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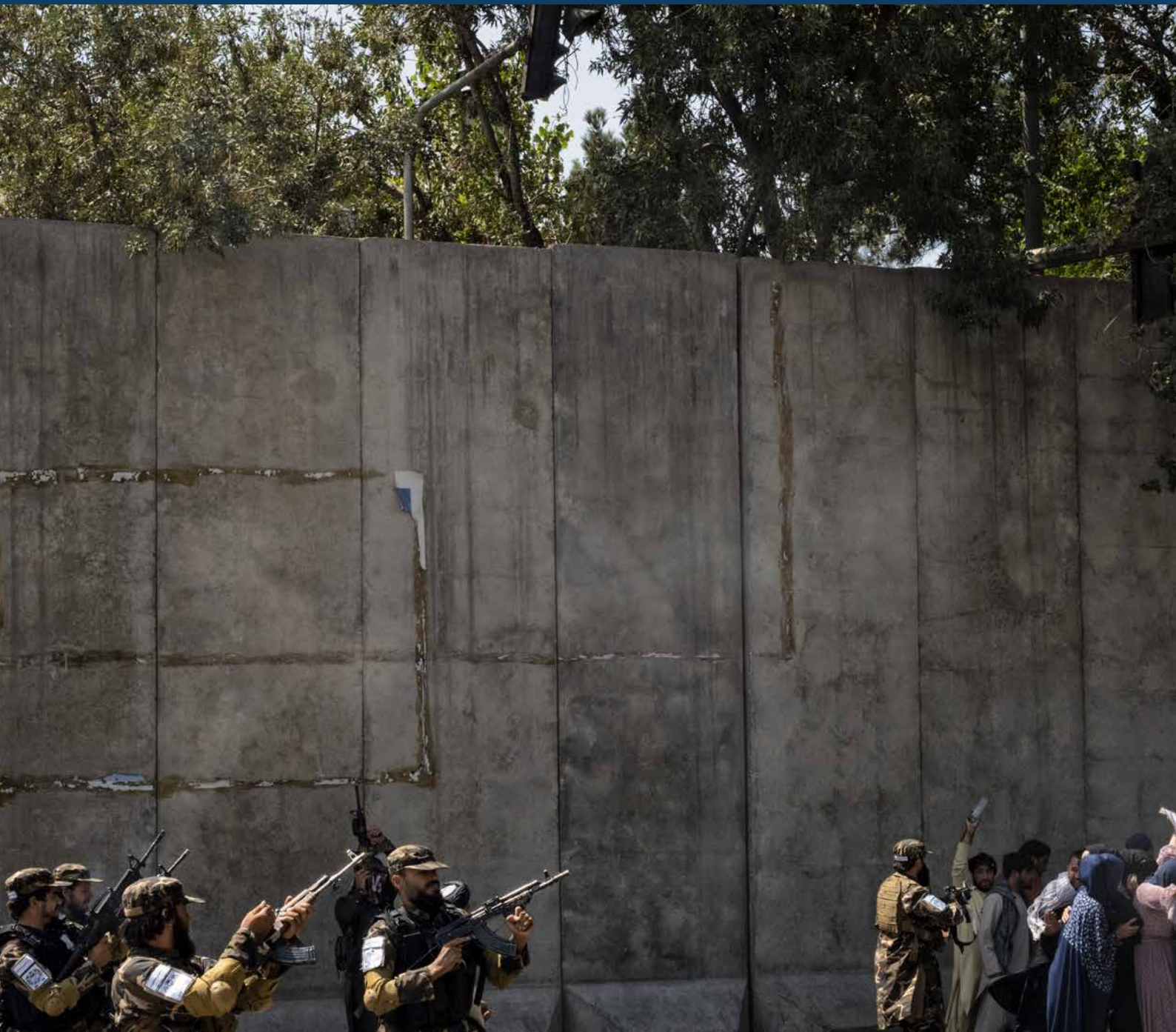


On the road in the Taliban's Afghanistan

BY JUAN CARLOS

An experienced freelance photojournalist known as Juan Carlos spoke to INSI about his three-month stint in Afghanistan, his many trips across the country, and the time when a car ashtray saved his pictures and, possibly, his life. He describes the chaos and jitters of negotiating passage among the intensely factional Taliban, amid the looming threat of famine and IS-K.

