

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1302
Land:	Afghanistan
Kilde:	Foreign Policy
Titel:	As Taliban Expand Control, Concerns About Forced Marriage and Sex Slavery Rise
Udgivet:	23. juli 2021
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	19. april 2022

DISPATCH

As Taliban Expand Control, Concerns About Forced Marriage and Sex Slavery Rise

In some Afghan towns, women are fleeing ahead of insurgent takeovers.

JULY 23, 2021, 4:13 PM

By **Lynne O'Donnell**, a columnist at *Foreign Policy* and an Australian journalist and author.

BAMIYAN, Afghanistan—When Taliban gunmen stormed into a remote Afghan district this month, they terrorized residents and looted local businesses, and then they did something even more troubling: The group demanded the names and ages of girls and women they said would be rounded up and married off to their young fighters.

Leaving Afghanistan

What happens to the country and its people after the forever war ends?

MORE ON THIS TOPIC

According to people in Saighan district, in the central highlands of Bamiyan province, the insurgents beat some men who tried to resist and forced some residents to show them closets of clothing to determine the ages of the girls and women who lived there. Among the women whose names they took down were widows of men killed fighting with the Afghan military against the insurgency.

Terrified women packed what they could, hired cars and goods carts, or simply walked to escape what some described as their worst nightmare—being kidnapped and forced into sex slavery by the Taliban.

“When the local people were informed of this, everyone got their women out of Saighan, especially the young girls, they were the first to be evacuated,” said Baes Sakhizada, a 28-year-old math teacher. He said he was beaten by Taliban gunmen when he closed the doors to his house, fearing the insurgents would plant mines inside.

Some women managed to escape to other provinces, where they remain for now, while others went to nearby villages. Among those who have returned are Baes Sakhizada’s wife of two months, 24-year-old Nafisa Sakhizada, who fled to Kabul along with his sister Basira, 30, and a cousin, Tamanna, 19, who did not give their surnames. During the 150-mile journey, they were stopped frequently at Taliban checkpoints. They returned to Saighan recently.

Baes Sakhizada shows a photo on his phone of a Taliban commander during an interview in Saighan district on July 21 .

Sitting on cushions in the room the Sakhizadas share in the family home not far from the town's main street, their faces covered but for the eyes, the women described the terror and dread they felt as the militants ransacked and looted homes and businesses—and announced their plans for the women.

Rumors have circulated in recent months of Taliban excesses and atrocities in districts they have taken during an aggressive advance across the country. The insurgents have raised their white flag over about a third of Afghanistan's districts, as state security forces have struggled under poor leadership and a lack of strategy to halt the Taliban's progress.

In Bamiyan province, where there is no Afghan army presence, militarized police have worked with so-called citizen uprising militias to defeat the Taliban in two districts—Saighan and Kahmard. Provincial Gov. Mohammad Tahir Zohair said the insurgents have been pushed 60 to 100 miles over the mountains and out of Bamiyan province.

A man shops in Saighan district on July 21, three days after the Taliban's retreat.

A soldier sits at the back of a police vehicle on its way from Bamiyan city to Saighan district on July 21.

In a speech at a Bamiyan mosque to mark the Eid al-Adha festival, Zohair described the plan to abduct and marry women as a “dangerous and cruel revenge on the wives and widows of the security forces who have fought for you.”

The insurgents overran Saighan on July 14, holding it for four days before being forced into retreat by local militias in a fierce two-hour firefight, according to Zohair, police, and residents. Security forces were late to the scene, as the Taliban had mined the road leading to the district center.

During those four days, the Taliban ordered women to remain in their homes, looted shops and fuel depots, searched for government employees, ransacked homes for weapons, stole food and livestock under the pretense of a “religious tax,” and imposed a poll tax of 8,000 afghanis, about \$100, for every resident of the district.

Most terrifying for the families of Saighan was the order, issued from the local mosques, to make lists of all young women and widows. The insurgents also demanded videos of local men who had joined the national armed forces, whether they were still

serving or had been killed in action—along with the names of their wives.

