

Preface

Imperialism Under a Mask

By Hossein Shahmoradi

On August 16, 2021, a deeply disturbing moment of contemporary history was recorded by cameras in Kabul International Airport: A huge throng is climbing whatever it finds to get a place on one of the last US military planes haphazardly fleeing the country, which is being seized by the Taliban. A few minutes later, one can see the plane departing with many people clinging to its wings and wheels. Once airborne, they fall to their inevitable, tragic death.

The problem with imperialism begins with an imperial power's insatiable thirst for expansion into other territories and subjugation of their peoples, the justification of which comes in the form of supremacy, if not outright racism.

A case in point are the efforts of colonial European states in Africa: They perceived themselves as civilized nations and their colonial projects as civilizing missions, aimed at elevating the lives of 'barbaric people' who had neither the material means nor the intellectual capacity to raise themselves out of their miserable lives. Slavery was the logical conclusion of that attitude: Better to be a slave in chains, working for a white master than a free, yet lost, black soul in Africa; being physically close to a colonial metropole was a chance which the slave had to appreciate, the white masters thought. White is superior and black is inferior.

All anti-colonialist struggles started at this very point. The oppressed fought to prove their identity and maturity. Their movements intended to unite their people in denying the aforementioned inferiority. And they suffered a lot. They lost their possessions. They lost their families. They were tortured. They were humiliated. Nevertheless, they kept fighting for an idea they found worthwhile. They paid a lot, but they put their hearts into it. After all, the falsehood of white supremacy, and its tyrannical implications, had become painfully clear to them.

The colonial tragedy, however, took a turn for the worse when some victims started to accept their inferiority. In their solitude, with nobody

around, a crack appeared in the wall of their belief in their self-worth: "What if they are really superior?" And then, little by little, it started to expand: "They are white. They are powerful. They are wealthy. And they are superior. This is our fate."

Here is the point where all the internal motivations to fight die out, which dooms any and all anti-colonial struggle. Here, the colonial power wins because the victims have internalized their inferiority. From now on, the colonizer doesn't need to try to prove its supremacy. Everything is already finished. They are done.

Let's go back to Kabul airport. To see some people falling from a plane and being killed is devastating, but the real devil is in the thought processes of the victims.

It's really astounding to see people whose country has been ruined and occupied for twenty years as a result of an imposed and aggressive war, pleading with the aggressor for salvation. This very mentality is what concerns me the most.

The outburst of the media during the past century changed almost every aspect of human life. More notably, the advent and expansion of modern media have changed the way the national and international powers rule. Previously, the main element of power was military capabilities by which the arrogant powers expanded their realm but, nowadays, a great deal of imperialism and neocolonialism occurs through the media and even by the victims themselves.

Imperialists don't necessarily have to invade a country militarily, when they can change the mentality of the people who are to be oppressed. This

is the role of the media.

Today, there are many organizations in the world whose missions are apparently beautiful and humanitarian, but they are, in fact, playing no role but serving imperialism. IAEA, WTO, UN, IMF, etc. are organizations with enticing slogans to help solve countries' problems, but they are actually helping the big powers mostly, if not only.

The significant role of the media is to hide the essence of different phenomena and embellish them to deceive people. The motive of a war is oil or arms trade or overthrowing a rogue regime, but the media shows the war as the most necessary and inevitable attempt to protect human values. The UN and other organizations gather to help the imperialist by recognizing the war as a legal one, too.

We believe the above descriptions constitute the unfair status quo. Military imperialism has been partly replaced by a cultural and economic one. Although this fact is clear to scholars and experts, many others in the world are not aware of what is happening and this negligence flattens the road for the imperialists.

In this issue, and hopefully in the next ones in future, we are going to talk about "imperialism"; less about overt imperialism, and more about informal imperialism. Internalized imperialism is something of a paramount importance for the world. Knowing cultural and economic imperialism and detecting the procedures through which they work are indispensable to the fight against modern imperialism and colonialism. The current special issue on Imperialism is our first step on a very long road.