Cover: A 'flying coach' minivan crossing a bridge on the Helmand River in Gizab district; Below: Taliban fighters start firing their weapons in the air to put an end to a large protest against repression under the new Taliban government.





1. Kabul

I arrived in Afghanistan in early August, in time to witness the Taliban take Kandahar and the messy US withdrawal from Kabul airport. It was my first time in the country. At first I moved around Kabul on my own. I do not speak the language and I did not have a translator or fixer, primarily because I couldn't pay for one. I ran out of cash pretty quickly and the banks were either closed or not stocking dollars, which is what fixers wanted to be paid in. It was all quite complicated but, having to sort myself out also meant I got to grips with the place quicker. I was eventually able to get cash through the "hawala" system, which is basically like money swapped on trust.

While in Kabul, I stayed in an apartment. To get around, I hired the same private driver every day, someone I trusted. Coming and going, I would be very discreet. I lived 50 metres

from a police station. There had always been a checkpoint at the corner there, which was now manned by the Taliban. Whenever I was in a taxi, I always avoided going through that checkpoint. At that early stage, it wasn't clear yet how the Taliban were going to behave towards freelance foreign journalists and I wasn't in a hurry to find out.

I wore Shalwar Kameez, traditional clothing, when travelling around so if I didn't speak, I could pass for Afghan. Sometimes that was useful, sometimes not. Sometimes they would begin to doubt my real identity and question me further.

I have dual citizenship from El Salvador and the US but only carry my US passport as a precaution. I will not mention that I am an American unless I absolutely have to. During the August evacuation crisis, as I was trying to

A view of the capital, Kabul.



enter the Baron Hotel, I had to go into an office which was serving as headquarters for the local Taliban. It was a very delicate situation on the streets at the time. You could get beaten by the Taliban or deafened by the guns they were firing into the air as a crowd-control measure.

I was escorted by a Talib all the way to the gate. Near the hotel, my escort informed the Talib at the checkpoint that I was an American. One of the guards tried to slap me and another one pushed me, saying, "Get out Americans, we don't want you here!" They did not want to let me in, even though I had been given permission from a high official and was literally being escorted by another Talib.

My escort had to argue with them to allow me through.

On other occasions, the Taliban defied my expectations. One incident around the same time, shortly after their takeover of Kabul, blew my mind. I was being driven around and the traffic was not as bad as it used to be, but a Talib in the middle of the road signalled that we should pull over. There was a broken vehicle by the side of the road and I thought he might want us to help with it. In fact, he had stopped us simply so that a woman – dressed in high heels, face uncovered, no burka – could walk across the street. It was like an episode of *The Twilight Zone*. I so wish I had taken a picture.

Top left: A Taliban fighter speaks to a truck driver at a checkpoint on a main street in Kabul; Top right: A member of the Taliban provides security at Kabul's biggest money exchange market, Sarai Shahzada; Below: Two Afghan women have a conversation at a coffee shop in Kabul in early August, before Taliban rule.



2. Panjshir

On September 6, after weeks of intense fighting, the Taliban announced that they had captured the Panjshir Valley. The mountainous area had been defended by the multi-ethnic National Resistance Front, the last holdout of anti-Taliban resistance.

The reporters I worked with at the time and I decided to make Panjshir the destination of our first trip out of Kabul. The entrance to the Panjshir valley is just over 100km from the outskirts of Kabul and the road to get there was smooth if eerily deserted.

Approaching the entrance gate to the Panjshir valley, we began to see lots of trucks with armed Taliban on. We reached the checkpoint at the entrance and showed the Taliban guards our letter of accreditation from the Ministry of Information and Culture in Kabul. It was signed by Zabihullah Mujahid, which is a prerequisite for every journalist working in the country. The letter allowed us to

cover anything, or so we thought.

The guards seemed okay with us and were checking if we were allowed further. While we queued at the gate, I was taking photos from the car. Suddenly a vehicle coming out of Panjshir pulled over. There were two elderly Taliban who seemed to be the leaders, and two young men with rifles. They got out and became very aggressive towards us, asking us to erase all our images. One of the older Talibs tried to grab my camera – I fought with him to keep hold of it. It got really tense.

