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Kabul's Bloody Ramadan and Our Friendly Weekend Iftars


By: Palwasha Hassan

A small circle of my friends and I have regular Iftar dinner parties (breaking of the Ramadan fast each night) that gives us a chance to have a break from the daily mourning, pain, suffering and blood shed that we all witness among us. In our neighborhood among our colleagues and family from time to time we always hear news of someone being affected in one way or other by the regular brutal incidences that have marked this year's Ramadan in Kabul.

Since beginning of Ramadan, Kabul has witnessed multiple suicide bombings which have killed 170 people and wounded some 500 others, causing large scales of destruction, demolishing large buildings and causing road blocks. In face of this mass destruction, public anger towards the government's inefficiency over public safety reached a boiling point, but peaceful demonstrations were soon manipulated by a group of anarchists and politicians very opportunistically. These included increased pockets of civic groups of anti-peace talk with Taliban.

Our Iftar time together is a mixed bundle of cooking, eating, and laughter, happiness of togetherness sharing our personal concerns, our family concerns and our stories of success overcoming the embedded patriarchal hassles in our everyday life. Our fun time ends with meditation and prayers that include loud prayer almost chorus for peace and stability in Afghanistan. In the course of our discussion sometimes we blame the men in neck ties who don't act better than Taliban when it comes in trusting women as real partner in issue of national security and politics and other times we blame women who cater to patriarchy as men. Each time of our discussions tends to end up in our 'no go' areas of politics. Heated discussions often find us arguing with one another as we come up with better security strategies and governance systems than what our government has provided us. Yet our conversations come up against the hard reality of proxy wars prevailing on Afghanistan. We are often left to cursing our intruding neighbors providing sanctuaries and support to extremists, territories launching attacks on Afghans on our own land or those who are exploiting our compatriot refugee status, forcing them to march to Syrian conflict, indulging Afghans yet in other battle with relatively new enemy (ISIS). This continues until one of us realizes that we crossed our red boundary of discussion for our weekend Iftar evenings which are supposed to be calm, peaceful and listening to Sufiana music and sharing our jokes and stories from work.

This weekend our small happy chit chat was broken by breaking news of the mosque attack in the western Shiite residence area called Barchi. We all got worried for those who we thought could be in Mosque at that time. Several of my colleagues and my house help come from the Barchi area that was attacked by ISIS that night. My friends tried to calm me when my colleagues did not reply to my hurried phone calls and my anxieties increased causing uncontrollable tears rolling down my face. In an effort to calm each other, we curse our



Facebook friends who post causality related photos and news without slightest reservations, increasing our anxieties even more. Grief turned to anger over failure of the government to place the right people in the right place and not learning from mistakes and above all never taking serious women's vision of security. Equally, we cursed international partners for ignoring the pressure points they could insert where such incidents are fueled that have targeted thousands of international and local security and civilian in Afghanistan. Our discussion even went down the rabbit hole of colonialism and its legacies which exponentially contribute to the politics of fueling extremism, fostering ground for ISIS and Talibanisation in our region.

Each of our disappointments ends with new positive force for the next day so that we can continue to play our part. We feel a little 'heroism' in waking up again to face the next day, in some way it is our tool that makes us resilient and able to survive the odds around and keep on struggling for us women and women rights. This morning we got together again to ensure much needed shelter homes for women continue functioning which is challenged by uninformed decisions of International partners. These partners are shifting the responsibility of women shelters to male-led organizations who have no experience whatsoever in handling sensitive issues as serious as violence against women, simply good proposal writing skills, this neglects all the pioneering work women organizations and specialization in these projects. This struggle will continue within us and against those who are killing and challenging our struggle for life, equality and our home- Afghanistan.

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