

# A Kinder, Gentler Taliban?

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Khola Hasan, a female Sharia Council scholar living safely in the U.K., enjoying perfect legal equality with men – as she could not in any Muslim country – is hailing the victory of the Taliban, which she claims has “grown up,” by which she means it is today a kinder and gentler group, not the murderous Taliban of 20 years ago. And no one should worry about its future acts, she insists, as it has promised to guarantee women’s rights. A report on this is [here](#).

*A UK Islamic Sharia Council scholar has claimed that the Taliban have ‘grown up’ and British Muslims are ‘celebrating’ the return of the jihadi group to power.*

*Since taking over Afghanistan, the jihadi group has claimed it will not carry out violence against women, and will not ‘seek vengeance’ on those who stood against them during the brutal 20-year war in the region.*

Unfortunately for Khola Hasan, the Taliban’s promise, designed to assuage critics, foreign and domestic, is not being observed inside Afghanistan. We have all seen the scenes of terrified women huddled at the Kabul Airport, desperate to escape from the prospect of Taliban rule. We have read about women being summarily executed for not wearing the burqa; all over Afghanistan women have been rushing to find burqas to wear, but some did not manage to do so in time. Women, speaking anonymously to Western reporters, have universally expressed their terror at a return of the Taliban – unlike Khola Hasan, sitting comfortably in the U.K., the women in Afghanistan have a much better sense of what the Taliban intends, and do not believe for a minute its promises to have

changed its ways. They are certain that when the last Westerners are out of the country, the Taliban will revert completely to type, taking girls out of school, confining women who had been working in the outside world to return to their homes, severely punishing women who are not properly garbed, or who are found in the company, no matter how innocent, of men to whom they are not related. Who should we trust on the subject of the Taliban? The women of Afghanistan, most of whom have been living with the Taliban threat all their lives, or Ms. Kholā Hasan of the U.K. ?

*Sharia Council scholar Kholā Hasan today told BBC Radio 4 that the Islamist group's recent posturing on women's rights was a 'good start', and 'every single person that I know, as a Muslim' was 'celebrating' their return.*

*She added: 'They have been ruled by foreigners for 40 years, let the people of Afghanistan rule their own country and determine their own fate for a change.'*

But the public opinion polls in Afghanistan show clearly that the Afghans do not consider rule by the Taliban as meaning "the people of Afghanistan rule their own country." In the most recent poll, taken in 2019, only 13 percent of Afghans expressed any sympathy for the Taliban. The rest expressed support for the Afghan government that, according to Kholā Hasan, constitutes "rule by foreigners." Those "foreigners" have spent two trillion dollars in Afghanistan, with the aim of providing a competent government, and in a country where the rights of women and minorities to equal treatment are respected. Kholā Hasan may think that "every Muslim" she knows is overjoyed at the Taliban victory; clearly she hasn't been listening to the accounts of Afghans men and women, expressing their terror at the Taliban takeover, and detailing how they or others have already been mistreated, hunted down, some escaping while others were executed, even as the Taliban assures the outside world that this time things will be

different.

*Fears over reprisal attacks and a return to the brutal rule of the jihadis have brought about deep unrest, with Western nations struggling to cope with the thousands of foreign nationals and locals trying to leave the country in the week since the Taliban retook power.*

*When asked about reports of women and children being beaten and whipped as they pass through checkpoints in Afghanistan, Ms Hasan said Afghanistan is a 'tribal society with tribal loyalties', with 'a lot of violence within the communities' amid decades of 'occupation'.*

It's not "tribal loyalties" that explain why the Taliban beat and whip women and children. It's Islam that teaches members of the Taliban to treat women so roughly. After all, a Muslim husband is allowed to "beat" his wife should he merely suspect her of disobedience. A Muslim daughter's inheritance is half that of her male sibling. Similarly, a Muslim woman's testimony is worth half that of a male witness. It is Muhammad himself who in a famous hadith said such a rule was justified because of the "insufficiency of her [a woman's] intelligence." The Taliban, though Pashtuns predominate in its ranks, is not treating its own women any less severely than it does Tadzhik and Uzbek women. Khola Hassan is merely trying to deflect attention from Islam as the source of the Taliban's horrific behavior.