The young Talib pointed his rifle in my face, telling me to give him the camera or erase the images. I refused. They opened my vehicle door, tried to pull me out with the gun still pointed at me, threatening to shoot if I didn't get out. I stayed put. I would never let go of my camera, no matter what. I have no idea why but thankfully, after a while, they let us go and we were told to turn around and go back the

Destroyed banners on the road to the Panjshir Valley, which was considered the last stronghold of resistance to the Taliban.





Taliban fighters at the Panjshir Valley entrance gate.

way we had come. We were disappointed that we could not go to Panjshir but at least we were safe, for now.

On our way back, one of my colleagues started filming the dilapidated "Welcome to Panjshir" signs by the roadside. The same vehicle from the checkpoint suddenly reappeared, and the Taliban demanded that we stop filming. We agreed and were allowed to carry on with them in tow. At that moment I thought it best to hide my memory card. The driver had some money in the ashtray, so I hid the card under it. I knew the Taliban were very wary of being accused of stealing or touching someone's money. I left the card with just a few videos on it in my camera.

By the time we reached another Taliban checkpoint, the same car was on our case again. They pulled up and demanded, at gunpoint, that we erase all our phones and cameras. They said they would kill us if they found images of the Panjshir gate or that area. As the young Talib cocked his gun and pointed it at me, shouting, I erased the nearly blank card on my camera. Then, to my horror, they started to search the car. They went through my equipment, as well as everyone's backpacks. Another Talib who spoke decent English came over and confirmed that we would

be shot if we did not erase everything. I really thought this might be it for us. If they checked the ashtray thoroughly, we could be killed.

They made us wipe everything from all our equipment. A man whom I believe might have been working for the Taliban media department took my spare cards, put them in his own computer and checked each one to see if any images were left. Once satisfied that everything had been wiped, they told us to leave, which we did. They never checked the ashtray.

Once back in Kabul, we found out that our letter did not permit us to photograph or access any military operations and they confirmed that we could not go into Panjshir at all. I still had some pictures though, on the card that had been hidden in the ashtray. We wanted to use them for a piece but I was worried about publication affecting my safety in Afghanistan. There was a lot of discussion between me, the reporter, and the editors back home. The conclusion was that the group that threatened us in Panjshir had nothing to do with Kabul and so publishing the photos should not put me in any danger. The piece was only published in print outside of Afghanistan and not online at all.



3. Daykundi

My next trip, towards the end of September, was to the Hazara minority enclave of Daykundi, right in the middle of Afghanistan. We had met Daykundi leaders hiding in Kabul and heard that people there were being threatened and kicked out of their homes by the Taliban. A Facebook video was circulating showing a house in a village of the Gizab district that had been bombed.

If you look at the map, the distance between Kabul and Daykundi's capital, Nili, is around 400km. We were hoping it would take us around eight hours each way, but we were very wrong. What was meant to be a three-day trip turned into an eight-day one.

The roads were awful. The main roads turned out to have been destroyed, mostly by landslides, and we had to take terrible back roads. Because of the sensitive nature of the story we wanted to cover, we were trying especially hard to keep a low-profile. We picked a normal car that would

not stand out but it broke down less than halfway and we had to find another car and driver, using our local contacts.

We came to one checkpoint on the outskirts of Panjab, a town still almost 200km from Nili. Oddly, the Taliban guarding the gates were young men from the Hazari community itself. They started questioning us. When they found out that we were foreigners, they were actually very friendly and asked if we had been harassed. We were permitted entry and ended up staying overnight in a room. From there we hired another driver and vehicle – what they call a flying coach, which is basically a four-by-four Toyota Hiace minivan.

Once we reached Gizab province, we did our best to avoid any problems. We visited rural areas where people had been forced from their homes. The villagers were scared but happy to speak to us. They were very cautious when we visited their houses. The photos I took did not show any faces and we did not use anyone's real names.

Guest House Bamiyan on the road from Kabul to Daykundi.



We also visited the city of Gizab, the capital of the district, to talk to the governor and the authorities there regarding this issue. For this trip, I was only left with two memory cards, because the Taliban kept my other cards after the Panjshir incident. Before leaving Gizab, I took out a card with photos of the villages and hid it in my boots, putting a blank card in my camera just in case we were confronted.

