

Accidental Alchemy: Forging the Taliban into Effective Governance by Default

by Matthew Snow

The warmth of the sun baked wrinkles into Haji Zahir's leathery face, lined with cracks like the dry valley floor, but he did not care. He intently supervised the men with long black beards and tattoos of swords and crescent moons that were every bit as rugged as the earth their heavy equipment chewed up. His tribe was finally receiving the help he spent the previous months chasing. Every year, the old mujahid watched his villagers die in their homes when they were unable to transport the sick or injured to a medical facility because the crumbling, narrow, uneven road became an icy cascade that sent carloads plummeting down the steep mountainside to the snow-packed farm fields below. He knew he was no longer the young defender of his tribesmen, but as an elder he owed his village the basic services to support their lives. Earlier in the year he travelled to the District Sub-Governor (DSG) to submit a request for a road, citing why he needed it and projected the cost. He thought he did it correctly, but like most Afghans struggling with the bureaucracy built in a western image, he cannot read or write, so he relied on someone that could. It quickly became irrelevant when Zahir heard that the DSG wanted to spend the annual allotment of funds on a road from his house to Kabul that would allow his Hazara tribesmen and him to by-pass the Pashtun portion of the district. Flustered with the corruption, he attempted a different avenue. Every morning for three months, Zahir woke before sunrise and walked down the mountain to the small American outpost to request a status update on his road. Likewise, every day the Americans would tell him that the funds had been frozen, but they would call when the money was restored. Zahir knew what was happening. The Mullah in the mosque and all the shopkeepers in the bazaar were abuzz with the recent announcement that the Americans were pulling out of Afghanistan. They were no longer an option. It became a simple choice between the government that is too scared to drive through his area but litter the countryside with checkpoints full of trigger-happy Hazaras that constantly fire blindly into Pashtun villages, or the boys he watched grow into men through the same crucible that forged his own manhood. They are the neighborhood kids and the children of his brothers. They are more like him than Karzai's government ever will be. They respect him as an elder in the tribe, and they respect him for his sacrifice during the ten years of jihad he fought to free his land of the Soviets. Above all, they have learned to connect with him, engage his needs, and fulfill them. Haji Zahir smiled as the sun baked the wrinkles into his face, because when the snow falls in the coming winter, his sick and ailing people will have a safe means to get to the clinic for medical care – thanks to the Taliban.

The Population-Centric Insurgency

The memory of the Taliban's treatment of the people during the reign of the Afghan Emirate is still relatively fresh. The draconian laws and their brutal enforcement depict a government far removed from its population. Possession of a radio would warrant a citizen's public flogging, and Kabul's

soccer stadium was the scene of gruesome executions and amputations.¹ As the conditions festered over the years, only madness seemed to bleed out through the country's porous borders in grainy videos left to be interpreted by a befuddled world.²

The violence and abuse can never be explained away, but its origins can be understood by dissecting the genesis of the perpetrators. The Taliban movement began not as a form of government, but a reaction to a social condition.³ The period between the fall of Najibullah's communist regime and the rise of the Islamic Emirate is depicted in the long lists of the Human Rights Watch, and bitter memories of most Afghans.⁴ Rape, murder and looting were common, and the conservative nation struggled under an anarchic system of warlords.⁵ However, as the movement gained momentum, it swept across the majority of the country in mostly uncontested transitions of established political parties or at the behest of the people.⁶ Most notably, Mawlawi Mohammed Nabi Mohammedi's party of clerics, Harakat-i-Inqilab, joined the Taliban *en masse*.⁷ Though the Taliban initially only sought to bring order to two districts in Khandahar, it was with this formation of men and students that they found themselves at the helm of a movement whose collective aim was to bring order to the chaos of civil war and warlordism in all of Afghanistan.⁸ Unfortunately, without an insurgency to weld their affections to the people, the group ruled over the population rather than served, while in major cities, such as Kabul and Herat, they *occupied*.⁹ However, as NATO stormed into Afghanistan reinforcing the Northern Alliance in late 2001, the Taliban Regime disintegrated, and the remnants were forced underground into what would eventually become a guerilla campaign.

