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## A School Bus for Shamsia

By *DEXTER FILKINS*

EVEN BEFORE THE men with acid came, the Mirwais Mena School for Girls was surrounded by enemies. It stood on the outskirts of Kandahar, barely 20 miles from the hometown of Mullah Muhammad Omar, the Taliban's founder. Just down the road from the school, in an area known as Old Town, residents had built a shrine to Mullah Dadullah, the Taliban commander with the fiercest reputation, who made his name by massacring members of the Hazara minority. He was killed in an American-led operation in 2007. Also nearby sat the Sarposa Prison, where, in June 2008, Taliban fighters and suicide bombers attacked, freeing more than a thousand criminals and comrades. The area around the Mirwais Mena School is the Taliban heartland. Teaching girls to read was not something that would escape their notice. Across the country, the Taliban have made the destruction of schools, particularly schools for girls, a hallmark of their war.

The Mirwais Mena School — L-shaped, cement, two stories, with canvas tents donated by the United Nations — was built in 2004 with a grant from the Japanese government. A plaque out front gives the date; it hangs on the 10-foot-high cement wall built to shield the students. Kandahar's Mirwais Mena neighborhood sits just off the national highway. A rutted mud path called Panjwai Road cuts through the center of the neighborhood and up an outcropping of bare rock that rises 500 feet. A single electrical wire runs into Mirwais Mena from a pole along the highway; no one can remember the last time it carried any current.

The attackers appeared in the morning on Nov. 12 of last year, as the girls were walking to school. The men came on three motorcycles, each one carrying a driver and a man on back. They wore masks. Each of the men riding on back carried a small container filled with battery acid. The masked men circled for several minutes as the girls streamed to school. Then they moved in.

Shamsia Husseini and her sister, Atifa, were walking along the highway when they spotted the men on the motorbikes. Shamsia, then 17, was old enough to be married; she was wearing a black scarf that covered most of her face. Shamsia had seen Taliban gunmen before and figured the men on the motorcycles would pass. Then one of the bikes pulled alongside her, and the man on back jumped off. Through the mask, he asked Shamsia what seemed like a strange question.

“Are you going to school?”

The masked man pulled the scarf away from Shamsia’s face and, with his other hand, pumped the trigger on his spray gun. Shamsia felt as if her face and eyes were on fire. As she screamed, the masked man reached for Atifa, who was already running. He pulled at her and tore her scarf away and pumped the spray into her back. The men sped off toward another group of girls. Shamsia lay in the street holding her burning face.

A MONTH LATER, a bulletin flashed across Afghan TV screens. Hamid Karzai, the president, announced the arrest of two suspects in the acid-throwing case. The case, by then, had generated extraordinary publicity. People around the world were worked up about it. Laura Bush, then the first lady, denounced the crime.

Karzai, wearing his signature karakul cap and flowing cape, looked straight into the camera. “Religious people do not spray acid in the faces of little girls,” Karzai said. “The penalty for this is execution. I will personally ask the Supreme Court to put these men to death.” Karzai repeated that last phrase several times.

The screen flickered. A middle-aged Afghan man appeared. He was unshaven and looking nervous. “My name is Jalil,” he said, his eyes darting.

Jalil spoke tentatively at first, but his story was electrifying. Jalil and eight other Afghans, he said, were paid to throw acid on the girls by an intelligence officer working for the government of Pakistan. This was not some vague assertion; Jalil provided names, details and places. The camera zoomed in on his face. A few weeks before the attack, Jalil said, he was contacted by one Major Tahir, an officer with the Directorate for Inter-Services Intelligence, or ISI, the Pakistani spy agency. The ISI helped create the Taliban in the mid-1990s and has maintained a close association ever since. Jalil and Major Tahir had known each other for years, he said. Jalil said that Tahir offered a sliding pay scale: \$2,500 for killing a teacher; \$3,700 for burning a school; \$1,200 for spraying acid on school girls.

“I said O.K.,” Jalil said.

The screen flashed again. Another Afghan appeared, younger than the first. His name was Niaz, a resident of Mirwais Mena. His nickname, he told the camera, was Bango. In Pashto slang, “bango” means “hashish.” On an evening in early November, Bango, 18, said, he drove his motorcycle to see

Jalil and two other men he'd never met, Naim and Torjan. Jalil handed the two men \$1,200 each. They would spray the acid. Torjan handed Bango \$125. He would drive.