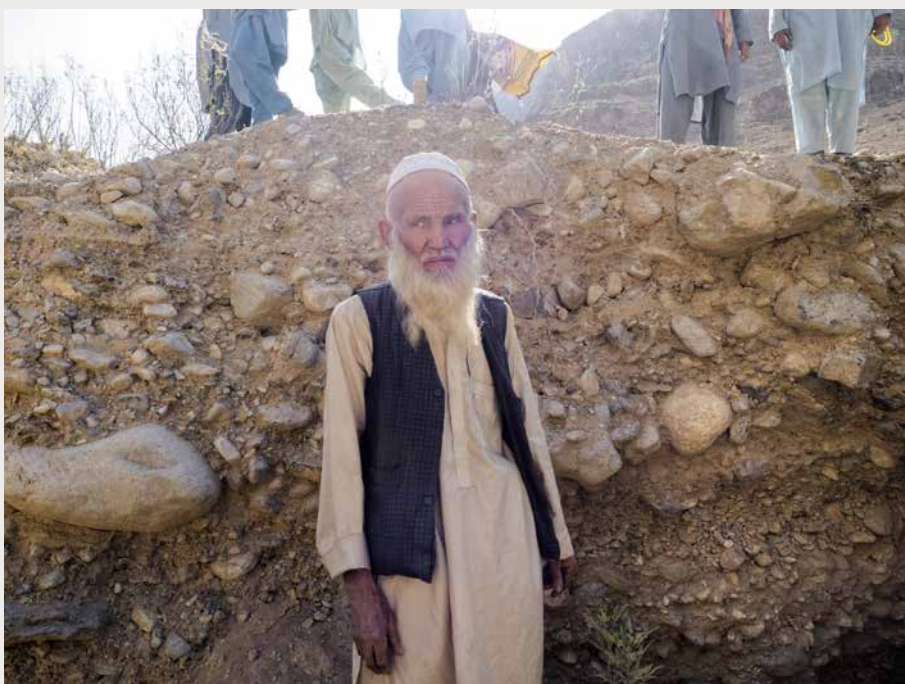
On the way back to Kabul, we encountered the Taliban a couple of times, once when we were hiding in a house and another time when they could not make us out properly in the minivan. I was wearing traditional clothing and everyone was wearing at least the Afghan hat, so they really had to pay attention to figure out that we were foreigners.

If we were to be recognised as foreign press, we hoped we could reason that the Taliban had made an open invitation to anyone, especially the media, to see Afghanistan under their rule. We would say that we wanted to see what Afghanistan was like under the Taliban, now that it was "safe".



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Top left: A family home destroyed by the Taliban in the Tagabdar Valley, Daykundi province; Top right: A flying coach in the Jawoz area of Daykundi; Middle: The dirt roads of Daykundi province; Bottom right: An elder of the village Dahan-i-Nala, where residents are being forced out by the Taliban under accusations of land grabbing.





Taliban Commander Saifullah, who is in charge of the Special Forces (Red Unit) for the four districts in Kunduz Province, which has been hit hard with an economic crisis.

4. Kunduz

We went to Kunduz in the first week of October to follow up on a historic story about civilians killed in a western airstrike. I went with two colleagues as well as our driver, who was also our fixer and translator. It was an eight-nine hour drive with really bad roads, half-lit tunnels and no alternative routes. Some sections of the road were paved and decent, some were terrible.

There were checkpoints at different villages and towns towards Kunduz but we had no issues. They just briefly checked the trunk, asked where we were coming from and heading to, then let us go. After the long drive to Kunduz, we carried on straight to the Sher Khan Bandar border without stopping: the crossing was closing at six pm and our colleague was planning to leave, to travel back to Europe.

To get out via this crossing, you need to have a Tajik visa and to be on a list from the Ministry of the Interior in Kabul. As we waited, a young Talib came over to us and took us back to the last checkpoint. Our driver translated

for us: we were accused of trying to sneak into Tajikistan illegally. The officials claimed that we had crossed into the border area without being checked or given clearance, even though we had been checked at the only gate that was manned on the way there.

The guards took us to one of the buildings near the last checkpoint. They said we were going to have to spend the night in that room, but they also offered us tea as well as food and were generally friendly. They asked us where we were from and what we were doing there. We answered and showed them our permission letter. After they read the letter, we were summoned to meet the leader in charge of the border at a separate building.