Between 2002 and 2005, little seemed to occur in the way of insurgency.¹⁰ It was as if everyone was waiting to see what this new government the West assembled in the first Bonn Conference would look like. It was comprised of exiles, feminists, and leaders of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance, and backed by western values and dollars.¹¹ In 2005, just when it seemed like Afghanistan would be destined for more of the same, the Taliban began its reconstitution.¹² A plethora of factors tend to form the necessary bedrock for a solid insurgency, but none so important as the acquiescence of the people. As the rebellion grows stronger, the acquiescence becomes a mutual dependency – without popular support, the insurgency will be doomed, just as Che Guevara discovered in Bolivia.¹³

Nearly a decade has passed since the reconstitution, and 641 billion dollars from the U.S. alone has poured into the reconstruction,¹⁴ and only a corrupt government has prospered - untrusted, and often unwanted, by its population.¹⁵ This strand of corruption only serves to further destabilize its own system like a parasite. These officials have no qualms in killing their host – a fact that is not lost on the people who frequently return to the rigid hospitality of the Emirate.¹⁶ Western governments, particularly those donor nations, thought the equation was simple: purchase western values for Afghanistan, and the nation will eventually westernize constituting a human terrain unsuitable for religious fanaticism.¹⁷ If this were the remedy, then the current state of Afghanistan would not have villages beyond eyesight of major cities turning to the Taliban to resolve issues ranging from administration, adjudication, infrastructure development, and security.

The West not only attempted to purchase a resolution for Afghanistan – but went so far as to barter rights for women, futures for children, and organization to the Afghan way of life with a state-of-

the-art government built by experts and enforced by exiles.¹⁸ Unfortunately, it was a bad design. Despite the billions of dollars the Coalition Forces have spent in their failed attempt to Westernize Afghanistan, they have produced an inverse reaction that may have positive ramifications for the troubled nation. They have successfully modernized the ousted Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan into an effective form of governance that could potentially stabilize the region.

Of Governments and Governance

There exists a delicate balance between Islam, Tribe, and State which the Karzai administration has sought to offset from the beginning. If these three pillars are seen as a pyramid, then the base would be the State expanding so widely that the pitch formed by Islam and Tribe hovers just above ground level with the whole structure threatening to collapse on the Afghan people trapped inside. While Karzai plays the dubious contractor – not a difficult image since Mr. Karzai has appointed at least six family members to positions that collect contracts from the United States – he lines his pockets with money meant for materials to brace and strengthen the structure.¹⁹ With such blatant disregard for an unstable creation, the Taliban stand to make huge gains with the Afghan people by merely shoring up the sides while the Karzai government loots the fixtures for their precious metals.

It is not that the Islamic Emirate has created an entire shadow government mirroring Karzai's government for every department; rather they have created a functioning command node that can capitalize on the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's (GIROA) ineffectiveness in a way understood by tribal Afghans – because its success is dependent upon the tribal functions.

Meanwhile, Karzai's government is failing on nearly every front. Since the first Bonn Conference outlined the responsibilities and responsible parties in 2001,²⁰ only thirty percent of the nation's capital had potable water by mid 2011 – though that figure was expected to increase to fifty percent over two years with tremendous investment from Germany.²¹ Hundreds of billions of dollars invested so far,²² and not even the most basic services have been restored by a behemoth bureaucracy that costs billions of dollars annually over what the poverty-stricken nation could ever afford on its meager GDP.²³ With a GDP ranking of less than twenty billion dollars in official exchange warranting almost one hundred billion dollars of pledged donations from the international community, Afghanistan cannot sustain the amount of government it has.²⁴ It would be like giving an unemployed vagrant a mansion in Beverly Hills, and responding with shock that he cannot afford the property tax or even the light bill – particularly if no one ever asked him if he wanted to live there in the first place.

This is often the case in Afghanistan with the ever expanding government. The Afghan Local Police program is just one example of a controversial bureaucratic arm funded entirely by the international community – despite protest from the Afghan people and government alike.²⁵ Though it is often billed as an “Afghan solution to an Afghan problem,”²⁶ Afghans themselves despise the program. Karzai initially protested its organization until General David Petraeus was able to procure his silence, but was unable to silence Afghan Generals or Talibs on the subject.²⁷ Both cited what a disaster the program would be. Major General Esmatullah Dawlatzai claimed it would merely be

renaming mafia and warlordism,²⁸ while Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef claimed reinstating state-sponsored militias would only create more conflict.²⁹ Though the program began in 2009, by the three year mark it was already under probe by the Human Rights Watch commission for allegations of rape, murder, land theft, and arbitrary detention.³⁰ Disregarding the concerns of the Human Rights Watch and Afghan population, General McAllen, then senior military commander in Afghanistan, sought to expand the force from 16,000 men to 30,000 men.³¹ Though this is merely one example, it serves as a microcosm for the bulwark of international issues in Afghanistan. Rather than healing an Afghanistan in Afghans' collective image, the West is merely forcing medication down the ailing nation's throat with blatant disregard to every warning on the label.

