

# Negotiating with the Taliban??

## How settling with the Taliban puts women at risk

The Taliban pounded on the door just before midnight, demanding that Aisha, 18, be punished for running away from her husband's house. They dragged her to a mountain

clearing near her village in the southern Afghan province of Uruzgan, ignoring her protests that her in-laws had been abusive, that she had no choice but to escape. Shivering in the cold air and blinded by the flashlights trained on her by her husband's family, she faced her spouse and accuser. Her in-laws treated her like a slave, Aisha pleaded.

They beat her. If she hadn't run away, she would have died. Her judge, a local Taliban commander, was unmoved. Later, he would tell Aisha's uncle that she had to be made an example of lest other girls in the village try to do the same thing. The commander gave his

verdict, and men moved in to deliver the punishment. Aisha's brother-in-law held her down while her husband pulled out a knife. First he sliced off her ears.

Afghanistan. It happened last year. Now hidden in a secret women's shelter in the relative safety of Kabul, where she was taken after receiving care from

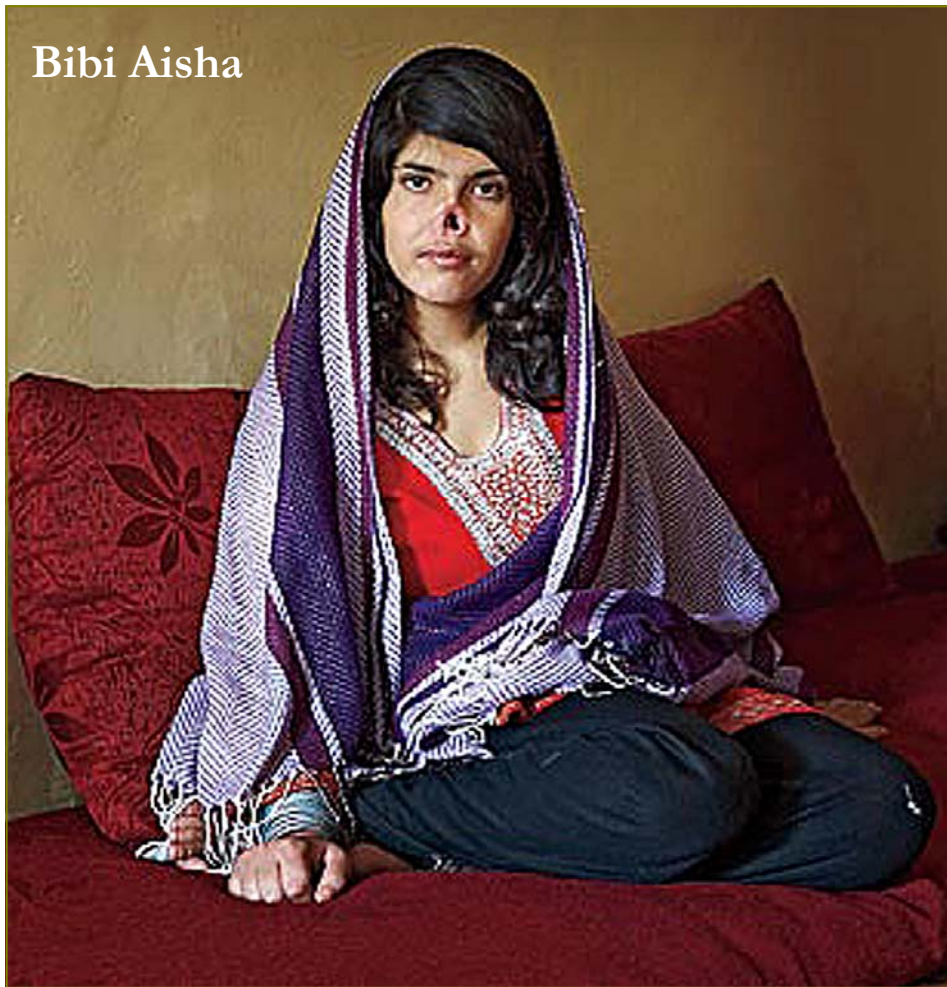
U.S. forces, Aisha recounts her tale in a monotone, her eyes flat and distant. She listens obsessively to the news on a small radio that she keeps by her side. Talk that the Afghan government is considering some kind of political accommodation with the Taliban is the only thing that elicits an emotional response. "They are the people that did this to me," she says, touching the jagged bridge of scarred flesh

and bone that frames the gaping hole in an otherwise beautiful face. "How can we reconcile with them?"

