

BRICS Dynamic Offers Cooperation with Afghanistan, While West Demands Punishment and Isolation

by Karel Vereycken

Dec. 25—A new decree, published July 31, 2024, mandates a number of extreme measures directed at women, and to a lesser degree at men, by the Taliban supreme religious leader Hibatullah Akhundzada. Afghanistan’s *Official Gazette* published it under the title, “Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice Law” (the PVPV law). In August, an unofficial translation of the [decree](#) was made available by the Afghanistan Analysts Network.

Adding to some 100 decrees restricting adult women from workplaces and from full access to higher education, the PVPV law adds new injunctions about how both women and men should cover their bodies, and other restraining orders. While the Quran says

nothing at all about this issue, many Muslim rulers see this as an exercise of their capacity to rule over the masses, calling it “tradition.”

However, sources on the scene throughout Afghanistan report that the religious hardliners are in the process of “preparing their own funeral” in these restraints, since most Afghans don’t accept or follow such extreme interpretations of Islamic law, and turn away more and more from such hardliners, leaning instead towards the moderates. This dynamic comes in the context of the efforts underway toward economic development and sovereignty, however severe the circumstances are under Western sanctions and economic warfare.



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A schematic of the City of Light Development plan to revitalize Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan.

BRICS Nations Back Development, Sovereignty

The PVPV law was one of the reasons why Afghanistan was not present at the BRICS Kazan summit, Oct. 22-24, not even as an observer. It is noteworthy, however, that the BRICS final Summit statement, though taking a demanding stance in its section on Afghanistan, absolutely opposed the “isolationist” attitude and belligerence of the West. The BRICS member nations neighboring Afghanistan are all engaging with Kabul on economic, security and other matters. This includes the border-sharing countries of China and Iran, as well as Russia, India, and the UAE.

The Kazan BRICS [resolution](#), Point 42, emphasizes, “the need for an urgent peaceful settlement in Afghanistan in order to strengthen regional security and stability,” and calls on Afghanistan to produce some “more visible and verifiable measures” in that respect. The declaration also stresses “the need to provide urgent and uninterrupted humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people and to safeguard the fundamental rights of all Afghans including women, girls and different ethnic groups.” The BRICS statement calls on Afghanistan authorities “to reverse the effective ban on girl’s secondary and higher education.”

Of course, the BRICS are right. The “issue” of the rights of all Afghans can only be solved domestically, and in a framework of national reconciliation and reconstruction which the entire world should facilitate. Outside “isolationist” pressure will only favor the hard liners.

Clash at the UN Security Council

At the UN Security Council meeting December 13, the clash was dramatic between the two opposing views and approaches by major nations toward Afghanistan. The purpose of the meeting was to take a vote on whether to renew the mandate for the UN team monitoring sanctions on Afghanistan, begun in 1988, to continue for the next 14 months. One view, stated by the United States, denounced the Taliban suppression of women’s rights, and demanded harsh penalties against Kabul. The opposite view—stated by Russia and China—expressed disfavor of repressing women and girls, but nevertheless called for humanitarian support, and building the Afghan economy.

The very short meeting, chaired for December by the United States, opened with the vote among the 15 UNSC member nations, which unanimously passed

UN Resolution 2763 of 2024. This continues the mandate until early 2026 of the UN team monitoring the implementation of UN sanctions on Afghanistan.

The U.S. representative singled out for criticism the Taliban vice and virtue directive, and also the subsequent prohibition of women to get medical education. The implication expressed is that sanctions are the response to these social matters.

The Russian representative asserted that the original 1988 sanctions were done in response to terrorism and drug running, and that the attempt to dilute the focus, and shift away from this to human rights is wrong. The domestic situation is discussed yearly, she said, by the United Nations, when the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan makes its report. She added that Russia regards the renewal of the UN monitoring team as a “technical rollover,” which in fact, should facilitate more visits of the team to Afghanistan, to then report back, toward reviewing the 1988 sanctions regime and making needed adjustments.

The Chinese representative concurred that there should be more visits to Afghanistan by the UN sanctions monitoring team, to repel Al Qaeda and other threats. After identifying the need in Afghanistan for inclusive government and human rights for women, the spokesman for China said that the 1988 UN sanctions were initiated in order to combat terrorism and are “not an appropriate platform for human rights.” The UN and nations must help Afghanistan meet its economic and humanitarian needs. The West should release the funds it sequestered from the Afghan Central Bank. Nations should discontinue any unilateral sanctions against Afghanistan.