Despite international meddling, Karzai's government certainly exacerbates the issues with greed for money and power. GIROA has successfully marginalized village elders, and with them the villages they support which only serves to silence the traditional mouthpiece of the population.³² Rather, the Karzai administration pushes their corrupt and often ineffective bureaucracy that continues to receive glorifying reviews from Western military. These reviews and reports are often authored by mid-level brass who have discovered the political ramifications of having their own success characterized by the success of provincial and district governments.³³ So in effect, corrupt officials continue to fleece money meant for districts, NATO's middle management and staff get promoted, and everyone wins – except the people of Afghanistan who cannot see the benefit of being connected to a “predatory” or “ineffective” government.³⁴

Elder obsolescence is best captured in one of Afghanistan's oldest conundrums historically mitigated through tribal councils: the land dispute – an issue that has become more problematic now than ever before as Afghans who fled decades ago return to find their land sold or seized, often many times over.³⁵ The disputes and their frequently violent resolutions pervade throughout the nation with estimated occurrences ranging from hundreds to thousands, and often involve members of GIROA as the antagonist who fraudulently sells state property, or fraudulently attempts to reclaim it.³⁶

According to Kabul-based political analyst, Mohammed Hassan Haqyar, these disputes are the second-largest detriment to the stabilization of Karzai's government beyond the kinetic insurgent campaign.³⁷ Particular disputes embody the failure of the population to understand the government they have been given which further exacerbates this misunderstanding with the abuses that government extends.

In 2011, Member of Parliament (MP) Qais Hussan and his brother Mir Wais erected a wall through the village of Mena not far from Kabul. MP Hussan declared that everyone living on one side of the wall needs to evacuate to the other side within twenty-four hours. The brothers claimed the village was unlawfully occupying state land, though the men intended to bulldoze the homes and sell the property for an entirely personal profit. When the village failed to obey, Mir Wais returned with a band of gunmen and shot at the villagers as they fled – killing six and wounding two dozen. Rockets were fired into their homes if they were not set ablaze.³⁸ Similar instances have been reported in Khandahar when former Governor Ghulam Haider Hamidi destroyed several hundred homes. Shortly after, he was killed by a suicide bomber in a meeting with the village-less villagers.³⁹ Both

instances reveal the predatory nature of the current form of Western-backed GIRoA, and the need some villagers have for an alternative.

Even on a less scandalous, smaller scale, intertribal land disputes also evolve as potable water and tenable land become scarce commodities, but essential to survival.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the recourse for a land dispute often involves a stack of paperwork, a slow bureaucracy, and a lofty bribe which only insures the poor, illiterate tribesman will lose every time. This typically leaves the rural Afghans returning to the last effective form of governance they recall: the tribal *jirga*, or council. Within a heated *jirga*, the argument can rage for days over gallons of green chai as both parties lay claim to a piece of land until one side has convinced the majority of his right to the property, or perhaps a monetary decision is made. The process is one of the most grass-roots democratic forms of governance that has existed for centuries within the tribal structure. Each elder is a representative of his sub-tribe or *qawm*, within a village or collection of villages. Those elders select a *malek* which represents their collective interests. Through the *jirga*, women have large influence over the decisions and resolutions capitalizing on their networks of female relatives insuring that each demographic of the village is properly represented.⁴¹ Unfortunately, GIRoA's power is not extended within the parameters of tribal jirgas, and they are often marginalized, forcing their citizens to utilize a less democratic and drastically more corrupt outlet funded and designed by the international community.⁴²

If no resolution for a land dispute can be established within the *jirga*, or if the dispute is between two separate tribes, the *jirga* may shift from the neutrality of an elder's mud-walled compound to a mosque. Here the Taliban is often requested to determine who has the right to the property in a *shura*, or religious council. If the Taliban can be viewed as Governance in this instance, it serves to illustrate the supplemental relation of State between Religion and Tribe. As Islam and tribe parallel one another, state can potentially stabilize the two like a truss supporting the natural priorities of most rural Afghans. With the common view that the Taliban *shuras* are unsusceptible to bribery, they effectively bridge the gap between tribe and Islam with decisions believed to be just and final.