### Stepping Out

When the U.S. and its allies went to war in Afghanistan in 2001

Bibi Aisha



Then he started on her nose. Aisha passed out from the pain but awoke soon after, choking on her own blood. The men had left her on the mountainside to die.

This didn't happen 10 years ago, when the Taliban ruled

with the aim of removing the safe haven that the Taliban had provided for al-Qaeda, it was widely hoped that the women of the country would be liberated from a regime that denied them education and jobs, forced them indoors and violently punished them for infractions of a strict interpretation of Islamic law. Under the Taliban, who ruled

Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, women accused of adultery were stoned to death; those who flashed a bare ankle from under the shroud of a burqa were whipped. Koofi remembers being beaten on the street for forgetting to remove the polish from her nails after her wedding. “We were not even allowed to laugh out loud,” she says. ...

It wasn't always so. Kabul 40 years ago was considered the playground of Central Asia, a city where girls wore jeans to the university and fashionable

women went to parties sporting Chanel miniskirts. These days the streets of Kabul once again echo with the laughter of girls on their way to school, dressed in uniforms

of black coats and white headscarves. Women have rejoined the workforce and can sign up for the police and the army. Article 83 of the constitution mandates that at least 25% of parliamentary seats go to female representatives. ...

During Taliban times, women's voices were banned from the

that Afghanistan's friends overseas are tiring of its dysfunctional ways. “I think it is possible to make things better if the international community supports good governance,” says Koofi, “but they are too focused on an exit strategy. They want a quick solution.”

For Afghanistan's women, an early withdrawal of international forces could be disastrous. An Afghan refugee who grew up in

Canada, Mozhdah Jamalzadah recently returned home to launch an Oprah-style talk show, which has become wildly popular. Jamalzadah has been able to subtly introduce questions of women's rights into the program without provoking the ire of religious conservatives. “If I go into it directly,” she says, “there will be a backlash. But if I talk about abuse, which is against the Koran, and then talk about divorce, which is permitted, I am educating both men and women, and hopefully no one notices.” Jamalzadah says her audience is increasingly receptive to her message, but she knows that in a deeply traditional

society, it will take time to percolate. If the government becomes any more conservative because of an accommodation with the Taliban, she says, “my program will be the first to go.”



radio, and TV was forbidden, but last month a female anchor interviewed a former Taliban leader on a national broadcast. Under the Taliban, Robina

# Afghan couple stoned by Taliban for adultery

KUNDUZ, Afghanistan (Reuters) – A man and woman were publicly stoned to death by the Taliban in Afghanistan's once-peaceful north over an alleged love affair, a provincial government official said on Monday.

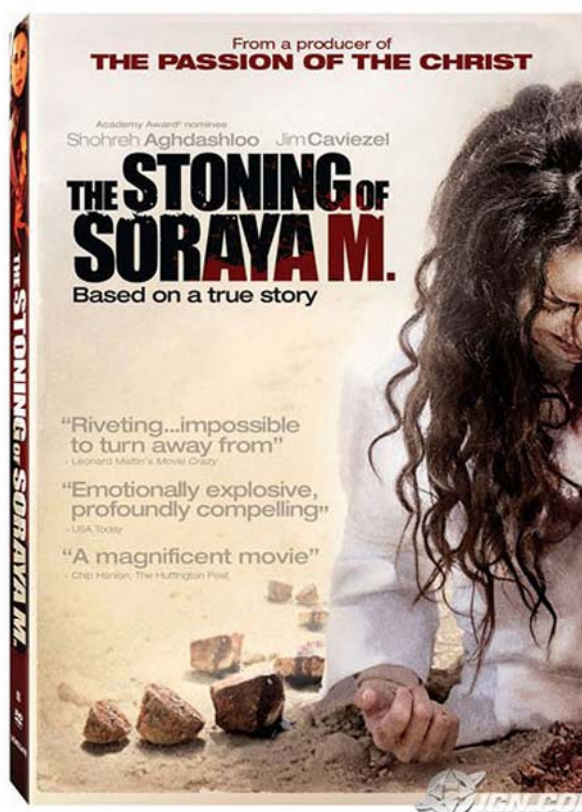
If confirmed, Sunday's executions in Kunduz province would be the first of their kind by the Taliban in the area and follow a call last week by Afghan clerics for a return to sharia and capital punishments carried out under the Islamic law.

