

Canaries in the Mines

The creation of American policy towards Afghan women after 9/11



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Save the women, save the world

Good morning. I'm Laura Bush, and I'm delivering this week's radio address to kick off a world-wide effort to focus on the brutality against women and children by the al-Qaida terrorist network and the regime it supports in Afghanistan, the Taliban. That regime is now in retreat across much of the country, and the people of Afghanistan -- especially women -- are rejoicing. Afghan women know, through hard experience, what the rest of the world is discovering: The brutal oppression of women is a central goal of the terrorists.

-- Laura Bush, National Radio Address, 17 November 2001¹

In a radio address held only two months after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Laura Bush addressed an aspect of terrorism that had been overlooked: brutality against women and children. She stated that oppression of women in Afghanistan was one of the primary aims of the terrorists. Just after the invasion in Afghanistan started, the First Lady offered an extra argument for the invasion of Afghanistan besides the War on Terror. As Laura Bush concluded in the same broadcast: "The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women."²

Just two days before the radio address by the First Lady, the Afghan Women and Children's Relief Act was passed by the Senate. On December 12, 2001, President Bush signed the act. In a speech at the Nation Women's Museum in Arts in Washington D.C. he backed his signature with the following words:

The central goal of the terrorists is the brutal oppression of women -- and not only the women of Afghanistan. The terrorists who help rule Afghanistan are found in dozens and dozens of

¹ Laura Bush, 'Radio Address by Ms. Bush,' The White House, Washington D.C.: November 17, 2001. <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/>.

² Ibid.

countries around the world. And that is the reason this great nation, with our friends and allies, will not rest until we bring them all to justice.³

The signing of the act and the two speeches were connected; Afghan women had become a priority for the Bush administration in December 2001. The two speeches by the presidential couple illustrated their idea that Islamic terrorists saw women's oppression as of their central goals. According to this White House rhetoric – which likely came from the same speechwriters -- the War on Terror was equal to a fight for the freedom of women. Why did the Bush administration choose this approach to a conflict that at first glance had little to do with oppression of women in Afghanistan? Were the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the Taliban's unwillingness to give up the brain behind attacks not the catalyzing reasons for the American invasion? Why the sudden attention for the Afghan women?

This essay analyses this attention by examining the rhetorical approaches to women's issues in the Afghan armed conflict. The essay focusses on public rhetoric since this is the manner in which an administration presents and legitimizes its policy, and tries to connect its policies to the feelings of the voters. I will look specifically at the American war against the Taliban instigated after the Al Qaeda attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. In the case of the war in Afghanistan, the focus on gender in public rhetoric has implications for the perception of the mission, both for the Americans and the Afghans themselves. A focus on gender - even if it appeared to be just in rhetoric - gave the mission a specific appearance. The story told by the government created an image of the enemy; the troops; the goals of the mission and offered an explanation why fighting is actually needed.

The essay will combine Foreign Relations and Gender Studies, two academic disciplines that have slowly explored its common ground in the past decades. In 1986, Historian Joan Scott cleared the field for the use of gender in historical analysis by her article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis".⁴ With contemporary feminist scholarship in mind she states that "gender did not refer to fixed biological differences between men and women but to socially-determined symbols, norms and identities."⁵ Scott goes on to say that gender, just as race or class, is a useful analytical tool to understand history, certainly in reconstructing the formation of power and how that power has been "conceived, legitimated and criticized."⁶ Similarly, Emily S. Rosenberg explored the field for a gender-based analysis in the field of Foreign Relations. In her 1991 article 'Gender: A Round Table; Explaining History of American Foreign Relations,'⁷ she describes four different approaches of the importance of gender studies in foreign relations. The first way is exceptional women, the second the influence of "women's work" done by missionaries, nurses, peace activists or other typical female jobs. Third

³ George W. Bush, 'Remarks at the Signing Ceremony for Afghan Women and Children Relief Act of 2001,' The National Women's Museum in the Arts, Washington, D.C.: December 12, 2001. <http://www.state.gov/>.

⁴ Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," 1053-1075.

⁵ Hoganson, "What's Gender Got to Do with It? Gender History as Foreign Relations History," 304.

⁶ Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," 1073.

⁷ Rosenberg, "Gender. A Round Table: Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations," 116-120.

Rosenberg mentions "discourses related to gender, that is, to analyze how gendered imaginary has legitimated international hierarchies by making them seem natural."⁸ Finally she looks at the influence of women in international development on the study on gender. Looking at these four approaches, the last two would be the most useful to apply to my research. The third because it applies to how the war on terror has been depicted or even legitimized within a focus on gender, the last because of the influence of a focus on gender on foreign policy.

In her work *Bananas, Beaches and Bases* (1989) Cynthia Enloe explains, like Scott and Rosenberg, that women cannot simply be overlooked when studying foreign relations. "Ignoring women on the landscape of international politics perpetuates the notion that certain power relations are merely a matter of taste and culture. Paying serious attention to women can expose how much power it takes to maintain the international political system in its present form."⁹ Enloe goes on to explain that although the world of international relations is predominantly male, certainly in the case of war or an intervention. But we should not forget that women like Margaret Thatcher and Jeanne Kirkpatrick have played a role in foreign relations. Those women understand the male world they work in and can even use their "state of office to foment international conflict, [so] that conflict looks less man-made, more people-made, and thus more legitimate and harder to reverse."¹⁰ In my opinion this also goes for the rhetoric used by the Bush government. When publicly focusing on the position of Afghan women during American intervention in Afghanistan, it became more of a people centered conflict, less an intervention to punish the bad terrorists. The enemy got the cruel face of a wife beater and the Americans the image of the one that saved the women; a picture that was easier to grasp than the difficult story of the terrorists. But what is new in this case, is that the Americans created a narrative that was not based upon cultural values or traditions, but on the access Afghan women had to work, health care and education. This point of view was consistent with the larger story the Bush government told on Afghanistan, but it can be questioned if it was beneficial for the Afghan women.

The above-mentioned comments by the presidential couple illustrate that the War on Terror can be seen as a specific example of the way gender is used in rhetoric to legitimize war efforts. When discussing the War on Terror, academics tend to focus on states, states men, terrorist organizations, or in short, a political approach is favored to a more cultural one. Enloe's perspective, however, suggests that this gendered approach to the American mission in Afghanistan has shaped the image of that mission. By saving the Afghan women the war got a humanitarian face. In one of the first attempts to include gender into the discussion on the War on Terror, Krista Hunt and Kim Rygiel mention that "[w]omen, when and if they appear, are typically represented as being acted upon than as actors themselves."¹¹ I agree with them that approaches like those above need to be studied more. "Without critical feminist scholarship, non-feminist commentators and analysis on the war on terror miss the

⁸ Hoganson, "What's Gender Got to Do with It?" 306.

⁹ Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹ Hunt and Rygiel, "(En)Gendered War Stories and Camouflaged Politics," 2.

way this war has been constructed, waged and legitimized on gendered terrain and ignore the detrimental effects that the Bush administration's manipulation of women's issues had on millions of women both in the United States and around the world."¹²

Emily S. Rosenberg does do just that, when she analyses the sudden rise of attention for Afghan women in November 2001 in an article written for a special edition of 9/11 in the *Journal of American History* of September 2002. In "Rescuing Women and Children" she notices that the sudden awareness for women in Afghanistan is an phenomenon that shows the interdependency of gender issues and foreign policy. According to Rosenberg the rise in attention draws back to two historical traditions:

First, the trope of rescuing women and children may be viewed as emerging from a social imaginary dominated by a masculinized national state that casts itself in a paternal role, saving those who are abused by rival men and nations. Second, it may be seen as resting within the imaginary of transcultural and transnational networks [...]that cast themselves as working in culturally diverse ways to challenge locally specific abuses based on gender.¹³

Her first point shows that nations on the verge of war - the United States in particular - often use the detrimental state of women in the enemy nation to portray the enemy. By saving these women the enemy nation can be uplifted and civilized. According to Rosenberg, these practices of modernizing and uplifting women create a form of American exceptionalism and these outings are very effective in times of war to play on emotive acceptance for the war. The strategy to focus on the status of women has been used to portray pictures of Americans saving Cuban women from the barbaric Spanish in 1898 or during World War I when Hollywood depicted the Germans violating women and children. "Going into battle to preserve civilization and to bring the blessings of modernity, in short often foregrounded the rescue of women and children from a social order that oppressed them."¹⁴

Secondly Rosenberg argues that this emphasis on women also opens doors for a enlarged focus of influence groups. Female Afghan advocates like Saira Shah use this momentum to push for more. "Applauding the Taliban's overthrow, they stressed the overriding importance of maintaining a steady postwar commitment to women's empowerment (opening new schools, clinics and jobs) within a reconstructed Afghanistan, a process that the overthrow of the Taliban and the repeal of its restrictions would only barely begin."¹⁵ According to Rosenberg, after the establishment used the situation of women to create a picture of the enemy, often advocacy for women pushed to keep the establishment committed to their cause. Rosenberg analyses several historical examples like Eleanor Roosevelt that pushed for a place for women on the agenda after World War II, because that was a logical response to fascism and would be good to promote peace and democratization. Roosevelt

¹² Hunt and Rygiel, "(En)Gendered War Stories and Camouflaged Politics," 2.

¹³ Rosenberg, "Rescuing Women and Children," 457.

¹⁴ Ibid., 460.

¹⁵ Ibid., 462.

pressed for a representation of women in the new to-be created international world, securing the notion of gender equality in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹⁶ The same happened with the advocacy for women in Afghanistan after November 2001; with Afghan women in the center of public attention, the pressure groups found a leeway to keep Afghan women high on the reconstruction agenda.

By looking at the way the Bush administration has focussed on gender during the invasion in Afghanistan, I hope to find out if this specifically gendered construction of this war served the Bush administration. To give a cohesive answer to this question, I will first offer a historical theoretical framework, in which I will discuss the role of gender in waging a war. The first chapter will investigate the nexus between post-colonial and gender studies, since this is the best theoretical framework to put my thesis in. As I will show in my theoretical chapter, gendered justifications for acts of war are not new in history and placing the War on Terror in this specific historical perspective might open up new or clarify other explanations given earlier. By looking at different approaches to the influence of gender on legitimizing a war over time. How has Gender Studies theorized the way women have been portrayed as the non-acting victims of a war? Why is 'save the women; save the world', such a tempting line of reasoning for going to war and favorable to other explanations or motivations for waging war?

This thesis will not so much address the results of the actual gender policies that have been instigated by the Bush administration in Afghanistan. The actual policies do have a place in my thesis, as they will come back in the rhetoric of the American government, so I will not totally ignore them. Although these actual policies do matter, this thesis will focus on the rhetoric of the American government and the public discourse within American foreign policy that addressed the situation of the Afghan women and so used to justify the war for the American or western audiences. I will leave the valuation of the outcome of the programs started during the War on Terror - a very interesting research topic in my opinion - to others.

In the second chapter I will look go deeper into the relationship between the United States and Afghanistan, and look for the different gendered approaches to that relationship. Before going deeper into the actual war, I will first give an overview of the ground there was for the idea of helping women in Afghanistan inside the United States before the attacks of 9/11. After this, I will discuss how the Bush administration rediscovered the Afghan women after the attacks of 9/11 while preparing for the invasion in Afghanistan. In the third chapter I will discuss how the American government and Congress create a narrative around the Afghan women and how they envision saving these women. In the fourth chapter I will discuss the different attempts made by the international community - but mostly by the Afghans themselves - to reconstruct Afghanistan after the mission. In this chapter I will investigate how the role of the Afghan women was manifested in this reconstruction. By taking this approach I hope to answer my main question: Has a focus on gender legitimized the War on Terror and did this focus benefit the women in Afghanistan?

¹⁶ Rosenberg, "Rescuing Women and Children," 463.

Women, War, East and West

As Enloe suggested, a particular view on gender creates a specific power relation within international relations. When looking at a gendered explanation for justifying the War on Terror a theoretical framework needs to be defined, since the academic discussion on gender, war and the relation between the west and the Middle East is very broad. The different narratives used by scholars and government officials during the War on Terror have different backgrounds and are used for different reasons. By constructing a theoretical basis - along the themes of war, gender and east-west relations - I will narrow down the way I will look at the different stories on the War on Terror, and their historical and academic background.

Miriam Cooke's *Women and the War Story* offers a useful definition for a representation of war in the concept of a war story. The "war story" is - as used in the reader *(En)Gendering the War on Terror* by Hunt and Rygiel - "the official, state authorized story about why we go to war and how wars are won."¹⁷ This story of war is constructed within familiar dichotomies—who is friend or foe, what is the beginning of a war, what is the end, who is a combatant, who a civilian? These dichotomies are formed within a "natural order of things", which Cooke explains as being a gendered natural order of things.¹⁸ Certainly the question on combatants and noncombatants is often told along gender lines: women are not on the battlefield: they stay at home, or when they do work for the army, they do not appear at the front lines. If women do end up in the fights, they are not meant to be there and so they are considered to be a victim.

Cooke determines that in contemporary times the "fictionality" of these dichotomies and thus the fictionality of war stories becomes more and more obvious. Because of new weapons, the front is not as clear as before, which makes women and children become - intended or unintended - targets. The idea of who is a combatant and who is not, is disrupted by this as well. She also doubts the clear lines between the start and the end of a war, since threats of war are often as well a "kind of war."¹⁹ I

¹⁷ Hunt and Rygiel, "(En)Gendered War Stories and Camouflaged Politics," 4.

¹⁸ Cooke, *Women and the War Story*, 15.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

would like to add that – certainly in the War on Terror – the division between friend and foe is, perhaps on purpose, made unclear. Combatants mix with civilians, front lines are undefined, the end of a war is not declared by the moment of defeating the enemy or conquering all of the opponents' territories. The fictionality of war stories today is even more apparent than in 1996 when Cooke wrote her book.

Although war stories do not often pass a critical examination, they were - as is illustrated by the above quoted statements made by the presidential couple - often used in the War on Terror to define who was evil and who is not. The Bush administration often used the definition of good and evil to determine the division between enemy and foe, who was "with us or against us". Defining who was an enemy and who was not, had been done along gender lines before. According to Anne McClintock in her article 'Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family', concepts of gender are used to define how nationalisms are shaped, and thus who is included into that nationalism and who is excluded. Although not acknowledged by the male scholars at the time she wrote the article, she tracks down that images of - in my point of view a western - family are used since mid-nineteenth century to define how that time new institutions like the nation-state, industrial bureaucracy and imperialism should be shaped:

The family figure was [...] drawn on to figure *hierarchy within unity* as an 'organic' element of historical progress, and thereby became indispensable for legitimizing exclusion and hierarchy within non-familial (affiliative) social formations such as nationalism, liberal individualism and imperialism.²⁰

McClintock goes on about the implications of the concept of family in imperial structures. The colonized are depicted as the children of the colonizer and within the imaginary of the family the children will one day grow up to be adults. Growing up is according to McClintock a organic change and so "projecting the family image on the national and imperial 'Progress' enabled what was often murderously violent change to be legitimized as the progressive unfolding of natural decree."²¹ Looking at how McClintock describes the way the family and justifies nationalism, this approach suggests to be also very useful for a gendered conceptualization of civilization; since in the imperial field rhetoric on nationalism and civilization often go hand in hand.