The low-hanging fruit of small disputes make popular support an easy harvest in many rural communities, but the more scandalous, large scale disputes could potentially push pockets of Afghans nation-wide to greener pastures. With examples like the suicide bombing of Governor Hamidi, this can send a powerful message to the population that not only can the Emirate peacefully and justly resolve the population's conflicts through *shuras*, but they will also sacrifice their very lives against the corrupt for the people's justice and protection.⁴³ Whether or not it was interpreted in this manner, the villagers certainly did not miss the opportunity to exact *badal*, or the Pashtun value of vengeance, while using the topic to eliminate a common and powerful enemy.

So common is the request for local Taliban commanders to resolve tribal and legal issues, that Mullah Omar Akhuzada, the leader of the Afghan Emirate, released guidance in his updated strategy published in *The Rules and Regulations of Mujahideen*.⁴⁴ In two different sections, he establishes mechanisms for Taliban commanders to solve tribal issues, and offers firm regulation to govern those mechanisms. The final section of the pamphlet entirely covers the conduct of his soldiers

with the local tribes and elders.⁴⁵ Granted, there are still occasions where local Taliban operate outside of regulation that results in abuse of villagers, but this is likely the result of decentralized controls due to the clandestine nature in which leadership is forced to operate. Without proper supervision, even the U.S. military which prides itself on discipline has committed massacres,⁴⁶ spree killings,⁴⁷ and desecration of the deceased⁴⁸ which had major international implications. Lapses in oversight, poor execution, and mistreatment of human beings can occur despite how stringent the rules, but freedom of operation enhances an organization's ability to enforce them. So it stands to reason that the Taliban can only improve if pulled into the mainstream of Afghan politics – particularly now that they have forged an actual relationship with the population they endeavor to serve.

A Woman's Right to Purdah

It was amid the Algerian War of Independence, and rebel factions fought to liberate the would-be nation from France. While General Raoul Salan commanded one of the earliest designs of the modern counter insurgency, his wife formed the Women's Solidarity Movement to liberate the women in public unveilings.⁴⁹ Pain lined the Algerian woman's face as deep as the humiliation that she tried her best to hide behind a forced smile and obligatory applause. The indignity she must feel is as palpable as the condescending magnanimity of the French woman who peels back the veil to show the villagers who were bussed in from the outlying areas that their women are free, now.⁵⁰ The French woman bejeweled in pearls and Chanel represents the modernity of 1958, and the great intervention of ideals the West has brought to a culture believed to be stagnant can be seen in the tears that tremble just beneath the surface of the Muslim woman. The scene is as painful to see as the scripts of the forced skits a hundred years before.

Oh! Protective France

Oh! Hospitable France!

Noble land, where I felt free Under Christian skies to pray to our God⁵¹

These skits were an attempt to alter the mindset of Algerian girls and women as they were performed at graduation ceremonies in 1851 and 1852. However, after a hundred and thirty years of colonial occupation, Algeria won its independence from France in the four violent years that followed the Forum of Algiers where the unveiling ceremony occurred.⁵²

The colonial appropriation of women's rights is as old as the perception that a veils, *burqas*, and *chadors* are physical evidence of oppression rather than the manifestation of modesty. However, according to the Holy Koran, one of the first duties of a Muslim is "to comprehend the reasons for practices which are enjoined as absolute duties by God."⁵³ Essentially, this excerpt demands the physical response to the commandment of God, rather than illustrating through words and thoughts. *Purdah*, or partition is the Islamic tenet designed to protect women physically as well as their value systems which manifests in the actions of women such as veiling, covering, and existing separately.⁵⁴ The act of donning the burqa in Afghanistan is more or less a statement that the woman beneath has familial honor to protect, whereas women who do not would be mocked for attempting

to seclude themselves.⁵⁵ This cultural dynamic is often lost on Western observers who view these measures as symbols of a lack of status, rather than the protection of it.

