



A Critique of Marvin G. Weinbaum's Review of "The Decline and Fall of Republican Afghanistan Book"

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Abstract

This paper examines Marvin G. Weinbaum's critique of "The Decline and Fall of Republican Afghanistan" by Ahmad Shuja Jamal and William Maley. Weinbaum's review, published in the Middle East Journal, offers a comprehensive analysis of the book's structure, strengths, and weaknesses. While Weinbaum effectively highlights the book's deep analysis, historical context, and scholarly rigor, this critique identifies several areas where his review could be further strengthened. These include a more critical examination of the sources used, a deeper exploration of the political and social impacts, a sociological analysis of Afghanistan's twenty-year war, and a comprehensive analysis of the authors' methodology. Additionally, this article addresses significant discussions such as the lack of localization in content, the process of Afghanistan's revitalization, and the impact of Pashtunism on the country's political and social dynamics. By incorporating these perspectives, the critique aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to the fall of Republican Afghanistan and the complexities surrounding its recent history.

Keywords: *Marvin G. Weinbaum; The Decline and Fall of Republican Afghanistan; Ahmad Shuja Jamal; William Maley; Critique; Afghanistan; Pashtunism; Political Dynamics; Peace; Localization; Revitalization; National Security*

Introduction

Marvin G. Weinbaum's review of the book *The Decline and Fall of Republican Afghanistan* by Ahmad Shuja Jamal and William Maley, published in the Middle East Journal, is considered one of the most comprehensive and precise analyses in the field of contemporary Afghan studies. This review provides an in-depth analysis of various aspects of the book, including its structure, content, and methodology, aiming to acquaint readers with a scientific and accurate perspective on the book's quality

and scholarly value. Weinbaum, leveraging his extensive knowledge in Afghan studies, sociology, and the political history of the region, has successfully highlighted the book's strengths and weaknesses in a detailed and documented manner.

This critique aims to offer a more precise evaluation of Weinbaum's review, analyzing its strengths and shortcomings. The goal of this essay is not only to provide a thorough assessment of this review but also to offer suggestions that could enhance the quality and depth of scholarly critiques in the complex field of Afghanistan's peace and conflict studies. By conducting a more detailed analysis of the sources used, examining the political and social impacts, and evaluating the research methodology, this critique seeks to present a complete and more comprehensive picture of the work under review.

Given the importance of this book in the fields of political, peace, and historical studies of Afghanistan, and its role in understanding the recent developments in the country, a more scientific and detailed examination of existing reviews, including Weinbaum's, appears essential. This essay attempts to deepen the analyses and highlight areas that require further attention, thereby paving the way for the improvement of future critiques and contributing to the strengthening of knowledge and scholarly literature in this domain.

Strengths of Weinbaum's Review

- I. **Comprehensive and Detailed Analysis:** Weinbaum's review thoroughly analyzes the book's structure and carefully examines its strengths and weaknesses. He assesses the book's notable features, such as its deep analysis, use of scholarly literature, and historical comparisons, providing a well-rounded evaluation.
- II. **Fair Evaluation:** Weinbaum's review is fair and balanced, praising the book's strengths while also offering constructive criticism of some of its weaknesses and shortcomings. This fair and realistic approach helps readers form a complete picture of the book's quality.
- III. **Attention to Historical and Theoretical Contexts:** Weinbaum effectively addresses the historical and theoretical contexts discussed in the book, providing a clear analysis of how the authors utilize scholarly and historical sources.

Weaknesses of Weinbaum's Review

- a) **Lack of Critical Examination of Sources Used:** Weinbaum's review does not fully engage in a critical examination of the scholarly and historical sources used in the book. A more detailed analysis of the sources and evidence employed by the authors could have added depth to the critique.
- b) **Insufficient Attention to Political and Social Impacts:** The review does not sufficiently address the political and social impacts of the book, which may have influenced the authors' analyses. Examining these impacts could help in understanding the authors' motivations and reasoning better.
- c) **Lack of Critical Analysis of Methodology:** Weinbaum's review does not comprehensively analyze the authors' methodology. A closer examination of the methodology used in the authors' research and analysis could have provided greater clarity and depth to the critique.

