EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES IN AFGHANISTAN AFTER THE RETURN OF TALIBAN

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Abstract

Afghanistan's education improved dramatically in the two decades after the Taliban's collapse in 2001. The number of schools had quadrupled by 2017. Enrollment in primary and secondary schools reached 9.2 million, with 39% being girls. That's about 10 times the number of kids enrolled in 2001 (nearly none of them were girls). The Taliban's sudden return has created major fears about the future of education, especially for girls. To comprehend the future, one must first comprehend the past. National governments and international organisations sponsoring education in crisis zones see it as a means to peace and prosperity. Education does actually empower students. It provides fresh perspectives and job prospects for students once the Taliban return. But this takes time. And schools are seldom neutral. Long-term political commitment is essential for educational progress.

Keywords: War, Taliban, Afghanistan, Education, Governments.

Introduction

For all practical reasons, the Taliban's new Afghanistan has demonised education. The country's hardline leadership have ruled out contemporary education, forbidding girls from attending school, and claiming that the Islamic curriculum taught at madrassas is all that is needed. To put it another way: Since August 15, when the Taliban retook control of Afghanistan, they've reintroduced strict controls to rein in personal freedoms, focusing on women's clothing and beard length rather than the larger issues of governance like dealing with a food crisis or an energy crunch in the country. Education is now the Taliban's next target, despite the group's need for skilled brains to deal with the country's death spiral. At a time when the international world has invested billions in development, Taliban acting

higher education minister Abdul Baqi Haqqani says the country's educational achievements over the previous two decades are useless as the country slides towards economic collapse and humanitarian tragedy. His ministry plans to employ instructors who have "values" beneficial to Afghanistan in a meeting with university faculty, an apparent allusion to the Taliban's as-yet-undisclosed interpretation of Islamic law, which he called "less valuable" than religious courses taught at madrassas.

One of the reasons for authoring this article was to fill a need left by the dearth of reliable and easily accessible English-language information available online concerning Afghanistan's educational system and its history. In addition, we want to talk about how education in Afghanistan has evolved and improved through time. Schools in Afghanistan teach contemporary sciences, whereas Madrasas teach Arabic and Islamic studies (Kamgar 2008, 15–16; B. Safi 1987, 1–2; Samady 2001, 25–26); the two terms are interchangeable in Afghanistan. Depending on the Madrasa they leave, graduates of Madrasas have a wide range of abilities. After graduating, they become Mullahs and begin their careers as religious leaders in the mosques. Some of them are also involved in the field of law. Modern education refers to government-run schools that follow a standard curriculum, including natural science, social and historical studies, and a minimal amount of Islamic studies, in this study. After high school, students have the option of continuing their education at a university or finding work in the public sector. As an alternative, traditional education focuses on teaching children the basics of Islam as well as basic literacy skills in mosques and private homes, all within a religious context. It is the responsibility of the mosque community to provide traditional education and to support it. In 1875, the Afghan royal family began establishing schools for civic and military objectives, according to records pertaining to the country's educational history. Habibiya School, a contemporary school comprising elementary, middle, and high school levels, was established in the 1970s. The foundation of the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Kabul and other large cities in 1922 was a result of the growth of several general and vocational schools. Next, in 1977, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) was established in order to consolidate the country's higher education institutions. This article begins by describing the rise of contemporary education and the growth of both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education. Afterwards, it discusses the organisation of both the primary and secondary education systems. As a final step, the present issues and possible solutions are laid out and debated.

Background

At least in part, the Taliban's current policy and practise toward education is characterised by inconsistencies and contradictions because of the differing educational experiences of

the various audiences the movement is simultaneously trying to reach. For example, rural Pashtuns in the southern Pashtun provinces have little or no history of females' schools. Due to patriarchal institutions in society, there has been a lot of hostility to teaching girls (particularly post-pubescent females). As many as 10 males attend elementary school in the Pashtun-dominated southern districts of Zabul and Uruzgan, while only one female goes. Some Afghan families appear to believe that the right to education is the same for both sexes, but that a few years of schooling is sufficient for girls in some areas of the country. In certain of the movement's southern member villages, the Taliban's view on girls' education is not nearly as contentious as it is for most Western audiences.

