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14. ABSTRACT Throughout the twentieth century, women's rights in Afghanistan were either precarious or non-existent. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the new Afghan constitution contained specific provisions guaranteeing women equal rights, including rights to education and work, in addition to specifying quotas outlining a specific minimum for women representatives in the Afghan parliament, known as the Jirga. Afghanistan's women have met the challenge that their constitution laid before them, running for office and serving their country at all national and provisional levels. Even though women have made tremendous political gains in Afghanistan, the cultural, particularly at the village level is overwhelmingly patriarchal, which marginalizes women's role in overall Afghan society. Additionally, women's abilities to exercise their rights are hindered by depressingly low literacy rates. Women's political rights are further curtailed by security factors. Many female politicians, both elected officials and candidates, have been assassinated or threatened. The Afghan National Police (ANP) should be an important group in guaranteeing the free exercise of women's rights, but the ANP is widely known as a corrupt and incompetent organization, with very low female recruitment rates. This paper advocates that policymakers continue pushing for Afghan women's rights by, first, not overlooking or ignoring the issue, and second, strengthening the ANP to support law, order, and stability. Helping Afghanistan's women exercise their constitutional rights requires concentration on social and security issues, as well as advocacy from Afghan women who are passionate about gaining and exercising their human rights.		

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

FEMALE POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN AFGHANISTAN:
SOCIAL REALITIES AND INTERNAL SECURITY

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER
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Executive Summary

Title: Female Political Participation in Afghanistan: Social Realities and Internal Security

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Thesis: This paper argues that Afghanistan's policymakers must consider the importance of social and security developments in order to promote the political gains of women in the country. The guarantee of women's rights is every bit as critical to Afghanistan's success as the other political and economic freedoms.

Discussion: Throughout the twentieth century, women's rights in Afghanistan were either precarious or non-existent. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the new Afghan constitution contained specific provisions guaranteeing women equal rights, including rights to education and work, in addition to specifying quotas outlining a specific minimum for women representatives in the Afghan parliament, known as the Jirga. Afghanistan's women have met the challenge that their constitution laid before them, running for office and serving their country at all national and provisional levels. Even though women have made tremendous political gains in Afghanistan, the cultural, particularly at the village level is overwhelmingly patriarchal, which marginalizes women's role in overall Afghan society. Additionally, women's abilities to exercise their rights are hindered by depressingly low literacy rates.

Women's political rights are further curtailed by security factors. Many female politicians, both elected officials and candidates, have been assassinated or threatened. The Afghan National Police (ANP) should be an important group in guaranteeing the free exercise of women's rights, but the ANP is widely known as a corrupt and incompetent organization, with very low female recruitment rates.

This paper advocates that policymakers continue pushing for Afghan women's rights by, first, not overlooking or ignoring the issue, and second, strengthening the ANP to support law, order, and stability. Helping Afghanistan's women exercise their constitutional rights requires concentration on social and security issues, as well as advocacy from Afghan women who are passionate about gaining and exercising their human rights.

Conclusion: Helping Afghanistan's women exercise their constitutional rights requires concentration on social and security issues, as well as advocacy from Afghan women who are passionate about gaining and exercising their human rights. Women's rights cannot be separated from Afghanistan's social structure and security situation.

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Preface

Since the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the ratification of the current Afghan constitution, I have admired the Afghan women who pursue political office despite the years of oppression and the lack of opportunity that subsumed their country in the 1990s. Early in the summer of 2010, I found Mohammad Qayomi's essay about growing up in Kabul in the 1960s. The essay included some remarkable photographs of a modern, vibrant city that seemed to present incredible educational and cultural opportunities to its citizens. My admiration for Dr. Qayomi's essay is the intellectual basis for this paper.

At Marine Corps University Command & Staff College I would like to thank Dr. Rebecca Johnson for her untiring guidance and mentorship. I must thank Dr. Eric Shibuya and Dr. Donald Bittner for their inspiring classroom discussion and readings. At home, I thank my parents, Karen and Gary Liebsch, for their love and faith. I also thank my best friend and constant companion, Rooney, for his good spirit and *joie de vivre*. Finally, I thank the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency for allowing me to attend the Marine Corps University Command and Staff College.