“When Torjan started spraying the first girl, I stopped my bike, but he told me to keep moving,” Bango said into the camera. “So I kept moving, and he sprayed another group of girls in the middle of the road.”

The screen flickered again. This time, an Afghan girl appeared, writhing in a hospital bed. She was covered in bandages. The scene changed again; the same girl reappeared, this time seated at a table. She wore a white head scarf, but the scars were still visible, rimming her eyes in a bright mask and spreading across her cheek. A caption gave her name as Shamsia Husseini.

“We want them to be executed in front of us,” Shamsia said. She spoke calmly and slowly. “The same way they sprayed acid on us, we want acid sprayed on them.”

After a while, the screen went dark.

EIGHT YEARS AFTER the Americans came to Afghanistan, it is hard to find reasons to be optimistic about the future. In November 2001, when the Taliban clerics fled Kabul, the country lay in ruins. Today, it still does. Outside Kabul, there is hardly any government to speak of. There are governors, there are some police authorities and there is very little else. The roads are mostly broken and unpaved. Warlords hold much of the country in their hands. The goodwill that flowed so freely eight years ago has mostly disappeared, drained away by the failure to rebuild the country, to crush the Taliban and to do so without slaughtering innocents. It is easy to give in to despair.

And yet if there is one unambiguously positive change that the American-led enterprise has brought it is the education of girls. In 2001, only a million Afghan children were enrolled in school, all of them boys. The education of girls was banned. Today, approximately 7 million Afghan children attend school, of which 2.6 million, or roughly a third, are girls.

As a correspondent in the late 1990s, I traveled often to Afghanistan when the Taliban were in control. The country was a grim and medieval place — I witnessed a public execution at a Kabul stadium. In July 2000, when the Taliban were at the height of their power, secret schools for girls were springing up across the country. The women and men who ran these schools, often out of their own apartments, risked horrible punishments. One afternoon in Kabul, on my way to meet some parents who were running one such school, I was descended on by the Taliban's vice-and-virtue police. I was arrested and expelled from the country. I didn't return to Afghanistan until after 9/11.

Those memories prompted me, earlier this year, to wonder about the fate of the girls at the Mirwais Mena School. I did not witness the acid attack or report on the event. I had not yet seen the government film. I figured the school would be empty — that it would be boarded up like so many schools for girls in the area and the girls isolated behind the walls of their homes.

And so when I visited the school one morning in January I was stunned by what I found. The Mirwais Mena School had indeed closed after the acid attacks, but only for a week. When I arrived it was crowded and filled with the laughter of 300 girls. Nearly all of the 11 girls and four teachers who were burned by acid had returned as well. Most surprising was the girl in the video, Shamsia

Husseini — she was not only in attendance, but animated and lively. I found her seated in the front row of a second-floor geography class. A scarlet scar, the size of a tennis ball, still covered her face.

The Mirwais Mena School is a sprawling and informal enterprise; the girls range in ages from 6 to 23, the older ones playing catch-up after spending their childhoods under Taliban rule. The girls besieged me the moment I walked through the gate. Many left their classrooms and followed me down the open-air halls.

“Hey, mistah! Hey, mistah!” they cried, touching me and running away.

Most impressive were the classes themselves. The school offered courses in chemistry, English, geography and math.

“All right, class, open your books!” barked Arja, the geography teacher.

“What is the capital of Brazil?” she asked, striding back and forth in the front of the room.

A dozen hands went up.

“Now, what are its major cities?”

A dozen hands again.

“By how many times is America larger than Afghanistan?”

When geography class was finished, I sat down with Shamsia. “I cried a lot after the attack,” she said. The scar on her left cheek was raised, and since the attack her eyes no longer functioned well enough for her to read.

Arja said, “We just told her to come to class and participate.”

Her mother and father, Shamsia told me, were both illiterate, as were most adults in Mirwais Mena. I asked her why they allowed her to continue coming to class.

“My parents told me to keep coming to school even if I am killed,” Shamsia said.

She exhibited a perfect grasp of the situation, both hers and her country’s: “The people who did this to me don’t want women to be educated. They want us to be stupid things.”

And so unfolded one of the mysteries not only of Shamsia but also of the Mirwais Mena School and perhaps all of Afghanistan. Women in Afghanistan are held to be lesser beings than men; they are accorded fewer rights and fewer opportunities. But build a school for girls, and the girls will come. They will face down death to come. And their illiterate parents will support them. Their illiterate parents will push them out the door.