It was Mullah Omar who decreed in 1996, shortly after the Taliban took Kabul and declared an Islamic Emirate, that education for girls would be temporarily halted due to concerns about safety. After then, the Taliban remained in power for another five years until the suspension was removed. According to the rationale of the 1996 edict, it would have been possible to provide education for females in areas firmly under Taliban authority. According to former Swedish Committee of Afghanistan (SCA) Country Director Anders Fänge, Taliban leaders would cite a lack of financial resources as a reason for restricting girls' access to education, and that boys should be given priority. SCA has worked in Afghanistan for decades, including during the Taliban regime. In spite of the belief of certain Taliban commanders that girls should not be allowed to attend school, this was never an official Taliban policy. The 1996 directive was not enforced by some Taliban authorities. Male and female maktabs operated under the cover of foreign NGOs like CARE International and SCA in rural regions. In 2000, SCA had 170,000 students, 39,000 of them were female. Despite these efforts, the number of children who have the opportunity to attend school remains extremely low, particularly among females.

Taliban hostility to education after 2001 has not always been an outright opposition to education itself, as some have suggested. When the administration of education (especially before 2009) was under GoA authority, there was a lot of influence. Taliban fighters claim that the destruction of educational institutions is a necessary act of retaliation for the government's oppressive rule. This is not to argue that everyone supports universal education; rather, it indicates that for some people, universal education is synonymous with a government that is repressive and unfair. Some underprivileged tribes have long taken pleasure in sending their kids to hujras (a traditional Pashtun male social institution) rather than formal madrasas, as an illustration of this trend.

Taliban militants were hostile to maktabs when they reemerged in 2004-05 as an insurgency against the Karzai government and declared war on it. Field commanders were directed in the first Layha, or code of conduct, released in 2006, to target maktabs that

adopted the post-2001 curriculum and to specifically target girls' schools. Assaults on schools rose 65 percent in 2006, according to ISAF estimates, and the Ministry of Education (MoE) said that more than 500 schools, mostly in the south and east of the country, were shuttered as a result of threats and actual attacks. 15 The University of Nebraska at Omaha created textbooks for mujahidin schools in the 1980s that stressed the necessity of jihad and military resistance against occupation. They preferred these books over the new ones provided in 2005 with the help of UNICEF, which the Taliban favoured. The anti-education passages were eliminated from the Layha when it was rewritten and enlarged in 2009 and 2010. Taliban assaults against schools, teachers, and children have been curtailed to a more indirect level in recent years, according to the group. As an alternative, they sought to impose their power through limiting access to education. A handful of schools were reopened after Taliban and MoE officials struck a deal. Taliban education and girls' education were no longer being opposed, according to then-Education Minister Faruq Wardak in January 2011. Mullah Omar supposedly issued an order in March 2011 urging Taliban militants not to target or intimidate maktabs. It has never been made public that such a directive existed. According to our findings, the Taliban and the Ministry of Education came to an agreement in 2011 to make small alterations to the basic curriculum. It also gave the Taliban some control over teacher recruitment and attendance and performance monitoring, including the use of laptop computers given by the MoE.

Afghanistan's Transition to a Modern Educational System

During the reign of Amir Sher Ali Khan, the initial steps toward modernising Afghanistan were taken. In Kabul, Afghanistan, two modern schools were established in 1875. For members of the royal family, the Maktab-e Mulki WA Khawanin (Royalty school) and Maktab-e Harbiyah (Military school) were erected. Modern educational practises were integrated into the curriculum and structure of these two institutions in the form of modern subjects such as mathematics and chemistry. The director of education for both Afghan and foreign instructors was responsible for overseeing the activities of both groups. In spite of the Second Anglo-Afghan War, Sayed Jamaluddin began this mild modernising instruction. The mobility of Afghan and other nation intellectuals was therefore halted (Andishmand, 2011)

Reintroducing modern education to India was Amir Habibullah Khan's goal in 1903. At Maktab-e Habibiya, he set up three levels of education: elementary (grades 1-4), lower secondary (grades 5-7), and upper secondary (grades 8-12). (grades 8 to 10). Islam, Dari and Pashtu, mathematics, geography, calligraphy, and other subjects were all part of the curriculum at the primary school level. Islam, local languages, history, geography, a foreign language (Urdu, Turkish or English), sketching, cleanliness, and systems of

numerical notation were all part of lower-secondary education. Islam, local languages, history and geography, algebra and trigonometry as well as physics and herbalism were taught in the secondary school. English was also taught. Habibiya School's primary branches were afterwards established in Kabul's six other districts. In the end, there were 1,534 pupils and 55 teachers enrolled (Andishmand 2011; Dowlatabadi 2011; Ghobar 2015). It had a profound effect on Kabul's intellectuals and professors. A few prominent alums of this institution include the previous king of Afghanistan, Mohammed Zahir Shah; President Mohammed Najibullah; Interim President Sebghatullah Mujadid; Hamid Karzai; the then current president of Afghanistan; and others.