Introduction

After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan and its international partners made a concerted effort to change the lives of women in the country. The Taliban regime virtually stripped Afghan women of their public lives and human rights. The new government sought to empower Afghanistan's women through implementing measures that addressed women's issues. Not least among their efforts are explicit Afghan constitutional initiatives mandating equal rights for women, allowing girls' education, and requiring female participation in the Afghan Parliament.¹ Policymakers in Afghanistan do not treat women's rights as an auxiliary issue, unlike recent experiences of nation-building in other countries.² But despite clear requirements for female political participation in the country, women in Afghanistan face tremendous cultural and security hurdles when they decide to pursue political office. Though these challenges are formidable, the ultimate value of involving women in Afghanistan's electoral politics and civil affairs is good for the country's governance and future. This paper first explores Afghanistan's recent history and post-Taliban political developments in order to explain the challenges and opportunities that exist for women in Afghanistan. Second, I explore Afghan cultural traits that inhibit women's political and civic aspirations. Finally, this paper examines Afghanistan's how precarious internal security situation affects the country's women. Ultimately, I argue that Afghanistan's policymakers must consider the importance of social and security developments in order to promote the political gains of women in the country. The guarantee of women's rights is every bit as critical to Afghanistan's success as the other political and economic freedoms.

Status of Women in Afghanistan in the Twentieth Century

Understanding the status of women in twentieth century Afghanistan is critical to knowing the roadblocks confronting Afghan women in the twenty-first century. Though

Afghanistan has made massive strides in terms of women's rights since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, the country's cultural traditions and recent history do not easily transition into a modern country where women's political rights may flourish. This is particularly true outside of Kabul, where the Afghan national government holds considerably less influence than the local tribal leaders do. In these areas, men traditionally have domination over the society through religious, tribal, and familial leadership positions, a dynamic that leads academics to characterize Afghanistan as a "classic patriarchy."³ Part of the reason for treating females in this way is that some groups of Pashtun view the segregation and exclusion of women as critical to preserving the family's honor and respectability.⁴ In Afghan culture, subjugating women is based on the traditional roles of Afghan men as the protector and property owner of women.⁵ Even if a woman is unmarried, thus unaccountable to a husband, she is still controlled by her male family members, such as her father or her brothers.

Throughout the twentieth century, the advancement of women's rights oscillated between progress and regression. In the 1920s, Afghanistan's ruler, King Amanullah, attempted to modernize his country through female education and family legislation. At the end of the decade, however, a tribal uprising partly motivated by the king's attempts at reform forced the ruler out of his position.⁶ The King's successor, Nader Shah, rescinded all of the previous ruler's reforms.⁷ In the 1950s, Afghanistan's government became more liberal, eventually granting women the right to vote in 1964.⁸ Though progress seemed limited to the cities,⁹ Mohammad Qayoumi, a native of Kabul and currently president of California State University, East Bay, writes that in the 1950s and 1960s, the country valued education for all citizens, and the mood was generally optimistic about the future for the country. He remembers, "A half-century ago, Afghan women pursued careers in medicine; men and women mingled casually at movie theaters

and university campuses in Kabul...”¹⁰ Qayoumi’s essay uses photographs to demonstrate his point. The pictures show women wearing Western-style skirts and shoes with their hair uncovered or topped by simple scarves rather than wearing burkas.¹¹

Even through the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, lasting from 1979 to 1989, educational and political opportunities for women existed on both sides of the fight. The pro-Soviet group, called Women’s Democratic Organization of Afghanistan, eventually claimed 95,000 members.¹² Meanwhile, an anti-Soviet organization, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), was founded to advocate for human rights in Afghanistan.¹³ Though RAWA opposed the Soviets, RAWA also opposed the Islamic fundamentalists who fought against the Soviets.¹⁴ Due to their dual oppositions to the Soviets and the Islamists, RAWA made enemies amongst both factions, leading to the assassination of RAWA’s leader in 1987.¹⁵ During the Soviet invasion, RAWA organized protested against the occupation of Afghanistan and began publishing a magazine entitled “Payam-e-Zan,” which translates to “Women’s Message,” to discuss politics and policy.¹⁶

Though the Mujaheddin expelled the Soviets from Afghanistan in 1989, freedom from foreign occupiers did not bring peace to the country.¹⁷ Throughout Afghanistan, factions of ethnic groups and warlords fought for control of the cities and valleys with no side able to solidify total control over the country. By 1994, Afghanistan had devolved into a violent and ungovernable state:

The predominantly Tajik government of [Afghan] President Burhanuddin Rabbani controlled Kabul, its environs and the north-east of the country, while three provinces in the west centering on Herat were controlled by [Tajik Northern Alliance commander] Ismael Khan. In the east on the Pakistan border three Pashtun provinces were under the control of a council or Shura (Council) of Mujaheddin commanders based in Jalalabad. A small region to the south and east of Kabul was controlled by [erstwhile Afghan Prime Minister] Gulbuddin Hikmetyar.