*Ms Hasan said: 'We have to be very careful not to take small, minor incidents and make them into something huge.'*

So cases of women and children being "beaten and whipped" – and in some cases murdered – for Khola Hasan are nothing but "small, minor incidents" that Islamophobes in the West have made "into something huge." Will she continue to insist on this as the stories of women being executed for not wearing

the burqa, or otherwise violating the Sharia, start to filter out, with ever-greater frequency, from Taliban-ruled Afghanistan? Will she bother to listen to the anguished Afghan women who manage to make it to the West and tell their tales of barbarous mistreatment by the Taliban, or will she instead try to protect Islam by undermining their credibility?

And what kind of “small, minor incidents” does Ms. Hasan think are being exaggerated? Are the Taliban, in setting up roadblocks everywhere to prevent its enemies – meaning all those who in any way helped the American effort to bring freedom and a modicum of prosperity to Afghanistan – from escaping, merely engaged in “small, minor incidents”? The knocks on the doors, as the Taliban seeks out those they intend to murder, and then indeed do murder them, do not strike me as “small, minor incidents”? Here’s one story among so many:

*Najia was at home with her three young sons and daughter in a small village in northern Afghanistan when Taliban fighters knocked on their door.*

*Najia’s daughter Manizha, 25, knew they were coming – her mother had told her they’d done the same thing the previous three days, demanding that she cook food for up to 15 fighters.*

*My mother told them, ‘I am poor, how can I cook for you?’” said Manizha. “(The Taliban) started beating her. My mother collapsed, and they hit her with their guns – AK47s.”*

*Manizha said she yelled at the fighters to stop. They paused for a moment before throwing a grenade into the next room and fleeing as the flames spread, she said. The mother of four died from the beating.*

There are many such stories – you need only search a bit to find them – about the Taliban’s murderous rampages, even

against people who have done nothing more than been too poor to cook for them. One wonders how Kholā Hasan would explain away the evidence of such widespread savagery.

*She [Kholā Hassan] added that 'western media loves misrepresenting Muslims', telling Sunday morning listeners: 'The kind of language that came out from Western media when the Taliban took over – civil war, monsters, they're going to slaughter people, it's going to be awful, poor women, oh blah blah we're going to cry our eyes out, poor women are going back into Medieval times, and all the rest of it.*

In a matter of months, there will be many stories coming out of Afghanistan about the “slaughter of people” and “poor women...going back into Medieval times” but I don't think such conclusive evidence will have the slightest effect on this despicable Defender of the Faith, Kholā Hasan.

*“It's [the Taliban] been misrepresented for so long that I've got used to it, I don't even blink an eyelid anymore.”*

*Ms Hasan was told the world had 'seen this movie before', referring to promises to be compassionate and merciful following the sack of Kabul 25 years ago.*

*She replied: 'No we haven't because the Taliban have grown up, they were not exposed to the modern world, so what they were saying 20 years ago this was a myopic, insulated, small organisation, living in the mountains, very illiterate, very uneducated, not just about the world but about Islam itself...*

So apparently the “old” Taliban consisted of Muslims who didn't really understand Islam. They were living in isolated areas (how then did they rule over most of Afghanistan?), uneducated, and “very[sic] illiterate.” This last is a strange claim, given that Taliban spokesmen were always quoting the Qur'an; the very word “Talib” means “student,” referring to

students in the madrasas set up by Afghan refugees in Pakistan, whose main occupation was to read, memorize, recite, and study the Qur'an and hadith. Apparently the members of the Taliban 20 years ago were getting the faith all wrong; it's today's Taliban that has got its "kinder, gentler" message of Islam right.

*'It's not an easy thing to do, to come from hundreds of years of one way practising your faith, and then suddenly exposed to different ways to think oh maybe we got it wrong. The problem is we don't give them a chance.'*...

Ms. Kholā Hasan, the Taliban has now been given another chance to show how much it has changed – a very big chance. For it now controls an entire country with 40 million people. We'll all be able to see how splendidly the new and improved Taliban, in which you claim to have such faith, behaves. The screams of terror and torment from Afghanistan should reach even to you, in your U.K. shelter, where perhaps they may serve to change your mind. But come to think of it, I don't think there is anything that will pierce the veil of Kholā Hasan's deceit and self-deception.

First published in