Exhibit 26

The Guardian picture essay

Afghanistan six months on from the Taliban takeover – photo essay

The photojournalist Stefanie Glinski reports on a country traumatised and tired, with an uncertain future as unemployment and poverty spread and memories of freedoms fade

by Stefanie Glinski in Kabul, Afghanistan

Nakiba, 30, holds her two-month-old son Mustafa, in the doorframe of what was once Sangin's clinic, now bombed out and destroyed. Photograph: Stefanie Glinski

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August's adrenaline may have worn off but the harrowing memories have not faded. It's been six months since the Taliban took Kabul, the country's then president and his cabinet fled and thousands of people flooded the airport in panic, so desperate for a way out that several men tried to hold on to a departing plane and fell to their deaths.

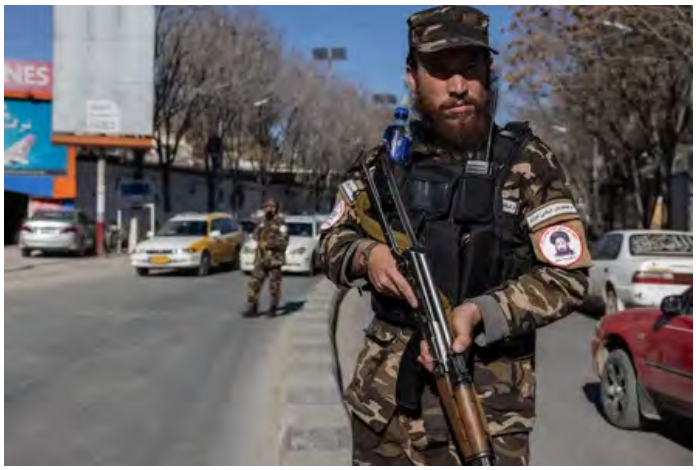
Food distribution in the northern Jowzjan province. Due to the economic crisis, many people cannot afford food, even though it's widely available in the market.

Shaista, 50, from Jowzjan, says that since the Taliban's takeover, her husband and children have lost their jobs. Right; Madina, 50, from Jowzjan.

Already scarred by four decades of war, Afghanistan's rapid regime change has left a mark that will take a long time to process. As the Taliban are slowly putting their government in place, many Afghans feel lost and confused. With uncertain futures, some see little alternative but to seek a new life abroad, adding to a diaspora of more than 5 million worldwide.

Most people, even in Kabul, have no access to clean water in their homes. Here, people are seen filling up jerrycans with water for drinking and cooking.

Tea vendors warm their hands on a cold day in Kabul.



Taliban guards drink tea in Kabul. Right: a Taliban soldier stands on a Kabul street.

Some of those who decided to stay, or who did not have an option to leave, say they will have to give the Taliban a chance, even though the group has not been recognised internationally. There isn't a large enough opposition anyway, and Taliban fighters have been stationed even in the most remote valleys of Panjshir, where the last battles of resistance played out.

"We will keep fighting if we have to, we're not tired," said Ziaul Rahman, a 21-year-old Talib stationed in Afghanistan's Logar province. Resistance fighters, whether in Panjshir or in the Uzbek-dominated Jowzjan province, say the same.

Ziaul Rahman, a 21-year-old Talib stationed in Afghanistan's Logar province.

For the past three and a half years of living and working as a journalist here, I have visited most of the country's provinces. Since the Taliban's takeover, I managed to return to many of them again, learning more about how people across the almost nation of 40 million perceive their new rulers.

The Taliban have been accommodating to foreign journalists, a privilege that has not been granted to all Afghan reporters. Several have been tortured, beaten, detained and intimidated and have since either left the country or are trying to get out.

To summarise - or even generalise about - the sentiment of a place as diverse as Afghanistan is, of course, impossible.

Destruction is widespread in Sangin, Helmand, previously right on the frontline. Here, every house is destroyed, few have been rebuilt, and people are starting over.

People cleaning up debris in Sanin, Helmand. Right: construction workers starting to rebuild their houses.

The data is bleak: last week Joe Biden announced that $3.5bn of frozen Afghan funds - including the private savings of ordinary Afghans - would be distributed to 9/11 victims, even though not a single Afghan was involved in the attacks.

Herat's old city.

The United Nations says at least half a million Afghans have lost their jobs since the Taliban takeover, and estimates that by mid-year up to 97% of people could be living below the poverty line. The majority of development aid - funding almost 80% of the previous government's expenditure - has ceased, throwing the country into economic crisis.