In the north the Uzbek warlord General Rashid Dostum held sway over six provinces and in January 1994 he had abandoned his alliance with the Rabbani government and joined with Hikmetyar to attack Kabul. In central Afghanistan the Hazaras [a Persian-speaking ethnic group] controlled the province of Bamiyan. Southern Afghanistan and Kandahar were divided up amongst dozens of petty ex-Mujaheddin warlords and bandits who plundered the population at will. With the tribal structure and the economy in tatters, no consensus on a Pashtun leadership and Pakistan's unwillingness to provide military aid to the Durrani [a dynasty of Afghan royalty] as they did to Hikmetyar, the Pashtuns in the south were at war with each other.¹⁸

Arising from this chaos, and with some logistical and weapons support from Pakistan, the Taliban conquered Kandahar in November 1994.¹⁹ In September 1995, they gained control of Herat. A year later, the Taliban took over Kabul. During an interview in March 1997, Mullah Omar, the Taliban's leader, noted the frightening and extraordinary success of his group's efforts to take over the country. "War is a tricky game. The Taliban took five months to capture one province but then six provinces fell to us in only ten days. Now we are in control of twenty-two provinces including Kabul."²⁰ By 1998, the Taliban controlled ninety percent of Afghanistan.²¹

After decades of invasion and civil war, some Afghans initially supported the Taliban.²² The hopefulness was short-lived because the Taliban very quickly instituted the most extreme interpretation of Sharia law in the history of Islam.²³ Even compared with Afghanistan's traditions of marginalizing women's rights, the Taliban was the worst yet. One report explains, "In Afghanistan, women have never enjoyed full equality with men, and the Taliban period was the epitome of this history, as well as demonstration to the world of the extremities violations against women's human rights can reach."²⁴

Women's Rights in the Current Afghan Constitution

After the defeat of the Taliban, the interim government convened a Constitutional Loya Jirga (CLJ) in December 2003.²⁵ The CLJ ratified a new constitution that contains articles that first affirmed Afghanistan's status as an Islamic nation,²⁶ then implemented equal rights and

political opportunities in ways that directly address the rights of women in Afghanistan. While five previous versions of the Afghan constitution attempted to create a unified country by stressing religious commonalities and legal equality for all citizens,²⁷ the current Afghan constitution represents a positive, though currently inconclusive, step forward for women's political rights in the country.

The most remarkably specific aspect of the Afghan constitution dictates the required quota for female parliamentarians in the Afghanistan parliament. Generally speaking, women should make up at least twenty-five percent of the Afghan parliament.²⁸ However, the constitution lays out specific guidance dictating that all provinces have at least two female representatives to the House of People, the lower house in parliament.²⁹ However, if a province only has two representatives, then only one of the parliamentarians needs to be female.³⁰ Furthermore, in the House of Elders, the President of Afghanistan appoints one-third of the parliamentarians. Amongst this one-third, the constitution calls for half of these appointees to be women.³¹

The CLJ intentionally set a high quota for female parliamentarians. First, the reality is that the Taliban spent years destroying Afghan women's human rights in their entirety. The Taliban forbade women from working, from seeking education, and from political leadership. Recovery from this level of oppression required that women had a high parliamentary quota in order to guarantee any significant level of participation. The only way to ensure that Afghanistan's women had a political voice in the new government was to give them a metaphorical megaphone.³² Second, Afghanistan's political leaders want their country to serve as a regional exemplar for women's rights and political involvement.³³ In addition to the symbolic value of women's involvement in the Afghan parliament, the CLJ argued that a

relatively high number of female parliamentarians would help free female parliamentarians from reliance on political parties to sway or unduly influence their votes.³⁴ Furthermore, Afghanistan's political leaders want their country to serve as a regional exemplar for women's rights and political involvement. To this end, the writers of the Afghan constitution intentionally set a high quota to assure high levels female involvement in order to signal to the international community that Afghanistan now seeks women in public life.

After the 2004 approval of the new Afghan constitution, the 2005 elections saw a surge of women running for political office. Out of 2,835 total candidates for parliament, nearly 350 of them were women.³⁵ Even though Afghanistan's constitution only requires that women hold one-quarter of the seats in the lower house in parliament and seventeen percent of the seats in the upper house, women currently hold nearly twenty-eight percent of seats in both houses.³⁶ On global and regional scales, Afghanistan is overachieving with regard to women in parliament. Worldwide, the participation rate for elected women in government is slightly over eighteen percent.³⁷ In Pakistan, meanwhile, female political participation in the lower house of parliament is twenty-two percent, while women hold seventeen percent of seats in the upper house.³⁸ In Tajikistan, percentage of seats held by women in parliament is in the teens.³⁹ Iranian women, in contrast, hold less than three percent of seats in their country's single house.⁴⁰