Jasmine Zine puts the statement above within the perspective of the War on Terror. According to Zine, '[d]iscourses of race, gender and religion have scripted the terms of engagement in the War on Terror.'²² She detects two grounds on which these discourses are based, which are both formed within an imperialist perspective. At first she mentions a religious aspect, which is used by both sides of the combating spectrum. Zine quotes Rosemary Ruether to show that Bush and the American Christian Right see themselves as the "messianic agents chosen by God to combat evil and to

²⁰ McClintock, "Family Feuds," 64.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Zine, "Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: Muslim Women and the Feminist Engagement," 27.

establish good." On the other side Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda use *fatwa's* and *jihad* in their fight against an infidel west.²³ A war story along the lines of religion is used to separate 'good' from 'evil', as well to create an image of the enemy.

A second ground for the terms of engagement in the War on Terror is suggested by Zine to be a neo-Orientalist vision on the east. Zine draws on ideas that are based on *Orientalism* by Edward Said. Said defines the term 'orientalism' as follows: "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'."²⁴ Although Said's study focuses mostly on literature and popular culture, his ideas inspired an ideological movement in cultural studies and - as we can see for example in Zine - also found its grounds in political-historical commentaries.

Said discusses notions of the Orient over time. Most relevant to this study would be his comments on orientalism after the Second World War, because from then on the Orient came under the hemisphere of the United States instead of that from Europe. What did not change were the vision on and the depiction of the Arabic world:

In the films and television the Arab is associated either with lechery or bloodthirsty dishonesty. He appears as an oversexed degenerate, capable, it is true, of cleverly devious intrigues, but essentially sadistic, treacherous, low. Slave trader, camel driver, moneychanger, colorful scoundrel: these are some traditional Arab roles in cinema. The Arab leader (of marauders, pirates, "native" insurgents) can often be seen snarling at the captured Western hero and the blond girl (both of them steeped in wholesomeness), "My men are going to kill you, but- they like to amuse themselves before"²⁵

Said claims that - although the United States became more economically involved in the Middle East, because of for example oil - images like the above persisted in American political culture, as well as in the academic world. Arabs are often seen as not capable of representing themselves, so they are still often represented by American or European academics or critics.²⁶

Although the images described above are created by Hollywood, they found their way into political discourse as well. In cultural relations policy the Orient and certainly Islam have been described as "closed traditional societies," that are "openly hostile against Western imperialism."²⁷ Nuances or differences within Arabic or Islamic societies are often forgotten. The West hereby created a power position over the Orient, because the Orient did not get the possibility to represent itself. Representations made by the West are conceived as being a true depiction of what the Orient is. Said

²³ Rosemary Ruether quoted in Zine, "Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: Muslim Women and the Feminist Engagement," 29.

²⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 286-287.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 293.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 299.

detects not many changes in his new preface, written in 2003: “there has been so massive and calculatedly aggressive an attack on the societies of the Arab and Muslim for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women’s rights that we simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment and democracy are by no means simple and agreed-upon concepts that one either does or does not find, like Easter eggs in the living-room.”²⁸

Going back to the point Zine makes about neo-Orientalism a same argument can be made about gender in the Islamic or Arab world. She argues that the Orient often has been dominated through feminization. The veil represents as well the backwardness of Islamic women as their hidden sexuality. Uncovering them is represented as civilizing and emancipating force for the women. Zine sums up that

This neo-Orientalist genre of literature has [...] had a powerful effect on shaping essentialized notions of Arab otherness based on presumed narratives of sexuality and deviance [...]. The role of orientalist knowledge production therefore continues to play a powerful ideological role in continuing imperial contest and enactment of violence against the body of the racialized other.²⁹

The words of Zine go back to gendered images created by McClintock. In the relation between east and west nationalities or even civilizations are shaped by images construed through an orientalist and gendered notion. Taking this in account, looking at the War on Terror in the perspective of war stories cannot do without including the notions of orientalism.

Yet, this theoretical framework is not sufficient without some connotations. At first, as mentioned by Cooke above, there are many perceptions of what a war is, when it starts and when it ends. Adding to that, war can also have influence on ideas of war at home. One could also question the influence of the War on Terror on the treatment of Islamic women in the United States or in Europe, or on the relationship with gender within the army. For the cohesiveness of this research I will look at the public narratives on gender at the ‘front’ or in the conflict situation - in this case Afghanistan - which is thus mostly focused on the representation of the contact between the west and the east.

The first connotation leads to the second. Terrorism as a combat tactic blurs the clear lines between combatants and civilians,³⁰ which will also influence the way in which victims, enemies and the innocent are described in the rhetoric used by the American government. The definition of good and evil is not clear in the war situation itself, and the stories in the different media or the official statements by the government become more influential on the opinion formed by the crowds. Looking at the definition given of a war story above – the official, state authorized story about why we go to

²⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, xiv.

²⁹ Zine, “Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: Muslim Women and the Feminist Engagement,” 29.

³⁰ Richardson, *What do Terrorists Want*, 95-97.

war and how wars are won – it becomes also important to look if this official definition is subdued to changes within the war itself.

The formation of War Stories in the War on Terror is explored by gender studies, international relations and notions of orientalism. All need to be addressed. In the next chapters I will use the historical setting of orientalism and gender in war stories to discuss different moments mentioned in the introduction, starting with a history on the Bush government on gender, international relations and orientalism to point out which theoretical framework is used by the government officials to explain the War on Terror.

Determining 'us' and 'them'

They were dressed in the mandatory head-to-toe burqas, which rendered them invisible, except for the shoes that peeked out from the bottom of their suits. And what shoes they were: stylish, expensive shoes, high heels, low heels and flats, of the latest Italian styles. Possibly Ferragamos. The women were speaking Arabic with Saudi accents. "I could be shopping in Paris, but instead, I am here, in this awful place" one of the women said to another through the vent in her burqa.

The other women nodded in agreement.

"Yes my husband has to be the tough-guy warrior, fighting for Islam," another huffed. "He thinks it brings him closer to God. And so here I am."

"We are stuck here," a third woman said, "in this cursed place."

All the burqas nodded.³¹

Dexter Filkins, at that moment journalist for the *Los Angeles Times*, describes a scene at the airport of Kabul during the Summer of 2000. The women portrayed here fit the profile of Afghan women, being dressed in a head-to-toe veil. Yet, the women were well aware how the world was, and were not too happy with their situation at that moment. They were the wives of the *mujihadeen*, and thus knew what their husbands were doing in Afghanistan. Finally, they were subject to the very restrictive laws of the Taliban, but they would rather be in Paris, shopping.

This little scene exactly describes the difficulty of the position of women in Afghanistan. This image is somehow conflicting, because these women were not mere victims of the strict Taliban rules in Afghanistan. They were part of a global consumer world; they liked to go shopping in Paris and buy the high-end labels. On the other hand they were part of a world completely opposite to the western one, a world of war based on religious motives. Moreover, the women were from foreign origin - Filkins assumes they are from Saudi Arabia - not even from Afghanistan. So although these women were dressed in the expected Afghan way, they are not really Afghan. This scene shows that the Afghan women were not just victims of Taliban oppression, the image is not simply black versus white. To

³¹ Filkins, *The Forever War*, 43.

assess the situation of Afghan women decently, the nuances actually give more information than a simple victim and oppressor analysis.

Although it would be easier to think in these mere dichotomies and consider these women as victims of a cruel, uncivilized Taliban government, the narrative about Afghan women is more nuanced. The scene shows that Afghanistan is not a land with a black and white story. Many different versions of the story need to be considered before it is possible to assess the position of women there. This chapter will discuss how the Bush administration first rediscovered Afghanistan, and subsequently discovered the Afghan women and constructed a story of the violation of women's rights in Afghanistan. To understand the position of women in Afghanistan it is important to look at recent Afghan history. This chapter will first discuss American-Afghan relations, starting with the Soviet-Afghan war and the rise to power of the Taliban in the nineties. Next, it will focus on the reactions of the American government to the events of September 11, 2001. Finally, it will discuss the decision to invade Afghanistan and the discovery of the American government during the first days of the invasion of the possibility to create a vision of the enemy partly by a focus on the situation of the Afghan women.

Afghanistan before 9/11

The attacks of 9/11 were not the event that put Afghanistan on the map for the United States. Afghanistan appeared on the radar of American policy makers as a Cold War battle ground. In April 1978 the Soviet Union backed the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan when it rose to power in the capital Kabul during the Saur Revolution. The authoritarian Mohammed Daoud Khan was killed and the new communist government, under the leadership of Nur Hamid Taraki came to power. Taraki was replaced later in September 1979 by a fellow leader of the People's Democratic Party Hafizullah Amin. Both leaders tried to modernize Afghanistan, for example by distributing land and bringing women into the government. Islamic conservatives did not consider these changes to be right which created instability, even within the government. After a coup within the government itself the Soviet Union decided to intervene to prevent the *mujihadeen* from getting power and installed Babrak Karmal as president on 27 December 1979.³² According to military historian Jeremy Black, this intervention "resulted from concern about the stability of their position in Central Asia, then part of Soviet Union, and from their unwillingness to see a client state collapse" and to a lesser extent for geopolitical reasons.³³

The Americans, however, saw this intervention as an example of the new expansionism of the Soviet Union in regions outside of Europe. President Carter felt that they could not let this go by and he formulated the following doctrine of January 1980: "any attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United

³² Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security and U.S. Policy*, 2.

³³ Black, *Introduction to Global Military History*, 205.

States. It will be repelled by the use of any means necessary, including military force."³⁴ The U.S. therefore decided to try to undermine the Afghan Communist government by supporting the uprising *mujihadeen*; among them were the later leaders of the Taliban. The aid given to the rebels was mostly financial or in form of weapon deliveries, with most notably among them the "Stingers", an anti-aircraft missile that was very effective against the Soviet air force.³⁵ President Ronald Reagan described this policy in his State of the Union of 1985 as "support for freedom fighters is self-defense". According to James Mann the term "freedom fighters" was an "oversimplification, glossing over the fact that the policy was based above all in opposition to the Soviet Union."³⁶ The tactic of support for the guerilla fighters proved to be effective, but it was not the only reason why the Soviets did not manage to control the country. Black argues that, besides a successful guerilla warfare, Soviet retreat resulted from the Soviets failing to win over the "hearts and minds" of the Afghan people. "The Soviet contempt for religion was [...] a serious issue in a society that took Islam seriously." Second, the Soviets lacked a sufficient number of troops. Third, support for the insurgents did not only come from the United States, but from other countries too; the occupation of an Islamic state led to other Muslims traveling to Afghanistan and fight for Islamic warlords.

The Soviets left the country in 1989, following the Geneva Accords brokered by the United Nations. After the Soviet Union withdrew its troops it basically left Afghanistan's civil rule devastated with several local groups starting to fight over power. Warlords competed to rule the different parts of the country. The Northerners overthrew the government left in place by the Soviets in 1992, and Burhunnadin Rabbani, from the Tajik minority living in the north of Afghanistan, became president. This was immediately followed by an upsurge by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the leader of the Afghanistan Islamic Party. At that moment Islamic students and clerics, mostly from rural Pashtun areas, formed the Taliban movement. They considered Rabbani corrupt and non-Pashtun. The Taliban, at that moment mostly residing in the southern provinces of Kandahar, started to fight the Rabbani government. They promised the Afghans to bring back stability and religious orthodoxy. They gained more power over the country in the following years, finally seizing Kabul in 1996. The Taliban never fully controlled Afghanistan though, since in the north oppositional warlords kept on fighting their rule.³⁷

The Taliban did what they promised and brought back stability by enforcing very strict Islamic law. The Taliban were especially known for their strict regulations concerning public life and their severe ways of punishment when anybody broke those laws; particularly for women. Women were banned from public life; for example, women were not allowed to work and were not granted access to education. When leaving the house, women were obliged to wear a veil that covered their whole body and face and their shoes were not allowed to make any noises. Pictures of women in news papers or books were banned as well. The laws were based on a very orthodox interpretation of the Koran.

³⁴ President Jimmy Carter as quoted in Lundestad, *The United States and Western Europe since 1945*, 208.

³⁵ Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance*, 2.

³⁶ Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*, 122.

³⁷ Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance*, 2-5.; Black, *Introduction to Global Military History*, 251.

However, the Taliban were not the first to install these strict public laws, the situation for women was not extraordinarily well before the rise of power of the Taliban. In 1994 a special UN rapporteur for the Commission of Human Rights already observed the strict rules in place for women garments. Women already had to wear a head-to-toe veil, even before the Taliban came to power.³⁸

Although the position for women under the Communist rule in the seventies seemed to be fairly well in Afghanistan, the severe resistance against the a-religious policy of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan made it possible for the more religious based parties to win ground in Afghanistan. The basis for the acceptance of such a strict Islamic rule increased after the Soviet Union left Afghanistan in a detrimental state of civic rule. The warlords fighting over power made everyday life very insecure, and going back to a strict religious regime was a very easy solution. As often said by the Taliban, the rigid rules for women in Afghanistan were not put in place to oppress them, but to protect them.³⁹

After the end of the Soviet-Afghan war American policy makers did not keep Afghanistan as their focal point of attention, and certainly Afghan women were not high on their priority list. With the withdrawal of the Soviet Union, the Americans left Afghanistan behind as well. The United States lowered the foreign aid it gave to Afghanistan and closed its embassy in Kabul from 1989 on. But Afghanistan was not completely forgotten. The United States never recognized the Taliban as the Afghan government, because they considered the Taliban to be cruel. As mentioned above, humanitarian aid was not stopped; the American government still issued foreign aid through USAID, mostly for food programs. In the 1990s the Clinton administration tried to talk the Taliban into moderating its severe laws, but had no success. Also the United Nations kept pressing the Taliban to stop discriminating women. Boutros Boutros-Ghali stated his concern in October 1996 and in 1998 two U.N. Security Council Resolutions urged the Taliban to stop the discrimination.⁴⁰

In the late nineties, it were mainly private initiatives that put a focus on the position of the Afghan women in the United States. Under the wings of the Feminist Majority Foundation, Mavis Leno - wife of Late Night talk show host Jay Leno - started to raise public awareness for the cause of Afghan women. Soon after the Taliban seized power, Mavis and Jay jump-started a special Feminist Majority campaign trying to get correspondents, politicians and the entertainment industry to address the poor conditions Afghan women had to live in.⁴¹ It was picked up by the entertainment industry; different actors supported Leno's cause and shows like *Family Law* and *7th Heaven* contributed an episode to

³⁸ Ermacora, *Interim report on Human Rights*, Commission on Human Rights and Economic and Social Council (November 8, 1994). <http://www.rawa.org/rules.htm>. Felix Ermacora is Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights.

