Afghans Tell of Executions, Forced Marriages in Taliban-Held Areas

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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/afghans-tell-of-executions-forced-marriages-in-taliban-held-areas-11628780820>

Taliban leaders have publicly pledged to be magnanimous in victory, assuring government officials, troops and the people of Afghanistan that they have nothing to fear as ever larger swaths of the country [fall under their control](https://archive.vn/o/O6qb5/https%3A/www.wsj.com/articles/speed-of-taliban-advance-surprises-biden-administration-dismays-u-s-allies-11628708393?mod=article_inline).

But Afghans pouring into Kabul and those still in Taliban-held areas say they have witnessed unprovoked attacks on civilians and executions of captured soldiers. In addition, they say, Taliban commanders have demanded that communities turn over unmarried women to become wives for their fighters.

The U.S. Embassy in Kabul said Thursday that it had received reports of the Taliban executing members of the Afghan military who had surrendered. “Deeply disturbing & could constitute war crimes,” the embassy [said on Twitter](https://archive.vn/o/O6qb5/https%3A/twitter.com/USEmbassyKabul/status/1425645725958955012).

A Taliban spokesman, Zabiullah Mujahid, denied the group had killed any prisoners, saying that would violate its principles. He also said allegations that the Taliban was forcing women into marriage were false, and that such actions would be contrary to the rules of Islam and violate cultural tradition.

On Wednesday, Mawlawi Abdul Qadir, a senior Taliban religious official, said in a speech in the newly captured capital of Badakhshan province that government soldiers who surrender and “confess their crimes” would be able “to live like a Muslim under the flag of the Islamic Emirate.”

[The deal reached last year](https://archive.vn/o/O6qb5/https%3A/www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-taliban-set-to-sign-deal-meant-to-end-america-s-longest-war-11582977729?mod=article_inline) by the Trump administration and the Taliban, under which the U.S. agreed to withdraw its forces, didn’t spell out any human-rights standards for the Taliban to follow. The group, however, promised to seek a peaceful settlement and a negotiated cease-fire with the Afghan government.

Some of those fleeing the violence as more provincial capitals fall have ended up in Kabul. One badly injured woman named Wazir Nazari, a member of Afghanistan’s Shiite Hazara minority, lay motionless on her side on a thin mattress on the roof of a house in the western part of the capital.

Her father, Abdul Rezaq Rezaie, said she had been shot in the head in early July by Taliban fighters going door-to-door in their village in the Malistan district of Ghazni province in central Afghanistan. Villagers said it was unclear what they were after.

Malistan is almost entirely populated by Hazaras, whose Shiite Islam is viewed with disdain by the strictly Sunni Taliban. In the 1990s, the Hazaras offered stiff resistance to Taliban efforts to take over the country and subsequently faced persistent persecution at Taliban hands.

The fighters shot Wazir’s sister-in-law in the stomach and she collapsed to the floor mortally wounded. As Wazir, who is in her 40s, bent to help her, she was shot in the face, Mr. Rezaie said. He said a bullet entered her right temple and exited from her left eye.

The family took Wazir by taxi on a 10-hour journey over unpaved roads to a hospital in a neighboring district that was still in government hands. Eleven days later, a military helicopter carried her to Kabul. Mr. Rezaie said she has suffered serious brain damage, can no longer see and is barely able to move.

“It would have been better for her if they had killed my daughter than leave her in this state,” Mr. Rezaie said.

Later that week, when the Taliban reached the neighboring village of Paai Julga, community leaders, including the principal of a girls high school there, Baba Ali Rahmani, went to see the local Taliban commander, known as Mawlawi Mosafir.

The commander assured them that the Taliban had no issue with the Shiite village and that residents could continue with their usual way of life, said Mr. Rahmani’s son, Sharif.

Days later, government forces attempted a counterattack in the district and the Taliban turned violent against Hazara civilians, Sharif Rahmani said. His father ventured outside the house and was killed. Neighbors said he had been shot by Taliban fighters on a motorcycle, Mr. Rahmani said.