Parliamentary involvement is only one aspect of political involvement in Afghanistan. For example, the Afghan government established the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) in 2001, before the ratification Afghan constitution in 2005.⁴¹ According to decree, MoWA is responsible for implementing and executing the Afghan government's policies that aim to increase women's rights in all aspects of Afghan law. Though the current incarnation of MoWA took shape after the fall of the Taliban, the Ministry began as a non-governmental women's

rights advocacy organization. Women's government groups have existed in Afghanistan since the 1940s, when a small group of women established the Women's Grand Organization in Kabul to train and educate women.⁴² In the early 1960s, the government's Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs absorbed Women's Grand Organization, but many of the training opportunities were still restricted to Kabul rather than expanded throughout the country.⁴³

Since the standup of MoWA under the current Afghan government, all Ministers of Women's Affairs have been female, and the deputy leaders of MoWA are women as well,⁴⁴ making leaders in MoWA among the most important women in the country. While MoWA may not specifically concentrate of female politicians in Afghanistan, its role in advancing women in the country is critical to empowering women through education and advocacy. To accomplish its goals, MoWA works with international and non-governmental organizations to expand opportunities for women holistically in light of entrenched resistance to women's rights. One critical part of the Afghan constitution is Article 22, which explicitly states that women, like men, have "equal rights and duties before the law."⁴⁵

As an important part of equal rights, the Afghan constitution explicitly grants all citizens, including women, the right to work in their chosen fields (so long as the field is legal).⁴⁶ Constitutionally allowing women to work is both ideologically and economically attractive. Ms. Gross explained that the modern globalized economy served as a major inspiration for the constitution's right to work. She said, "The crux of the argument is that 300 years ago, even the most advanced nations on earth did not need women in society. However, now life is so advanced that you can't do it just with men. Women bear an equal share or responsibility for advancing society."⁴⁷ The right to work is both pragmatically and symbolically important in order to push Afghanistan past the tyranny of the Taliban.

There is no doubt that many women in Afghanistan still face political oppression and social marginalization, and that the current constitution may not have drastically improved the life of every single woman in Afghanistan. Despite some of these shortcomings with regards to women's rights, some experts point out that the constitution's inclusion of women's rights and political obligations is, in and of itself, an important milestone in Afghan women's equality, even though the country's means to enforce the constitution might be weak. Palwasha Hassan, a scholar on Afghanistan's gender issues, explains, "Women and men need to twofold achievement to reach justice: one having good laws, two having system and agency enforcing/implementing these laws. And because we still have a problem with the latter it doesn't mean that having good law is not an achievement."⁴⁸ As we will explore in the next section, Afghanistan is still mired in tribal customs and social problems that severely limit the impact of the constitution to substantively improve the lives of all Afghan women. But for right now, these realities are secondary to the very existence of a constitution that officially and categorically recognizes the basic human rights that had heretofore been denied to Afghanistan's women. Ms. Gross succinctly stated, "This constitution is extremely critical so that way no one can say that women don't have rights."⁴⁹

Though women's rights have statutory importance in Afghanistan's constitution, Afghanistan's tribal cultures and gender roles may undercut achievement of women's rights in the present. From an outside perspective, it is tempting to dismiss the constitution's utility as an equal rights landmark as a political gimmick because true equality for women in Afghanistan seems remote or impossible. Despite roadblocks, some women's rights activists and academics are sanguine about the potential for gender equality in Afghanistan. One activist responded to questions about the possibility of enforcing equal rights by rhetorically asking, "Well, do women

have equal rights in America?"⁵⁰ While the reality of equal rights may seem remote or impossible, equality is an important goal for all citizens in Afghanistan. Even though the constitution may not be completely effective at enforcing women's rights throughout the country, Afghanistan imbues its constitution with symbolic importance, which is just as critical as legal importance at the current, nascent stage of Afghanistan's post-Taliban development.

Modern Tribal Culture, Citizenships and Women's Rights

The incredible gains that Afghan women have made with regard to their constitutional and political rights have not totally changed Afghanistan's deeply entrenched tribal culture, which frequently marginalizes in or eliminates women from local political decisions. For example, in tribal decisionmaking, women are totally excluded from the *shuras*,⁵¹ a tribal decisionmaking body. *Shuras* are constituted of local leaders, such as elders, land owners, military commanders, and tribal leaders—all of whom are men.⁵² If a woman needs to take issues before the *shura*, generally she must have a man represent her.⁵³ The inherent tension between women's rights under the current constitution and traditional Afghan social structures is to be expected. As one study points out:

[T]he values embodied in the traditional authorities are often nondemocratic (or as sometimes characterized, pre-democratic), discriminatory to women and contrary to international standards for human rights. So without some changes, they may not serve to inculcate democratic governance that will build and solid base for stability and legitimacy.⁵⁴

Shuras have almost total domination over local politics in Afghanistan. One study points out that even though the process for choosing delegates for Loya Jirgas is ostensibly democratic, the real selection power is actually held with the *shuras* rather than with the people.⁵⁵ *Shuras* have so much power in Afghan governance that some have actually suggested that they should be monitored by outside organizations such as the Afghan International Human Rights

Commission, arguing that such oversight “would have made the consultations [with the *shuras*] more conducive to free and open participation by women and helped support independent women candidates.”⁵⁶ Without dedicated expansion of women’s rights at the local and village level, actual gender equality in Afghanistan is not possible. The Afghan constitution has helped, and continues to help, women make political and educational strides at the national and provincial levels; however, to expand human rights for all Afghan women, the Afghans must concentrate on gender equality at the village level.