They also come a week after officials said the Islamist militants publicly flogged and executed a woman accused of adultery in northwestern Badghis province.

"The two were stoned to death in a bazaar of Dasht-e Archi district on the accusation of committing the act of adultery," said Mohammad Omar, the governor of Kunduz.

The Taliban arrested the two, who were each engaged to be married to other people, at the request of their families after they tried to elope, said district police chief Hameed Agha.

The hardline Islamists, who drew international criticism for such punishments when they ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, have distanced themselves from the incident in Badghis.



A spokesman for the group said on Monday he was not aware of the Kunduz incident.

Sharia prescribes punishments such as stonings, lashings, amputations and execution. A gathering of clerics, meeting last week to discuss reconciliation with the Taliban, expressed support for such punishments, known as "hodud."

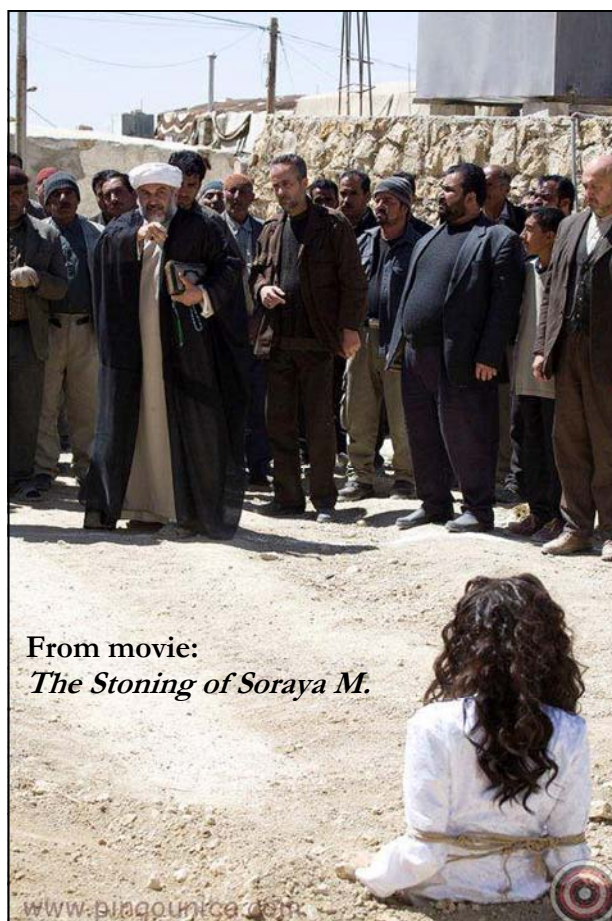
Some Afghans still refer to Taliban courts for settling disputes, viewing government bodies as corrupt or unreliable.

Despite the presence of more than 140,000 foreign troops, backed by 300,000 Afghan soldiers and police, the Taliban have managed to spread beyond their traditional strongholds in the south into formerly peaceful areas like Kunduz.

On Monday, a spokesman for NATO-led forces criticized the Taliban for carrying out what he said were acts of indiscriminate violence against ordinary Afghans. "They have increased acts of violence and repression against innocent Afghans," Brigadier General Josef Blotz told reporters.

"The insurgents have clearly given up winning over the population, knowing that they don't have an appealing vision for the people."

A U.N. report last week showed civilian casualties had risen by 31 percent over the first six months of 2010, with 1,271 killed, and that the Taliban and other insurgents were responsible for 76 percent of casualties.



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