In Nuristan, the deep valleys insulate the communities with unforgiving landscape, and offer greater measures of security. Blessed with relative safety, and empowered by a different but set of mores still similar to the *Pashtunwali*, the Nuristani women offer a historic window into the tribal place of a woman within an Afghan setting. While the men of a family follow flocks of sheep and goats from pastures set among the mountain tops, the women are left to life within the community, tending the farm fields and procuring the needs of the home. This results in some of the more fiercely independent women of the Afghan tribes, yet certainly still observe *purdah* within the village setting, and don the *burqa* when traveling to less secure frontiers.⁵⁶

The failed attempts to implement Western values in colonies did little to discourage the United States and England from quickly tying the issue of women's rights to the success of the Global War on Terrorism in an effort to find greater popular support. In a radio address shortly after the initial bombing campaign began, First Lady Laura Bush even went so far as to claim that "the brutal oppression of women is a central goal of the terrorists." A goal which she later claims, "they would like to impose on the rest of us."⁵⁷ Three days later, Cherie Blair, Prime Minister Tony Blair's wife, echoed similar sentiments in England.⁵⁸ However, the counter to these arguments exists in the unlikely Northwest Frontier Province outside the village of Chitral. The village lies just east of the volatile eastern Afghan provinces of Kunar and Nuristan where the fighting has been fierce enough to result in five Congressional Medals of Honor for American soldiers.⁵⁹ Likewise, Chitral lies just to the west of Swat Valley where multiple offensives have been launched to address the growing Tehrik-e Taliban in Pakistan insurgency.⁶⁰ Despite living in the eye of an Islamic storm, the Kalash tribe exists as it has for centuries before. The women roam not only uncovered, but greatly adorned with elaborate headdresses made of beads and sea shells set atop their exposed hair hanging in multiple braids.⁶¹ They practice ancient rituals to a pantheon of gods – publicly – and embrace their heritage bequeathed to them by their ancestors allegedly brought by Alexander the Great.⁶² Certainly the tribe is often referred to as the *kafir* Kalash, as if their name must be denoted by first calling them infidels; however, little tragedy has found them throughout their existence.⁶³ They have representation in the provincial government, though suffer a bit heavier taxation on goods, though there has been no invasions of their lands or large-scale violence directed against them.⁶⁴ However, the paranoia of the West cries out that the "central goal of the terrorists" is to export their oppression of women to "the rest of us." A point made all the more prudent by the revelation that Afghan women were not hiding mini-skirts beneath their *burqas*. In fact, over a decade since Mrs. Bush announced the West *freed* women, outsiders will still note that only rarely does a woman wander around villages outside of the main cities of Afghanistan devoid of her full-body cover – even in the Kingdom of Kabul it is often worn. The answer is simple: a woman's freedom is not tied to her cultural modesty, but to her representative authority within the political and legal landscape. Unfortunately, in this sense, the current administration in Afghanistan has obliterated women's rights to an inferior position of what they were nearly a hundred years before.

While it may seem counter to the mainstream portrayal of the Taliban, Mullah Abdul Salaam Zaeef, a founding member of the Taliban, claims that they were never against women's rights. He explains that the security situation at the time was not conducive for women to be allowed out of homes alone.⁶⁵ Under the tribal value of *namus* which is an interpretation of the Islamic tenet of *pardab*, or the protection of women, it would be unethical, if not sinful, to allow a woman into the wilds of instable security – particularly in a nation cited specifically for widespread rape multiple times by the Human Rights Watch.⁶⁶ There is no greater threat to a tribe or family's honor than the perception that they are unable to protect their women and children.⁶⁷ If a *qawm* cannot even protect their most sacred treasures from enemies, then lesser treasures must certainly be available for taking. Beyond, the immediate effects, any single event that possesses the power to strip an entire family or *qawm* of honor, will certainly have the second order effects of a tribal feud until the *badal* is satisfied and the honor is restored.⁶⁸ Set against a cultural dynamic where honor is the primary currency, and within the context of anarchic depravity within which the Taliban originally formed, an outsider can see how such protective measures for women were initially formed. Certainly, it is not forgivable – but neither is allowing a land to fall into such chaos that these measures seem sane to the people that live there. This is exactly what happened when Western Nations built these warlords, then abruptly stopped the funding and never produced a real reconstruction effort.⁶⁹

After the fall of the communist regime, Afghanistan was carved into sections for primary warlords, the largest chunk belonging to the Northern Alliance. The Northern Alliance marshaled by the great warrior philosopher, Ahmed Shah Massoud, was nominally led by Professor Burhanudin Rabbani, and believed to be the legitimate and recognized government of Afghanistan as they slaughtered thousands of Kabul's citizens while fighting Gulbuddin Hikmatyr of Hisb-i-Islami for control.⁷⁰ Amid this chaos, Northern Alliance appear and reappear on the Human Rights Watch's list for crimes against humanity – particularly, the indulgent rape, mass murder, and looting of its citizens in Kabul.

