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The Vulnerability of Women's Rights in Afghanistan

Forty years ago Afghanistan's capital city, Kabul, was, "considered the playground of Central Asia, a city where girls wore jeans to the university and fashionable women went to parties sporting their Chanel miniskirts" (Baker 4). Today Afghan women are struggling to be given permission to walk down the street without a man by their side, receive any sort of education, and to flash their ankle without being whipped by the Taliban as punishment, (Baker 4). However, women's rights have improved a significant amount in the past eight years when a bill was passed stating that it was mandatory for women to represent twenty five percent of Afghanistan's parliaments in 2006, (MDGD 1-10). In 1990 only three point seven percent of parliament was represented by women compared to the twenty seven point seven percent today, (MDGD 1-10). In these past few years women's rights in Afghanistan have reached a wartime high; however, these rights are extremely vulnerable and could be taken away from the nation at any point because of the presence of the Taliban and Islamic Law in Afghanistan's government, the U.S's drawdown of their troops and their avoidance of long term war solutions, and the existing resentment women have against Afghanistan for the cruelty that has been inflicted upon them during the past four decades (Baker 1-8).

As women's rights have developed in Afghanistan opportunities for the Taliban and Islamic Law to dominate these rights have also developed. Thus the recent increase of women's rights are revocable at any point if a Taliban take over occurs in the nation. An example of how the rights of women can be taken away from them at any point is written in Article Three of the Constitutions and Laws of Afghanistan that holds that no law may contravene the principles of Sharia, or Islamic Law (Baker 5). Islamic Law states there should be complementarianism, a significant difference between the roles of men and women (Nieuwkerk 200). Women are expected to ask their father or husband permission to carry out daily activities under this law; thus, men are thought of the leaders of their households and the women are seen as the accessories when Islamic Law is enforced, (Oosterum 4-5). Therefore, if Article Three of the constitution were to become enforced by the Afghan government then women's rights could be taken away without hesitation. Women's rights in Afghanistan had reached their peak of vulnerability after The Taliban was overthrown and Ten Dollar Talibs were introduced to the nation as low level insurgents, (Baker 4). They were said to have been known to fight for cash or local grievances, (Baker 4). These accommodations are one of Afghanistan's first attempts to reintegrate the Taliban back into parliament since their over throw in 2001, (Baker 4). The government has given the Taliban opportunities to be eligible for the training and employment paid for by international donors without needing to account for their actions through the Talibs, (Baker 4). The empowered women of Afghanistan have protested the Ten Dollar Talibs; however, they do not have the authority, power, or followers to create change in their government. Parliamentarian Sabrina Saqib has expressed her fears of the Taliban re-entering parliament: “I am worried that the day that the so-called moderate Taliban can sit in parliament, we will lose our rights,” she says. “Because it is not just the Taliban that are against women’s

rights; there are many men who are against them as well,”” (Baker 5). Saqib’s fears were justified in the summer of 2009 when a bill was passed involving a husband’s rights in a Shi’ite family:

“Saqib voted against a bill that authorized husbands in Shi’ite families to withhold money and food from wives who refuse to provide sex, limited inheritance and custody of children in the case of divorce and denied women freedom of movement without permission from their families.” (Baker 5)

This bill exemplifies the control that the Afghan government has over their nation’s women and women’s rights; thus, it proves Afghanistan’s ability to rid women of their new rights which they have just recently received over the past decade.

In order for there to be an ending to the Afghanistan War that empowers women and creates peace between President Hamid Karzai’s government, the Taliban, and the Afghan people, long term peace solutions need to be created and executed by the involved parties, (Baker 6). It is thought that these peaceful solutions could take ten to fifteen years to create; however international war participants are looking for quick solutions to occur even though these solutions would result in Afghan women’s rights being sacrificed, (Baker 7). When the U.S and their allies had entered the Afghanistan War in 2001 “it was widely hoped that the women of the country would be liberated from a regime that denied them educations and jobs,” (Baker 4). However, only small improvements had been made regarding the rights of women in Afghanistan before President Obama of the United States had announced the beginning of a drawdown of the U.S. troops from Afghanistan in 2011, (Baker 3). This drawdown was Obama’s quick solution to the war, which he was forced to make to secure the safety of his troops. His

