

PEOPLE OF AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ UNDERSTAND AND PRACTICE “COMPROMISE”

The occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq by the United States is not only based on profound distortions of truth and less than humane motives, it is also tragically guided by ignorance and misunderstandings of the cultural foundations and social complexities of the two countries. In his August 23, 2005 appearance on the PBS NewsHour NewsMaker segment, Zalmay Khalilzad, former American Ambassador to Afghanistan and currently to Iraq made the astonishing claim “that compromise does not come easy in this part of the world, that the word compromise does not exist in the Arabic language, and when I served in Afghanistan, the same problem existed there as well. The word compromise did not exist in the Afghan language (sic) as well”. This is a gross misrepresentation of the socio-cultural realities of Afghanistan and Iraq. Arabic is not the only language spoken in Iraq and at least six languages are spoken in Afghanistan. To suggest that the ambassador is simply ignorant and uninformed—possible as that might be—contradicts everything we have been told about his educational and cultural background by his employer, the media, and the public record that Khalilzad has created for himself over the past twenty eight years. The ambassador’s counsel to his employer about political and cultural conditions in Afghanistan and Iraq is framed by these distortions. There is a profound disconnection between the cultural and social realities in Afghanistan and Iraq and the ambassador’s understandings of these realities.

Dr. Khalilzad’s unawareness is rooted in the debilitating effect of the American neoconservative ideology that has infested his mind, conscience, and soul. Had he not been so incapacitated he would have known that the intellectual and behavioral ingredients for compromise exist in all corners of human communities. Social life in general, as we know it, would be virtually impossible without the flexibility which the universal understanding and practice of compromise offers. It may be that Khalilzad is engaged in a kind of wishful thinking that produces the imaginings of the non-existence of this universal feature in Afghanistan and Iraq because the neocolonialism which he so loyally serves thrives on distortion, division, and disunity as its major weapon for control and domination. Indeed, if Khalilzad and those who depend on his knowledge were to unintentionally succeed in facilitating a united Afghanistan and Iraq through the application of home grown compromise (and consensus) the Ambassador will have to look for another job because that would bring about the demise of the unwelcome American colonial presence in these two countries.

However, Ambassador Khalilzad’s condemnation of the people of Afghanistan and Iraq to compromise-deficiency is starkly contradicted by extensive cultural, linguistic, and ethnographic evidence from Afghanistan and Iraq. Zalmay Khalilzad lacks the knowledge and understanding of the cultural and

social complexities of Afghanistan and Iraq but the media continues to market his “Afghan birth”, that he “is well versed in negotiating tribal and ethnic divisions”, and that he speaks Afghanistan’s “two main languages—Pashto and Dari” (Andrew North, BBC News, February 2006). Khalilzad’s published writings dealing with Afghanistan and South Asia are framed by explicit American Cold War ideology and are mostly based on anecdotal data and information. Of poor scholarly quality, his published work is uninformed by the cultural, ethnographic, and historical realities of the country he claims as the place of his birth.

Dictionaries of Arabic, Farsi, Kurdish, Paxtu, Baluchi and other languages in the region contain elaborate linguistic labels and cultural constructs for the equivalent of the English concept of “compromise”—a settlement of differences in which each side makes concessions. The extensive ethnographic record about the Middle East, Central and South Asia is replete with unambiguous evidence for not only the existence of the concept “compromise” in the cultures of these regions but also for the creative and varied application of this vital intellectual construct (and ways in which it facilitates consensus) in the social, political, and economic lives of the people in these regions. These culture areas contain rich traditions for peaceful disagreement, dialogue, compromise, and consensus. Indeed, no other region in the world has more elaborate and complex procedures, tactics, strategies, and rituals for bargaining and compromise than the organized cultural and social locations in the countries stretching from Morocco to the Indus and on to Southeast Asia.