Mr. Rahmani said he didn’t know why his father, who was hit three times in the torso and once in the neck, was singled out.

Mr. Rahmani, 26, has since fled to Kabul with his two adult sisters, and is staying with relatives. Left behind in the village are his mother and three younger siblings, still children. “My mother said she has nothing left to lose, so she stayed,” he said.

An estimated 2,200 mostly Hazara families from Malistan have escaped to the relative safety of Kabul since the Taliban conquest, said Khaliqdaad Fitrat, a community leader in the district.

Mr. Fitrat said he fled as a Taliban search party approached. They opened fire as he ran, he said.

The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission says at least 27 civilians have been killed in Malistan since the Taliban takeover, with 10 others injured.

Mr. Mujahid, the Taliban spokesman, said that in Malistan, no civilians were harmed after the takeover.

After a pitched battle between government forces and Taliban fighters in the southwestern province of Nimroz, people there said, the Taliban executed a dozen captured soldiers. One of the prisoners had his eyes gouged out and another had his ears cut off, according to local residents who later retrieved the bodies for burial.

Pictures purporting to show the soldiers’ dead bodies were shared by local Taliban fighters on messaging apps.

Mr. Mujahid denied the group had executed captured soldiers in Nimroz.

A senior Afghan government official in Kabul, who corroborated the local residents’ accounts, said that the images from the execution had spread fear among troops ahead of the [fall of Nimroz’s provincial capital](https://archive.vn/o/O6qb5/https%3A/www.wsj.com/articles/taliban-seize-capital-of-afghanistans-nimroz-province-11628259499?mod=article_inline), Zaranj, last week.

Shaharzad Akbar, head of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, said mounting evidence was emerging of the execution of captured soldiers around the country. She said civilians, especially those who work for the government, were also being targeted.

“There is absolute disregard for international humanitarian law,” Ms. Akbar said. “My biggest fear is that this will become a pattern that will keep repeating itself.”

In Spin Boldak, a town on Afghanistan’s southern border with Pakistan, the Taliban executed 44 people after taking over in mid-July, according to an investigation by Human Rights Watch.

Those killed were supporters of a family that controlled the border crossing and ran a pro-government militia, the rights group said. Videos shared by pro-Taliban accounts on social media showed a fighter with a machine gun shooting bound prisoners by the side of a road.

In many newly conquered areas, the Taliban have imposed harsh restrictions on the movement of women, not allowing them to leave the house without male relatives and mandating that they wear the all-enveloping burqa, according to local residents reached by phone.

A man who fled Badakhshan province, in the northeast, said the Taliban had told his village that women weren’t to leave home without male chaperones. Men were ordered to go to the mosque for prayers five times a day. Families with more than one man were required to provide one to fight with the militants, he said.

The United Nations warned this week that it was receiving deeply distributing reports of human-rights abuses in Afghanistan.

“Hampering a woman’s ability to leave home without a male escort also inevitably leads to a cascade of other violations of the woman,” said Michelle Bachelet, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights.

After the insurgents in late June took the Rustaq district of the northern province of Takhar, a senior local Taliban figure addressed residents in the mosque during Friday prayers. All girls over the age of 15 and widows younger than 40 should be married to the insurgent fighters, he told the congregation, according to a local man who was present.

The man was later summoned and ordered to hand over his 15-year-old daughter. He said in a telephone interview that he fled the area and was trying to make his way to Kabul from the province, whose capital fell to the Taliban on Sunday.

Experts said the openly declared demand for women for their fighters showed the Taliban had grown even more extreme than they were when their regime was in power the 1990s. The practice shows the influence of Islamic State, which [enforced sexual slavery on women](https://archive.vn/o/O6qb5/https%3A/www.wsj.com/articles/ragged-but-alive-yazidis-emerge-from-life-under-islamic-state-11552388400?mod=article_inline) on a massive scale in Syria and Iraq.