In the case of the Mirwais Mena School, however, a leader was needed. It did not take me long to find him: Mahmood Qadari, the headmaster. For an Afghan who has lived through three decades of war, Qadari had a remarkably gentle demeanor. He dressed in traditional Afghan clothing, but over

that he wore a leather jacket. Most important for the girls of Mirwais Mena, Qadari had cultivated an untraditional vision of Afghan gender roles. Three of his daughters live outside the country, including one near Atlanta.

“My father wants Afghan women to be educated in particular, since they have not been given their rights,” Fatima Ludin, Qadari’s daughter in Georgia, told me.

Following the acid attack, Qadari shuttered the school, but after a few days girls started showing up, sent by their parents. Why is the school closed, the girls asked? When do classes begin? Qadari went to the leaders of Kandahar Province and secured promises for a school bus, a team of police officers and a walkway over the national highway outside. Then he called a meeting of the parents of Mirwais Mena. Send your girls back, he told them.

“I told them, if you don’t send your daughters to school, then the enemy wins,” Qadari told me. “I told them not to give in to darkness.”

And so the girls returned. Neither the bus, nor the police, nor the walkway ever arrived.

I WROTE AN ARTICLE about the Mirwais Mena School and the acid attack that appeared in this newspaper on Jan. 14. It ran on the front page, accompanied by a four-column-wide photograph of Shamsia. The article was featured prominently on The Times’s Web site with 10 more photographs. The burns on Shamsia’s face were visible to all.

When I awoke in my Kandahar hotel room the next day, I found that 200 people had sent me e-mail messages. Over the next 24 hours, another 200. The letters and e-mail messages came from readers in the United States, Switzerland, France, Japan. Nearly all of them posed the same questions: How can we help Shamsia? How can we help the girls?

“I was wondering if you knew of an organization, or group (that you would trust), who would be able to take donations and actually help these types of schools,” wrote a reader named Lou Comnesso. “If we can help more of these poor women and girls become educated, the lock on the door to their free lives will be blown wide open!”

Journalists are not supposed to become involved with the people they write about. That’s one of the craft’s tenets. I have occasionally given some money to one or another of the more luckless people I’ve interviewed — a widow whose husband was killed by a death squad in Baghdad, for instance. But mostly I’ve kept my distance.

This time, I decided to set the rules aside. There was just too much e-mail to ignore. I decided that if some journalistic standard was preventing me from helping a group of woebegone Afghan school girls, then that standard probably wasn’t worth saving, at least not in this case. I wrote a letter to Comnesso, saying I would set up a bank account for the girls and spend any money I received helping Shamsia and the school. I copied the letter several hundred times and sent it out. “The girls need every cent,” I wrote, “and I am sure they would be thrilled to know that someone from the outside world cares about them.”

When I returned to New York a month later, a stack of envelopes awaited me. There were 75 letters with checks totaling \$11,970. (One woman, Jenny Butterworth, sent me a \$5 bill.) In addition to the

checks, people volunteered their services — doctors for plastic surgery and lawyers for asylum applications. Still others held their own fund-raisers. One was Mina Saudagaran, a 15-year-old from Tacoma, Wash. Under the banner Project Shamsia, she sent fund-raising letters of her own to friends and relatives, collecting more than \$5,000. Kate Berg, a young marketing manager for the designer Diane von Furstenberg, held a party at the Bowery Hotel in Manhattan's East Village and charged \$100 a person. She raised \$10,000.

I happened to be in New York the night of Berg's fund-raiser. "My mom forwarded me the article," she said. Her mother and father came, too. There were lots of glamorous young men and women. Berg asked me to say something, so I said the obvious: "I wish you could know how different Afghanistan is from a place like this."

ONE DAY, STANDING inside the compound of the Mirwais Mena School and watching the girls rush through the front gate, I suddenly realized that Afghan girls live their lives in reverse. Behind the school's walls, the girls of Afghanistan comport themselves with confidence and self-possession. They are alive, alert and literate; they run, jump and laugh out loud. They confront male visitors, point their fingers, ask questions.

They do everything, in other words, that an adult Afghan woman, just outside the school's walls, could never imagine.