Claiming that the people of Afghanistan and Iraq lack the intellectual capacity and practice of compromise is all the more disturbing since Mr. Khalilzad has been hired by the Bush administration as the chief scholarly authority on the peoples and cultures of the Middle East and the frontline political operative in Afghanistan and Iraq. He has played central roles in the planning and implementation of the destabilization and attempted reconstruction of the two countries. Khalilzad played a major role in the production and management of the *mujahidin* terrorists who caused the collapse of the state infra-structure of Afghanistan and the emergence of the Taleban movement. As a core member of the neoconservative circle in Washington, Khalilzad has openly expressed his support for the racist policies of the state of Israel. During the 1990s, in promoting the interests of UNOCAL oil company in Afghanistan he negotiated with the Taleban regime and recommended its recognition by the United States. But when UNOCAL decided not to pursue its involvement in Afghanistan, Khalilzad changed his mind and announced his opposition to the Talebs.

Zalmay Khalilzad is on record for gleefully acknowledging the destruction of the state of Afghanistan as a “worthwhile” price for American “strategic” interests: “The gains we made as a result of the struggle in Afghanistan, even with the problems we have had since, I think from the American

strategic point of view, it was very much a worthwhile investment" ("CNN Presents: 'Cold War'" TV broadcast, March 7, 1999).

Khalilzad has cleverly manipulated his ethnic and national background by portraying himself to his employer as a member of the numerically dominant Paxtun group in Afghanistan. In practice he has no meaningful competence in the language and culture of Paxtuns or, for that matter, any other ethnic group in that country. He speaks rudimentary Farsi but it is not known whether he can read and write it. There is no public record of Khalilzad ever speaking in coherent Paxtu, language of the Paxtuns. Anyone with adequate personal and/or scholarly ethnographic familiarity with Afghanistan would know that no Paxtun would have a (self-selected or assigned by one's family) name that ends with the suffix "zad". "Zad" is a Persian word that means nativity or descent and it is used as a suffix in last names among non-Paxtun Kabuli Afghans. Its Paxtu equivalent is "zai" (e. g. *achakzai*, *ahmadzai*, *'abd al-rahimzai*, *noorzai*, etc.). Some knowledgeable Afghans have suggested that Mr. Khalilzad's parents were members of the peripatetic *jat* or *qawal* ethnic groups.

From the beginning of his years in the United States, Zalmay Khalilzad has been involved in American right-wing politics. He holds a doctoral degree in political science from the University of Chicago (1979) where he was heavily influenced by the Zionists and anti-communists Leo Strauss and Albert Wohlstetter. His doctoral thesis, framed by American neoconservative ideology and Cold War anti-communist anxieties, was titled "The political, economic and military implications of nuclear electricity: the case of the Northern Tier"—reference to the Middle Eastern countries (including Iran) bordering the former Soviet Union. When the Afghan monarchy was overthrown by the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan in 1978, Khalilzad published several anti-communist articles under the pseudonym "Hannah Negaran". After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 (and during the Taliban regime) Khalilzad wrote (now under his real name) numerous anti-communist and anti-Afghan government pieces in various right-wing outlets. He also stated these views in several appearances before congressional committees during the 1990s. The circulation of these reactionary views helped him find his way to closer association with the neoconservative cabal that has currently infested the military and foreign policy machineries of the government of the United States. This band of Zionist neoconservative ideologues includes Condoleezza Rice, Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, John Bolton, Elliot Abrams, David Wurmser, Douglas Feith, and Lewis "Scooter" Libby. Khalilzad and his Zionist colleagues share strong anti-communist and pro-Israeli sentiments. Rice's 1981 Cold War inspired doctoral thesis in political science "The politics of client command: party-military relations in Czechoslovakia: 1948-1975" at the University of Denver was directed by the Zionist Jonathan R. Adelman. Wolfowitz' 1972 pro-Israeli and anti-communist doctoral thesis in political science titled "Nuclear proliferation in the Middle East: the politics and economics of proposals for desalting" at the University of Chicago was

written under the direction of Albert Wohlstetter. During the early months of the American occupation of Afghanistan, it was widely reported that Khalilzad had arranged for the intelligence services of the country to be developed by the Israeli MOSAD.