Additional Analysis

- A. Weinbaum's review effectively highlights the unique way in which the book mixes theory with meticulous research and journalistic-style writing. The authors provide a detailed account of the last years of the Republic of Afghanistan before the Taliban retook the country in August 2021. The book is notable for its emphasis on Washington's policies that led to the withdrawal of NATO

forces, while also recounting the internal struggles and tensions within the Republic's government.

- B. The book's undercurrent of anger, particularly evident in the final chapter on "betrayal," does not overshadow its rigorous analysis. The authors devote considerable space to political theory, sometimes appearing to cover all bases, yet they deftly use theory to serve the overall narrative. Their meticulous sourcing of the fall of the Republic and the resurgence of the Taliban is commendable. The critique of American policy, especially under Presidents Trump and Biden, is trenchant and cogent. Even if one takes issue with some of the authors' conclusions, their presentation is well-argued and well-researched.
- C. **Lack of Localization in Content:** One of the criticisms of the book is that the authors did not localize the content. A significant reason for the fall of provinces and villages was the influence and actions of local leaders and mosque imams. For instance, during the last days of Afghanistan's fall, the Taliban strategically used local imams and leaders to undermine the defense efforts. These religious and community leaders were sent to military bases to persuade defense and security forces to surrender to the Taliban and abandon their posts. This tactic of leveraging local influence to facilitate the Taliban's advance was crucial in the rapid collapse of various regions. The book fails to address this localized aspect of the conflict, which played a vital role in the unraveling of the Afghan National Security Forces. Understanding these local dynamics is essential to comprehensively analyze the fall of the Afghan government and the effectiveness of the Taliban's strategy.
- D. **Omission of Afghanistan's Revitalization Process:** Another topic missing from the book is the process of Afghanistan's revitalization. In my opinion, one of the very important reasons for Afghanistan's collapse was the changes and replacements in high-level security positions. Ashraf Ghani and his team dismissed or retired experienced and knowledgeable specialists and generals, replacing them with young individuals who had no war experience. This was one of the common problems during Ashraf Ghani's tri-presidency.
- E. **Neglect of Pashtunism:** It seems that the authors did not pay much attention to the issue of Pashtunism in Afghanistan. Ethnic and linguistic supremacy, systematic cultural discrimination, division, occupation of indigenous lands in the north by southern Pashtuns, and the imposition of Pashtun ethnic-cultural identity on other ethnic groups by the government were among the other factors that made non-Pashtuns detest the government. Ashraf Ghani said in an interview that: "More than 98% of the prisoners are speakers of one language (Pashto), which is not balanced." He once promised the Pashtun people in Kandahar that if he became president, he would release all Pashto-speaking prisoners from Afghan government prisons. Ashraf Ghani fulfilled this commitment. He not only released all Pashto-speaking prisoners from Afghan government prisons but also expelled Tajik political leaders and non-Pashtun ethnic groups from the country through his ethnic group (the Taliban) in collusion with foreigners and American weapons.

Conclusion

Marvin G. Weinbaum's review of "The Decline and Fall of Republican Afghanistan" by Ahmad Shuja Jamal and William Maley is a comprehensive and well-balanced critique that provides readers with a detailed understanding of the book's strengths and weaknesses. Weinbaum's fair evaluation, attention to historical and theoretical contexts, and thorough analysis of the book's structure and content are commendable. However, the review could benefit from a more critical examination of the sources used, a deeper exploration of the political and social impacts, and a comprehensive analysis of the authors' methodology.

In addition to Weinbaum's observations, it is important to address some significant omissions in the book itself. The lack of localization in content overlooks the crucial role of local leaders and mosque



imams in the rapid fall of Afghanistan's provinces and villages. Furthermore, the book does not sufficiently discuss the process of Afghanistan's revitalization and the detrimental impact of high-level security position changes under Ashraf Ghani's administration. Lastly, the issue of Pashtunism and its influence on the political and social dynamics in Afghanistan is not adequately explored.

Overall, while Weinbaum's review is insightful and provides a valuable critique, incorporating these additional criticisms would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the complex factors that contributed to the fall of Republican Afghanistan. By addressing these aspects, future critiques and analyses can better capture the multifaceted nature of Afghanistan's recent history and the challenges it faces moving forward.

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