Though the Taliban began as a way for the tribal and religious community to address a few specific warlords whose men were raping women in the Khandahar area, it was this complete chaos that resulted in requests from other districts and eventually other provinces to bring Shari'a to turbulent communities.⁷¹ It was a move that many, even Clinton's Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, Robin Raphel, hoped would stabilize Afghanistan as she asked the U.N. not to isolate the Emirate.⁷² It was only the perception of women's mistreatment that caused the Western Nations to retract even suggested support to Taliban.⁷³ But it was this fear of women's abuse that resulted in the initial extremity of *namus* under the Taliban's reign which grew more exaggerated as the organization lost touch with the population. Despite the grievances many Western Nations had with the national attitude toward women in the latter part of the Taliban's reign, nothing has been more paramount to the reversal of women's rights in Afghanistan than those perpetuated by the NATO-backed Karzai administration. With the Shia Family Law in 2009, Mr. Karzai governed the sexual habits of Shiite Muslim women as well as outlined the parameters and conditions of their 'freedom', effectively making them the physical property of their husbands. Not only is it illegal for a Shiite woman to leave her home without her husband's approval, it is illegal for her to withhold sexual relations from

him. The law even went on to specify that if the woman is sick, she still must perform her sexual duties at least every four days.⁷⁴ This legalization of sexual slavery effectively reverses the progress of King Amanullah's 1919 abolishment of slavery and 1920 abolishment of forced labor.⁷⁵ Western nations merely wagged their finger at the Karzai administration before doubling-down on the money pouring into Afghanistan.⁷⁶ Unfazed by hollow diplomatic threats, a year later Karzai signed the Personal Status Law for Shiite Muslims which only served to solidify the Shia Family Law.⁷⁷ At the height of the Afghan Emirate's restrictions of women, the intention was at least to protect them, whereas Karzai, who was very much a part of the Northern Alliance, plainly exhibits his contempt of women with this legalization of spousal rape.

Seekers of Truth

Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef recounts in depth in his autobiography, *My Life with the Taliban*, the importance that education played throughout his organization's struggle against the Soviet occupation, and systematically at the birth of the Taliban movement.⁷⁸ The term *Taliban*, after all, translates to students, or seekers of truth. However, that history was largely lost when the Emirate captured Kabul, one of their first orders of business was closing schools for girls, though as Robin Raphel mentioned in her press conference on South Asian affairs shortly after, there were not many left after the seventeen years of war.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, the re-establishment of education has been a stated-aim of the West since the beginning of the conflict,⁸⁰ and still exists on USAID's list of objectives right next to "Gender Participation."⁸¹ While it is not shocking that it is an ongoing endeavor, it is surprising that the idea pervades that the Taliban do not value education. While the Taliban did initially close schools for girls, Mullah Abdul Salam Zaeef claimed in an interview with Al Jazeera that the Taliban never *opposed* them, and their closure was a judgment based on the factors of instability and questionable state of security.⁸² While many may view this as an apologist's claim, recent activity suggests its merit.

Security is not an issue in many of the more isolated valleys and districts where NATO forces typically cannot logistically support missions and the resistance is too unforgiving. The eastern province of Kunar is such a location with deep valleys well off the beaten path. As a result, it has not received much assistance for their isolated population in the way of education. They have exhausted foreign aid and help from nongovernment organizations, but logistically there is still much to do. When local Taliban noticed teenage girls discontinuing their education to preserve their modesty, the unlikely advocates approached the Provincial Education Director, Sayed Jamaluddin Hassani, to find more female teachers or men older than fifty to stem the flow of drop outs. Hassani went on to attest that the education program was very active due in large part because of the Taliban. The Kunar Taliban issued a statement supporting all school and welfare incentives administered through the National Solidarity program, and backed it by financially supporting a school in Chogam. However, the group did not stop here. They continued to monitor the education programs in all boys' and girls' schools located in regions beyond the government's control. Hassani went on to say that the Taliban resolves any conflicts as they arise, and not a single school, student or staff member has been harmed in 10 years within the province.⁸³ While this may

seem an isolated or provincial occurrence, it was the Islamic Emirate's leader, Mullah Omar, who initially opened discussions with Maulana Faizullah after the Swat School closure in January 2009. While he may or may not have been the sole reason Maulana Faizullah reversed his decision, he certainly made his intent public, though it never seemed to reach mainstream media outlets.⁸⁴ While these are bold moves for the Emirate, they do not necessarily illustrate besting the Karzai administration in education, but they certainly counter the popular assumption that the organization is *against* education. Zaeef's statements may be explained, but they can also be refuted by the Taliban's actions witnessed by the discerning public; however, the recent strides of the Emirate could potentially highlight an organization more attuned with the population it hopes to openly govern in the pending future by simply recovering GIROA's failures.