³⁹ Hatch Dupree, "Afghan Women under the Taliban," 145-166.

⁴⁰ Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance*, 6.; United Nations Daily Highlights, October 7, 1996, Central News Section of the Department of Public Information; "United Nations Daily Highlights" United Nations: October 7, 1996. <http://www.hri.org/cgi-bin/brief?/news/world/undh/96-10-07.undh.html>.

⁴¹ Daunt, "Jay Leno and Mavis Leno turn serious about the plight of Afghan women," *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 2009.

the position of women in Afghanistan.⁴² This pressure on the government worked. In May 1999 Senate passed a resolution, calling upon the president not to recognize any afghan government that opposed women.⁴³ In October that year at the California's Governor's conference for women that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright warned the Taliban due to them oppressing of Afghan women would never get them accepted in the world. She also told that promoting the rights of Afghan women was an important point in American foreign policy.⁴⁴

But Osama bin Laden started to take over the America's Afghan agenda. He was America's number one enemy ever since his Al Qaeda attacked the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1996. The Clinton administration had undertaken several attempts to eliminate him, but never succeeded. When Bin Laden moved to Afghanistan in 1998 and could operate under the wings of the Taliban, Clinton tried to destroy his threat by firing cruise missiles into terrorist training camps where bin Laden was thought to be attending a high-level meeting. Bin Laden got away and in 1999 the CIA started an operation to train 60 commandos from the Pakistani intelligence service, but that project was never executed because of a military coup in Pakistan. Several other attempts had been in place to locate Bin Laden, but all were never that successful that Bin Laden was actually caught.⁴⁵ Bin Laden stayed a top priority for American intelligence services at the moment president Bush was inaugurated into office, and attempts were made to track Bin Laden down in Afghanistan, but Afghanistan did not become a focal point for the policy makers. In the first year of the Bush administration attention for Afghanistan itself mostly went to condemning the destroying of two big Buddha statues situated within Afghanistan and the Taliban's intolerance against religious minorities. The American Congress passed two bills where it expressed its contempt with these decisions of the Taliban.⁴⁶

Rediscovering Afghanistan

The attacks of 9/11 dramatically changed the American perspective on Afghanistan. Within the second the planes hit the World Trade Center in New York, Afghanistan was back on the American radar. As soon as evidence emerged that Osama bin Laden's Al Qaeda was responsible for the attacks, and the Taliban gave Bin Laden a safe haven to plan these attacks, Afghanistan became the new focal point of American foreign policy.

⁴² "Hollywood's latest cause. Can a Pack of Celebrities Save Afghanistan's Women?" *Newsweek*, December 6, 1999.; *7th Heaven* "Yak Sada (a.k.a. One Voice)" *The CW*, October 4, 1999; *Family Law*, "Games", CBS, November 8, 1999.

⁴³ Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance*, 6.

⁴⁴ "World: South Asia: Albright warns Taleban on women," *BBC News* October 6, 1999. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/466739.stm.

⁴⁵ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 5-6.

⁴⁶ *Condemning the recent order by the Taliban regime of Afghanistan to require Hindus in Afghanistan to wear symbols identifying them as Hindu*, H.CON.RES.145, 107th Congress, 1st sess. (May 25, 2001).; *Condemning destruction of pre-Islamic statues*, H.CON.RES.52, 107th Congress, 1st sess. (July 3, 2001).

The events of 9/11 made the Bush administration revise their foreign policy completely. After a security briefing on the morning of 12 September, Bush declared to his counselor Karen Hughes, that the United States was at war and combatting terrorism "would be the main focus of the administration."⁴⁷ A day later, Bush was meeting with advisors and his staff considering his options. Attacking Afghanistan seemed to be the best way to bring Bin Laden to justice. Paul Wolfowitz, Deputy Secretary of State, mentioned on 12 September that nations that harbored terrorists should be punished as well,⁴⁸ a statement that the White House officially followed on 15 September: "The President has said that a war has been waged against us, and this is a war with those who engage in these terrorist acts and those who harbor them."⁴⁹ According to Bob Woodward - known writer on the policies of the different American administrations - Bush already agreed with this line on September 13. He wanted the Taliban to know that they had to hand over the terrorists and if they would not do so he would unleash America's power on them:

Tell the Afghans to round up al Qaeda. Let's see them, or we'll hit [the Taliban] hard. Were going to hurt them so bad so that everyone in the world sees, don't deal with bin Laden. I don't want to put a million-dollar missile on a five-dollar tent.⁵⁰

Bush didn't want to show any mercy for anyone that supported the terrorists. He would strike hard and clearly stay far away from any attempts Clinton took to catch Bin Laden, which in Bush's eyes were costly, unsuccessful and most of all weak and cowardly operations. Afghanistan was at the center of American foreign politics again, and Bush would be the war president that would decisively round up Al Qaeda there. Nobody would attack the United States without consequences.

In the following days the administration brought this thought to the American people by telling that the United States was at war and explaining what kind of war the War on Terror actually was. In a speech before Congress on September 20, the President explained to the American people the current state of the nation. On the place where the president normally delivered *The State of the Union*, Bush felt like he did not have to present the actual state of the United States that night. "Tonight, no such report is needed. It has already been delivered by the American people."⁵¹ After the president described the brave reaction of Americans of the passed nine days, he continued to describes that the world has changed: "night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack."⁵² Bush introduced the enemy and its malice nature:

⁴⁷ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 40.

⁴⁸ Fleischer, White House Press Conference, Washington D.C: September 13, 2001.

⁴⁹ Fleischer, White House Press Conference, Washington D.C: September 15, 2001.

⁵⁰ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 63.

⁵¹ George W. Bush, Address to Joint Session of Congress, Capitol, Washington DC: September 21, 2001, <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>.

⁵² Ibid.

In Afghanistan we see al Qaeda's vision for the world. Afghanistan's people have been brutalized, many are starving and many have fled. Women are not allowed to attend school. [...] Religion can be practiced only as their leaders dictate. [...] The United States respects the people of Afghanistan -- after all, we are currently its largest source of humanitarian aid -- but we condemn the Taliban regime.⁵³

This war would not be against the people of Afghanistan, it would be against the Taliban and Al Qaeda. It would not be a war of Christians against Muslims, it would be a war against violent terrorists. Bush stated that the war would not be a conventional war:

We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place until there is no refuge or no rest. And we will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation in every region now has a decision to make: Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.⁵⁴

Here, Bush told the American nation an important focal point of the upcoming war strategy. The war was not against the normal Afghans; they were not the enemy. The enemy were the terrorists that despised the free world. Anybody supporting them, either a person or a nation, would feel the same wrath as the terrorists would feel. The president reached out to anyone in that considered himself not to be a terrorist to align with the United States, it would be a war of the free world against the people and nations that undermined freedom. This mindset asked for the Americans - and even the rest of the world - to be ready to fight a new sort of war, one that was never fought before and would be fought on many fronts. Two days after the president's speech before Congress, Ari Fleischer, Bush's White House Press secretary, elaborated on the different fronts during the daily White House Press Conference. Nations could help the United States in the fight in different ways: financially, military, diplomatic, economic, or even with humanitarian aid.⁵⁵ This statement showed that the speech before Congress not only prepared Americans, but the whole world for what would be coming; it construed a basis for an upcoming invasion in Afghanistan. The fight would be one of the civilized against the barbaric.

On September 23, several of the Principals - as Woodward calls the closest of Bush's advisors on the war on Terror - met and discussed the actual shape of the war. Bush wanted them to avoid to "pound the sand" as he called the efforts of Clinton to reverse threat by shooting "cruise missiles in tents and so forth." There needed to be boots on the ground. Tenet suggested to the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld that they actually put them on the ground in the Northern parts of Afghanistan. With the support from the Northern warlords they could open a front against the Arab brigade - an elite Taliban force trained in Al Qaeda camps. Rumsfeld liked the idea, since this would be

⁵³ George W. Bush, Address to Joint Session of Congress, Capitol, Washington DC: September 21, 2001, <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/09/20/gen.bush.transcript/>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Fleischer, White House Press Conference, Washington D.C: September 23, 2001.

a blow at both the Taliban and Al Qaeda, which in reality were respectively not very numerous in military force but still very hard to catch.⁵⁶ Just after midnight that night Bush signed the Executive Order that froze the financial assets of several terrorists organizations, leaders, a front corporation and several non-profit organizations. "With a stroke of a pen" the war on terrorism had started.⁵⁷

Although the actual military war planning was not yet finished, the plans to portray the Afghan people as the victims of the Taliban did take a more definite shape. As mentioned by Bush in the speech on 20 September, during the war planning big emphasis was put on the idea that the target was the Taliban and Al Qaeda, not the Afghan people or Islam. The Americans should not end up as being considered invaders or occupiers by the Afghans. To show that the Americans were there to get out foreign forces - in the shape of the Taliban and Al Qaeda - America could not just barge in; the Afghans had to be won for the American cause. In an interview with Woodward, Bush mentions that he did not want the war to be viewed as a religious one and that the United States would come out as an conqueror. "I wanted us to be viewed as the liberator." Thus, a great focus for the president during the planning was on humanitarian aid, both out of practical and moral reasons. Practically he liked the idea of feeding the starving Afghans, because it seemed to be a good way to win over their hearths. Morally "[t]here is a value system that cannot be compromised - God-given values. These [are not] United States created values. They are values of freedom and the human condition and mothers loving children. What is very important as we articulate foreign policy through our diplomacy and military action, is that is never look like we are crafting - we are the author of these values."⁵⁸ Besides just winning over the hearts of the Afghan people, Bush also felt like he had a moral duty to spread these universal values, which were harbored in American society for ages and should benefit anybody else who could experience these universal values.

What about reconstruction?

In the final days of war planning one big caveat existed. When the actual shape of the mission got more defined, nobody in the Bush administration spoke about what should happen after the Taliban was removed from power. On 25 September, Ari Fleischer was asked what would happen if the Taliban was gone. His answer first stressed again that the Taliban and Al Qaeda were not Afghans and second that the war was:

⁵⁶ The Principals Woodward talks about are Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, Condoleezza Rice, Director of the CIA George Tenet, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Richard Myers and White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card Jr. At this meeting Cheney, Powell, Rumsfeld, Rice, and Tenet are present. Also attending is General Henry B. Shelton, at that moment still Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Myers will take over that position on October 1, 2001. Woodward, *Bush at War*, 123.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

not designed to replace one regime with another regime. Part of the process also will be being mindful of stability in the region throughout the process. But it is not nation-building, but that's not to say that the Taliban will be given a free pass, because they can encourage terrorism [...].⁵⁹

Also within the White House the war planners started to question the future of Afghanistan after the Taliban was eliminated. Bush had made it a statement in his presidential campaign that he would not use the military for any nation building, since the military was meant for war. On the other hand, the administration could not leave a vacuum in power, risking a situation similar to that after the Soviet retreat in 1989. On October 3rd the deputies of several departments met for a so-called post-Taliban reconstruction talk. The U.S. should lead efforts to stabilize Afghanistan, like helping with food, health and education for women. Politically, nation building had to be huge and the whole world had to be involved, money flows needed to be start to make their way to Afghanistan and allies had to be found to secure the state even after the Taliban was gone.⁶⁰ Getting the military involved would still be very difficult, considering the statements made by Bush in his election campaign. The next day Condoleezza Rice, National Security Advisor, Wolfowitz and Bush discussed the matter of raising funds for rebuilding Afghanistan. Bush asked: "Who will run the country." The president here touched upon a subject that scared Rice, "We should have addressed that, Rice thought. Her most awful moments were when the president thought of something that the principals, particularly she, should have anticipated."⁶¹

On October 7, in spite of these concerns, American and British forces started bombing Afghanistan. Several attempts were made to win over the hearts of the Afghan people. To start of with, the Americans dropped leaflets over the country to tell the Afghans that "the United States was there to liberate the Afghan people from the invading bin Laden and Al Qaeda, that this was not a war against Islam."⁶² On the back of these leaflets an imagedepicting a Talibani beating a woman was printed. This picture was accompanied by the line "Is this the future you want for your women and children?"⁶³ The Americans also used financial incentives to persuade the normal Afghans to root for the American cause. "The fighters on both sides, and their families who often traveled with the fighters, would be cold and starving. The humanitarian aid would work to the U.S. advantage."⁶⁴ This was also reflected by one of the first resolution concerning Afghanistan passed in the House of Representatives after 9/11. This resolution expresses the urgency to provide food and agricultural

⁵⁹ Fleischer, White House Press Conference, Washington D.C: September 25, 2001.

⁶⁰ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 193.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 163.

⁶³ Pictures of these leaflets can be found on: psywarrior.com, "Afghanistan PSYOP leaflet" <http://www.psywarrior.com/afghanleaf04.html>.

⁶⁴ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 194.

assistance to Afghan civilians, including Afghans refugees in the region.⁶⁵

On October 9, two days after the start of the invasion, National Security Council updated Bush on the current progression of the invasion. Woodward reports that the president considered that the story of the invasion needed to be brought to the American public, and that the government needed to explain what the goals of the mission were. He suggested that a focus on the situation of women and children could be beneficial for this: "The department of Education is going to try and sponsor elementary school to elementary school exchanges, and we want to make a pitch to Muslim women and reach out to Muslim women." The Taliban's oppressive treatment of women was one of the most visible affronts of the strict fundamentalist regime, and Bush wanted to show that overthrowing it would liberate women.⁶⁶ In the Pentagon Memorial Speech, held two days later, Bush explained the attack to the nation and again the president focussed on the brutal attitude of the Taliban:

The Taliban regime has brought nothing but fear and misery to the people of Afghanistan. These rulers call themselves holy men, even with their record of drawing money from heroin trafficking. They consider themselves pious and devout, while subjecting women to fierce brutality.⁶⁷

Bush had discovered the Afghan women and the power that lay in the bad treatment the women received from the Taliban. As shown in the in the quote above, Bush reconsidered the notion the Taliban had of themselves as being good men. In Bush's eyes they could not be, they were involved in drug trade and abused there women. Those people could not be fit to rule a country.

The attacks of 9/11 forced the American government to reassess their position of Afghanistan dramatically. From day one, it was clear for the Bush administration that Afghanistan would be invaded and that it needed to happen as fast as possible. The fast pace in which war planning had to be done, made the administration cover problems as the came along. To go back to Cooke's War Stories, the Bush administration created a story of who was the enemy and who was not. The administration did this to keep the peace at home, but also to win over the hearts and minds of the Afghans. The administration set up a strategy to make the invasion a war of "us against them", with "us" being all the civilized free people and "them" being terrorists or anyone who supported the terrorists. Great effort was put into avoiding it to become a religious strife; one of christians versus muslims. Even the Afghan people were not supposed to be the target, they were just as much a victim of the invading powers of Al Qaeda and the Taliban.

