



Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group

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Hazara Asylum Seekers from Afghanistan: the increasing dangers they would face if they return

This collection of new material: 8th November 2012

*Graeme Swincer¹ for Blue Mountains Refugee Support Group,
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The following updates have been published since the original release of this paper.

- Collection of new material: 8th November 2012
- Supplementary update: 12th February 2013
- Supplementary update: 19th May 2013
- Supplementary update: 28th February 2014

All of these papers are available on our website:

bmrsg.org.au/research-material/afganistan/

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Introduction

In the 6 weeks since the basic paper was produced there has been a spate of documented atrocities in Afghanistan, pointing to further deterioration in the safety situation for Hazaras all over Afghanistan.

The following set of articles is simply listed along with key extracts and no commentary. The stories speak for themselves and reinforce the earlier conclusion that it would be unconscionable to force any Hazara back to Afghanistan.

A repeated theme is growing anxiety that the situation will grow even much worse for Hazaras following the projected withdrawal of international troops in 2014.

1

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/31/world/asia/taliban-hits-region-seen-as-safest-for-afghans.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

Taliban Hit Region Seen as 'Safest' for Afghans

By Graham Bowley

Habib Zahori contributed reporting from Bamian, and an employee of The New York Times from Kabul, Afghanistan.

Published: October 30, 2012

BAMIAN, Afghanistan — The war has finally found Bamian, a remote corner of Afghanistan that for a decade had enjoyed near immunity to Taliban violence.

“Bamian was the safest province in the country,” said Mohammed Natiqi, a Kabul-based military analyst. “The insurgents are trying to find a toehold there by destabilizing it to show their presence all over the country.”

According to Mohammad Aziz Shafaq, head of Bamian’s provincial council, fear has begun constricting both their livelihoods and lives. “Ordinary people cannot feel safe to go to their farms and do their work,” he said. “Businessmen do not feel safe sending supplies in and out of the province because they fear they will be confiscated by illegal armed men and insurgents.”

In July, gunmen killed an American engineer traveling on the Kabul-Bamian road. In September, five Hazaras were killed on another connecting road through Wardak Province. The main Hazara political leader has been targeted in attacks.

Hajji Ashuqullah Wafa, a member of Parliament from Baghlan, said militant groups enjoy the patronage of local warlords who are intent on destabilizing the government and are preparing for a time after 2014 when coalition combat forces are gone and they can extend their sway more widely throughout the region.

He added, “ISAF claiming security improvement is a narrative that is not always covered by reality”.



#2

<http://www.hazarapeople.com/2012/11/08/afghanistan-road-dangers-and-the-rising-threat-of-renewed-ethnic-violence/>

Afghanistan: Road Dangers and the Rising Threat of Renewed Ethnic Violence

November 8, 2012

by Melissa Kerr Chiovenda

Bamyan Province is still a pocket of relative tranquility in Afghanistan. But things get dangerous for locals when they have to travel. All roads into and out of the province must run a Taliban gauntlet.

The reputation of Afghanistan's Bamyan Province as one of the safest places in Afghanistan has been dented over the past year by several bursts of Taliban-inspired violence. Hazaras, who make up Bamyan's majority, and foreigners working there, also face violence while traveling in nearby areas.

Perhaps most alarming is a newer trend that seems to be developing, in which Hazaras are targeted for simply being Hazara. This summer, eleven civilians were tortured and beheaded in two separate incidents, about a week apart, in Jalrez District. And more recently, in Ghazni province on October 27, five Hazaras were pulled from a van and executed by Taliban militants. Although Ghazni has long been considered a dangerous province, this incident is part of a larger trend in which Hazaras are killed because of their ethnicity, and not because of any affiliation with international organizations or the Afghan government.

Meanwhile, the perils of road travel remind Hazaras that when international troops withdraw in 2014, they could very well once more be at the mercy of the Taliban.

#3

<http://www.theage.com.au/national/taliban-hell-awaits-asylum-seeker-20121102-28ppp.html>

Taliban hell awaits asylum seeker

November 3, 2012

Dan Oakes

For much of the past decade, Bamiyan was the shining light for the US-led coalition in Afghanistan.

When this reporter visited Bamiyan more than two years ago, New Zealand troops drove around in unarmoured utes, waving to children. Locals were talking about enticing tourists to the province, which was a stop on the hippie trail in the 1960s and 1970s.

However, a farmer warned, "When the Taliban controlled this place, we fled to Pakistan, to Iran, to other provinces. Each household left one person here to watch over our land. We need the central government to protect us, so this does not happen again."

Fast forward 2½ years. Five NZ soldiers were killed in two separate incidents in August and *The Wall Street Journal* recently reported that Taliban fighters are roaming openly in parts of the province.

There are no Afghan army units in Bamiyan, security is in the hands of an under-equipped and demoralised police force and the governor has to fly to Kabul for meetings as the Taliban control the roads.