Tamanna, seen during an interview in Saighan district on July 21, said she fears the Taliban will return and try to round up local women again.

The Taliban follow an extremely conservative Islamic ideology that regards women as “*kaniz*,” or commodities, and therefore as “*qhanimat*,” spoils of war, said Omar Sadr, a professor of political science at the American University of Afghanistan. “It has happened before, in the 1990s when Kabul and places in the north fell—they abducted women and forced them to marry their rank and file,” he said.

“Once jihadists such as the Taliban capture territory, whatever property is there, their ideology allows them to claim and own it as Qhanimat (spoils of war). This includes the women, they don’t even have to marry them, it is a form of sex slavery,” he said. He said it was also a form of “ethnic cleansing,” as the predominantly Pashtun culture of the Taliban would ultimately dilute the gene pools of other ethnicities by subsuming the women into Pashtun society.

The insurgents' military victories in recent months have exacerbated concerns that whatever advances were made in women's rights over the past 20 years would quickly recede across the country.

Saighan is one of eight districts in Bamiyan province, known for the huge Buddha statues destroyed by the Taliban in March 2001, when they held power throughout most of the country. They were overthrown later that year, after the 9/11 attacks, carried out by al Qaeda, which at that time was being harbored by the Taliban regime. Leaders escaped over the eastern border into Pakistan, where they have enjoyed sanctuary and support ever since.

Cradled in a fertile valley in the Hindu Kush, Saighan has a population of around 30,000 people, with ethnic Tajiks dominating the district center, running shops and businesses, and Hazaras in the villages, growing wheat and fruit, and raising livestock.

Men eat ice cream at a shop in Saighan district on July 21.

A farmer carries wheat in Saighan district on July 21.

Baes Sakhizada, the math teacher, said some of the insurgents who entered the district wouldn't communicate in Dari, the local language. The leaders covered their faces and did not speak to any residents, only directing others. They commandeered the district's only excavator to dig their positions.

Nafisa Sakhizada said she and other women in the household fled Saighan as soon as they heard the Taliban were coming and that local forces had pulled back. She said she stayed in a local village for a night, until word came that the Taliban had set up commissions to complete specific tasks—one of which was tracking down marriageable girls and women.

She said they rented a car and drove into neighboring Maydan Wardak province, only to get stuck in a traffic jam of vehicles also fleeing the Taliban advance. "So we got out of the car and put our luggage in wheelbarrows, and pushed them," she said. "It was really crowded and there was a lot of dust and so many people, it was terrible."

Her sister-in-law Basira also joined the exodus, she said, after the district governor ordered the local police not to resist the Taliban advance and then later to withdraw. This so-called tactical retreat deployed by the military leadership until recent

changes at the top has enabled the Taliban to roll over districts across the country.

Men and boys stand in the street in Saighan district on July 21.

“All of the women in our family left,” she said, after word went around that women and girls would be rounded up for forced marriage. Her cousin Tamanna said she remains terrified that the Taliban will return and once again try to round up the women. She and other young women in the district have nightmares about it, she said.

Zohair, the newly reappointed governor, arrived back at his post earlier this month after a year serving as a minister in Kabul. He ordered an offensive stance by police and the uprising citizen militias, which saw the two districts, Saighan and Kahmard, retaken from the insurgents within days.

Zohair said the Taliban had also been forcing girls and women into marriage in other parts of the country, naming Takhar and

Badakhshan in the north where the insurgents had surrounded the capital cities after overrunning districts in both provinces.

“The Taliban are suppressors and murderers, why run away from them. Fight, or die or kill them,” he said in his Eid speech, to rousing shouts of “God is great.”

Lynne O'Donnell is a columnist at *Foreign Policy* and an Australian journalist and author. She was the Afghanistan bureau chief for Agence France-Presse and the Associated Press between 2009 and 2017.