⁶⁵ *Expressing the sense of Congress with respect to the urgency of providing food and agricultural development assistance to civilian men, women, and children in Afghanistan, including Afghan refugees, and to the civilian populations of other countries in the central Asia region, including Pakistan, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.* H.CON.RES.240, 107th Congress, 1st sess. (October 2, 2001).

⁶⁶ Woodward, *Bush at War*, 217.

⁶⁷ George W. Bush, Pentagon Memorial Speech, Pentagon, Arlington Virginia: October 11, 2001. <http://www.september11news.com/PresidentBushPentagon.htm>.

When considering winning the hearts of the Afghans, Bush discovered the Afghan women. By showing that he would help them, he could show that his moral values were values of a universal kind. The story of Afghan women was perfect for displaying the dichotomy of the "civilized us" versus the "barbaric them", because the way women were treated in Afghanistan was, according to Bush, unacceptable for any civilized mind. The Taliban and Al Qaeda were despicable, and the way they treated their women was the case-breaking evidence for the American argument. The depiction of the Taliban and Al Qaeda as the villains in this situation, worked very well for creating a clear depiction of the enemy. The trouble with this depiction was that it did not portrayed the complete truth about Afghan women, something which would cause difficulties for the actual nation building in Afghanistan after the Taliban was removed from power, as we will see in the following chapters.

The \$100 bill not left on the street

We believe that once there is no foreign interference, especially of a fundamentalist type, all ethnic groups of all religions, with no regard to the devilish designs of the fundamentalists, will, prove their solidarity for achieving the most sacred national interests for the sake of a proud and free Afghanistan.

The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) asks that all anti-fundamentalist, freedom and democracy-loving and pro-women's rights forces and also the ex-king of Afghanistan, before it is too late, must play their role in the organizing of mass-uprising and as well thwart the plans of the internal and external enemies of Afghanistan.⁶⁸

This statement was put out by the Revolutionary Association for Afghan Women (RAWA) on October 11, 2001, just days after the invasion in Afghanistan started. RAWA, founded in 1977 by a group of Afghan female intellectuals, considered itself an independent social and political organization, who strived for more public access for women in Afghan political and social life, respect for the human rights of women and the improvement of democracy and a secular rule in Afghanistan.⁶⁹ As their statement above illustrated they also stayed true to their core values just after the American invasion had started. Moreover, they used the opening offered by the American attacks to press their own agenda. This statement was not only published on their website in several European languages and Arabic, but also distributed in Afghanistan in the local languages. Just like RAWA, several other groups used the momentum created by the Bush administration to call attention to the situation of Afghan women and give their own possible solutions or advice to the Bush government now that the latter was planning to change the rule in Afghanistan dramatically.

This chapter will discuss the different attempts by activists like RAWA to express their opinions in the media and will also consider the political attempts made by the American Congress and the administration to improve the situation of Afghan women. Although the Bush administration did not have any well-designed plan at the start of the invasion, they needed to address how they wanted to

⁶⁸ RAWA, "RAWA Statement on U.S. strikes on Afghanistan" October 11, 2001. <http://www.rawa.org/us-strikes.htm>

⁶⁹ RAWA, "About RAWA.." <http://www.rawa.org/rawa.html>

rebuild Afghanistan. A big challenge laid ahead for both the Afghans and the Americans. The image of the enemy - which included the accusation of violating women's rights - had consequences for the actual nation building process the Americans would pursue. They would have to include women in any effort of nation building, since women were at the center of the American attention, certainly when activists like RAWA used the above mentioned momentum to get their version of the story through and give their account on what should happen in a post-Taliban Afghanistan. This chapter will address the discussion in the media and in the American government about Afghan women. How did the different agendas of pressure groups get implemented into policy and which parts were left out by the government?

Creating a narrative

When the Americans invaded Afghanistan and Bush stated that he wanted to reach out to the Afghan women, possibilities opened up to further push to women's rights agenda, both for the government as for advocacy groups. As the media opened its forum to this issue, several newspapers paid attention to Afghan woman in October 2001. *The Washington Post* took a front role in reporting on the issue. On October 8, it reported that RAWA had come to the United States to spread its message. In an interview RAWA member Tahmeena Faryal - traveling under an alias to secure her safety - outed her dissatisfaction with the Taliban. She saw hope in the future: "If the Taliban weaken [...] the burka would definitely be thrown out with anger". On October 18 *The Post* featured an article about the struggle of American Afghan women and that now their voices would be heard by the grand American audience. A day later the same newspaper published an article on the improvement of the possibilities for Afghan women in the freed areas since the start of the American invasion. It is interesting that all three articles were written by female staffers of the newspaper.⁷⁰

The New York Times took a different approach than *The Washington Post*. On 19 October, *The New York Times* featured a piece by Jan Goodwin, journalist, writer and fighter for female human rights; and Jessica Neuwirth, president of Equality Now. Both women showed special interest in Afghanistan. Goodwin had traveled as a one of the few female journalists to Afghanistan under the Taliban regime to report on the state of women's rights there. Goodwin also wrote *The Price of Honor*, a book on women and islamic extremism.⁷¹ Neuwirth, as one of the founders of Equality Now, promoted grass-root reporting of violations of women's rights over the world to improve these rights, and one of Equality Now!'s main subjects of this was Afghan women.⁷² Just like the White House did,

⁷⁰ Schmidt, "Female Foes of Taliban Seeking Support Abroad; Afghan Group Says Women Are Angry, Want Freedom and Rights Restored," *The Washington Post*, October 8, 2001; Witt, "Speaking Up for Afghan Women" *The Washington Post*, October 18, 2001; Raimondo, "'Small Steps' for Afghan Women Rights; In Rebel-Held Area, Freedom to Work Comes Despite Conservative Morals and Social Customs," *The Washington Post*, October 19, 2001.

⁷¹ Phillips, "Interview with Jan Goodwin" *CNN Sunday Morning*, October 28, 2001. <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0110/28/sm.09.html>.

⁷² Equality Now, "Equality Now." <http://www.equalitynow.org/english/index.html>.

Goodwin and Neuwirth emphasized that repression of women was not a religious act, but a political act. Yet they explicitly linked radical Islam to repression of women: "Anyone who has paid attention to the situation of women in Afghanistan should not have been surprised to learn that the Taliban are complicit in terrorism. "When radical Muslim movements are on the rise, women are the canaries in the mines."⁷³

Two days later *The New York Times* published an article on a different side on the conflict; reporting on women on the Afghan-Pakistan border actually being proud of raising their sons as *jihadis*.⁷⁴ A week later, on October 27, the same paper featured a critical article on the policy of the United States in Afghanistan and the limited role it offered for women. Because of the emphasis on building a coalition with muslim allies, the article argued, the women's rights agenda probably would not have a big chance:

As the administration seeks to help broker a coalition government to someday replace the Taliban, Bush advisers warn that the president's message must be muted for fear of alienating potential Muslim allies in Afghanistan and the region. "Right now we have other priorities," a senior administration official said, referring to women's rights in a future government. "We have to be careful not to look like we are imposing our values on them."

The article continued to question if the United States had to actively involve itself in the women policy in Afghanistan, or if they should refrain from imposing its values on others and leave it to the Afghans to decide how to include women in their society.⁷⁵

But the American government certainly did not decide to turn away from the subject of Afghan women. The pitch to Afghan women, as mentioned by Bush on October 9, was made by both Congress and The White House in the last weeks of October and first weeks of November. On October 24, Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) posted an amendment to the bill regulating funding for foreign policy. The amendment expressed the sentiment in the Senate that the role of women in the future reconstruction of Afghanistan was of significant importance. First the amendment described the state of women's rights in Afghanistan and how it deteriorated after the Taliban rose to power. Women held 70% of the jobs in schools, 50% in government and were 40% of the doctors in Kabul, all areas that the Taliban later closed off for women. The amendment asked for a specific attention to the role of women in a future government:

Afghan women organizations must be included in planning the future reconstruction of Afghanistan. Future governments in Afghanistan should work to achieve the following goals:

⁷³ Goodwin and Neuwirth, "The Rifle and the Veil", *The New York Times*, October 19, 2001.

⁷⁴ Addario, "Jihad's Women" *The New York Times*, October 21, 2001.

⁷⁵ Stanley, "A Nation Challenged: Women in Authority; Walking a Fine Line in Showcasing Women and Dealing With Muslim Allies" *The New York Times*, October 27, 2001.

- (A) The effective participation of women in all civil, economic, and social life.
- (B) The right of women to work.
- (C) The right of women and girls to an education without discrimination and the reopening of schools to women and girls at all levels of education.
- (D) The freedom of movement of women and girls.
- (E) Equal access of women and girls to health facilities.⁷⁶

The next day Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison - a Republican Senator from Texas, the state where Bush was Governor before becoming president - and Senator Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) introduced a bill to 'Authorize the provision of educational and health care assistance to the women and children of Afghanistan'. The bill was cosponsored by all the other female senators, both Republican and Democrat. In the introduction for the Senate, Senator Mikulski reflected upon the horrible state of women's rights under the Taliban:

The Taliban regime represents repression of all people and particularly is most brutal to women and children. Taliban restrictions on women's participation in society make it nearly impossible for women to exercise their basic human rights. Restrictions on Afghan freedom of expression, association, and movement deny women full participation in their society. They don't even have access to the basic ability to work, go to school, and have health care.⁷⁷

Senator Mikulski went on quoting the article by Neuwirth and Goodman that the actual repression of women by the Taliban was not out of religious reasons, but political. The article was handed out to the other Senators. Mikulski presented a clear reason for the United States to help these women:

We now have an opportunity to create a new world order. This is what this legislation is all about. America will demonstrate our solidarity and our support to these women and children. As America leads the international coalition against al-Qaida and the Taliban regime, let's use this as the opportunity to help the women and children there.⁷⁸

In the subsequent remarks made by the cosponsors, Senator Boxer pushed for an immediate passing of this bill. The bill ended up in the House quickly, where it was referred to the Committee of Foreign Affairs on November 15. On the final vote on the bill in the House on November 28 female Representatives again spoke out to show their sympathy for the Afghan women. Representative Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) repeated what her fellow members of congress had expressed before:

⁷⁶ *To express the sense of the Senate regarding the important role of women in the future reconstruction of Afghanistan.* S.AMDT.1940, 107th Congress, 1st sess. (October 10, 2001).

⁷⁷ 'Statements on Introduced Bills and joint resolutions' *A bill to authorize the provision of educational and health care assistance to the women and children of Afghanistan.* S. 1573, 107th Congr., 1st sess. (October 25, 2001).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Preceding the takeover by the Taliban, women constituted 70 percent of the teachers in Afghanistan, 50 percent of the government workers, 40 percent of the health professionals; and, of course, with the onset of the Taliban regime they were forbidden from working. Women suffered, girls suffered, but everyone suffered. Who taught the little boys? Because 70 percent of the teachers were women. So everyone in Afghanistan suffered, and everyone in Afghanistan will benefit under the provisions of H.R. 3330 which authorizes educational and health care assistance to the women and children of Afghanistan.⁷⁹

Representative Millender-McDonald (D-CA) elaborated on the subject with her view as Democratic chair of the Congressional Caucus on Women's Issues. She again reminded her audience that women were not always treated badly in Afghanistan and that there was a special task for the United States in bringing back human rights to women in Afghanistan. Certainly in the upcoming conference to form an interim government, to be held in Bonn at the end of November, it was still important, according to Millender-McDonald, that the United States would leave an imprint on the outcome:

While it was left to the Afghani groups to decide on participation at the Bonn meeting, the U.N. agreed that the women of Afghanistan have a central role to play in putting that country back together. The future of women in Afghanistan, and ultimately the stability of any provisional settlement, will rest upon a foundation of inclusion, not exclusion. Therefore, America, so often viewed as a beacon of freedom and human rights throughout the world, must ensure that the rights and freedoms denied to Afghan women for so long are restored as soon as possible.⁸⁰

The bill passed through the House fairly quick; within 50 days the bill was ready for the White House to be signed into law.⁸¹ The final bill first reflected upon the malicious state of the current Afghan legislation for Afghan women and children, and furthermore showed the proactive way in which the Taliban had worked to prevent women and their children from getting decent food resources, health care or education. Finally the bill granted the American president authorization "on such terms and conditions as the President may determine, to provide educational and health care assistance for the women and children living in Afghanistan and as refugees in neighboring countries."⁸²

Interesting in reviewing the passing of this bill from introduction to signing by the president, is that the different female members of Congress all produced the same story. Afghan women were horribly treated under the Taliban, but had been significantly better off in previous days as they played

⁷⁹ Pelosi, "Afghan Women and Children's Relief Act," U.S. House Of Representatives, Washington D.C: October 28, 2001. <http://www.house.gov/pelosi/prafghanwomen.htm>.

⁸⁰ Millender-MacDonald; "The Future of Women Leaders in Afghanistan," U.S. House of Representatives, Washington D.C.: November 28, 2001.

⁸¹ *A bill to authorize the provision of educational and health care assistance to the women and children of Afghanistan*. S. 1573, 107th Congr., 1st sess. (October 25, 2001).

⁸² Ibid.

a vital role in Afghan public society. When these previous days actually took place was not specified. The better times were illustrated by the reoccurring statistic of 70% female teachers, 50% female government employes and 40% either female medical personal or even doctors appeared. Getting women back to getting access to the fields addressed in the statistics - healthcare and education - would be a huge step forward in getting them back to some civil position in Afghanistan's society. By sticking to this story Congress managed to divert from the religious or cultural aspects of the suppression of women in Afghanistan. They stayed true to the claims made by Goodwin and Neuwirth in *The New York Times* that suppression of women was a political act. Congress created a narrative around Afghan women: the suppression of women in Afghanistan was not religious, but political.

Hearing different voices, repeating the narrative

Other voices told a different story from the narrative that was created in Congress. A good example of can be seen in the different testimonies made during a postponed hearing for the Subcommittee of the US House on International Operations and Human Rights, which was originally planned to be held on September 12, 2001. On October 31, several witnesses offered their views on the human rights situation in Afghanistan. One of them was the previously mentioned Tahmeena Faryal; the 23 year old Foreign Affairs RAWA representative. Faryal fled to a Pakistan refugee camp during the Soviet Invasion when she was 10, got educated there in a RAWA school and later taught the children herself. Three years before she arrived in the U.S. she went back to Afghanistan to help to organize secret literacy classes for women.⁸³ Traveling under a fictional name in the U.S. from October 8 on,⁸⁴ she made several appearances in the media. On 29 October she received the *Glamour Magazine's Women of the Year Award*, presented to her by Mavis Leno. During all her public appearances she kept her identity hidden, because she was still targeted by the Taliban.⁸⁵ Two days after she received that reward, Faryal outed an emotional claim for the Subcommittee:

Mujahadeen forces, armed and trained by the US government and now part of the Taliban and the Northern Alliance, waged a brutal war against women, using rape, torture, abduction, and forced marriage as their weapons. Many women committed suicide during this period as their only escape. Given their past record, we see no possibility that any of these Jihadis will change their nature. ⁸⁶

⁸³ Mask, 'Woman speaks of Taliban oppression But Afghan activists say bombs aren't the answer', *Chicago Daily Herald*, November 10, 2001.

