



**Paper Title: Book Review: Hanging by a Thread: Afghan Women’s Rights & Security Threats**

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## **Book Review: Hanging by a Thread: Afghan Women's Rights & Security Threats**

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**Title:** Hanging by a Thread: Afghan Women's Rights & Security Threats

**Authors:** Dr. Masouda Jalal and Dr. Mario Silva

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**Year:** 2014

Hanging by a Thread by Dr. Masouda Jalal and Dr. Mario Silva shares perspectives and lays bare the pressing security and civil liberties issues that Afghan women face as the country attempts an ambitious transition to sustainable peace.

The first part of the book discusses the history of women's struggle in Afghanistan before and after the fall of the Taliban, covering human rights challenges and the need to engender enduring peace with the full participation of Afghan women. It illustrates how the fates and lives of the women of Afghanistan are hanging by a thread, and how the country itself is at a critical juncture in its history. Yet, even as the country has gradually begun to move forward, Afghans are expected to accomplish a monumental task, unaided, i.e. putting an end to war—something that was not achieved even with a decade of massive international support.

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The second part of the book addresses issues of state failure and reconstruction, application of international law, application of domestic law, terrorist threats, and the US–Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement. State failure in Afghanistan has especially created several humanitarian, security, and legal challenges for the international community. During the Taliban regime, violence and criminal economic activity thrived, and terrorists benefited from the prevailing anarchy. The question of whether the international community responded effectively to deal with state failure and whether the NATO and its allies provided the Afghan National Security Forces with necessary tools to prevent future security threats is yet to be answered. The conflict in Afghanistan is one of the most protracted ones in contemporary times. Substantial investment has been made and thousands of lives have been lost in the effort to end the violence. However, Afghanistan's reconstruction requires long-term investment and commitment by Afghanistan and its willing partners.

The current situation in Afghanistan, which continues to be a source of great concern, presents a multitude of challenges for the new administration as well as the international community. Afghan women know that democracy and Talibanism cannot go hand in hand because the two phenomena are the antithesis of each other. Democracy is based on rule of law, human rights, peaceful coexistence, the protection of human life and dignity, and people's participation. Conversely, Talibanism is based on despotism, repression, tyranny, and the glorification of violence. Democracy can only thrive where peace is present, whereas Talibanism can only thrive where violence reigns. Thus, to assume that the Taliban will embrace peace is would be a major blunder. Furthermore, to hope that the Taliban will make peace under democratic terms while ignoring their ideological makeup would be another folly. Expecting Afghanistan to make peace with the Taliban, a group that operates in Afghanistan and has safe havens in Pakistan is akin to expecting the world to make peace with al Qaeda.

Some Afghans do not realize that the concept of peace promoted by the Taliban and al Qaeda contradicts the democratic concept of peace. Today Afghan women face the nightmare of a resurgent Taliban regime. Afghan women are bewildered by the sudden obsession among elected leaders in

favor of negotiating peace with the Taliban using a two-pronged strategy involving paying off the 'moderate' Taliban to return to mainstream life, and offering political concessions to the 'hard core' ones. Every Afghan woman knows that there is no such thing as a moderate Taliban.

Life experiences of those who became Taliban members have been as uniquely edifying and compelling as the experiences that have made the rest of the Afghan people seek peace and democracy. Nothing can genuinely convince a Talib that terrorism is unacceptable, and that democracy is good for everyone. To make peace with the Taliban is to allow them to erode the very foundations of democracy.

Afghans believe that a peace process should be pursued from a position of strength. Today it appears that the Afghan government has been granting concessions to the Taliban without receiving anything in return. If the Taliban are committed to achieving peace, they should be asked to immediately halt all armed hostilities. Afghans need peace to make peace. Every concession that the government gives to the Taliban should be reciprocated with an equivalent act of peace.

*Hanging by a Thread* is a very good socio-political study of women's situation in Afghanistan. It not only outlines the causes and effects of the appalling situation of Afghan women but also sheds light on governmental efforts and failures. It is a groundbreaking book as far as realities experienced by Afghan women are concerned. Importantly, it succinctly articulates the ways in which Afghan women's rights are violated. That being said, understandably, it does not cover every aspect of society. Some matters—such as the rights and the plight of Afghan women—are highlighted more, and some others—such as how to deal with the Taliban—are not included. However, this does not render this book entirely imbalanced or unhelpful.

Yet the Taliban are a reality in Afghanistan and ousting them from the country alone is not the solution. An inclusive and prosperous Afghanistan needs to be built, one where no section of the society is left behind, and in this regard, there cannot be a one-sided solution.