Women’s rights are further hindered by geographic factors. Thus, joining political movements or running for office to effect change in Afghanistan may seem unrealistic or even impossible. Dr. Sima Samar, a former Deputy President and Minister of MoWA acknowledges that, in general conditions for women in cities have improved since the fall of the Taliban; however, that is not the whole story in Afghanistan. Dr. Samar argues that for women in the tribal or remote areas, the fall of the Taliban and the instantiation of a new constitution changed very little in their day-to-day lives.⁵⁷ Joining political movements or running for office to effect change in Afghanistan may seem unrealistic or even impossible. Even if women in tribal communities have the autonomy to exercise their rights, many women may not know what their constitutionally guaranteed rights even are. Dr. Samar explained, “The majority of women who live the rural area do not know about their equal rights in the constitution. [This] means that the equal rights for them is not a reality.”⁵⁸ In the Asia Foundation’s 2010 *Survey of the Afghan People* found that even in Central Kabul, twenty-five percent of respondents reported that they were unaware of the upcoming 2010 parliamentary elections.⁵⁹ While other regions reported slightly higher levels of awareness of upcoming elections,⁶⁰ the fact is that Afghanistan still has

problems informing its citizens, including women, of upcoming elections and political developments.

Part of the reason why informing the people of Afghanistan about politics and elections is so difficult is because of the country's high illiteracy rates. Literacy has long been an issue in Afghanistan. Even before the Taliban, literacy rates throughout the country stayed below twenty percent.⁶¹ During the Soviet invasion, school enrollment for females plummeted to twelve percent.⁶² For nearly two decades, from the Soviets to the Taliban, females were either restricted or prohibited from attending school. By 2001, male literacy was at about thirty percent; women's literacy was at four percent.⁶³ Even though Afghanistan and its international partners have placed a high priority on rebuilding schools,⁶⁴ educating girls in the country's rural areas is a difficult proposition. In the 2010 *Survey of the Afghan People*, more than thirty percent of respondents identified poor education and illiteracy as the top problem for Afghan women.⁶⁵ One study points out there are infrastructure problems in remote regions—there simply are not as many schools—as well as cultural problems that include “early marriage, reduced mobility for girls, and a lack of value placed on female education... The worsening security is also a critical factor.”⁶⁶ While these factors are understandable, if girls and women are to effectively push for their political rights in their country by becoming politicians or advocates, they must be educated.⁶⁷

In a more political sense, literacy is good for women and for Afghanistan because of the role that literacy plays in developing citizens. One expert bluntly argues, “Literacy is often seen as the basis of participation in citizenship.”⁶⁸ Literacy allows women to understand the issues confronting themselves and their country,⁶⁹ particularly in a country like Afghanistan where women continuously find their rights in a precarious balance between tribal traditions and

modern reforms. If women rely on men for their information, which some postulate is the case in situations where female literacy is low, women cannot act as informed citizens.⁷⁰ Female literacy is not a tangential issue in Afghanistan's political development. It is a precondition for a functional democracy. "Citizenship is currently often replacing income-generation, poverty, health and even gender equality at the forefront of the aims of literacy learning."⁷¹

Though Afghanistan has made strides over the past decades, women face many strong cultural issues and informational deficiencies that cost them their ability to fully execute their responsibilities as citizens of Afghanistan. Male-oriented traditions, specifically *shuras*, are not issues to be overcome but issues that must be acknowledged in order to transform Afghanistan into a country that is hospitable to women's rights. Women must have information if they are able to advance politically, as candidates and citizens. For that reason, Afghanistan and its international partners must seriously and continuously address critical issues such as election awareness and literacy. There is no panacea for Afghanistan's cultural problems, but acknowledging the problems is an important step in rectification.

Civil Security for Afghanistan's Female Politicians

Though many in Afghanistan laud the constitution as a critical step forward for women's rights in Afghanistan's culture and government, many women who seek political office face threats and violence as they campaign and govern. A report issued by MoWA contends, "The issue of security is not the only challenge against women participating in rehabilitation of the country, but prevalence of conservative practices limits their role in civil, cultural, economic, political and social lives in the society."⁷² Despite the Afghan constitution's guarantee equal rights for women, including the explicit rights to work and education, women who exercise these rights may face violence and intimidation. Simultaneously promoting equality while building

stability may be a difficult action for the Afghan government. As one study succinctly points out, “The political choices in Afghanistan are limited and unattractive.”⁷³

Malalai Joya, a combative female politician known for facing off against warlords and challenging human rights violators, explains, “One of my greatest challenges as a parliamentarian was simply getting to work safely.”⁷⁴ Joya explains in her memoir that the government of Afghanistan provides every Member of Parliament, regardless of gender, with at least two bodyguards, due to unstable security, death threats, and for general protection. Due to her high profile, Joya needed six bodyguards when traveling around Kabul.