⁸⁴ Schmidt, "Female Foes of Taliban Seeking Support Abroad; Afghan Group Says Women Are Agry, Want Freedom and Rights Restored" *The Washington Post*, October 8, 2001

⁸⁵ Williams, "A night of 'Glamour' for women of the year" *USA TODAY*, October 31, 2001

⁸⁶ U.S. Congress. House. Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights of Committee on International Relations, *Afghan People vs The Taliban: The Struggle for Freedom Intensifies; Hearing before the Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights of the Committee on International Relations*. 107th Congress, 1st sess. (October 31, 2001)

She insisted that a new government would “*exclude* all Taliban and other criminal Jehadi factions from political power;” only to be excepted if they were absolved from any war crimes or crimes against humanity. Faryal’s fear was that Afghanistan would otherwise go back to the “living hell” of the period between 1992 and 1996. A new government should include women and should hear women and Faryal asked, as spokesperson from RAWA, the US and other democratic nations to support her in this aim. Hereby, Faryal pointed out one of the main concerns of RAWA: not just the Taliban, but more groups in Afghanistan had repressed women and a new Afghan government should take Afghan women serious. Faryal was backed in this statement during the hearing by T. Kumar, advocacy director for Asia and Pacific of Amnesty International USA. Kumar claimed that everyone’s human rights were violated in Afghanistan and that under the Northern Alliance - pointing to the rule under Rabbani from 1992 till 1996 - rule this was not much better.⁸⁷ This statement noted on the problem that the big focus on the Taliban and Al Qaeda has created. With making the Taliban and Al Qaeda the detrimental point of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, others that violated women’s rights might get away with it, or could even end up in a new government.

Several witnesses addressed these concerns. When Lorne W. Craner, Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor of the Department of State and Jeffrey J. Lundstead, Senior Advisor and Afghanistan Coordinator, Bureau of South Asian Affairs of the Department of State were questioned on the collaboration of the American troops with the Northern Alliance, the House representatives mostly worried about the abusers of human rights ending up in a new government. This seemed to be highly unlikely according to Craner, since a new Afghan government had to respect human rights.⁸⁸ The Northern Alliance had lost power once, and seeing what became of Afghanistan afterwards, would be a reason, according to Craner, to assume that the Northern Alliance would comply with any American demands on human rights.⁸⁹

The subcommittee also questioned the special representative and spokesman for the Northern Alliance, Haron Amin. They asked him about the allegations at the Northern Alliance made by Faryal and Kumar. Amin countered these questions by stating that the period between 1992 and 1996 was a very unstable period and mainly other competing warlords made it impossible for the Northern Alliance to secure the rights of women.⁹⁰ Remembering that the Northern Alliance leader Massoud, murdered by the Taliban just days before 9/11, always had the best for the Afghan women in mind, Amin assured that women would get a role in a future government. “We strongly believe that without the active participation of women, the task of reconstruction, rehabilitation and repatriation of Afghanistan cannot be achieved.”⁹¹

⁸⁷ U.S. Congress. House. Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights of Committee on International Relations, *Afghan People vs The Taliban*. 41-43.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

Congress picked up the message and several bills were introduced from October 2001 to secure the place of women in a post-Taliban Afghanistan. In the House of Representatives two bills were passed. On November 7, "Commending and urging increased support for organizations led by Afghan women that are providing substantial education, health, and relief services during a time of humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and in Afghan refugee areas in neighboring countries, and for the inclusion of women in any new government established in that nation" was introduced. In this bill the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan before 9/11 was brought to the attention of Congress and the government. Again, the bill addressed the difference for women in the pre-Taliban era and commended the Department of State and the President to protect these women's rights and make sure that women got a place in the new to form government.⁹² The second bill, "Expressing the sense of Congress that women from all ethnic groups in Afghanistan should participate in the economic and political reconstruction of Afghanistan", was introduced on November 13 and also this bill repeated the same narrative. The difference for women before and under the Taliban was stressed and the bill again stated the statistics of the number of women working in pre-Taliban times. This bill resolved that the Congress sensed that a portion of humanitarian aid should be spend on women, that women from all ethnic groups should be included in economic and political recovery and that women's rights should be addressed in a new Afghan constitution.⁹³ According to Congress it was critical importance to include women into the new government to safeguard peace and security. Interesting is that these new bills, produced after the hearings, specifically address the reconstruction, but do not mention any of the atrocities against Afghan women by others than the Taliban and the idea of taking this in consideration when rebuilding Afghanistan.

Government narrative

In the mean time The White House also kept the Afghan women on its agenda. To emphasize that the White House was serious, it put the Laura Bush behind the microphone to deliver the weekly national radio address, something only the president had done before. The radio address the First Lady gave on 17 November focussed on the situation of Afghan women, and again a main point was to show that this fight for women's rights is a universal fight for the right thing: "Fighting brutality against women and children is not the expression of a specific culture; it is the acceptance of our common humanity -- a commitment shared by people of good will on every continent." The First Lady reiterated the same

⁹² *Commending and urging increased support for organizations led by Afghan women that are providing substantial education, health, and relief services during a time of humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and in Afghan refugee areas in neighboring countries, and for the inclusion of women in any new government established in that nation.* H.RES.281, 107th Congr., 1st sess. (November 28, 2001); *A concurrent resolution expressing the sense of Congress that women from all ethnic groups in Afghanistan should participate in the economic and political reconstruction of Afghanistan.* S.CON.RES.86, 107th Congress, 1st sess. (November 28, 2001).

⁹³ *Expressing the sense of Congress that women from all ethnic groups in Afghanistan should participate in the economic and political reconstruction of Afghanistan.* H.CON.RES.268, 107th Congress, 1st sess. (November 13, 2001).

narrative as the members of congress did. The women in Afghanistan were excluded from health care and people around the world - among them many muslims - condemned these practices by Taliban. Americans had a moral obligation to condemn it as well and show their support to the Afghan women.⁹⁴ Just like the Members of Congress, Laura Bush stressed the non-religious aspects of the Taliban's oppression.

On the same day as Laura Bush gave her radio address, the Department of State joined in the global media campaign and presented the report *The Taliban's War Against Women*. The output from the government stayed consistent, so this report also adopted the narrative used by both Congress and The White House. The report started with an overview of all the rights women had in Afghanistan before the Taliban came to power. Women could already vote from 1920 on, and were an important part of the working force in Afghanistan until the Taliban banned them from economic life. The report stressed that the Taliban had changed the situation for women dramatically by cutting them off from proper food, health care and education:

The assault on the status of women began immediately after the Taliban took power in Kabul. The Taliban closed the women's university and forced nearly all women to quit their jobs, closing down an important source of talent and expertise for the country. It restricted access to medical care for women, brutally enforced a restrictive dress code, and limited the ability of women to move about the city.⁹⁵

This statement was backed by emotional quotes from Afghan women, depicting how bad life for women in Afghanistan was. It argued that humanitarian rights had severely been breached and "[a]s a result of these measures, the Taliban was ensuring that women would continue to sink deeper into poverty and deprivation, thereby guaranteeing that tomorrow's women would have none of the skills needed to function in a modern society."⁹⁶ Finally, it praised the rise of American concern for Afghan women by stating that:

[t]oday, with Kabul and other Afghan cities liberated from the Taliban, women are returning to their rightful place in Afghan society -- the place they and their families choose to have. Schools are preparing to reopen and women are praying again in mosques. The international community stands with Afghanistan and with Afghans in reclaiming their traditions and their rights. "Afghan society is like a bird with two wings. If one wing is cut off, then society will not function."⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Laura Bush, Radio Address, White House, Washington D.C.: November 17, 2001, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011117.html>.

⁹⁵ Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, *The Taliban's War Against Women, Report on the the Taliban's War Against Women*. U.S. Department of State, Washington D.C.: November 19, 2001, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/6185.htm>

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Paula Dobriansky, Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs, saw the report as an important reach-out to Afghan women. "We recognize the key role women can play in the political and economic recovery for a future Afghanistan. [...] We support the inclusion of Afghan women in the planning and reconstruction of a future Afghanistan."⁹⁸

The media reviewed the address made by the First Lady as a new road into Bush's record on women's issues. The Bush administration or the Republican Party did not have the best record on it and by focussing on the Afghan women the government could show that it did have female issues on its mind. The radio address made by Laura Bush was a multimedia campaign:

Administration officials said the address served as a crucial symbol in a global campaign, conceived and coordinated by the White House, to draw attention to Taliban repression of women. Officials said President Bush hopes that by calling attention to the issue, he can help build support for a voice for women in a future Afghan government."⁹⁹

Jane Smiley, a feminist and Pulitzer-price winning novelist, looked at the public statement of Laura Bush in a complete different way:

Promoting the liberation of Afghan women is a political stance without risk and without a downside. It is kind of like walking down the street and seeing a \$100 bill lying on the sidewalk. The administration has to pick it up; it would be against human nature not to.

Smiley continued with stating that Laura Bush got the opportunity to present herself as an ally to women for who "any sort of life other than imprisonment is a liberation", but she did not have to align herself with feminists or "Hillary types [...] because her position doesn't require any theory or analysis that might reflect on the corporate or multinational goals of G.O.P. sponsors or the failures of American foreign policy over the years."¹⁰⁰

The attention generated by both the Radio Address delivered by Laura Bush, the propositions made in Congress and the report of the Department of State, created an even bigger attention in the media for the stories of Afghan women. One of the most noticeable broadcasts was the rerun of *Behind the Veil* - originally aired in June 2001 - by CNN on the day of the Radio Address. With the help of RAWA reporter Saira Shah, an Afghan woman now living in Britain, showed the hardships that Afghan women had to face everyday. Women being executed on the Kabul football field and three little girls refusing to tell what happened to them after the Taliban invaded their home after killing their mother were the most striking images in this documentary.¹⁰¹ This documentary was rerun often

⁹⁸ Allen, "Laura Bush Gives Radio Address; First Lady says Fight Is for Dignity of Afghan Women; Children" *The Washington Post*, November 18, 2001

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Smiley, "The Way We Live Now: 12-02-2001: The Gaze; Women's Crusade" *The New York Times*, December 2, 2001

¹⁰¹ *Beneath the Veil*, dir. Cassian Harrison (Hardcash Productions, 2001)

during the following days, next to numerous discussions on tv-shows and in newspapers. Afghan women were in the center of the media's attention.¹⁰²

Explanation for the narrative

When *The Afghan Women and Children Relief Act* was signed into public law by the president on December 12 2001 - just five days after the Taliban gave up its last stronghold in Kandahar¹⁰³ - the bill was the outcome of a suddenly raised attention for the status of Afghan women. The American government made into one of the focal points for the upcoming reconstruction of the country. Just as Rosenberg suggests above the American government used the trope of saving women, in this case the Afghan, from a brutal oppressing group, the Taliban. With a very consistent narrative the government created a story on Afghan women. By giving the Afghan women access to economic and health care sources the women would be lifted from their detrimental situation and got a possibility to create a better society from the bottom up, with America as a lighting example. By sticking to the narrative the Bush government avoided the religious or cultural aspects of the oppression of women in Afghanistan. This was very convenient, because the Administration, as seen in the previous chapter, wanted to avoid that the war would be depicted as a clash of religions. The war in Afghanistan was a war of civilized people against barbaric oppressors: The Taliban.

But statements from pressure groups showed a different side of the story. Faryal's claims for the subcommittee were an example of the openings advocates for Afghan women's rights used to promote their ideas, as Rosenberg argues. From the moment the Bush administration discovered Afghan women, feminist pressure groups saw their chances to press for keeping the U.S. government to its claims. As mentioned above, media coverage of Afghan women was considerable. Articles like that of Goodwin and Neuwirth or that of Bumiller - who too explicitly stated that it is not just the Taliban that violates the rights of women in Afghanistan - were published.¹⁰⁴ The documentaries *Beyond the Veil* and its sequel *Unholy War* were often rerun on *CNN*, and *PBS* devoted a panel to prominent Afghan women in *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, where Tahmeena Faryal also took a seat, again made unrecognizable for her own safety.¹⁰⁵ All these articles and speeches explained to the American public how detrimental situation for women was in Afghanistan. Although the initial idea behind this media coverage was to inform the American people of the horrible state Afghan women had to live in under the Taliban rule, all the appearances in the media also seized the opportunity to pitch to the American public and government that within an interim or new Afghan government female rights should be high on the agenda.

¹⁰² Rosenberg, "Rescuing Women and Children," 456.

¹⁰³ BBC News, *Afghanistan Timeline*. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1162108.stm.

¹⁰⁴ Bumiller, "White House Letter; The Politics of Plight and the Gender Gap, *The New York Times*, November 19, 2001.

¹⁰⁵ Panelists were Rina Amiri, Nafissa Mahmood Ghorwal and Tahmeena Faryal; *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* PBS, November 21, 2001.

For example, both Bumiller and Faryal claimed that a nuanced look at the situation for women was needed for the near future if the U.S. wanted to build a sustainable government. Who had actually violated women's rights, and who had not? Faryal explicitly stated in *NewsHour* that when the Northern Alliance would be included in the new government there was not much hope for women, because they had instigated the severe gender laws in Afghanistan in 1992. Faryal and the other panelists called out for a democratic approach. Rina Amiri, at that moment a scholar at the Kennedy School at Harvard University, stated: "Our enemy's enemies are not necessarily our friends. Our true friends are the democratic forces."¹⁰⁶ The lines between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban were not as clear for Afghans as they had been presented to the rest of the world according to Amiri.

Challenges lay ahead for the reconstruction of a new Afghan government. It could not be in question that women would not be on the agenda at the Bonn conference for building an interim government, with having the Afghan women in the midst of public and political attention. It looked like things could actually change for women in Afghanistan. Fighting for women's rights seemed to be an unavoidable step to take. Although concerns did rise that the Bush administration was focussing too much on the Taliban and forgetting that it was not only the Taliban who had violated the rights of women in Afghanistan¹⁰⁷ - with the Taliban removed from power, rebuilding Afghanistan would not happen without securing a humanitarian role for women in Afghan public life.

¹⁰⁶ Rina Amiri during *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* PBS, November 21, 2001.

¹⁰⁷ Bumiller, "White House Letter; The Politics of Plight and the Gender Gap," *The New York Times*, November 19, 2001.

Afghan Hats?