The leader said everything had been cleared up and he apologised for the procedure. We were given dinner. The following morning, they gave us breakfast – fish from the Kunduz river. Our colleague received a stamp with the official Islamic Emirate logo to help him leave the country,



but he had further issues on the Tajikistan border, even though they agreed that he was on the official list.

Once he was safely through, the rest of us travelled up the Panj river, which divides the forested area along the border. After seeing the area, the locals told us to take a path through the villages, which is not visible on the map, as a shorter route back to the main road to Kunduz.

We drove up to a T-junction, where this motorcycle with two Talibs showed up. One of them had a machine gun, the other one had a rifle. They were looking at us. We ended up asking them for directions. They were

friendly and told us to follow them. We followed them to a village where they stopped and started to question us. We showed them our letter but they insisted that their commander had given orders to take us to the main police station. They also checked our phones and took them, too but did not delete anything. We were taken to the police next, who were very aggressive. They did not care about the authorisation letter. They made up various excuses for holding us, including saying that we were smugglers.

So within 24 hours, we had been accused of trying to escape illegally into Tajikistan and now of smuggling.



Top: A Taliban carrying artillery in Kunduz; Bottom left: A Taliban guard on the Afghan-Tajikistan border; Bottom middle: A makeshift ferry carries Taliban fighters and a police truck across the Kunduz River; Bottom right: View of the Panj River at the Afghanistan-Tajikistan border at Sher Khan Bandar.

The local imam showed up, examined our letter of authorisation, and said he did know anything about it. Eventually, they called the number of a contact in the Ministry of Communications, who advised them to respect the letter if it had the seal of the Islamic Emirate on it. This embarrassed our captors and finally they let us out at night, returning our phones intact, and we drove back to Kunduz.

In Kunduz city, we stayed in a guest house. The next day we tried to get access to a former foreign military base which had been under Taliban control for a while. We tried our best to secure entry, without any luck, and so we started the long journey back to Kabul.

Along the way, we took a detour and stopped at the national park in Bamiyan. People used to go to Bamiyan for relaxation. There is still some tourism but it is mainly the Taliban now, enjoying the area. We had seen images of them on social media and we were even able to speak to some of them. They seemed to enjoy using the pedal

boats on the lake but were reluctant to leave their guns anywhere. We arrived back at Kabul at one in the morning.



Top: Security for the Taliban Commander Saifullah in Kunduz Province; Bottom: Taliban fighters enjoy riding a peddle boat on the lake while visiting the Band-e Amir National Park.

5. Nuristan

The Taliban were constantly saying that the war is over, that anyone could go anywhere as long as there is no fighting in the area. But of course, there is still a risk from IS-K in many provinces, particularly those bordering Pakistan. We wanted to report on a part of Afghanistan that was off limits during the conflict, but that was – in theory at least – more accessible by then.

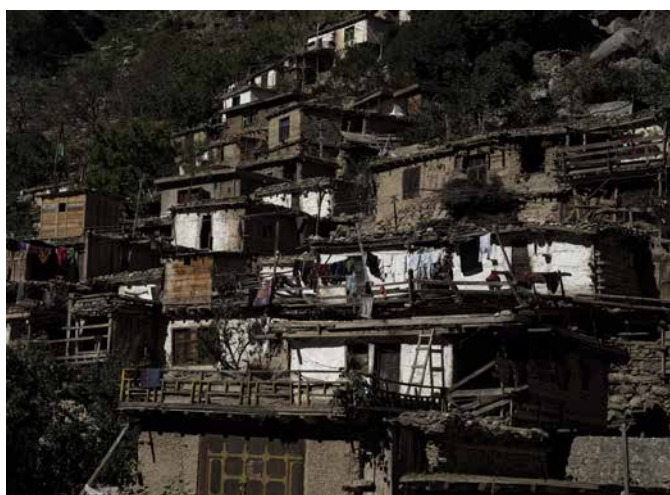
And so in mid-October, we set off for Nuristan province, this lush green corner of Afghanistan high up in the mountains near the Pakistani border. We opted for a route that would take us east out of Kabul, through Nangarhar province, and then north, through Kunar. Much of it is stunningly beautiful country, heavily forested and unspoilt. IS-K is active in the area and foreigners are at risk of being kidnapped, but we figured we would be all right as we were just passing through and not travelling by night. We left early and managed to reach Asadabad, the capital of Nangarhar province, by nightfall as planned.