Kabul too had its start with vocational schools. There are several vocations that fall under this category, including architecture, agriculture and fine and applied arts; telegraphy; carpentry; construction; police training; music; carpet-weaving; home economics; and women's health and other fields. Another important milestone was the expansion of education to other parts of Afghanistan. Jalalabad, Qandahar, Herat and other significant cities had similar schools.

For this purpose, the Ministry of Education (MoE) was founded in 1920. (Andishmand 2011). In the same year, both boys and girls were required to attend primary school under Article 68 of the first Afghan constitution. Schools were restructured into three divisions: elementary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary (3 years). The contemporary and traditional educations were able to work together. With a population of over 51,000, there were approximately 322 primary schools in 1927. Over 100 best graduates were transferred abroad for advanced study because there was no official higher education system in place at the time (Andishmand 2011; Shorish 2011).

His return to the nation from a European tour brought with it many Western characteristics, including social and cultural reforms that he hoped would quickly modernise Pakistan. There are several examples of this, such as a Thursday vacation instead of Friday, signs on particular routes with the phrase "women with niqab cannot pass these roads," obligatory attire, and so on. According to Amanullah Khan, initiatives like female education and sending students to study abroad were anti-Islamic, which sparked religious outrage. As a result of this conflict, as well as revolutionaries backed by foreign powers, the Kingdom of Amanullah Khan was overthrown in 1929. All educational institutions were closed within a few months (Andishmand 2011).

In 1994 and 1995, more than 1.6 million students were enrolled in elementary and secondary schools, with more than 250,000 of those pupils being female. There were 23,697 schoolteachers in these years, 13,185 of them were women. In addition, 5,300 men

and women were enrolled in teacher training institutions (Andishmand 2011). The Taliban imposed a restriction on female education beginning in 1996 and lasting until the end of 2001. The madrassa (religious education and mosque schools) became the primary source of basic and general education. Nearly 875,000 pupils attended school in 1999; 64,110 were females (Andishmand 2011; Samady 2001). In 2001-2002, Afghanistan's nascent democracy received a large amount of international help to reconstruct the education system across the country. Despite the difficulties, several private and public educational institutions were founded throughout the country.

A summary of Taliban policy

Taliban assaults on schools and threats against teachers escalated in 2015, following ISAF's military retreat at the end of 2014, in line with an overall uptick in violence. Targeted executions of Maktab clerics in Khost; teacher kidnappings in Wardak; and public harassment and humiliation of students during the Taliban's temporary control of Kunduz in September 2015 are just some of the incidents that have occurred. End 2015, UNAMA estimated that Taliban control was steady in 13 districts in Helmand, Zabul and Ghazni provinces as well as in Paktika and Khost provinces as well as Badakhshan and Sari Pul districts. The Ministry of Education has no access to these regions, thus there are no public schools other than the local mosques that are utilised for rudimentary religious training. Many communities have recently become used to a lack of formal schooling. As an example, in Helmand's Baghran and Naw Zad districts, there have been no functional official schools for boys or girls for more than a decade.. When it comes to the districts of Kandahar that are under Taliban control (Khakrez, Nesh, and Shah Wali Kot), schools are closed, although schools are open in areas that are under state authority (Kandahar).

Another example is the Nawa area in southern Ghazni, which has been under Taliban military authority since around 2007. A shadow district governor, a district council member, and a previous shadow governor are the three most important Taliban members (military commander). Since 2007, there have been no schools for boys or girls. There were no girls' schools even before the Taliban took power. The district has three madrasas. Elders in the neighbourhood petitioned the Taliban to open a maktab in 2011. Schools can start only if they meet certain requirements set down by local commanders, including as a transfer of MoE funds for teaching staff, and a Taliban mandate for the curriculum. MoE officials rejected this idea, therefore schools have been shuttered ever since. There isn't a single organisation in Nawa that provides lessons for members of the local community. When the expected monthly cost of 50 Afs (less than $1) per individual could not be

afforded by the locals, a community attempt to develop low-cost private tuition services failed.