[T]he international community will be unable to carry out reconstruction on the scale that is needed until there is an Afghan partner. This requires the emergence of an interim political authority. Such an authority must lead to a broad-based government that represents all the people of the country, people of every ethnic background and region, women as well as men. Indeed, in all of our efforts, relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, we must ensure that women play prominent roles as planners, as implementers and as beneficiaries.¹⁰⁸

Secretary of State Colin Powell stated his belief that women should be incorporated into the new Afghan interim government in all possible ways. Not only should the Afghan women's rights be defended in the interim government, but they should also be part of that government; "as planners, as implementers." Powell made this statement after a conference which was held on November 20th in Washington. The conference was hosted by Japan and the U.S., answering the call of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1378. This resolution asked for an establishment of a new Afghan government, one that valued human rights and would be representative of all Afghan people of every ethnicity, religion or gender. It called upon the members of the U.N. to give "long-term assistance for the social and economic reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan and welcome [...] initiatives towards this end."¹⁰⁹ During this conference the world's wealthiest nations and influential financial bodies discussed the future of an open market economy within Afghanistan.¹¹⁰ The Washington conference would be the start of several conferences held in the end of November 2001 that addressed the actual reconstruction of Afghanistan in all its different facets. These conferences finally led to the creation of the Afghan interim government during the Bonn Conference in early December of that year.

¹⁰⁸ Powell, "Reconstruction of Afghanistan; Secretary Colin L. Powell; Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill; Japanese Minister Sadako Ogata Remarks at Working Session at the State Department" Department of State, Washington D.C.: November 20, 2001. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/powell_brief42.asp.

¹⁰⁹ United Nations Security Council, *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1378*, [PDF] (November 14, 2001). <http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/2001/sc2001.htm>.

¹¹⁰ Campbell, 'War in Afghanistan: Powell Wants Role for Women' *The Guardian*, November 21, 2001.

This chapter will discuss the different efforts at the reconstruction of Afghanistan, some of which already been founded before 9/11. After 9/11 - with Afghanistan in the middle of the world's attention - the United Nations and American government actively published their will to help in the reconstruction. They organized several conferences concerning the reconstruction, leading up to the above mentioned one in Bonn. This chapter will focus on the role of women; the women present and the role of women's issues during these conferences held in Washington and Islamabad. Second, it will address the Bonn conference and the installation of the interim government. Who was invited to the conferences and who was not and how was the actual group of invitees received by the Afghans? What was the role of Afghan women during the creation of the government and in the the actual interim government itself? Was the Bonn conference influenced by the Afghan Women Summit, held in Brussels at the exact same time? Were the participants of Bonn influenced by Western ideas of womanhood or not? Finally, I will answer if the narrative created in the American government complied with the ideas of nation building of the Afghan women.

Washington and Islamabad

The first serious international attempt to guide the reconstruction of Afghanistan was during the Washington conference of late November. The conference saw 21 nations discussing humanitarian aid and reconstruction assistance for a post-Taliban Afghanistan.¹¹¹ The representatives present did not discuss the actual political future of Afghanistan; the conference was meant to show the long-term commitment to the reconstruction of Afghanistan of the United States and the other invited nations.¹¹² This commitment was mostly shown by gathering a group of donor nations and institutions that could make the economic growth of Afghanistan possible. Western officials saw, according to the *Financial Times*, "explicit economic incentives as playing a significant part in encouraging Afghanistan's rival factions to bury differences and join a broad-based government."¹¹³ Although Colin Powell considered it too early to make pledges for actual grants - since the situation in Afghanistan at that very moment was too insecure - officials estimated, the *Financial Times* reports, that \$6.5 billion and even \$25 billion over a decade would be needed to rebuild Afghanistan's economy.¹¹⁴

On the same day, November 20, the United Nations Special Envoy to Afghanistan Fransesc Vendrell announced that different ethnic Afghan groups would meet in Germany under auspices of the United Nations to form a new government. The Northern Alliance would be invited, but the Taliban was excluded from the talks.¹¹⁵ That the announcement of the talks and the promised investments in Afghanistan were made on the same day was not a coincidence. According to the *Financial Times*, officials stated - just like Colin Powell had done - that "[w]ithout a government in Kabul that speaks

¹¹¹ Hattori, "Press Conference" Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan, November 20, 2001.

¹¹² "Afghanistan Timeline" *BBC News*. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1162108.stm.

¹¹³ Beattie and Fidler, "Donors to discuss Afghan reconstruction finance" *Financial Times*, November 19, 2001.

¹¹⁴ Fidler, "Powell pledge over Afghans' future financing" *Financial Times*, November 21, 2001.

¹¹⁵ "Afghanistan Timeline" *BBC News*. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/1162108.stm.

for all sections of Afghan society, there would be no credible partner with foreign donors for reconstruction. Foreign financing, on the other hand, provided the main incentive for factions to join to form a government.” The possibility to cut funding was also a form of control to keep governments out that were not installed in a democratic way.¹¹⁶ A government that would stabilize Afghanistan, would be highly beneficial for the economic advancement of the nation. James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank Group stressed the importance of a stable government:

Afghanistan needs a vision for tomorrow - of an Afghanistan where people are safe and ethnic relations harmonious; where there is a government that represents and effectively promotes the will of the people; where men and women are free to pursue their way of life and improve their livelihoods; where the economy is growing and poverty is disappearing over time; where the entire population, including girls, can get educated; where everyone has access to basic medical services and clean water; and where good governance and non-intrusiveness of government authorities are the rule.¹¹⁷

Where at the start of October 2001 the idea of nation building was not on the radar of the Bush administration, at the end of November the Afghan reconstruction started to take form - at least in design. Rebuilding Afghanistan would not be a short-term effort, but needed an all-including, long-time effort from the international community. Furthermore, to create a safe harbor for women, a widely accepted government was needed, which was backed by a healthy, stable economy.

The next week the talks continued in Islamabad, Pakistan. That three-day conference was hosted by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and had a broader setup than the conference in Washington. The meeting was designed to let NGOs, investors, companies and politicians assemble so they could gather information and knowledge; the starting principles of any reconstruction effort according to the organizers. Like the meeting in Washington, this meeting was not instigated to start a political reconstruction of Afghanistan. According to the organizers that was a job of the Afghan's themselves. The meeting was intended to create the economical backdrop for the actual creation of a new stable Afghanistan.¹¹⁸ The almost 200 participants came from countries all over the world and covered the wide range of backgrounds intended by the organizers. In contrast to the conference in Washington, the people meeting in Islamabad were not political leaders or high diplomatic officials, but people who could lay the groundworks for an actual reconstruction of Afghanistan. Almost a third of the participants was

¹¹⁶ Fidler, “Powell pledge over Afghans’ future financing.”

¹¹⁷ Wolfensohn, “Remarks at the Working Session on the Reconstruction of Afghanistan,” Washington D.C: November 20, 2001. <http://web.worldbank.org/>.

¹¹⁸ Conference on Preparing for Afghanistan's Reconstruction, “Press Release - Conference to Harvest Ideas and Knowledge” Islamabad, Pakistan: November 27-29, 200. <http://www.worldbank.org.af/>.

Afghan.¹¹⁹ The opening remarks by David E. Lockwood focussed on the new government being one of inclusion, just like Powell after the conference in Washington had done. Lockwood, Deputy Regional Director for Asia of the UNDP, saw a future Afghanistan where all inhabitants were represented:

The opportunities that seem to be before us are enormous – the prospect of an interim authority which will pave the way for an internationally recognized broad based government; a nation of men and women, boys and girls, with renewed hope that they can finally begin to rebuild their shattered lives, a donor community which recognizes the neglect of decades and is ready to help them by investing in recovery immediately, leading to long term reconstruction and development.¹²⁰

William Byrd, Senior Economic Advisor of the World Bank and based in Kabul, also remembered that the participants of the conference they were there for the Afghans. In his view the Afghan society was complex, but the participants could provide a structural economic basis on which a post-Taliban Afghanistan could build a future:

I would like to suggest that, as we look forward to lively open discussions and group work during the next two days, we all take off our "agency hats" and put on our "Afghanistan hats". Afghanistan by the way has many different kinds of hats—wool, cotton, or silk; for men and for women and for children; embroidered or plain; decorative or practical against the cold. Afghanistan's hats are made by the people, usually by the women, with loving care. I am sure that each of us will be able to find a suitable "Afghanistan hat" [...] that helps meet the country's numerous and complex reconstruction needs and also fits with our own organizational and individual capabilities.¹²¹

During the second day, one of the conference's work groups focussed on 'The Role of Women in Reconstruction of Afghanistan.' The group itself gathered ideas for the implementation of a better position for women in Afghanistan, with the main remarks that women should get access to education, that awareness of women's issues should be raised and that women should be involved in the new political system. Women should be used as role models for both women as men. Another point that the work group stressed was that all this should be done with respect for traditions, culture and

¹¹⁹ Conference on Preparing for Afghanistan's Reconstruction, "Media Advisory - International Conference: Preparing for Afghanistan's Reconstruction" [PDF] Islamabad, Pakistan: November 19, 2001. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFGHANISTAN/Resources/media_advisory.pdf; Conference on Preparing for Afghanistan's Reconstruction, "List of Conference Participants - Conference on Preparing for Afghanistan's reconstruction," Islamabad, Pakistan: November 27-29, 2001. <http://www.worldbank.org.af/>.

¹²⁰ Lockwood, "Opening remarks" Conference on Preparing for Afghanistan's Reconstruction, Islamabad, Pakistan: November 27-29, 2001. <http://www.worldbank.org.af/>.

¹²¹ Byrd, "Lessons from International Experience, Aid Management during Post-Conflict Reconstruction." Conference on Preparing for Afghanistan's Reconstruction, Islamabad, Pakistan: November 27-29, 2001. <http://www.worldbank.org.af/>.

religion. One of the ideas that passed in that regard was that quotes from the Quran should be used to promote women's rights.¹²² The topic of women ended up in the co-chair's concluding remarks of the conference: "Women, as well as men, must be fully engaged in reconstruction planning and development, with the family at the centre of our attentions."¹²³

Bonn's Participants

Simultaneously with the conference in Islamabad, leaders of different Afghan factions met in Bonn by invitation of the United Nations to lay the basis for a new political structure for Afghanistan. Already before 9/11 several initiatives for a new Afghan government had been taken, mostly instigated by the U.N. together with Afghan exiles. It is important to quickly go over the different initiatives that already existed, because these initiatives were influential for the group participating in Bonn. During the 1990s, the U.N. often mediated with the former Afghan King, Zahir Shah to form a government by a *Loya Jirga*, a traditional assembly. These attempts failed because it was hard to get the different warmongering factions face the same way. Other attempts without the involvement of the U.N. were also made, with the most noteworthy being the so-called "Rome Process": a discussion group launched by Hamid Karzai, former *mujahideen* leader Abd Al-Haq and the King Zahir Shah. The groups that tried to form a more representative government in Afghanistan during the 1990s would be the groups that were also invited to Bonn.¹²⁴

In Bonn, the U.N. attempted to get as many of the different Afghan factions - mostly created along ethnic lines - at the same table as possible. The United Nations invited four delegations, representing the largest ethnic populations. As the leaders of the Afghan resistance to the Taliban, the Northern Alliance were assured a spot at the table. The Northern Alliance included the Tajik, Uzbek and Hazar minorities and consisted of eleven delegates and fourteen advisors and was led by Yunis Qunnani, a Tajik leader residing in Kabul. The Northern Alliance delegation did not include key figures as Burhanuddin Rabbani, the former president of Afghanistan who was ousted by the Taliban in 1996, General Dostum, leader of the Uzbeks living in Afghanistan; or Ismail Khan, the leader of the Sunni Tajik fighters. The second important group consisted of the Durrani Pashtun, the group around Hamid Karzai and King Shah, which mostly lived in the South of Afghanistan. This so-called Rome group was led by Abdul Sattar Sirat, a direct representative of the king, who himself would not be present. Also Hamid Karzai was not present in Bonn, but did speak to the representatives through a video-conference.¹²⁵ The Rome group consisted of eleven delegates and seven advisors and was considered to be very pro-western. Sayed Hamid Gailiani, a protege of the Pakistan government, led the third

¹²² Conference on Preparing for Afghanistan's Reconstruction, "The Role of Women in Reconstruction of Afghanistan, Working Group Report, Conference on Preparing for Afghanistan's Reconstruction" Islamabad, Pakistan: November 27-29, 2001. <http://www.worldbank.org.af>.

¹²³ Iwasaki, Lockwood and Nishimizu, "Co-Chairs Concluding Remarks" Conference on Preparing for Afghanistan's Reconstruction, Islamabad, Pakistan: November 27-29, 2001. <http://www.worldbank.org.af>.

¹²⁴ Katzman, *Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance*. 9.

¹²⁵ "Grote leiders ontbreken aan de onderhandelingstafel" *De Volkskrant*, November 28, 2001.

delegation, the so-called Peshawar group. The Peshawar group consisted of Pashtuns living close to or just over the Pakistan border near the border city Peshawar, hence the name. The Peshawar group was known as *gucci-mujahideen* because of its loose interpretation of the Islamic rules. The group consisted of three delegates and three advisors. The last group was the Cyprus group, which was led by Humajun Dscharir, a former Afghan foreign minister and the son in law of Gulbuddin Hekmatjar, the warlord which was held responsible by the Northern Alliance for the disruption of the peace in Kabul between 1992 and 1996. The Cyprus group consisted Afghan politicians in exile, some of them in Iran. The group sent three delegates and six advisors, but was considered to be on the outer circle of the negotiations.¹²⁶ For the United Nations Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi and for the U.S. Special Envoy to Afghanistan James Dobbins were present.¹²⁷ The Taliban, being removed from Kabul and from power, were not considered to be a vital partner for the talks and were not invited - as intended by the U.N. on November 20th.

It was not evident from the start that women would be part of the different delegations, or a matter of subject during the talks. The U.N., facilitator of the meeting, did not force the groups to include females, but it recommended the participants to do so.¹²⁸ In the United States the the role of women in Bonn was also under discussion. When journalists asked the Department of State Spokesman Richard Boucher on November 20th if there would be consequences if women were not included in a new Afghan government he answered: "I would say this means that you can assume that the United States will continue to promote the idea that women have to be involved in all aspects of Afghan life, and that we see that as essential to the creation of a broad-based government."¹²⁹ A day later Boucher said that America had made "[...] this part of [its] diplomacy, to encourage people, the Afghans who meet on the political process, to understand that the broad-based government means that women have to be involved in the political process."¹³⁰ These statements by Boucher followed just days after the First Lady gave her national radio address, and Boucher - like his fellow American government officials - stayed within the narrative described in the previous chapter. The United States supported the presence of women in Bonn, but Boucher did not give any comments on the consequences if women were not involved, if the percentages of women in Bonn were a reliable reflection of the number of Afghan women or if the women present did represent the different ethnical factions in Afghanistan.

The obvious support for the cause of Afghan women from the American government in the media seemed to have changed the minds of the delegations. Just before the start of the negotiations and just after the public remarks made by Laura Bush and the Department of State report, Hamid

¹²⁶ "Afghanistan-Konferenz, Die Teilnehmer" *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 30 November 2001.

