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Achieving Democracy in Afghanistan doesn't require a Western-style Democracy

by

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Abstract

The West persists in advocating a democracy ill-suited for the Afghan people. The West should ask the following question: How may we assist the Afghan people in adopting a form of governance most consistent with their culture and current economic conditions to allow for effective control of Afghanistan? This essay discusses the cultural justification for more suitable governance, the importance of perceived governmental legitimacy by the Afghan people, and exposes obvious failings of the current attempt to implement a Western-style democracy within Afghanistan. The U.S. and the international community must fully recognize the cultural and historical basis for a more fitting democracy in Afghanistan. The system of government adopted must enable the government to effectively address the people's needs, thus attaining legitimacy. The imposition of a Western style democracy upon Afghanistan only continues to set the conditions for prolonged failure. However, the successful promotion of a culturally adapted democracy will produce needed regional stability. The key element is to promote democracy, not a purely Western democracy.

with perceptions of social injustice in the distribution of development gains, lead to mistrust of the intervention and a sustained cycle of conflict that further erodes all democratization gains.¹¹

“When Afghanistan no longer fears for its own disintegration, it will become more feasible for the state to experiment with forms of local governance and decentralization of the administration in order to provide the public services that the Afghan people are now demanding.”¹² If the Afghan government gains legitimacy in the eyes the people, support for democracy will strengthen; however, excessive pressure to rapidly achieve a Western-style procedural democracy will surely create antagonism and resistance throughout the country and the region.

Many advisors from the international community are seeking to implement Western-style democracy in their likeness within Afghanistan. As addressed previously in this essay, a Western-style democracy is not sufficient to put into practice directly in Afghanistan. For this reason, Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh and Michael Schoiswohl argue:

The democratization project in Afghanistan therefore seems to have reached a stand-off between what the international community wished to see in Afghanistan, in terms of the liberal tenets of Western democracy, and what the Afghans were trying to carve out for themselves, to cajole and adapt to their circumstances, culture and history.¹³

The international community must recognize the benefits of allowing modifications to the templates of a Western-style democracy for Afghanistan. Additionally, Ali Jalali asserts, “Both state building and governance in Afghanistan are troubled by diverging concepts that influence the policies of domestic, regional, and global actors on the Afghan scene.”¹⁴ The international community must reach a consensus on what effective governance within Afghanistan will resemble, only then will progress become possible. Ali Jalali warns, “Long-term stability in Afghanistan requires that efforts be directed toward changing the divisive situation rather than adopting solutions solely to accommodate the existing fragmentation.”¹⁵ Selecting governance