Even though Joya may have made herself an appealing target for assassination because her idealistic and pugnacious nature,⁷⁵ her experience of constantly feeling under threat is not atypical for female politicians. In fact, the year following Joya’s expulsion from the Afghan parliament in 2007 was an extremely deadly year for female politicians in Afghanistan. In a testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2010, Melanne Vermeer, Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues, explains the initial optimism about the Afghan constitution, and the risk that female politicians have run in the past few years:

In the political realm, women made immediate gains after the Taliban era. Between 2001 and 2005, many women entered political life at the most senior levels: there were three female ministers in the national government, and there was substantial increase in women striving to assert their rights and seeking legal support. However since that time, deteriorating security conditions have made the prospect for women’s participation in public life more difficult. In 2008 alone, at least ten women in public positions were assassinated. Women have suffered abuse by the police forces responsible for protecting them. They lack significant representation in the justice system... Women politicians are often threatened and prevented from engaging in political life.⁷⁶

The evidence indicates that 2008 was not an outlier year for violence against female politicians. During the elections in 2010, many female candidates reported that threats, intimidation and violence curtailed their ability to campaign.⁷⁷ Many women candidates

received night letters from extremists, warning them not to seek office. Vandals ruined advertisements for female candidates.⁷⁸ One case reported by the United Nations Development Fund for Women claimed that a candidate was so scared by threats that she campaigned in male garb in order to conceal her identity from attackers.⁷⁹

The women running for office had significant reasons to be afraid for their lives. In April 2009, a Kandahar Provisional council member named Sitara Achekzai was assassinated. The next year, in March 2010, gunmen shot Fawzia Kofi, a member of the Afghan National Parliament. Then in April 2010, Nida Khyani, a Provisional Council Member, was shot in the capital of her province of Baghlan in northern Afghanistan.⁸⁰ The Afghan national and provisional governments are either powerless or unwilling to find the perpetrators. One activist argues, "When high-profile women are assassinated, their cases are not given the priority they deserve and their killers are rarely brought to justice."⁸¹ Because of the threats to their safety, some women, notably Dr. Samar, surrendered their governmental positions.⁸²

The female politicians are not the only victims of extremists' violent resistance to women's political rights. Individuals who work for female candidates risk their lives as well. During the elections in 2010, ten men who worked for a female candidate, a member of Parliament named Fawzia Gilani, disappeared.⁸³ While the Taliban claimed responsibility for the kidnappings, Gilani did not know if the Taliban was actually behind the disappearances. Gilani said, "I do not know who did it. I have political rivals and there are other armed groups, but I cannot blame anyone specifically because it is hard to know."⁸⁴

The Importance of the Afghan National Police in Providing Security

In order for women to safely pursue political office, the Afghanistan government's the Afghan National Police (ANP), administered by the Afghan government's Ministry of the

Interior, must prioritize guarding women as they campaign for positions or execute their political duties. The ANP has many wide-ranging responsibilities, to include providing security and protecting rule of law within the Afghanistan.⁸⁵ Nasrine Gross argues that women could be much safer if the ANP were both empowered and trained to provide basic security for candidates. She points out that during the 2009 campaign, the Ministry of the Interior promised two bodyguards to every female candidate; however, no guards ever materialized.⁸⁶ In addition to breaking promises to candidates, the ANP is hampered by egregiously low pay and problematic recruitment. One expert argues, “Both the international community and the Ministry of the Interior declare gender a priority, but neither have given it priority attention, despite a government policy to ‘gender mainstream’ across all ministries.”⁸⁷ The failure to adequately provide security for female candidates is explained by the ANP’s many competing priorities and problems. Other critical issues include counternarcotics, corruption, traffic enforcement, and insurgent attacks.⁸⁸

The ANP has been problematic since the standup of the current Afghan government. Many of the police were either untrained or had been trained before the Taliban regime.⁸⁹ The absence of prescribed operating procedures and basic resources, such as money and uniforms, caused many police to align with local militia or tribal leaders.⁹⁰ When foreign partners tried to provide training and aid to the ANP following the expulsion of the Taliban, much of the training involved on-the-job patrols with the foreign security officers.⁹¹ Pay for lower-ranking police started out at an irregularly paid \$16-\$24 per month.⁹² United States experts recognized the failings and importance of the ANP. The U.S. Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, the late Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, described the ANP as the “the weak link in the security

chain.”⁹³ In the same speech, however, Ambassador Holbrooke declared that correcting the problems with the ANP was critical to stabilizing Afghanistan.⁹⁴