¹²⁷ Peel, Hoyos, Thornhill, Bokhari and Dinmore, "Hunt for peace among quarrelsome neighbours: BONN CONFERENCE: Conference will try to bring together the disparate and quarrelsome elements of the Afghan opposition. FT writers look at the central figures" *Financial Times*, 23 November 2001.

¹²⁸ McCarthy, 'War in Afghanistan: Ex-king's delegation might include women' *The Guardian*, 23 November 2001.

¹²⁹ Boucher, State Department Daily Briefing, Washington D.C.: November 20, 2001.

¹³⁰ Boucher, State Department Daily Briefing, Washington D.C.: November 21, 2001.

Sadig, senior aide to the former Afghan king, expressed that women might be part of the king's delegation: "The role of women for the future of Afghanistan is crucial and important."¹³¹ The delegation of the king did keep its promises and invited two women: Sima Wali and Rona Mansuri. Sima Wali was the president and CEO of Refugee Women in Development Inc., an institution which focused on women in conflict and post-conflict regions. She received several awards for her pioneering advocacy for women's rights, mostly in Afghanistan and Pakistan. She was also known to the American government because she testified for the Congress and for the State Department in 1999 resulting in the 'Afghan Women's Support Bill,' mentioned above.¹³² Rona Mansuri was the daughter of the former Afghan prime minister Mohammed Yousaf Khan. She left Afghanistan in 1964, and spent her time in exile in Germany, where she was head of the German Association for Afghan Women. Although the Northern Alliance did not seem to be very keen to invite any women among their ranks, they eventually did send a woman along with their delegation: Amena Afzali. She was a former member of Rabbani's Jamiat Islami Party¹³³ and helped Afghan refugees settling and integrating in Iran.¹³⁴ Also a RAWA representative joined as an observer for the Northern Alliance.¹³⁵

The other groups in Bonn still seemed to be reluctant to include women in their delegations. Even after protests by Fatana Gailani¹³⁶, head of the Women's Counsel in Peshawar and daughter of their leader Pir Sayed Gailani, the Peshawar group did not invite her as a delegate, but she was present at the Bonn Conference as an advisor. The Cyprus group sent in Seddighe Balkhi as an advisor. Balkhi was the head of the Islamic Centre for Political and Cultural Activities for Afghan Women. She left Afghanistan in 1981 for Iran to teach refugee women. She managed to build bridges between women from different ethnical backgrounds, for example by bringing them to school together. In 1991 she returned to Afghanistan to continue her work there.¹³⁷ At the start of the conference, all the Afghan groups present had female representatives, either as a full-blown delegate or as an advisor to their male delegates.

Brussels' Afghan Women Summit

The women participating in Bonn went to another conference held at the very same time. The Afghan Women's Summit, held in Brussels on 4 and 5 December 2001, was initiated by Sima Wali and

¹³¹ McCarthy, "War in Afghanistan: Ex-king's delegation might include women."

¹³² "Sima Wali" Institute for Afghan Studies <http://www.institute-for-afghan-studies.org/iasmembersbio/simawali.htm>.

¹³³ Bhatia, *Contemporary Afghanistan: A Political Dictionary*. New Dehli: Har-Anand Publications PVT LTD, 2003, 37.

¹³⁴ Qazi, "Biographies, Other Important Personalities of Today" Afghanistan Online <http://www.afghan-web.com/bios/today/others.html>.

¹³⁵ Neuwirth, "Women and Peace and Security: the Implementation of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325," 255.

¹³⁶ McCarthy, "War in Afghanistan: Ex-king's delegation might include women".

¹³⁷ Rostami Povey, "Women in Afghanistan: Passive Victims of the *Borga* or Active Social Participants," 14.

sponsored by the western feminist organizations Equality Now, The European Women's Lobby, V-Day, The Center for Strategic Initiatives of Women and The Feminist Majority. The goal of the summit was to bring different Afghan women from different ethnical backgrounds together so they could discuss the future of Afghan females and their role in the reconstruction and future of Afghanistan, as stated in UNSC RES. 1325. Because the Taliban was defeated very quickly and ousted from power, the summit in Brussels unexpectedly coincided with the talks in Bonn, which, according to Neuwirth, a participant herself as president of Equality Now, changed the agenda of the Brussels summit into a more practical advising backdrop for the female Bonn-participants.¹³⁸

The conference in Brussels, which was very well covered by the press according to Neuwirth started with two closed meetings; one for the western women, and one for the Afghan women. In the meeting with the western women the goal was "to discuss [in solidarity] strategies for support of the women of Afghanistan including advocacy for funding conditionality; raising awareness; and providing technical support for women's rights lawyers in Afghanistan."¹³⁹ The western women showed their solidarity with the Afghan women; they fought for every woman's rights. The other closed meeting had a different character. There, the Afghan women met to discuss their future in Afghanistan. First, as explained by Rina Amiri, the Afghan women - in contrast to the western women - did not have a monolithic female voice or a sense of female unity. They had to overcome their own ethnical difference first. As Austin explains:

The polarization of ethnic groups has been much higher in the past five years, making collaboration difficult. And the type of gender consciousness that exists in the West does not exist in Afghanistan. It's the veiled versus the semi-veiled versus the unveiled.¹⁴⁰

Second, the Afghan women present were representatives of the elite of the nation. According to Habiba Sorabi, a RAWA elder

[w]ealthy educated women have the ability to express themselves, to demand their rights [...]. But I would like to emphasize the rights of rural women. Nobody is asking how a constitution would back their needs. They are deprived of so many basic rights and cannot even express themselves. Basically they are treated like animals.¹⁴¹

The suggestions for rebuilding Afghanistan that came out of the meeting of Afghan women showed these ethnical and class differences. One of the major issues discussed was the form the new Afghan government should take: secular democracy, an Iran-like Islamic republic, or something in between? The pace of modernizing Afghanistan was also under discussion; where the more western Afghan

¹³⁸ Neuwirth, "Women and Peace and Security," 255.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 256.

¹⁴⁰ Austin, "Where are the women? Debating Afghanistan's Future" *The Nation*, 31 December 2001, 11.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 12.

women pushed for a women's rights manifesto "based on the language of international law" others pressed for a more traditional and slow change. "The Afghan women who have lived there and are aware of traditional, Islamic culture understand how hard it is. We are a traditional backward, patriarchal and conservative country" is how Afghan exile and participant Enayat-Seraj described the dangers of modernizing Afghanistan too fast. She considered it overly ambitious and risky.¹⁴²

Nonetheless, these differences were not reflected in *The Brussels Proclamation*, a document drafted on December 5 with the summit's concluding remarks. The document advocated that Afghan women, as well as female Afghan refugees, should get access to education, media, culture and healthcare. The proclamation also called for the international community to see to it that Afghan women would be part of a new political system (as well as be represented in the legislative, judicial and executive branch) and that a future Afghanistan would comply to the International Declaration of Human Rights.¹⁴³ Although it was no manifesto of Afghan women's rights, the document fairly abided by international standards for human rights. A possible modernization or westernization of Afghanistan were not discussed, nor the cultural and religious background of Afghan women.

Bonn's Outcomes

On the same day as that draft of *The Brussels Proclamation* was issued, the conference in Bonn ended with all the delegations agreeing on an interim government taking over power in Afghanistan from December 22. *The Bonn Agreement* first reaffirmed the independence of Afghanistan and stated:

Acknowledging the right of the people of Afghanistan to freely determine their own political future in accordance with the principles of Islam, democracy, pluralism and social justice,

Other than *The Brussels Proclamation* the agreement signed in Bonn did address the cultural and religious background of Afghanistan. This was very apparent in the following section where the delegates expressed their appreciation for in their eyes brave work of the *mujihadeen* for Afghanistan; which was followed by a statement that interim government would also recognize the ethnicities not represented in Bonn. Finally the interim government would be a first step towards a political system that was as inclusive as possible:

Noting that these interim arrangements are intended as a first step toward the establishment of a broad-based, gender-sensitive, multi-ethnic and fully representative government, and are not intended to remain in place beyond the specified period of time.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Austin, "Where are the women?" 12.

¹⁴³ Afghan Women's Summit For Democracy, *The Brussels Proclamation; Afghan Women's Summit For Democracy*, Brussels: December 4-5, 2001.

¹⁴⁴ Afghan Reconstruction Conference, "Agreement on provisional arrangements in Afghanistan pending the re-establishment of permanent government institutions" Afghan Reconstruction Conference; Bonn, Germany: December 5, 2001. <http://www.un.org/News/dh/latest/afghan/afghan-agree.htm>.

These claims addressed the differences within Afghan society, recognized the violent past, the many ethnical groups living in Afghanistan and that a new interim government should include as well women as men as different ethnicities. The document continues with more practical issues of forming a government. The different members of the interim government were appointed, with Hamid Karzai as the interim president. The interim government would rule for six months, after which an Emergency Loya Jirga would be called. This traditional Afghan grand assembly would then draft a new Afghan constitution and install a transitional government, which would organize general elections, to be held 18 months after the installment of the interim government. Until then, the Afghan Constitution of 1964 would be the judicial basis for this interim government, with the difference that Afghanistan would now be a republic instead of a monarchy and that it had to comply to international treaties signed by Afghanistan not taken into account by this constitution.¹⁴⁵

The Bonn agreement also ensured "the participation of women as well as the equitable representation of all ethnic and religious communities in the Interim Administration and the Emergency Loya Jirga."¹⁴⁶ Two women participated. Dr. Sima Samar, who would be the head of the department of Women's Affairs and a vice-chairman, was a doctor in Jaghoori, south-west of Kabul. She fled to Pakistan after her husband was arrested by the communist regime. In Pakistan she founded the Shuhada organization, which provided health care to Afghan women and girls in Quetta, Pakistan. This organization expanded later with branches within Afghanistan.¹⁴⁷ The second female in the interim government was Suhaila Saddiqi. Saddiqi was a physician like Samar. She was able to resist the Taliban because of her professional reputation as well as her rank as lieutenant general in the Afghan medical corps. At first when the Taliban came to power, she was banished to her home, but eight months later the Taliban asked her to treat their wives and girls. She agreed, under the condition that she and her sister would not be obliged to wear a burka; which turned her into a heroine for many Afghan women.¹⁴⁸

The appendixes to the agreement asked the the members of the United Nations to help with the creation of this new government of Afghanistan, by making the elections possible by registering voters and help with calling the Emergency Loya Jirga together. It also asked for help with organizing security:

Conscious that some time may be required for the new Afghan security and armed forces to be fully constituted and functioning, the participants in the UN Talks on Afghanistan request the United Nations Security Council to consider authorizing the early deployment to Afghanistan of a United Nations mandated force. This force will assist in the maintenance of

¹⁴⁵ Deledda, "Afghanistan - The End of the Bonn Process"14.

¹⁴⁶ "Agreement on provisional arrangements in Afghanistan."

¹⁴⁷ "Agreement on provisional arrangements in Afghanistan"; Samar; "Dr. Sima Samar" Dr. Sima Samar's Personal Website. <http://simasamar.com>.

¹⁴⁸ Goldenberg, "The Women Who Stood Up To The Taliban," *The Guardian*, January 24, 2002.

security for Kabul and its surrounding areas. Such a force could, as appropriate, be progressively expanded to other urban centres and other areas.¹⁴⁹

This request led to the installment of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which was mandated by the UN Security Council on December 20th by the UNSC RES. 1386. ISAF was first led by the British, not by the Americans. The Pentagon refused to do so.¹⁵⁰

Other voices

During and after the conference in Bonn several protests were voiced against the setup, the invitees, and the topics addressed. A RAWA representative, under the alias of Shahala Asad, expressed her fear that the Northern Alliance would come to power again:

"We are against the Northern Alliance," she said. "We experienced them from 1992 to 1996, the most dark period of our history. Our people will not forget and forgive the atrocities - killing, raping of women, destruction, fighting among factions, looting of houses, beating, using the gun for power. There is no difference between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance. They both are anti-democracy and anti-women."¹⁵¹

The accusation that the Northern Alliance would grasp power and turn Afghanistan back to the heydays of the Taliban tapped into a bigger concern of Afghans. Besides fear of a violent government, Afghans questioned if the delegates at Bonn were an adequate representation of Afghan society and its population. Did all the groups present had a right to be there, considering the violent past of Afghanistan, or did they just earned a spot on the table by doing the dirty work of the Americans? Sven Gunnar Simonsen argues that the U.N. deliberately chose to shape the reconstruction talks in a way that all ethnical groups were represented: "[s]imilar to other peace buildings by international administrations in recent years, the post-conflict period [in Afghanistan] has been characterised by efforts to involve broad segments of the population and political forces."¹⁵² This was shown in the invitations; the four major groups that were invited to the Bonn conference represented in essence all the major ethnic groups within Afghanistan. On the other hand, it was questioned whether this concept of inclusion would actually work for Afghanistan with its rough history. The actual effectiveness of the agreements was not considered to be that promising according to Larry Goodson: "[T]he Accords are based on a centralized governance model that is at odds with Afghanistan's

¹⁴⁹ "Agreement on provisional arrangements in Afghanistan."

¹⁵⁰ ISAF Information & Resources, "History" ISAF, NATO; <http://www.isaf.nato.int/en/our-history/>; United Nations Security Council; *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1368*, Goodson; "Afghanistan's Long Road to Reconstruction" *Journal of Democracy*, vol 14, no. 1 (January 2002), 86.

¹⁵¹ Martin, "Afghans protest at U.N. talks, angry women say Northern Alliance as bad as Taliban," *The Washington Times*, December 5, 2001.

¹⁵² Simonsen, "Ethnicising Afghanistan?: inclusion and exclusion in post-Bonn institution building," 711.

traditional and now war-heightened localism.”¹⁵³ According to Goodson a more federal system would be better, certainly with the lack of power the ISAF mission got by its mandate. While international forces could only guard the Kabul area, local ethnic warlords could easily restate the power they had in other Afghan areas.

Other aspects of representation were not as well covered as the ethnic part. First, inviting women among the delegates looked like a last minute decision. Second, a big concern for many Afghans, certainly the female, was that most of representatives in Bonn were actual Afghans living in exile. From all the Afghan women present in Bonn, only one returned to Afghanistan during the Taliban rule. All the others lived outside of Afghanistan’s borders for years. The exiles did not go through the hardships the Afghans that stayed had to endure. Soraya Palika, an actual Afghan female rights protester living in Afghanistan, wanted to organize a march to the Afghan U.N. office in Kabul during the Bonn conference. She wanted to protest against the lack of women that lived through the hardships of the Taliban’s abuse there. Yunis Qunnani - the soon to be interim minister of the Interior - told her not to go because of safety reasons. The refusal of her proposal to be one of the delegates in Bonn made Palika very upset. As *The Guardian* reported,

Ms Parlika and the women packed into her flat yesterday were furious. For years they had risked beatings and jail terms to organise secret meetings and school classes for girls. Even then several thousand people were in her Union of the Women of Afghanistan. Now that women are appearing in public again they want guarantees that they will not be overlooked this time in the warlords' jostle for power. "The women here keep asking why we are not represented at Bonn?" she said. They regard the three women at the UN negotiating table as little more than a token effort.¹⁵⁴

All women present in Bonn, except for Balkhi, did not live under the Taliban. To Parlika, it seemed unfair that women living abroad for many years were considered to be the legitimate representatives for the women in Afghanistan. They never encountered the hardships the women that stayed in Afghanistan had to face, so how would the women in Bonn be able to build a government that could totally abandon and abolish these practices they did not know themselves?