Ambassador Khalilzad played a major role in putting together the government of Kabul after the invasion of Afghanistan by the United States in 2001. As in other post-1920 governments of Afghanistan, Khalilzad invoked and manipulated the so called "*Loya Jerga*" (Paxtu, grand assembly, council) as the legitimizing mechanism for the Kabul government. Conceived after the Paxtun tribal sodality of *Jerga* (assembly, council) for the resolution of conflict, the Loya Jerga was invented by the rulers of Afghanistan as a hegemonic device for the domination of Afghan civil society. Passing themselves as Paxtuns these non-Paxtun rulers manipulated the myth of the numerical majority of Paxtuns in Afghanistan and their concept of *Jerga* to legitimize their rule. In reality the Paxtun numerical majority in Afghanistan is a mere speculation and their tribal society does not have anything called Loya Jerga. (See my article "Editing the Past: Colonial Production of Hegemony Through the '*Loya Jerga*' in Afghanistan". *Iranian Studies*, vol.37, no. 2, 2004).

During 1994-2001 Khalilzad served a charter member of the editorial board of the Middle East Quarterly. MEQ first appeared in 1994 and is sponsored by the pro-Israeli Middle East Forum, an organization that "believes in strong ties with Israel, Turkey, and other democracies as they emerge". MEQ is edited by Daniel Pipes, director of the Middle East Forum and son of the famous Zionist anti-communist, Richard Pipes. After 9/11 when American preparations for the invasion of Afghanistan started, Khalilzad's name disappeared from the list of the editorial board of MEQ. Other members of this board include the Zionist Marvin Zonis, the University of Chicago neoconservative and the raving Arab and Muslim hater, Fouad 'Ajami. Khalilzad, like many of his Zionist and neoconservative associates, has worked at the conservative Rand Corporation through which he published numerous policy papers.

Khalilzad is known in Washington as the one who thinks of "security to the exclusion of everything else. He tends to look at military solutions as the first, not the last policy option" (Washington Report on the Middle East, April 2003, p. 12). As the official leading authority on the Middle East, Central, and South Asia in the Bush administration, Mr. Khalilzad's defective understanding of Afghanistan and Iraq has produced results that do not bode well for the rehabilitation and future stability of these beleaguered countries, regional stability, and the security interests of the United States. Hundreds of billions of American tax dollars have been wastefully spent in Afghanistan and Iraq on neocolonial projects in which the "blind lead the blind". This sightless enterprise foretells calamitous prospects for international security and global peace. Tens of thousands of lives have been lost in Afghanistan and Iraq because of the implementation of uninformed and ill-fated American

policies in which Ambassador Khalilzad continues to play a central role. In both countries, one man's neoconservative blinders and distorted understanding of local cultures have produced results to the detriment of stability, peace and security. Ambassador Khalilzad's neoconservative ideological blinders and misunderstanding of the cultural, political, and social complexities of Afghanistan and Iraq have brought these countries to the edge of all out civil war. The policies and practices that have unleashed the American government's destructive narcissistic rage in Afghanistan and Iraq have produced a bottomless well of anti-American intellectual and emotional energy. The first step towards rescuing the political rehabilitation and integrity of the states of Afghanistan and Iraq and the neutralization of this massive reservoir of disrespect, contempt, and hatred towards the United States is an informed and genuinely even-handed policy in the Middle East. This requires the disinfestations of the American government's policy making machinery from pro-Israeli Zionist neo-conservatism that has captured the imagination of Zalmay Khalilzad and his neo-con friends. In moving from Kabul to Baghdad, Khalilzad has become Afghanistan's gain and Iraq's loss.

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