but then it should be within the framework Islamic/Sharia laws.

Islamic/Sharia law is vague and construed in different ways by Islamic regimes to benefit their own political agendas and rules. Furthermore, the Taliban would also like the West to acknowledge them and take them seriously, and all these claims are part of painting a whitewashed image for themselves. Maybe after a few months they would say that we will hold elections since we believe in justice and democracy! These pretences will never change their true nature, and will still be Islamic fundamentalists: misogynist, inhuman, barbaric, reactionary, anti-democracy and anti-progressive. In a word, the Taliban mentality has not changed and will never change!

Sonali Kolhatkar: Why did the Afghan National Army and the U.S. backed Afghan government fall apart so quickly?

RAWA: Some major reasons out of many are:

- 1) Everything was done according to a deal to handover Afghanistan to Taliban. The US govt. negotiating with Pakistan and other regional players had agreement to form a govt. mainly composed of Taliban. So the soldiers were not ready to be killed in a war that they knew there was no benefit of the Afghan people in it because finally it is set behind closed doors to bring Taliban to power. Zalmay Khalilzad is highly hated among Afghan people due to his treacherous role in bringing the Taliban back to power.
- 2) Most Afghans understand well that the war going on in Afghanistan is not the war of Afghans and for the benefit of the country, but waged by foreign powers for their own strategic interests and Afghans are just fuels of the war. Majority of the young people are joining the forces because of severe poverty and unemployment so they have no commitment and morals to fight. It is worth mentioning that the United States and the West have tried for 20 years to keep Afghanistan a consumer country and have hindered the growth of industry. This situation created a wave of unemployment and poverty, paving the way for the recruitments of the puppet government, the Taliban and growth of opium production.
- 3) Afghan forces were not so weak to defeat in the course of a week, but they were receiving orders from the presidential palace not to fight back Taliban and should surrender. Most provinces were peacefully handed over to the Taliban.
- 4) The puppet regime of Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani were calling Taliban "dissatisfied brothers" for years, and released many of their most ruthless commanders and leaders from prisons. Asking Afghan soldiers to fight a force that is not called "enemy" but "brother", emboldened the Taliban and hit the morale of the Afghan armed forces.
- 5) The armed forces were unprecedentedly plagued by corruption. The large number of generals (mostly former brutal warlords of the Northern Alliance) sitting in Kabul grabbed millions of \$, they cut even from food and salary of soldiers fighting in the frontlines. "Ghost soldiers" was a phenomenon exposed by SIGAR. High-ranking officials were busy filling their own pockets; they channelled salary and ration of tens of thousands of non-existing soldiers into their own bank accounts.
- 6) Whenever forces were besieged by Taliban in the hard fight, their call for help was ignored by Kabul. In numerous cases tens of soldiers were massacred by Taliban when they were deserted without ammunition and food for weeks. Therefore the rate of casualties among armed forces was very high. In the World Economic Forum (Davos 2019), Ashraf Ghani confessed that since 2014 over

45,000 Afghan security personnel have been killed, while in the same period only 72 personnel of US/NATO were killed.

7) Overall in society growing corruption, injustice, unemployment, insecurity, uncertainty, fraud, vast poverty, drug and smuggling, etc. provided a ground for reemergence of Taliban.

Sonali Kolhatkar: What is the best way for Americans to help RAWA and Afghan people and women right now?

RAWA: We feel very lucky and happy to have the freedom-loving people of the US with us during all these years. We need the Americans to raise their voice and protest against their government's war-mongering policies and support the strengthening of the people's struggle in Afghanistan against these barbarians.

It is human nature to resist and the history bears witness. We have the glorious examples of US struggle "Occupy Wall Street" and "Black Lives Matter" movements. We have seen that no amount of oppression, tyranny and violence can stop resistance. Women will not be shackled anymore! Just the next morning after the Taliban entered the capital, a group of our young brave women painted graffiti on the walls of Kabul with the slogan: Down with Taliban! Our women are now politically conscious and no longer want to live under the Burqa, something they easily did 20 years ago. We will continue our struggles while finding smart ways to stay safe.

We think the inhuman US military empire is not only the enemy of the Afghan people but the biggest threat to world peace and instability. Now that the system is on the verge of decline, it is the duty of all peace-loving, progressive, leftist and justice-loving individuals and groups to intensify their fight against the brutal war-mongers in the White House, the Pentagon and the Capitol Hill. Replacing the rotten system with a just and humane one will not only liberate millions of poor and oppressed American people but will have a lasting effect on every corner of the world.

Now our fear is that the world may forget Afghanistan and Afghan women like under the Taliban bloody rule in late 90s. Therefore, the US progressive people and institutions should not forget Afghan women.

We will raise our voice louder and continue our resistance and fight for secular democracy and women's rights!

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