Human Rights Watch has reported executions and enforced disappearances of former government officials, and to this day many people live in fear and remain in hiding. With the newly appointed all-male cabinet and divisions within the Taliban, Afghanistan's future remains uncertain.

Taliban fighters sit by the roadside in Logar's Mohammad Agha district.

“As we feared, the situation is worsening in most respects - a reflection of the Taliban’s determination to crush dissent and criticism,” said Patricia Gossman, an associate Asia director for Human Rights Watch. “Revenge killings, crushing women’s rights, strangling the media - the Taliban seem determined to tighten their grip on society, even as the situation grows increasingly unstable in the coming months.”

A boy flying his kite from a rooftop in Kabul.

Kabul's Mandawi market is always busy.

At first sight, the changes on Kabul's streets aren't all too visible. Surrounded by majestic mountain peaks, parts of the city are still bustling. Kebabs wrapped in fresh warm bread are sold by the roadside, and boys selling balloons navigate through busy traffic. The Taliban's post-victory euphoria has ebbed, and while the city was flooded with insurgents in summer, most of them now seem to have left. Those remaining man checkpoints or work in the newly established government.

Taliban on the streets of Kabul.

While the Taliban initially detained all drug addicts and moved many of them to prisons, now more are again seen on Kabul's streets. Right: Sayed Jafar, a carpet vendor, sits in his shop in Kabul. Since the Taliban takeover, business has essentially stopped as his customers have left the country.

Yet at a closer look the city is emptier, though the number of beggars has increased significantly. Once buzzing coffee shops are vacant; several restaurants have permanently closed. Outside the Iranian embassy, long queues of people wait for visa appointments; they say they are hopeless. At a Kabul maternity clinic, a newborn boy lies abandoned. “His family doesn’t have the money to take care of another child,” said Latifa Wardak, one of the hospital’s doctors.

A nameless boy lies abandoned in the prenatal ward at Rabia Balkhi hospital.

Rahela Shahavi, 25, works as a nurse in the postnatal ward at Malalai maternity hospital, where up to 100 babies are delivered each day. Out of the 446 staff, 400 are women. Right: nurses and midwives working in the prenatal ward at Rabia Balkhi hospital in Kabul sit down for lunch.

The trauma of the last months haunts many, and although Afghans are private people who often choose to conceal emotion, they visibly carry their pain. I've noticed it when interviewing people. The conversations last longer, because there is a real need to talk and process. With countless cups of green tea consumed, many describe the loneliness felt after their family members escaped the country. Memories of the past Taliban regime are recalled, often linked to present fears. Tears are shed.

A man walks through fresh snow in Panjshir's Hezarak district.

Leftovers from America's longest war: a destroyed army vehicle sits by the roadside in Panjshir's Hezarak district.

There are good moments, too. On a snowy morning, Naim Naimy, 63, from the southern Kandahar province, said he had travelled six hours to see a white Kabul. “I’ve been watching the weather forecast,” he said, standing amid trees in a park, soft white flakes melting on his skin. “I love snow,” he added, smiling.

In Kan-e-Ezzat village, as on many other similar frontlines, the guns have fallen silent since the Taliban’s takeover. Wardak had been one of the first provinces to see a resurgent Taliban after the start of the 2001 US-led invasion, with conflict almost a constant over the past decade.

Lal Mohammad, 48, from Wardak.

Whenever fighting erupted, Lal Mohammad, 48, would run through the family's compound gathering his children and other relatives, shoving them towards a small, dark, underground cowshed. They would sit amid the dung, crammed in and scared, around 40 of them, sometimes for hours, listening to the sounds of bullets and mortars, often in the cold of the night, waiting for the flare-up to pass.

Naila, 10, from Wardak, has been having nightmares for months, even now that the war has stopped.

The Kabul-based International Psychological Organisation (IPSO) has said Afghanistan is a "trauma state", estimating that 70% of Afghans are in need of psychological support.

Lal admitted to being traumatised too. He never aligned with the Taliban, but said he was glad that fighting had at least stopped. Most of his family sustained injuries over the years. He pointed to his 12-year-old nephew Sheer, sitting on a cushion next to him, his right hand deeply scared by a shrapnel wound. Little aid had trickled down to Lal's village. "The foreigners brought us cookies but little development," he said cynically.

"Everyone in this village has either lost a family member or has an injury. Everyone is traumatised and tired. We didn't want the Russians, nor the Americans, nor the Taliban. We just want peace. Today I can at least tell my children that the war is over."

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