The Future of Terrorism

Of course there are stacks of evidence for the Taliban's stance on administration, education, and women's rights, but the primary concern of Western citizens is typically a question of terrorism. For this, there is no evidence – only estimation. It would not seem likely that systemic support of inter-regional terrorism would ever be hoisted out of the wreckage of Afghanistan in the foreseeable future. While Pakistan may enjoy the strategic depth of a firm alliance with Afghanistan, and potentially utilize it to train jihadists for attacks against India, it is unlikely that terrorism, as the West understands it, will arrive on European and American doorsteps with a postmark from Afghanistan. After the first attack against a Western nation believed to be staged out of Afghanistan resulted in over a decade of war, billions in bombings, and an incalculable human cost, it is difficult to surmise that such an event would ever occur again. Should the brand-name of Al Qaeda return with heavy consolidation in Afghanistan, it would only draw drone strikes as seen in Pakistan and Yemen. It would be much more probable to foresee a tacit alliance with the Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI), and a hospitable welcome for Tehrik-e Taliban as the tangible limits of international terrorism. As for the miscellaneous terror organizations that once trained in Afghanistan's camps, the west would do well to remember that the Filipino terrorist organization is named Abu Sayyaf, or Sons of Sayyaf, in honor of Professor Rasul Sayyaf: the man who first invited Osama bin Laden to Afghanistan from Sudan.⁸⁵ He is the man who mentored Khalid Sheik Mohammed, the planner of the 9/11 terror attack.⁸⁶ He is a former Northern Alliance commander whose specific faction is named in Human Rights Watch for rape and pillaging of Hazara neighborhoods in Kabul.⁸⁷ But more than the carnage he has orchestrated, Rasul Sayyaf is also the senior Member of Parliament in the NATO-backed Karzai administration. Afghanistan is not currently any less of a terrorist hotbed with Al Qaeda operating within its borders, radicals in power, education in shambles, economy in foreign-destitution and women's rights in remission. The only difference now, is the central government is funded by Western nations rather than Gulf States.

Bridging the Gap

Afghanistan could be a nation that would be recognizable to all Afghans, not just exiles. It could be an Afghanistan that exists independently – beyond the welfare of the international community and embody the independent spirit of the tribesmen that live there. As men like Haji Zahir succumb to

old age, Afghanistan will lose not just the men that defeated the Soviets, but the last men to have laid eyes on their country not at war. These are the last men to work and raise a family without the daily sounds of explosions or gunfire. They are the men that understand the depths of tribal community and the wisdom of governance. And as their tempered last breaths dissipate in the arid mountain air, so will the collective experience of centuries of tribal governance.

The men left to hoist the withered bodies wrapped in white sheets and parade them on their shoulders through the dusty village roads to the hard scrabble graveyards are the generation that was born into war and has lived in it ever since. These are the boys raised in refugee camps and reared in tribes fractured by political parties, wrecked in civil wars, and relegated to novelty under the Karzai administration. These are the boys that found order in the madrassas and grew into the Taliban. However, as the insurgency forced the Taliban to abandon their dominant positions, and gray begins to pepper their beards, they have resurfaced working through the tribes. Finding the function of the old way, but interpreted in an effective way. No longer are they a function to forcibly control the population, but reliant on them for support – a support that is won through outreach, diplomacy, and governance.

Afghanistan stands on the cusp of a decision. They can bury the elders and ignore their ways as the Karzai government spirals deeper into corruption, or they can move forward while embracing the past and preserve the honor of women, the dignity of the tribes, and the education of their young. While the Karzai government would rather collapse the nation's connection to the dead and the past they represent, the Islamic Emirate stands positioned to fortify the gap between Islam and Tribe like trusses on a bridge crossing over decades of war-torn earth. This bridge may not lead the Afghan people into the most advanced nation of the twenty-first century or the most progressive, but perhaps it will be the most peaceful Afghanistan that has been seen in the last decades.

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