decision could result in detrimental consequences for the Afghan people, specifically for women. A former Deputy Speaker of Afghanistan's parliament had commented on Obama's withdrawal of troops and stated that he feared that women's rights would become the sacrifice that would be made in order to achieve a peaceful ending to the Afghanistan War, (Baker 3). As a result of Obama initiating the withdrawal of his troops, The Taliban felt that they had the upper hand in the war. This has led them to begin dismantling the few women's rights that had been achieved after their reign had ended in 2001, (Baker 6). They had begun their dismantlement through their, "Threats in the night," which began in 2010 (Baker 6). The Taliban had begun sending night letters to women in the south of Afghanistan who were employed, and these letters degraded women and were extremely graphic:

"[Name], you are working with the government. We Taliban warn you to stop working for the government otherwise we will take your life away. We will kill you in such a harsh way that no woman has so far been killed in that manner. This will be a good lesson for those women like you who are working. The money you receive is haram (forbidden under Islam) and coming from the infidels. The choice is now with you." (Ebadi 1)

It is clear that the rushed withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan had become an opportunity for the Taliban to regain the control that they had lost during the Americans' stay through death threats to the Afghan people, in particular women. Therefore, long term solutions involving changes in The Taliban and Islamic Law had become the only way to end the war peacefully, and to ensure the security of women's rights in Afghanistan.

Mental, physical and verbal abuse had become daily occurrences for women living in Afghanistan during the Taliban's rule, (from 1996 to 2001), and these types of abuse still occur in the nation today as forms of punishment for outspoken women who believe that they have more rights than their superiors say they do, (Baker 1). Afghan women are not allowed to dispute their husbands actions under any circumstances and divorces are very rare; therefore, once a woman is given to her husband by her father she is his property, (Oosterom). Today many women are unable to recover from their abusive pasts and do not have faith in their newly founded rights and The Islamic State of Afghanistan, (Oosterom 3-4). An example of this resentment began in 2009 when an eighteen year old girl named, Aisha, was punished for running away from her husband and abusive in-laws, (Baker 1). Aisha believed that if she has stayed with her husband she would have been killed by her in-laws, (Baker 1). When she was caught by the Taliban she was taken to a mountain clearing in the southern Afghan province of Uruzgan:

“Aisha's brother-in-law held her down while her husband pulled out a knife. First he sliced off her ears. 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,” (Baker 1)

Aisha had survived her horrific punishment and lives in a secret women's shelter in the reasonably safe city of Kabul, (Baker 1). As a result of her punishment, Aisha has become numb to her surroundings now and the only topic that will evoke any sort of emotion in her is the Afghan government's consideration to have political accommodation with the Taliban: “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?”

(Baker 1). On November 25th 2013 it seemed as though the reconciliation had furthered developed between The Taliban and the Afghan government, (Graham-Harrison 1). That day a report was published speaking about the new addition to a draft revision of Afghanistan's penal code that was drawn up by the ministry of justice, (Graham-Harrison,1). The new addition to the penal code was the public stoning of female, married adulterers, and floggings of unmarried offenders as forms of punishments for their actions, (Graham-Harrison 1). This addition to Afghanistan's penal code had solidified the theory that women's rights in Afghanistan are not permanent. The Taliban have created a divided that cannot be destroyed between their nation's women and themselves. This divide has forced the women to resent anyone who supports The Taliban; therefore, The Taliban see women as being unappreciative for any rights that they have been given. The Taliban are constantly trying to remind their women who the real leaders of Afghanistan are, which is causing women's rights to progress at a slow and vulnerable pace, (Oosterum).

The Islamic State of Afghanistan has constructed a nation that holds women's rights in the palms of their parliament's hands. Throughout the past decade slow improvements involving the rights of women have been made; however, these improvements could be abolished at any point in time a result of various situations. The most likely of these situations that could take away the rights of Afghan women is the empowerment of The Taliban as they reintegrate into the nation's parliament and the enforcement of Islamic Laws, the aftermath of U.S's decision to withdraw their troops from the country in 2011, and the existing resentment women have against Afghanistan for the cruelty that has been inflicted upon them during the past four decades. Compromises and solutions need to be created by Afghanistan's government in order for there to

be a peaceful ending to the war and for their nation to be a place where women's rights are respected and considered by all levels of society. (1984 words)

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