The journey from Kabul to Asadabad can take a while because of heavy traffic and winding roads but overall, it was pretty straightforward. We travelled in our fixer's car, one of these ubiquitous Toyota Corollas that Afghans seem to take everywhere, even places where you might expect them to use a sturdier vehicle. We, however, would not be taking our fixer's sedan onto the dirt roads of Nuristan. The one thing you do not want is a breakdown in the mountains, and so we decided to use a four-by-four or pick-up truck for the next leg of the journey, even if that meant being more visible.

After overnighting at a hotel in Asadabad, we made our way to the local transport hub the next morning, hoping to find a driver with a reliable vehicle who could take us to Parun, the capital of Nuristan province. For a trip like this, it really helps to use a local driver who knows the road and knows what's going on, because no matter how much you read up beforehand, you are never going to have real-



The mountains of Parun, the capital of the Nuristan province.



Above: A village with traditional stone houses on the road to Nuristan; Right: A view of the Kama River, which crosses Nuristan.



time updates for the situation on the ground. We turned up at the taxi rank and everyone gathered round.

Normally you would just be assigned to the driver whose turn it was next, but we wanted to check out our driver and vehicle, and also make sure that we would not be sharing a ride with anyone. Given that we had not planned any of this, we were lucky to find a really good driver who did not overcharge us, which is apparently something that happens a lot. People can work out that you are a journalist even if you do not tell them, simply because journalists are the only foreigners they see. There used to be some NGO workers around too, but not anymore, given the situation. We paid 50 dollars for the round trip from Asadabad to Parun.

There had been plenty of checkpoints along the way to Asadabad, all manned by the Taliban of course – you do not live to tell the tale from an IS-K checkpoint. We had no issues until we reached the gates of the city, and some of the guards were quite friendly, offering us corn-on-the-cob when they found out we were foreigners. At the checkpoint to the gates of Asadabad though, the guards asked us to leave the vehicle, and we spent a frustrating half hour going through the rigmarole of proving that we had permission to be there. I left my camera kit in the vehicle as I was not worried about the Taliban stealing anything – there is generally little risk of that. The bigger risk is that they will see the cameras and want to search the vehicle, ask more irrelevant questions, and I did not want to give them that opportunity.

Officially, we were told that we were being held back for our own safety because there was a lot of IS-K activity in the area. As usual, this felt like an excuse for making sure that our story checked out. If it was simply a matter of keeping us safe, the checkpoint would have

arranged an onward escort for us. Instead, they went through all our documents and permits, including a letter from the Taliban spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid. We had interviewed Mujahid in Kabul and were carrying an authorisation letter from him. In our case, this letter was just a signed statement on a page torn from a notebook, saying that we were allowed to go wherever we wanted, as long as it was not a military base or the Panjshir Valley. It was not so much an access-all-areas pass, more like a get-out-of-jail card – something to deploy as a last resort when the guards had decided to detain you because they were unconvinced by the other documents.

While we were waiting at the Asadabad checkpoint, this Taliban elite unit turned up in a truck. Their commander took our letter and rang the phone number to speak to Mujahid or his assistant. Then they wrote down our names and fathers' names, all this cultural stuff. Once they were satisfied with our credentials, they became very apologetic and offered us tea. They also insisted on escorting us into town to find a hotel, which we did not particularly want but were in no position to refuse. So we were fine in the end, but it was an insight into how the Taliban on the ground tend to be simultaneously hyper-cautious and disorganised.

As we were leaving Asadabad the next day, we would encounter another layer of the Taliban's security

bureaucracy. We had only just set off and were passing through the town's outskirts when the driver's phone started ringing: it was the controller at the transport hub. The driver initially ignored the call but he eventually answered because they kept trying. The controller asked for his location and told him to wait by the roadside, which weirded him out. It turned out that the head of intelligence/security in Asadabad wanted to check on us. Again, this is a standard Taliban pretext for holding up foreigners. We were constantly being told that we had to report to the local district or provincial governor about our movements, and that this information had to be passed on to various intelligence chiefs and commanders on the ground.