All issues are resolved by an elected 15-member community shura in Nawa, which is recognised by the Taliban there. "If we attempted to go to school this way, then yeah," said one Nawa local, "Taliban has nothing against private schools - they are not opposing it." Establishing ten or more classes would be doable if we had the cooperation of the shura. As a result, 30 or 40 parents may get together to form a community of support. The fact that we have 15 elders who are well-respected on both sides is critical... and the support of these folks can be used to further one's education." Asked to clarify his belief that the local Taliban are not opposed to education in general, the interviewee said, "No. "Education is not a threat to anyone." As for girls' education, he said: "People want, but there is no way to build a girls' school in this region." We must first and foremost think of the lads. Priority should be given to the boys because they are completely illiterate at this time. It is impossible to start a girls' school in the midst of the Taliban."

Some Taliban commanders want everyone in the areas they control to get a good education. There should be no interference with maktabs and an open attitude on CBE and private classes. As long as the Taliban believe they can exert influence over key aspects of education, such as curriculum, MoE funding and teacher recruitment and performance evaluations at designated learning locations (maktabs), they will be more willing to cooperate. Local political agreements between the Taliban and those who give education, aided by elders and ulama, often result in this sense of control.

• Taliban administrators and commanders from the district with family or tribal connections to elders and ulama;
• Literate Taliban administrators and commanders;

Directors and commanders from the district who have familial or tribal ties to local elders and ulama and have been instructed by the Taliban to encourage education in their district are examples of Taliban leaders who have been given the task of doing just that. There are also organisations of ulama and elders that can facilitate discourse, negotiation, and mediation. Known as SMCs or other shuras, these groups are made up of people who are adept at negotiating and mediating.

Bermel, a border district in Paktika province, shows how difficult it is to get an education in areas controlled by the Taliban. The Taliban have been using Bermel as a smuggling route into Pakistan for more than a decade. Pakistani Taliban have recently exploited it as a safe haven in South Waziristan to escape the notice of the Pakistani military. The Taliban's

military chief in Bermel and the surrounding region is Bilal Zadran. Bilal Zadran's brother, Sangeen, was assassinated by a US drone attack in 2013. Deputy leader Sirajuddin Haqqani allegedly chose Bilal as his successor. His Bermel district does not allow general education, but he allows maktabs to run in Ziruk, Nika, and Gian - districts that belong to his Zadran tribe - to be taught.

Statistics of Afghanistan's Educational Sector

Since 2001, Afghanistan has seen significant gains in school attendance, gender equality, and literacy. There is still uncertainty as to how big such improvements are, though. Much of the world is plagued by a lack of trust, making data collecting and verification difficult. The Ministry of Energy has also been accused of exaggerating its data. When Ashraf Ghani was president, he created a panel that included representatives from the AG's office and the NDSC to look into allegations of corruption and fraud at the MoE. One fact-finding team was created in January 2016 to evaluate the quality of education, student and teacher populations, as well as the methods for selecting new instructors. Even though the first commission's conclusions had not yet been made public, early indications suggested that some of the previously stated data could need to have their accuracy checked.

In 2013, there were 8.6 million students registered in maktabs, with 39% of those students being female, according to the draught National Education Strategic Plan 2015-2020 from the MoE. At least 3.5 million children were not in school in 2011, according to UNICEF's assessment of the Net Enrollment Ratio for primary and secondary education. Groups such as girls and children with disabilities and those who live in dangerous or rural places are among the most vulnerable.. In 2015, 72 females were enrolled for every 100 boys in Afghanistan's schools, despite significant advances. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) has grown from 0.08 to 0.72 since 1999, with an estimated primary gross enrolment ratio for females rising from less than 4% to 87.5%. The GPI for this country is still the lowest in the world, despite its undeniable significance. Provincial and rural-urban differences in the GPI are also notable. There were nine females for every 10 boys in Badakhshan and Herat in 2012, whereas the GPI in Zabul and Uruzgan was only 0.1. (one girl to ten boys). Many elements are at play here, but some of the more obvious ones include varying degrees of Taliban influence, local political agreements that control schooling and its nature as well as ethno-religious customs, family priorities, and levels of security.