Indeed, just outside the school's walls, in the muddy streets of Mirwais Mena itself, it is rare to see a woman at all. There are men, of course, and boys and girls, and there are horse carts and automobiles. But almost no women. Even if you enter an Afghan home, you will almost certainly not, as a Western male, set eyes on an adult female. They are sequestered in another room. Inside the Afghan home, life can no doubt unfold in myriad ways. But without the benefit of literacy, without being allowed to roam outside, the life of an Afghan woman is, by and large, muffled and clipped.

Most of the Mirwais Mena girls, even if they are only 8 or 9, arrive at school fully covered. And as soon as they walk through the gate, they throw off their shawls and race around until the headmaster gathers them in the yard.

"May God protect us from evil!" the girls shout, standing at attention.

"May God bring peace to our country!"

"May God give us the strength to continue our education!"

"O.K.," Qadari says, "now go to your classes."

And the girls run off.

It struck me then, seeing this, that the girls do not have the slightest idea what is in store for them. They do not know that this time inside the walls of the Mirwais Mena School will, in all likelihood, grant them the greatest freedom they will ever experience. The girls might as well be sailing down a stream, toward a waterfall and rocks.

Still, a large proportion of this generation of Afghan girls is attending schools like this one, despite arson and gas attacks. Over the course of the visits I made to the Mirwais Mena School between January and June, I sometimes sensed a revolution was quietly unfolding. In a second-story classroom, one teacher, Mohammed Daoud, stood before 25 girls and delivered what was ostensibly a talk about Islam. But after a while, the talk turned into something else.

“You should work,” Daoud told the girls. “You should serve your country — serve the people.

“You should strive to do great things,” he continued, “and you should try to be independent and self-reliant.”

The girls looked on, wide-eyed.

“A woman can do whatever she attempts,” he said. “But she needs skills, she needs effort and learning. This school, for instance, was built by human beings — people with skills.”

In a country where women’s rights are so curtailed, Daoud’s lecture amounted to a manifesto of liberation.

“A woman should have self-confidence,” he told the girls, “and she should trust in herself that she can do anything.”

IN APRIL, LADEN with more than \$25,000 in donations, I returned to the Mirwais Mena School to meet with parents and teachers. It was a sort of Afghan P.T.A. meeting: Qadari, about a dozen teachers and a handful of daughters and mothers — 18 women in all. Three men came as well; they sat in the back.

I told them about the people who had sent all this money for them. They looked on in silence.

“Think big,” I said.

They fell into conversation. At one point, Shamsia’s father was asked to speak.

“Her face is spoiled,” he said with a shrug.

Then they turned to Shamsia.

“I have eye problems, especially when I try to read,” she said.

“It’s up to you,” Qadari said to her father.

They talked some more and then announced their agreement. In order of preference, they said, the \$25,000 should be spent to repair Shamsia’s face and eyes — donors had, after all, been responding to an article that focused on her — and, after that, on a bus with a driver to carry the girls to and from the school. A bus, they said, would protect the girls from another attack. And it would spare many of them a two-mile walk.

As the Afghans were getting up to leave, my eyes went to the corner of the room. A woman sat there, her face covered. Throughout the meeting she neither spoke nor moved. I asked Qadari about her.

“That is Shamsia’s mother,” he said.

WHEN EVERYONE ELSE left, I sat down with Shamsia and her parents. I would have liked to meet them at their home in Mirwais Mena, but they had vigorously objected. It wasn’t just that such a visit would endanger me — it would endanger them too. The Taliban roamed the neighborhood more or less at will. What’s more, one of the men arrested for throwing acid lived next door. His family had begun to threaten Shamsia’s family.

Hussein Ali, the father, looked tired and slightly annoyed. I told him I wanted to send his daughter to the United States for medical treatment. He shot me a skeptical look.

“She’ll never be able to get married with a face like that,” Ali said.

After a moment, he began to soften a little: “I remember when my daughters were attacked. I found Shamsia lying in the street. Her face was so badly burned. She was in so much pain. I thought she was dead. I carried her to the hospital.”

What about the school? I asked.

“I know the value of education,” he said. “I want my girls to go to school so they can be doctors and teachers. I don’t want them sitting around the house all the time.”

His wife, Mena, sat in silence.

I asked Ali who he thought carried out the attack.

“Pakistan,” he said without hesitation. “They want to bring chaos to this country.”