We waited for half an hour on the edge of Asadabad for the governor to show up with his security detail. They were quite aggressive at first, and so we showed them all the various letters and permits. They asked us why we had not reported to the authorities, and we explained that we had done exactly that at the checkpoint outside Asadabad the previous evening, and that it was not our fault if their people were not communicating with each other. Outside Kabul, these letters and permits are

quite a novelty – you often get senior officials, not just footsoldiers, who have never seen them and feel they have to verify everything for themselves. Eventually, they apologised and let us go, and there were no problems on the rest of the journey to Nuristan.

The landscape was stunning, very photogenic. Of course, it was harder to photograph people, especially women. The provincial capital, Parun, has seen a lot of investment and was in good condition. The local officials were helpful and we did not have any fears for our security, or any issues with checkpoints until we were on our way back to Asadabad.

We ended up being stopped at a checkpoint outside Asadabad, just after we had gone past the main security headquarters in the town of Nangalam. As is often the case, it was just one guy who decided to make things difficult for us and insisted that we had to go back and report to the headquarters. It was very frustrating because we had literally just been there, but he would not listen. So we had to go through the motions again, proving our credentials to various commanders, and eventually they apologised and let us go.

The Kama river running along Kunar to Nuristan province.





Ashtiway national park area of Nuristan.

We ran into similar problems again on the border between Nangarhar and Kunar province, where there were checkpoints every 15 minutes or so. It was always the same story, with the Taliban questioning our credentials. One of the Taliban was a former police officer who in fact recognised the reporter from a previous trip and was able to confirm that he was a journalist, but even this did not stop his colleagues from making phone calls to check our identity. The special forces there asked us to get out of the vehicle and demanded that we pose for a photograph, for their own records. I was trying to set up the picture when one of the Taliban pushed me, telling me to take the picture. I told him there was no need for that, gave him a bit of attitude and he got really mad. This is what can happen – it is kind of friendly but it is not.

The underlying problem here is that a lot of these Taliban are from small towns, they are illiterate and they can get quite aggressive, because they have spent so long fighting foreigners – it is the only thing they know. Sometimes they just want to be thorough but they end up being idiotic or nasty. Sometimes they are just following

orders. The special forces are a different matter, they are hardcore and they seem to enjoy the work. It was always very frustrating, and you always have to find the right balance between showing your displeasure without losing your temper, which can make things worse.

I firmly believe that we would have faced a lot more danger if we had been an American group. As a rule, we played down any links to the US at checkpoints. No one disclosed any US citizenships and the fixer would always say we were working for a German publication. If anyone asked for passports, I would show the badge from my agency, which is French, and if anyone asked where I was from, I would say “El Salvador”.

We spent the last night of the trip in the city of Jalalabad, where there have been battles between the Taliban and IS-K. That night in our hotel room, at around 11 pm, we received a visit from Taliban intelligence officers who did the usual thing of interrogating us, taking down details and checking documents. They gave the same reason as always – it was because of the IS-K threat in the area. The reporter was really mad at them.

6. Faryab

The next piece we wanted to do was from Faryab province, which borders Turkmenistan to the north. The region is in the grip of a humanitarian crisis – a famine caused by drought and exacerbated by the withdrawal of international aid – and part of our trip would be facilitated by the World Food Programme (WFP). Towards the end of October, we took one of the few domestic flights still operational, from Kabul to the northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, and from there a taxi westwards to Maymana, the capital of Faryab province.

The road to Maymana was in good condition, apart from the potholes left by IEDs. The car was a Toyota Corolla, of course. The initial plan had been to travel from Maymana to Ghormach, a town near the border with Turkmenistan. However, we got word from our contact at the WFP that

IS-K had set up checkpoints in this area and were hunting for Taliban, so there was no question of us going there.