Major Issues of Afghanistan's Educational Sector

According to the author, Afghanistan's most powerful individuals should keep in mind that international assistance in the country will eventually expire. As a result, it is imperative

that our country's cultural, educational, and scientific exchanges with the rest of the globe aren't just one-way flows of information. Afghanistan has made great strides in education over the past decade despite a disparity between quantitative and qualitative growth; nevertheless excellent education, both in the general and higher education arenas play a significant part in building a stable Afghanistan in a wide range of areas.

A general survey and a survey of Computer Science students were done by the author of this research to learn more about the influence of school specialisation. Most of the participants were college students, either recently graduated or now enrolled in a university (e.g. freshmen, sophomore, and male and female graduates). The majority of those in attendance came from Herat's several universities, with only a handful coming from outlying areas. In the polls, 70% of respondents said that schools are mostly unwilling to work with the market or higher education to achieve their goals. When students graduate, they will not be well-prepared to enter the workforce. It also does not provide pupils with a solid intellectual foundation for further study. As a result, 95% of respondents said that providing students with the option to pursue specialised training once entering postsecondary education is both helpful and a wise move. As a result, improved career preparation for high school students will result from offering them specialised courses that emphasise hands-on experience. In addition, if students decide to continue their education, they will be better prepared for the classes they select at the university level.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) does not officially supervise pre-primary/kindergarten education. Basic education can begin with the development and promotion of public and private kindergartens in urban areas. A. Safi (2012) has found that students who have completed pre-school (pre-primary) are more likely to succeed academically than those who start primary school without having completed any pre-school. For the group of children who did not get pre-school training, research shows (A. Safi, 2012) that the costs and future services required were seven times more than those for the group of children who had received pre-school training. In Japan, pre-school or kindergarten lessons are required for children before they start primary school. Currently, 90% of Japan's five-year-olds are enrolled in educational facilities, and 60% of these facilities are privately managed. A number of nations are working to put pre-school education under the purview of the public education system, including Germany; Australia; France; Canada; South Korea; Taiwan; and others (A. Safi 2012).

In an informal poll of students, teachers, and the author's own experiences, the majority of students at Afghan educational institutes do not complete the curriculum or the textbooks. Furthermore, only the foundational skills of reading and writing in elementary and secondary school have been mastered. Getting into a good high school or a good university

is one of the most difficult things for kids to do. To address these challenges, it is imperative that elementary and lower secondary education be given greater attention and serious examination because of the insufficient and ineffective teaching methods (since education is the foundation for higher education). More over a quarter of Afghan children aged seven to fourteen are employed by their families, according to UNICEF. On the other hand, the problem is exacerbated in rural places As soon as their children finish elementary school, some families are requesting that their youngsters begin looking for jobs. This might be attributed to families' limited financial resources or to parents' perceptions that teaching their children to read and write is sufficient in and of itself. Students may not be able to go to school at all because of this. This means that the Ministry of Education must devise and execute strategies to ensure that all children are able to attend primary and secondary school.

Building a good educational system requires the growth and strengthening of science and technology in education. Teaching these courses should be bolstered with greater care and seriousness by competent and skilled professors who use practical techniques for pupils. In addition, polls reveal that the majority of students planning to take the Kankor test have taken lessons to help them prepare for it in addition to their regular schoolwork. Math, Physics, Geometry, Trigonometry, Chemistry, English, and Computer-Supportive classes were taken by nearly all of them. The Kankor test is to blame, as half of the questions are based on math and physics. Students in the 10th and 11th grades are typically taken out of public high schools by their parents, who enrol them in private institutions. Because they believe private high school kids have a better chance of passing the Kankor exam. In the author's view, parents were seeking to get their children out of a highly regarded public high school and enrol them in private institutions.

There have been more than 9 million girls and boys attending school since the Taliban rule was overthrown in 2001 and this number is expected to rise. Despite the large number of pupils, there was a shortage of teachers. More than half of the 165,000 instructors in the country had only a high school degree or had not completed their college education, according to data from the Ministry of Education (MoE). A lot of female university graduates want to be teachers, according to the author's own experiences and knowledge on the issue. In spite of this, the education industry continues to be plagued by a shortage of highly trained instructors. This means that MoE should put its efforts into developing a national plan for enhancing the existing teaching workforce. Ideally, prospective teachers should have some knowledge of the subjects they would be teaching before enrolling in teacher education programmes. The hiring procedure should also be enhanced and made more efficient.