What about the Taliban? I was curious how Ali and the other parents could send their daughters to the Mirwais Mena School while tolerating the Taliban in their midst.

“The real Taliban do not bother the people,” Ali said. “After the attack, a man from the Taliban came to the mosque and spoke. He said they had nothing to do with the attack. Criminals did this.”

Finally, the talk turned to surgery. Ali said he was all in favor of it: “If she has an ugly face, no one will want to marry her.”

At first, getting surgery for Shamsia seemed like a remarkably easy thing to arrange. One person who had reached out to me was Ted Achilles, an American who runs a nonprofit organization in Kabul. Achilles works with a group in North Carolina called Solace for the Children, which brings children from Afghanistan to the United States for medical treatment.

And so it was arranged, or so I thought. A group of doctors in Charlotte agreed to treat Shamsia. A local family agreed to host her in their home. All I needed was \$3,500 for travel expenses — \$7,000

if I sent an Afghan woman to escort her. I could pay for all that and still have enough money for a bus.

The surgery was scheduled for June. And then, while I was out of the country, Shamsia's family backed out. Taimoor Shah, who translates for *The Times*, reported that Ali had refused, on grounds that the Taliban were not pleased and that the family of the suspects was threatening him again.

"They say it is too dangerous," he said.

IN LATE JUNE, I returned to Kandahar again, this time to Sarposa Prison. Among other things, I wanted to unravel the mystery of the attack itself.

All of the nine men arrested for the crime were sitting in the prison. I was skeptical of their confessions, particularly of the allegation that Pakistani intelligence was involved. (I went to the Pakistani Consulate in Kandahar, but no one there would come to the door.) I wanted to hear the men speak.

Sarposa Prison is a vast structure, dark and cacophonous and dense with bodies. When I arrived, workers were still repairing the damage from last year's Taliban jailbreak. I made my way to the warden's office, where a pair of suspects, barefooted and manacled, were waiting for me. The first was Abdul Jalil, the supposed ringleader.

"I don't have anything to do with the attack," Jalil said. "I was tortured into making that confession."

The warden, Abdullah Bawar, sat in the corner, reclining in a chair and smoking a cigarette.

"I was stripped of my clothes and hung upside down and beaten for many hours," Jalil said. "I passed out many times." I searched Jalil's face for signs that he was deceiving me. There were none. Mostly he seemed tired.

"I didn't even know about the attack — God is my witness," Jalil said. "I have two daughters, and both of them are in school."

It's possible Jalil was lying, but he was convincing — more convincing than he was in the video. He spoke at length about his arrest, offering details that seemed too banal to concoct. It started with a man named Hamayoun, he said, to whom Jalil sold a 1986 Toyota Corolla three years ago. Ever since, Jalil had pressed Hamayoun to pay what he owed, which amounted to \$400.

In November, Jalil said, he heard that Hamayoun had come to Kandahar, so he called and persuaded him to meet at a local tea shop. Hamayoun promised to bring the \$400. But when Jalil arrived, he found another man, named Lalai, an officer with the Kandahar police. Lalai said he needed to ask Jalil a few questions; would he come along? Jalil was blindfolded, arrested and taken to the police station, where the torture began. After several days of abuse, which Jalil described in horrific detail, he agreed to memorize the confession that was ultimately shown on television.

Jalil could only guess, but he figured that Hamayoun heard about the acid attack and fingered Jalil to avoid repaying the loan.

“It is amazing, what has happened to me,” Jalil said.

I then spoke to Bango. And after that I spoke to two more of the accused men. All of them told a similar story: that they were innocent, that they were framed in various plots by men who owed them money and that they had been tortured. None of this was implausible. Despite eight years of American-backed efforts to field a corps of competent police, the police in Afghanistan have built reputations for torture and blackmail.

The warden, Bawar, saw me out.

“They seem to remember everything,” he told me with a smile, “except the crime itself.”

BY EARLY SUMMER, at least 478 Afghan schools had been destroyed, damaged or threatened out of existence, the overwhelming majority of them for girls, according to the Afghan Education Ministry. The means employed to terrorize girls were inventive. In May, 61 teachers and pupils in Parwan Province, most of them girls, seemed to have been poisoned by a cloud of gas let loose into a school courtyard. It was the third suspected gas attack on a school this year. In Kandahar, Nasaji Nakhi High School and Miyan Abdul Hakim High School were set afire.