Opposition to PVPV Law from Religious Scholars

The July PVPV law went beyond all the extremes seen so far, claiming (in article 13:1 and 13:2) that not only do women’s entire bodies have to be covered in all public appearances, but (in article 13:3) it adds that “*Women’s voices* (in a song, a hymn, or a recital out loud in a gathering) *are also something that should be concealed.*” (Emphasis added.)

This extreme interpretation is creating a great divide. A French journalist, from the *Libération* daily, who was in Afghanistan following the decree, wrote: “The Taliban is not a monolithic movement. Many of them, discreetly, oppose the rigor of school interdiction and tolerate the existence of clandestine schools for women.” In reality, a wide gap is growing

daily between the hardliners (called conservatives) and the moderates (called pragmatists) while many young women are planning to leave the country.

What is new today, is that Islamic scholars in Afghanistan and abroad, have started raising their voices. They underscore that the PVPV law grossly misinterprets Islamic teachings. Pretending that women's voices are *awrah* (nakedness), and that they require strict covering is not supported by the Quran or *Sunnah*. In fact, numerous religious texts exist that affirm women's voices were

heard and respected during the Prophet Muhammad's time, directly contradicting the Taliban's position. For instance, Quranic verses such as 60:12 and 58:1 show women engaging in verbal communication with the Prophet, while the *Hadiths* narrated by Aisha, the Prophet's wife, further prove that women's voices were never meant to be silenced in Islamic tradition. These scholars have highlighted that morality enforcement, according to Islam, is the responsibility of the Muslim community as a whole, not the state, debunking the Taliban's justifications for creating a morality "police."

Observers on the ground also note increasing signs of internal division within the Taliban regarding the implementation of the vice and virtue law. Taliban leader Haibatullah Akhundzada's unusual visit to northern and western Afghanistan earlier in September, covering eight provinces, including Takhar, Badghis, Balkh and Kunduz, indicate desperate efforts to address growing dissent among local officials and tribal leaders. Several governors have reportedly refused to enforce the vice and virtue law. Abbas Stanikzai, one of the Taliban's chief negotiators of the 2020 Doha agreement and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, has repeatedly and publicly spoken against its restrictions on women.

Also, the Jeddah-based Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), founded in 1969 in Morocco, and its scholars have expressed their disapproval, with some delegations snubbing Taliban officials at recent meetings. Even traditionally conservative members like Saudi Arabia have criticized the Taliban's harsh interpretation of *Shariah*.

Also to be noted, the fact that Afghan women, as citizens, have officially requested the OIC's Fiqh Academy to issue a *fatwa* (a legal opinion or decree



A symbolic BRICS banknote, which includes the flag of Afghanistan, “a reminder of Afghanistan’s significance, even as the Taliban regime remains diplomatically isolated.”

handed down by an Islamic religious leader) against the Taliban's misuse of Islamic sources, including the Quran and *Hadith*, in this new vice and virtue law. In its brief response, the OIC said women have the right to education and to speak and be seen. If the OIC seizes the occasion to review the law and issues an official legal ruling condemning the Taliban's unfounded interpretations, it would give the hardliners a golden opportunity to back down without appearing to surrender to external pressure by aligning on Islamic jurisdiction.

When it comes to the geopolitical hardliners of the Collective West, rather than trying to force change from the outside by completely isolating and starving Afghanistan—as some madmen are doing right now—instead there should be a keen support of the more moderate elements within the Taliban, such as those already questioning the law's necessity. This could favor a reorganization of leadership and open the way to broader reforms, and betterment for all.

Poetically, Afghanistan's flag already waves, along with the flags of other newer members of the BRICS, on the back of a banknote denoting the future of cooperation and development. Khaama Press wrote this Fall, “The symbolic banknote serves as a reminder of Afghanistan's significance, even as the Taliban regime remains diplomatically isolated. This move further emphasizes the international community's continued engagement with Afghanistan's future, even in symbolic forms.”

Karel Vereycken is an honorary research fellow of the Schiller Institute, France. In November 2023, he co-initiated a [petition](#) to lift all sanctions preventing genuine cooperation on cultural heritage between Afghanistan and its historic partners in this field.