The asylum seeker - who cannot be named - the federal government is trying to force back to Afghanistan comes from neighbouring Ghazni province, which also has a substantial Hazara minority but is one of the country's most violent and dangerous provinces.

There have been reports of the Taliban beheading Hazara in Ghazni (and in the Australia-controlled Oruzgan).

With foreign forces leaving Afghanistan, the Taliban moving back into Hazara areas and the history of brutality against the minority group, it is hard to understand how the Australian government could claim it is safe for the asylum seeker to return.

#4

<http://www.hazarapeople.com/2012/10/27/five-hazara-civilians-gunned-down-in-east-afghanistan/>

Five Hazara Civilians Gunned Down In East Afghanistan October 27, 2012

Based on reporting by AP and dpa

Reports from Afghanistan say five civilians travelling in a bus in the eastern province of Ghazni have been shot dead.

Provincial officials said Taliban militants stopped the bus on October 26 in the Andar district, pulled out five people, and killed them on the spot.

Police recovered the bodies on October 27 from the roadside.

Deputy Governor Mohammad Ali Ahmadi said the five dead were from the ethnic Hazara minority.

#5

<http://www.hazarapeople.com/2012/10/15/hazaras-not-deterred-by-tougher-immigration-laws/>

Hazaras not deterred by tougher immigration laws October 15, 2012

TONY EASTLEY: More than 500 asylum seekers arrived in Australia over the weekend and in Afghanistan ethnic Hazaras have told the ABC that tougher immigration laws will not deter them from paying people smugglers to get to Australia.

Hazaras are persecuted in Afghanistan and many have paid thousands of dollars to come to Australia by boat. They say it's worth spending the money and the time on Nauru for a chance to escape poverty and violence.

South Asia correspondent Michael Edwards reports from Kabul.

MICHAEL EDWARDS: War and persecution have forced hundreds of thousands of Hazaras out of the provinces and into Afghanistan's capital, Kabul. And on the streets they're quick to tell you they also want to get out of the country.

ABDUL ALI: I want to go again to Australia because the situation with security in Afghanistan is very, very bad for me and for those who are living in Afghanistan.

MICHAEL EDWARDS: To these people even life in a camp on Nauru is preferable to one of filled with violence and uncertainty.



#6

<http://www.hazarapeople.com/2012/10/16/australian-senator-defends-hazara-refugees-causes/>

Australian Senator Defends Hazara Refugees' Causes

October 16, 2012

Speech made in the Senate by Senator Sue Boyce (Liberal, Q) on 9th October 2012

In the world of refugees there are many deserving causes, but perhaps none more than that of the Hazara people of Afghanistan, who, through no fault of their own, survive persecution to become refugees. It is hard in Australia to imagine the plight of many displaced and persecuted peoples, but the plight of the Hazara people is one of the worst. The Hazaras are perhaps the best educated of all Afghan tribes, and they are—for their sins!—marked people. They have the distinctive Mongolian facial features that mean they are easily made a target of hatred.

I am aware of the dire situation facing the Hazara people through two cases that have been brought to me.

They have been accused of being collaborators in the service of the so-called NATO invaders, been denied the right to education—mosque burnings, bombings, targeted assassinations and beheadings have been commonplace. I want especially to come to Hussein Balkhi's story shortly, because I am both shocked and hurt by the fact that our Department of Immigration and Citizenship believe he has nothing to fear by being returned to Afghanistan, despite the picture that I have just painted.

It was claimed by this government in a media release on 9 April 2010 that, after the fall of the Taliban, 'durable security and constitutional and legal reform were serving to protect minority rights in Afghanistan.' Such claims were wrong then, and they are wrong now. Thousands of Hazara Shiites have been persecuted and murdered. The Department of Immigration and Citizenship, quite reasonably, asks our embassy in Kabul for reports on security and sectarian strife.

But the reports I have had from people who spend time on the ground in Afghanistan helping refugees are that the embassy staff in fact have little opportunity to get into rural, remote and far-flung Afghanistan and that they do not know all the facts. Human Rights Watch says that **the killing of Hazara Shiites is 'significantly under-reported'**. The government and their officers have also seemingly accepted the advice of an unnamed representative of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, who claimed that since the fall of the Taliban the Hazara were experiencing a 'golden age'. Decapitation is hardly 'golden', nor is becoming a homeless refugee.

Many Hazara who have sought sanctuary here come from the Ghazni province, 120 kilometres south-west of Kabul. In June 2011 The International Crisis group described the province as the third-most volatile in all Afghanistan, just behind Helmand and Kandahar. Hazara in Ghazni have been killed, disappeared, forced to flee and had their ancestral lands confiscated. **But they are not safe anywhere in Afghanistan.**

In September the Director of the Asia-Pacific College of Diplomacy at the ANU, William Maley, said 'there is little reason to be confident the general situation in Afghanistan will take a turn for the better in the foreseeable future.