On the morning of June 27, not long after the gas attack in Parwan, I delivered a passenger bus to the Mirwais Mena School. It’s a two-tone tan Toyota Turbo with 24 seats, built in 1986. I bought it for \$17,000 in cash.

I didn’t actually hand over the money myself. The big market for buses in Afghanistan is in the town of Spin Boldak, near the Pakistani border, a dangerous place for a Westerner. So I gave the \$17,000 to Taimoor, the translator, who drove to Spin Boldak, located the bus and purchased it from an Afghan named Haji Sadozai. (Sadozai had shipped the bus from Dubai and smuggled it, to avoid customs duties, on a truck from Pakistan to Afghanistan.) Taimoor hired a driver too, named Torjan. I agreed to pay him \$250 a month.

Torjan drove the bus to Mirwais Mena, while Taimoor and I followed in a taxi. Along the way, Taimoor bought a case of Pepsi and a cake so we could hold a small celebration. School was out for the summer, but at least Qadari would be there. Torjan parked the bus in the courtyard, and Qadari greeted us. There were a few teachers inside one of the classrooms, but they didn’t come out. Qadari climbed into the bus and sat down in one of the seats toward the front.

“Thanks to everyone who did this,” he said. “It’s really great.”

We had made an appointment to see Shamsia and her father at the school, but they didn’t show up. I was determined to make one last try to persuade him to allow his daughter to come to the United States. I asked Taimoor to send a taxi to their home.

Taimoor had spoken several times to Shamsia’s family in the preceding weeks, and the response was always the same. The Taliban and the family of the accused posed too great a threat, they said. I was torn between the need to respect this explanation and my desire to help Shamsia. Besides, something about their story struck me as false. Why would the Taliban care if Shamsia had her face repaired — particularly if, as they claimed, the Taliban had nothing to do with the attack?

Sitting in the classroom, I pressed Taimoor. What if Shamsia were a boy? What would they do then?

“If she were a boy, she would be allowed to go to America,” he said.

The problem, Taimoor said, was that, at 17, Shamsia was of marrying age. As an unmarried girl, her reputation had to be preserved at all costs. Traveling to the United States, with all its possibilities for corruption, was out of the question. So if she stayed, according to her father, she wouldn’t be able to marry because of her injuries; but if she left to go to the U.S. and have her injuries repaired, she wouldn’t be able to marry either.

About a half-hour later, Ali and Shamsia walked in. Ali was filthy; his clothes and face were covered in dirt and oil. We retired to a classroom — Ali, Shamsia, Taimoor and I.

“I want to help your daughter get medical care,” I said. “People have given me a lot of money for this purpose.”

“Why not just buy me a house,” Ali said. “Buy me a big house in Kabul.”

“The money is for your daughter,” I told him.

I was reduced to pleading. I suddenly felt like a parody of a wealthy Westerner, forcing charity onto an unwilling third-world subject.

“Just give the money to me,” Ali said.

Even Shamsia had changed her mind.

“We want to live in Kabul,” she said.

And so it had come to this. The Taliban, or someone who thought like them, had thrown acid in the faces of a number of girls, and a number of readers in the United States and other countries, filled with generosity, had given their money to take care of one of those girls and the school. And now the girl’s family, for reasons I could barely comprehend, was telling me, in effect, that they wanted something else.

I offered a compromise: What if we brought your daughter to Kabul and had doctors check her there?

Ali said nothing.

And if she needs surgery, I continued, would you consider allowing us to bring her to one of the better hospitals in India, an hour’s plane flight over the Himalayas?

“I will think about this,” Ali said.

I pressed some more.

“O.K.,” he said finally. “But you will need to put us up in Kabul.”

We shook hands. I handed Ali some money for a taxi, and he and Shamsia walked out together through the front gate. Her eyes and her face would have to wait a little longer — and maybe longer still. A month or so later, Ali agreed to bring Shamsia to Kabul after the Aug. 20 election.

The Mirwais Mena School was quiet. Only Qadari remained. I asked him if there was anything else we could do to help. His face emitted a tiny, almost embarrassed smile. “Gasoline,” he said. “School starts in just a few weeks.”

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*Lynsey Addario/VII Network, for The New York Times*

**Blackboard Jungle** After she was attacked with acid, Shamsia said, "My parents told me to keep coming to school even if I am killed."

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