Ambassador Holbrooke’s assessment of the ANP’s failure and importance falls squarely in-line with the prevailing efforts to overhaul the ANP. Since the fall of the Taliban, the international community has worked to build the ANP into a competent and professional police organization. Germany acted as the ‘lead nation’ for police building following the fall of the Taliban. The United Nations provided advisors to the police to assist in preparing the ANP for the Afghan elections in 2004 and 2005. In 2005, the United States supported an overhaul of the ANP’s organizational structure and pay scales, eventually helping the Ministry of the Interior more than triple the pay of lower-level police from around \$20 per month to about \$70 per month.⁹⁵ Despite major international attempts at reform, the ANP is still not an effective organization. The ANP does not have enough officers to secure the villages; the ANP is “legendary for their corruption and incompetence.”⁹⁶

Another major reform instituted by the ANP is the attempt to recruit female police. The ANP is an extremely male-dominated organization. There were less than 200 female police in 2007, a number that totaled approximately one-third of one percent.⁹⁷ The small number of women in the police is problematic because, according to Islamic traditions, men cannot touch or manage women. Recruiting women to the ANP has been difficult because police work, even among men, is considered unrespectable in Afghanistan.⁹⁸ For women, joining the ANP is almost verboten. The few women who have joined the ANP joined the organization prior to the rise of the Taliban.⁹⁹ In addition to typical police functions, i.e., enforcing the law, the ANP is also the organization that is charged with ensuring safety during Afghan national elections. Due to security concerns, when individuals show up at the polling stations to vote, the police must

search all voters. Since male police cannot search or touch women, if women police are not in the vicinity, then the village's women cannot vote.¹⁰⁰ Though the issue of female police may seem tangential to a discussion of women's politics in Afghanistan, the fact remains that recruiting women police is a critical associated factor in creating an environment where women may fully and safely participate in the political system.

Political and Educated Women As Strategic Assets

If the women of Afghanistan have any hope of exercising their political rights, and if the Afghan constitution is to succeed, the U.S. and partners must decide that empowering the women of Afghanistan is critical to the "grand strategy" for security in the region. Without the support of the U.S. and ISAF, Afghanistan's women will be forced to advocate for their rights from a dramatically weakened position. Ambassador Vermeer told the Senate Foreign Relations committee, "Our civilian assistance strategy in Afghanistan incorporates the values of inclusive human rights, good governance, and rule of law. Women's empowerment in Afghanistan and their full and equal participation in their society are fundamental prerequisites for achieving this strategy."¹⁰¹

Within Afghanistan, women must continue pursuing political office in order to protect their constitutional rights. Even women who do not hold governmental positions need to pressure the international community to ensure continued support, even when strategies such as negotiating with the Taliban seem like the most appealing option for Afghanistan's international partners. For example, in London in January 2010, some Afghan women's groups were initially denied entry to the International Conference on Afghanistan. Despite this hurdle, some groups came to London, and used the media to gain attention in order to be granted admittance to the conference. Seizing this seemingly minor opportunity, the women garnered support from U.S.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. The groups even attended an event at Buckingham Palace where they handed out materials to attendees, who included Secretary Clinton, United Kingdom Prime Minister Gordon Brown, and other military and civilian leaders.¹⁰² Considering that views of women in Afghanistan were silenced under Taliban rule, the opportunity to take the stage and demand attention for their rights represents that, with the aid of receptive nations, the women of Afghanistan have a worthwhile cause that must be addressed collectively at the world stage.

Conclusion

Even though the Taliban was cast from power in 2001, and the current Afghan constitution recognizes women's equal rights, and mandates that women participate in government as politicians and citizens, women in Afghanistan face tremendous difficulty when they fully exercise their rights. Afghanistan's culture is not naturally accommodating to women's political rights, and modernizing the country has been made more difficult by decades of occupation, civil war, and oppression. Women's rights cannot be separated from Afghanistan's social structure and security situation. Policymakers in Afghanistan must continue to offer substantive support for security, literacy, and human rights programs for women. The U.S. has pledged to continue supporting women's rights initiatives,¹⁰³ which is the right decision. Even though the Afghan constitution contains clear guarantees for women's rights and equality, continuous international scrutiny can only help the cause. Furthermore, Afghanistan and its international partners must continue reforming the ANP. The ANP might be corrupt and incompetent,¹⁰⁴ but it is also the best organization for enforcing Afghan constitutional law and providing election security. Helping Afghanistan's women exercise their constitutional rights requires concentration on social and security issues, as well as advocacy from Afghan women who are passionate about gaining and exercising their human rights.

