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"Women Come Last in Afghanistan" by Ann  
Jones*

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## April Roundtable: Introduction

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## April Roundtable: Introduction

### Abstract

An annotation of:

"Women Come Last in Afghanistan " by Ann Jones. Salon.com. February 6, 2007.

### Keywords

Human rights, Afghanistan, Taliban, NATO, Women's rights

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**[“Women Come Last in Afghanistan ” by Ann Jones. Salon.com. February 6, 2007.](#)**

**An Annotation:**

Ann Jones, in this month’s focal article, details the impact of the 2001 U.S.-led NATO intervention, and subsequent adventure in nation-building, on the women of Afghanistan, in light of the fact that the war was sold to the world as a means to alleviate human suffering and install a rights-respecting regime. Beginning with an historical account of women’s rights under the Taliban and then bringing readers up to speed with the current situation on the ground, Jones tells a discouraging tale of sexual violence, human trafficking, suicide, illiteracy, and systemic societal repression.

**“Afghan women and girls are, by custom and practice, the property of men.”**

When culture and history dictate a group’s status and role in society, how does the modern international human rights community advocate for change? Do we maintain distance and respect the “social harmony” that tribal codes dictate, or do we take steps to empower women, potentially throwing into disarray local social structures? If we decide to intervene, how do we act so as to actually help people and minimize unintended consequences? These are central questions that human rights advocates need to struggle with, especially because our experience with military intervention has been notoriously checkered. The recent interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq are evidence that the current model based on physical force is neither the most creative nor effective means to protect human rights.

**“[President Hamid Karzai] also advised a British reporter that Westerners shouldn’t even mention women’s rights when more important things are at stake. As if security is not a women’s right.”**

As we discussed in last month’s [Roundtable](#), the well-being of vulnerable subgroups (homosexual men in the March installment, women herein) are commonly dismissed outright as a secondary consideration when a state or a clan is confronted with threats to its security. Often it need not be anything as severe as a true existential threat, but rather when there is any excuse whatsoever to continue oppressive policies, the excuse is leveraged to its fullest capacity. The argument usually proceeds as if human rights are luxuries only enjoyed in Eden, instead of recognizing the potential interdependence of the exercise of rights and political stability.

**“The war against the Taliban was supposed to have liberated Afghan women, but the reality is that little has changed.”**

A confluence of dangerous elements has created the current situation in Afghanistan: a traditionally oppressive cultural sphere; an arrogant superpower responsible for a well-intentioned but poorly executed intervention; a recent history of armed resistance to invasion; and a thriving and hostile Islamist movement. These issues taken together should clearly indicate the necessity to tread lightly before action is taken or judgment passed. The reflections for this month’s Roundtable share an emphasis on complexity and sophistication in elucidating the nuances to be considered *before* making a decision as difficult as committing personnel to military intervention.

*~ The Editors*