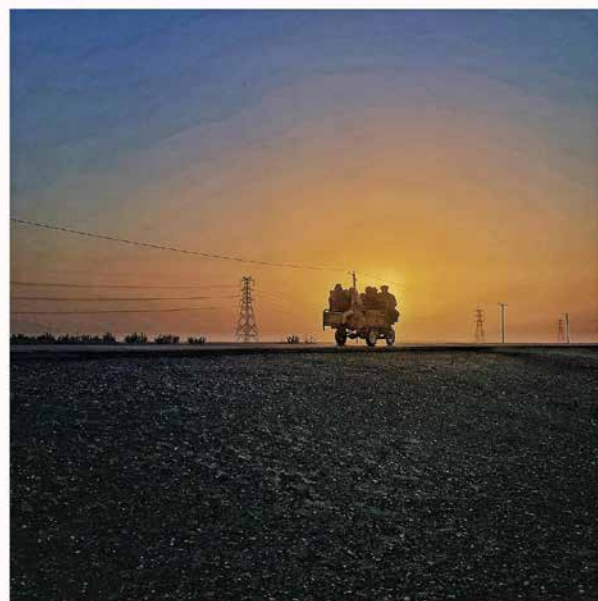
After overnighing in Maymana, we went to Ghormach district in neighbouring Badghis province, where the impact of the drought was all too apparent. We got the story and the pictures: people ploughing the dry land, crowds at a WFP distribution centre. On a road outside Ghormach town, I was taking pictures of a rudimentary irrigation system when all of a sudden a Taliban intelligence official showed up and started questioning the WFP guy about us. Nothing happened at the time but the next day we were told by our host at the guest house in Chahar Shanbe Bazar that the Taliban's head of intelligence had summoned us back to Maymana. You



A young Talib in Ghormach village in the Faryab Province which is facing water scarcity due to a drought.

can guess what happened next. We explained that we had already notified the governor in Maymana of all our plans and had secured all the permits we needed to do our jobs. It was our last day in Ghormach and we had more reporting to do – we were in no mood to go back to Maymana. But the Taliban would not back down and so at the urging of our host, we agreed to a rendezvous at a gas station in Chehel Qazi.

We were met there by the district governor and an intelligence officer. Again they asked us why we had not informed them of our plans, and again we explained that we had, and that there had been a failure of communication among their officials. We were told we had to stop reporting. We argued that our work was in no way a threat to the Taliban and that our story would in fact help the administration by highlighting the plight of the people. Speaking out of annoyance, the governor surprised us by saying he didn't care if people died of hunger and that it was more important for us to see the



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Top: The Mazar to Maymana road; Bottom: Residents of the Ghormach District leaving with food aid packages provided by the World Food Programme.



intelligence commander in Maymana. It is always the same battle with the Taliban. You get the permission, you start working, you get stopped and asked why you did not get any permission.

Eventually we were allowed to carry on reporting in Ghormach, but we would be shadowed for the rest of the day by two Taliban on a motorcycle, who followed us everywhere. We ended up having to tell them to back off a little bit because it would stop people from speaking to us. Back in Maymana, we were reminded that we still had to meet the local intelligence officials, who remonstrated with us for not having informed them in advance.

The next day we boarded a United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) back to Kabul, where I arrived just in time for my flight out of Afghanistan, bound for Qatar on October 28. I was pretty much done with the Taliban by this point, but it turned out that they were not quite done with me.

Top: Residents of the Ghormach District waiting to receive food aid by the World Food Programme;
Middle: An elderly farmer from the Alokazay village ploughs the dried land in the hopes that it will rain and he will be able to harvest;
Bottom: Travellers on the Mazar to Maymana road at dusk.



At the airport, I was interrogated because I had overstayed my visa. I explained that I had no way of renewing my visa because there had been a change of government and there were no instructions for visa renewals. The immigration officials said: "Why not renew your visa now?" I replied, "I did not know where I should go to get it renewed." I had fully expected to be deported for overstaying my visa, I am used to that, but these guys wanted to hold me back. Mostly when you overstay your visa, it means you cannot officially stay in the country any longer. In Afghanistan, you cannot leave. Eventually, a Qatari government official arranged for a fine to be paid and I managed to board the aircraft just as they were closing the doors.

I was so glad I made it out but I knew already it would not be long before I would return.



Above right: Residents of Chehel Qazi receiving food aid packages by the World Food Programme in the drought-stricken region; Below: A shepherd with his herd on the road to the Ghormach village in the Faryab Province.





Top: Kabul: A woman marching next to a Taliban fighter during one of the largest protests under the new Taliban government; Bottom left: A landscape in Paktia Province; Bottom right: A local business selling fish in the city of Kunduz.



Above: Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid at the Ministry of Information and Culture, Kabul; Below: Children heading to school in Daykundi province.





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