¹ Constitution of Afghanistan.

² Swanee Hunt, "Let Women Rule," *Foreign Affairs* 86 (May 2007): 109-120.

³ Jennifer L. Fluri, "Feminist-Nation Building in Afghanistan: An Examination of the Revolutionary Association of Afghanistan (RAWA)," *Feminist Review* 89 (2008): 34-54.

⁴ David Cortright and Sarah Persinger, *Afghan Women Speak: Enhancing Security and Human Rights in Afghanistan* (Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, October 2010).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mohammad Qayoumi, "Once Upon a Time in Afghanistan..." *Foreign Policy*, May 27, 2010, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/05/27/once_upon_a_time_in_afghanistan (accessed January 20, 2010).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *Encyclopedia of Women & Islamic Cultures: Family, Law and Politics*, s.vv. "Women's Unions and National Organizations," "Afghanistan."

¹³ Fluri 2008.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), "About RAWA," <http://www.rawa.org/rawa.html>.

¹⁶ Fluri 2008.

¹⁷ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil, and Fundamentalism in Central Asia* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2000).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Lauryn Oates and Isabelle Solon Helal, *At the Cross-Roads of Conflict and Democracy: Women and Afghanistan's Constitutional Loya Jirga* (Montreal: Rights and Democracy, May 2004).

²⁵ Oates and Helal 2004.

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- ²⁶ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "References to Islam and Women in the Afghan Constitution," *Arab Law Quarterly* 22, (2008): 270-306.
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- ²⁹ Constitution of Afghanistan, Article 83, 2004.
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- ³¹ Constitution of Afghanistan, Article 84, 2004.
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- ³³ Gross, discussion.
- ³⁴ Oates and Helal 2004.
- ³⁵ Cortright and Persinger 2010.
- ³⁶ Inter-Parliamentary Union, "Women in National Parliaments: World Classification," Inter-Parliamentary Union, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> (accessed February 15, 2011).
- ³⁷ Cortright & Persinger 2010.
- ³⁸ Inter-Parliamentary Union 2011.
- ³⁹ Ibid.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Introduction to MoWA," Ministry of Women's Affairs, <http://www.mowa.gov.af/english/fulltext.php?id=2024&tab=sc>.
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Introduction to MoWA."
- ⁴⁵ Constitution of Afghanistan 2004.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Nasrine Gross (founder, Kabultec) in discussion with the author, February 2011.
- ⁴⁸ Palwasha Hassan, e-mail message to author, December 25, 2010.
- ⁴⁹ Gross, discussion.
- ⁵⁰ Gross, discussion.
- ⁵¹ Oates and Helal 2004.
- ⁵² Oates and Helal 2004.
- ⁵³ Derick W. Brinkerhoff, Ronald W. Johnson, and Richard Hill, *Guide to Rebuilding Governance in Stability Operations: A Role for the Military?* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2009), 30.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵⁵ Oates and Helal 2004.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
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- ⁵⁹ Ruth Rene, ed., *Afghanistan in 2010: A Survey of the Afghan People*, (The Asia Foundation, 2010).

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- ⁶⁷ Gross, discussion.
- ⁶⁸ Alan Rogers, "Women, Literacy, and Citizenship: A Critique," *Review of Education* 53 (2007): 159-181.
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- ⁷¹ Ibid.
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- ⁷⁵ In fairness, Joya's willingness to take on Afghanistan's current and historic corruption has earned her a number of admirers.
- ⁷⁶ Ambassador-at-Large Melanne Vermeer, testifying for "Afghan Women and Girls: Building the Future of Afghanistan," on February 23, 2010, to the Subcommittee on International Operations and Organizations, Human Rights, Democracy, and Global Women's Issues and the Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs, Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
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⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Robert Perito, "Afghanistan's Police: The Weak Link in Security Sector Reform," in *Revisiting Borders Between Civilians and Military: Security and Development in Peace Operations and Post-conflict Situations*, ed. Eduarda Hamann (Rio de Janeiro: Viva Rio, 2009), 79-87.

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⁹⁵ Murray 2007

⁹⁶ Seth G. Jones, "It Takes the Villages," *Foreign Affairs* 89 (May/June 2010).

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¹⁰³ Vermeer 2010.

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Pieces	Definition	What We Know	Tactics
Parties	Who are the principals? How are decisions made?		
Culture	Values about conflict, decisionmaking, reconciliation. Rituals and closing? Mine/others'		
Issues	Known issues, underlying (maybe unknown) issues to be resolved		
Power	Imbalance? Sources? Perceptions?		
First Move	What's our core message, what's our first move?		
End Game	Shared, known, shifting, connected to other negotiation events or dynamics?		