Some religious leaders advise their followers to avoid sending their children to school (especially the girls). The country has a fundamental distrust of foreign ideas and practises. There will be no quick resolution to these irrational worries and preconceptions. It will take decades of quiet and steady growth to dispel these anxieties. If Afghanistan is able to provide peace and security to its people, a stronger educational system might be established to serve the country's youngsters and provide them with the required skills for the future. The country's educational system will be more resilient if elementary schools and mosques work together to coordinate and establish trust. This level of harmony and cohesion was not achieved. There are a number of reasons for this, some of which date back to earlier times. Such cooperation is crucial to ensuring the stability of society and the country as a whole. Fostering national discourse between schools and Madrasas is a great approach to build and deepen trust among students and teachers alike. Better to begin in major cities and eventually expand to smaller ones as well as rural locations.

Recommendations

Keep looking at and dealing with systemic decentralisation in the MoE.

Restrict the use of schools as military bases or shelters by GoA soldiers. As a significant contrast between the GoA and Taliban, make this a priority.

Human rights and international humanitarian law must be respected by "parallel militias" and other groups sponsored by the GoA or its international allies when it comes to protecting schools and educators. This includes training, teaching and reprimands.

Make it clear that working with the Taliban for humanitarian and development purposes, including promoting education, would not be met with Afghan security forces' opposition.

Promote dialogue among key stakeholders in regions susceptible to long-term crises, such as those under Taliban or ISIS control, through strengthening the capacity of the MoE's social mobilisation section. Local shuras would work with the unit in order to avoid and address any issues, including those created by armed groups, that may arise.

Ensure that major abuses and local corruption are reported to the highest levels of the Ministry of Education in Kabul through strengthening contact channels with local populations.

Increase the use of technology, especially for training female instructors and providing short-term education to youngsters, in the most troubled areas.

Look into the possibility of empowering women in underserved communities to take on the role of educators.

The building of boundary walls, the provision of restrooms and sanitary items, and the availability of transportation should be continued in order to make schools as accessible as possible, especially for teenage females.

While it may be more efficient to work with already-existing groups like the SMC and other local shuras, a more comprehensive national survey of attitudes toward education among Afghan families, including women's perspectives on the reasons for persistent gender disparities and the perceived value of a general education, should be conducted instead.

Conclusion

In the last week of March, secondary schools in Afghanistan opened their doors to female students for the first time since the Taliban seized power. Indefinite school closures were announced to the students, who were ordered to return to their homes. The Taliban's official response to the U-turn was confusing and conflicting as world criticism rose. The organisation blamed the school closures on a shortage of teachers and said they first wanted to create an environment where girls could learn and decide on proper attire. Education ministry statement then stated that school openings will be delayed "until further notice" until "a comprehensive strategy, in conformity with Sharia and Afghan culture" is devised. Uniforms aren't a factor in the decision to close schools to girls above the age of 11, according to some experts. To be clear, this does not mean that there are no differences inside the group. Molvi Noorullah Munir, the Taliban's Minister of Education, stated that "no Ph.D. degree, master's degree is useful now." Even if the mullahs and Taliban in power lack a PhD, MA, or high school diploma, they are nonetheless regarded as the best of all time." Education in Afghanistan was considered as one of the aid-funded Taliban's final attempts to dominate the country's success stories after the U.S. invasion in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Around the world, 67% of men and 48% of women attend school on a regular basis, according to data from the World Bank from last year. Ninety percent more Afghan youngsters are now in school because to foreign help. Girls were unable to attend school at all under the Taliban's rule. There are those who work in education and human rights who believe that the country is headed in the same direction as before. Heather Barr, the Human Rights Watch's associate director for women's rights, noted that allowing girls to attend primary school was a significant compromise. If they think this is enough, then so be it. Education for girls might be utilised by the Taliban to extract concessions from Western countries, such as diplomatic recognition or unfreezing of financial assets.

Factional political considerations are likely to take precedent over any attempt by the Taliban to discourage its most hard-line supporters from defecting to the local Islamic State-Khorasan franchise. A bilateral agreement signed in 2020 has helped to the Taliban's progress this year, but some followers of the organisation are outraged by their choice to meet and work with former US President Donald Trump. Taliban concessions in the treatment of women might inspire more of its members to join the Islamic State, a group the Taliban has identified as a foe.

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