A final concern considered the outcomes of the Bonn conference. As Goodson explains, the Bonn Accords did not answer what the actual government would look like and what its focus would be:

Shall the national government be presidential, parliamentary, or something in between? Will there be a constitutional monarch? What role in governance will be played by Islam generally and Islamic law (shari'a) specifically? What are to be the rights of individuals, minorities, and

¹⁵³ Goodson, “Afghanistan’s Long Road to Reconstruction,” 89.

¹⁵⁴ McCarthy, “War in Afghanistan: Burkas stay on as women of the capital await their liberation: Rout of Taliban fails to improve the female lot” *The Guardian*, November 21, 2001.

women? How are the party and electoral systems to work? Which languages will have official status?¹⁵⁵

Those were the big challenges that lay ahead for the new interim government, but also for the international community. If they wanted to keep their promises to stay committed to Afghanistan and its women, they had to face how the Emergency Loya Jirga would address the issues that came out of the protests after the Bonn agreements in the new to draw constitution.

Considering the outcome of women's rights within Afghanistan, several people questioned where the actual priority of Afghan women lay. Was that in gaining women's rights, or were more basic needs of a greater importance? Julie Mertus of the American University School of International Service and writer of *War's Offensive on Women: The Humanitarian Challenge in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan*, argued for the latter in a letter to *The Washington Post*: "Afghan women are concerned about their rights. However, ask any Afghan woman in a refugee camp to list her primary concerns, and she is more likely to talk about the need for peace, health care, food, education and shelter than about having to wear the burqa."¹⁵⁶ In an interview with *The Guardian* the to be appointed Minister of Health Saddiqi gave her opinion on the recently won independence for Afghan women:

"I hope things will improve step by step but it will be slow [...]. I see there are women on television now and that is some sort of independence. But we don't want our women to be like those in the west where they are used for pornography and glamour." The real problem, she said, was not the symbolism of the burka but the destruction of education and infrastructure over 20 years of war. "The priority is education, the reconstruction of this country and an end to the interference by foreigners."¹⁵⁷

The two women raised a question that would be very significant, and it touched upon the differences between the actual reality of Afghan women and their depiction in the world. The discussion was initially fueled by images of women deprived of all humanity into a confining burqa. But Mertus and Saddiqi described a different image than that portrayed in the narrative created by Americans in November 2001. Instead of fighting for the overall freedom of Afghan women, Afghan women did not really care about shedding the burqa; they wanted a decent life first. The reality for Afghan women was different from the narrative created in the United States.

In reality the Afghan women struggled with the idea of the freedom; they could not directly come to a conclusive ideal. Should a new Afghanistan be built according to traditional Afghan lines, or should a more modern state - with the United States as an example - be the future of Afghanistan? This was due to ethnical differences between the women themselves and to delegates to the

¹⁵⁵ Goodson, "Afghanistan's Long Road to Reconstruction," 89.

¹⁵⁶ Mertus, "Afghan Women have more immediate concerns than 'women's rights'", *The Washington Post*, November 26, 2001.

¹⁵⁷ McCarthy, "War in Afghanistan: Burkas stay on as women of the capital await their liberation."

conferences mostly consisting of women not having lived under the Taliban, but in the west. Getting the women at a conference table that could represent all the women in Afghanistan was fairly impossible. Finally there was the reality of the cultural background of Afghanistan. For many Afghan delegates it was very important that this would be respected in a new Afghan political system; but this stood in stark contrast to the modernizing call from Americans concerning the Afghan women.

Nation building in Afghanistan consisted of juggling the nation's diverse ethnic background, its violent past, its fairly orthodox religious traditions and the international call to modernize. Considering the Afghan women, the ideal of modernization was not easy to realize. Traditions and customs - either religious or not - did not give Afghan women a public role in society, and with a nation in a devastated condition like Afghanistan, modernizing was not a priority for women. The narrative created in America did address these basic issues by focussing on providing food, health care and work to the women, but did not address these traditions, or question if the women actually wanted to emancipate along western lines. Securing a better future for the women in Afghanistan would not do with a pledge of support from the west, but needed considerable nation building.

Shedding the scarf?

Everyone is waiting for one woman: Sima Samar. She is an object of fascination, a medical doctor unknown in the Afghan political world before she was appointed in early December to the interim Afghan government, one of two women in the cabinet. Named a deputy chair and the minister for women's affairs, Samar, 46, is the highest-ranking woman in the government, and she is charged with one of its most difficult assignments -- rebuilding the lives of Afghan women. When she finally rushes into the room, late from another meeting, Samar is not wearing her head scarf. It is draped around her shoulders, where it often sits -- where it usually sits, save for when her picture is being taken, or she is addressing a specific group. Save for those times when she worries that not wearing the scarf will offend.¹⁵⁸

Above, A *Washington Post* journalist described the visit of Sima Samar to the United States on April 24, 2002. Samar was at that moment the Afghan Minister of Women's Affairs. As seen above, Samar was highly anticipated, she was a special woman - but the description of the scarf told that she was also part form a different world. A world where a powerful woman apparently had to wear a scarf to prevent her from offending audiences. What the journalist did not address, was that Samar might have brought her scarf for other reasons: because of tradition, religion or habit. This description is an interesting one because it touches upon two questions left open in previous chapters. First, was the Western narrative of the Afghan women correct? Second, did the emphasis on women's rights actually benefit the women in Afghanistan or was it more beneficial for the American government in their attempt to legitimize the War on Terror?

This concluding chapter will answer these questions. First the chapter will briefly discuss the outcome of the promises made to the Afghan women in the last months of 2001 by the American Congress and government, by going over the establishment of US-Afghan Women Council, addressing the formation of the new Afghan constitution by the *Constitutional Loya Jirga* and a review of a Human Right's Watch report assessing the progress made on the human rights position of Afghan Women, published in December 2009. Finally I will analyze the war story as created by the American

¹⁵⁸ Frey, "A Healing Force For Afghan Women; From her Cabinet Post, Sima Samar Sees a Long, Hard Road Still Ahead" *Washington Post*, April 24, 2002.

government. Along which dichotomies was it told? Why was this story told? Did it benefit the struggle of Afghan women or was it solely beneficial for the Bush administration explaining the war to Americans?

After Bonn and Brussels

One of the promises made by the western women in Brussels, was that they would support the Afghan women in solidarity by bringing their cause to the attention of government officials. One day after the presentation of *The Brussels Proclamation*, the women informed the European Parliament. On December 13th the Parliament called for aid given to Afghanistan "to be made conditional on the participation of women in decision-making and in the use of such aid" and for the next International Women's Day to be in honor of the Afghan women.

On that same day a delegation from Brussels conference arrived in the United States for a visit of a week to meet with U.N. and government officials, among them Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice.¹⁵⁹ This meeting proved to be effective. When President Bush and Hamid Karzai met on January 28, the Afghan women were on the agenda. In their joint statement the presidents announced that they had "agree[d] to launch a joint U.S.-Afghanistan Women's Council to promote private/public partnerships and mobilize resources to ensure women can gain the skills and education deprived them under years of Taliban mis-rule."¹⁶⁰ The council would be an organization where private and public institutions would cooperate with the goal to provide Afghan women the tools and skills so they could claim their rightful place in Afghan society. Examples were projects to train women to use computers, so they could do office work for the government, opening up health care to women or building schools so girls and boys could go back to school.¹⁶¹

These efforts were very welcome in Afghanistan, but for the Afghan women to get an equal position in Afghan society, they needed to be protected by Afghan law. So the creation of the constitution was of vital importance. In the constitution ratified in 2004 women and men were equal before the law; that there will be no division among gender lines is explicitly mentioned. The state will also promote programs to balance the differences between women and men, and women without caretakers would receive support from the state. Finally, it is noteworthy that the constitution determined a set quota of female representatives in the legislature.¹⁶²

Although these developments looked really promising, a Human Rights Watch report, published on 6 December 2009 told otherwise. Human Rights Watch found that "[e]ight years after the

¹⁵⁹ Neuwirth, "Women and Peace and Security," 258-259.

¹⁶⁰ George W. Bush and Hamid Karzai, "Joint Statement by President George W. Bush and Chairman Hamid Karzai on a New Partnership Between the United States and Afghanistan" Office of the Press Secretary; Washington D.C.: January 28, 2002. http://avalon.law.yale.edu/sept11/joint_014.asp.

¹⁶¹ U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesman, "Inaugural Session of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council Announces Computer Education Program for Afghan Women", U.S. Department of State, Washington D.C., April 25, 2002. <http://2002-2009-usawc.state.gov/news/13412.htm>.

¹⁶² Afghan Constitution, Chapter 2 and chapter 5. http://www.afghan-web.com/politics/current_constitution.html.

fall of the Taliban, women and girls suffer high levels of violence and discrimination and have poor access to justice and education.” This was completely different from the promises made by the American government at the end of 2001. What happened? According to Human Rights Watch “[t]he plight of women and girls under the Taliban was used to help justify the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, [but] women's rights have not been a consistent priority of the government or its international backers.”¹⁶³ Was Human Rights Watch right?

Conclusions

On March 26 2010 the website <http://wikileaks.org> published a CIA document concerning the European support for the Afghan mission. To avoid a domino effect of Western nations pulling out of the mission in Afghanistan - after the fall of the Dutch government over their participation in the ISAF the month before - the CIA distributed an internal, secret memorandum with possible public relations strategies to sustain Europe’s solidarity with ISAF. The apathy of German and French voters - two countries who bring sufficient amounts of troops to Afghanistan - could turn into hostility with fighting starting again in the upcoming Summer. To avoid that, the CIA Red Cell, charged by the Director of Intelligence to provoke thought and intelligence with out-of-the-box views, came up with two ideas. First, send in President Obama to convince the European voters, since he was well-trusted to solve foreign issues. Second, let women tell their story, because

Afghan women could serve as ideal messengers in humanizing the ISAF role in combating the Taliban because of women’s ability to speak personally and credibly about their experiences under the Taliban, their aspirations for the future, and their fears of a Taliban victory. Outreach initiatives that create media opportunities for Afghan women to share their stories with French, German, and other European women could help to overcome pervasive skepticism among women in Western Europe toward the ISAF mission.¹⁶⁴

Keeping in mind that this document’s goal was to provoke thought and it was leaked, it still shows that Human Right’s Watch’s claim that Afghan women were used to justify the mission made sense. According to the CIA, the story of the Afghan women created empathy, certainly if they would tell it themselves and to other women. And this empathy for the Afghan women would also raise the support for the mission.

If we look back, we can find reasons why the story of the Afghan women worked. Going back to Cooke’s idea; war stories are created to explain “the official, state authorized story about why we

¹⁶³Human Rights Watch, “We Have the Promises of the World, Women’s Rights in Afghanistan” [PDF] Human Rights Watch. <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/12/03/we-have-promises-world-0>; Human Rights Watch, “Afghanistan : Keep Promises to Afghan Women” Human Rights Watch. <http://www.hrw.org/node/86997>.

¹⁶⁴ CIA Red Cell, “CIA Red Cell Special Memorandum; Afghanistan: Sustaining West European Support for the NATO-led Mission-Why Counting on Apathy Might Not Be Enough” [PDF], March 11, 2010. *Wikileaks*: <http://file.wikileaks.org/file/cia-afghanistan.pdf>.

go to war and how wars are won.”¹⁶⁵ The American government also created a war story, or a narrative for the mission in Afghanistan. Just after 9/11 the Bush administration had to rediscover Afghanistan, the Taliban and Al Qaeda that it was harboring. One thing after 9/11 was certain: the United States would strike back. But it was not really sure against which enemy. When creating the image of the enemy - Al Qaeda and later on the Taliban - the Bush administration wanted to avoid that the mission would be portrayed as a clash of religions or cultures. The administration used the dichotomy between a corrupted power - the Taliban - and the innocent civilians - the Afghan people.

The trope of the Afghan women was a useful story to explain this dichotomy. Afghan women were the epitome of the innocent civilian. They were by no means combatants, because they were women. They were no supporters of the Taliban and they could not vote or participate in the Taliban government. Second, the Afghan women as the portrayal of the innocent civilian also strengthened the image of the Taliban and in a lesser sense Al Qaeda as the enemy. They were the ones that oppressed these women so brutally. And whoever fought that brutality had imminently a good reason. So when Bush discovered the Afghan women, the administration and Congress did not hesitate to pick it up. It was an extra reason - besides fighting terrorists - to invade Afghanistan. It was a story that sounded very natural.

But, as Cooke mentions, the dichotomies used in war stories, often reside in ‘fictionalities’. This was certainly true for the story on Afghan women. Along the lines of Said’s and Zine’s description of how the west portrays the east, Afghan women were portrayed as non-acting victims of a barbaric, brutal subjugation of a corrupt masculine institute, with the United States going in there to free them. Different from Said and Zine, was the explanation in the American narrative of how the women were oppressed. They were not suppressed because of a backwards culture or religion; but because of political and economic decisions, made by the Taliban.

Although it is understandable that the American government avoided the cultural or religious background out of electoral and security reasons at home - they did not call 9/11 an act of Muslims against Christians to avoid a heated religious debate - the mere focus on politics and economics was fiction as well. The Taliban justified their suppression of women by a deep reading of the Quran for instance. The call for a deeper understanding of the traditional background of Afghan women, surfaced when these women got to tell their own input on the reconstruction of Afghanistan. During the conferences in Islamabad, Bonn and Brussels they voiced their opinion that Afghan culture and history should be respected in the reconstruction of the country, and that a humanitarian balance that included all the different ethnic groups should be found between a more westernized government and these traditional values.

These fictionalities were soon discovered and widely discussed within the media. Like Rosenberg claims, whenever the government used the topic of Afghan women to justify their foreign policy, feminists - both Afghan and western - took up the topic themselves, for example in the media, but also in Brussels. They started fighting for their cause, and used the opening that was created by the government, to get their own ideas through. The advocates were clearly visible on the radar of the

¹⁶⁵ Hunt and Rygiel, ‘(En)Gendered War Stories and Camouflaged Politics,’ 4.

American government. Herein lies the big difference with the Human Rights Watch report. Their analysis claims that Afghan women were not necessarily better off with all the American help; but one big step forward has been made. The Human Rights Watch report got noticed because everybody in the western world now knew who the Afghan women were and what had happened to them. Even if the narrative on Afghan women was not exactly following the truth; it opened doors for Afghan women's advocates to address their plight. And all the attention made the Afghan women a cause that people would not easily forget.

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