

Night Surprise

My wife Anne Marie was still working in Germany at that time. In early spring 2007 she visited me in Kabul. In addition, Gisela was temporarily staying in our Kabul office. Gisela is a retired nurse. She helped at a friendly organization in their clinics. During the week, Taufiq, the accountant, was part of the crew in our house. He lived in a room in the side wing. The weekends – in Afghanistan Friday is the weekly holiday like Sunday in our country – Taufiq spent with his parents in Logar province. This weekend, however, he had traveled to Jalalabad with his future in-laws. So only Nassim, our cook, was left in the house. Quite unusually, we had electricity all night from Thursday to Friday. At that time, Kabul's electricity supply was extremely poor.

A hard knock on the bedroom door woke us up. "Nassim," I called, "what is it?" No answer. With anxious feelings, I went to the door and opened it. All the evil expectations were true. The hallway was lit up. I was facing several figures, which I perceived only like silhouettes in the backlight. On the right side of the door, a man had a pistol pointed at me. In the middle stood Nassim with his hands tied behind his back. Behind him stood a man holding a knife to his neck. Across from me – to the left of the door – a man immediately struck the top of my skull with the pommel of a pistol. Nassim shouted to him not to do that.

All fear was gone. I pushed out into the hallway while my counterpart continued to beat on the top of my skull. Anne Marie appeared on the battlefield her red pajamas. Suddenly, cables fell on us. Were they trying to tie us up? But then the attackers ran down the stairs. I ran after them. One of them fell on the landing. I threw myself on top of the lying man. It was Nassim. The strangers were gone.

It was already quite late at night, maybe half past three. Gisela came out of her room and reproached herself for not having intervened. A French woman lived in a neighboring house. Her night watchman had called the police. And they arrived quickly – after all, foreigners had been attacked. An officer came with at least 16 policemen.

Men who had fought against the Communists during the war and later against the Taliban called themselves mujahideen. "Fought" they had done in their closer home. When it was quiet there, they had lived in dilapidated huts or caves. Sometimes they had stopped a transport. The transport was only allowed to continue if it handed over parts of the load to the mujahideen. This kind of warriorship had hardly stimulated their intellectual development. What was the Afghan state to do now with the hundreds of thousands of mujahideen for whom there was no longer a war? The easiest solution was to put them in the army or the police. Such former mujahideen were our policemen.

Their officer, Colonel Daud, was to be pitied. He sent some of the men to his vehicle. They were to fetch a pad with forms for the report he now had to write. After a few minutes they returned. They had found nothing. Anne Marie filled a bowl with dried mulberries. Now the policemen had something to occupy themselves competently with. Colonel Daud was properly trained, probably by the Russians. Before entering our house, he had already looked at the side wing and Taufiq's room. The light was on. The television was on. The stove was still warm.

One could now guess the course of events. The intruders wanted to steal our Safe. It was in the accounting department on the first floor. Our three vehicles were parked in the yard. The keys were in it. Once the safe was put in one of the cars, all the intruders had to do was open the gate and drive away. But the safe was much too heavy. It would take at least seven men to lift it. The intruders were too weak. They retreated to Taufiq's room and pondered what to do.

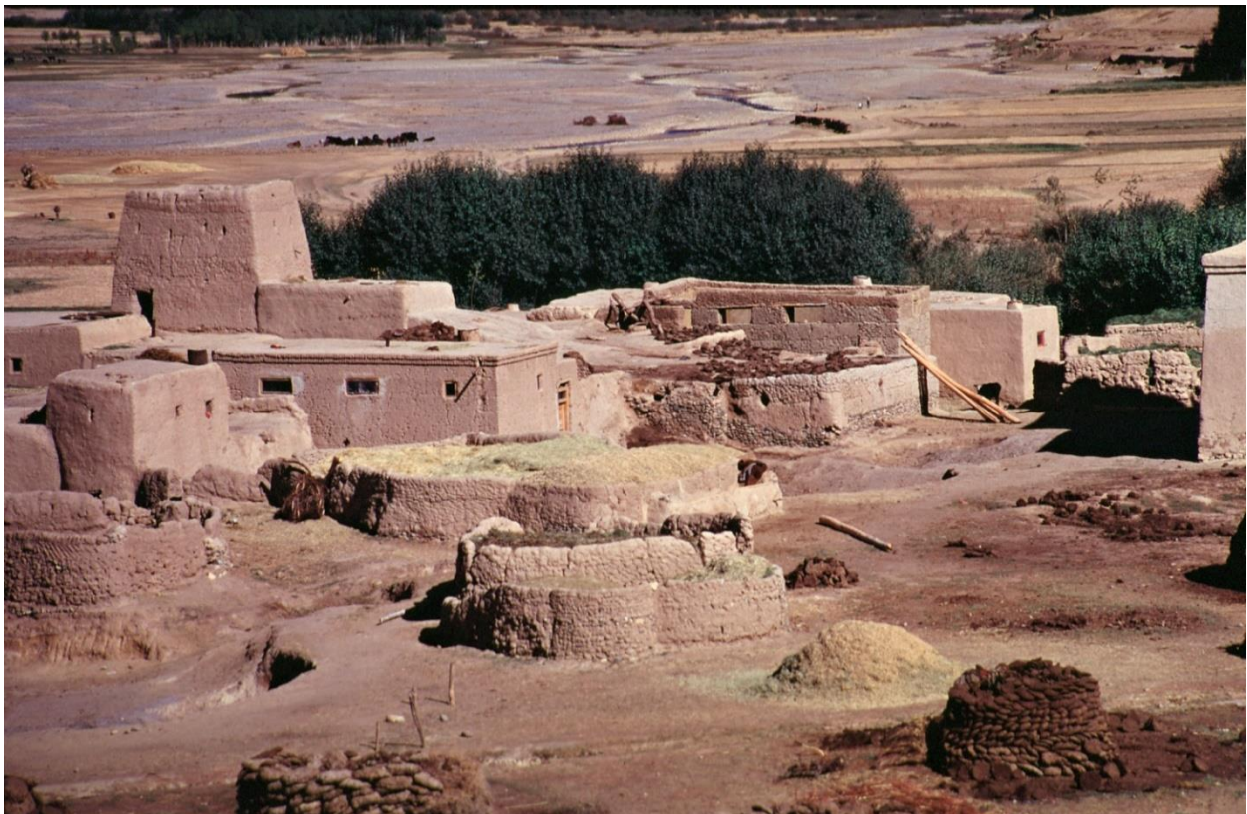
Safe keys were needed. Taufiq had a set of keys. But he had apparently taken it with him to Jalalabad. Anyway, there was no key to be found in Taufiq's room. But the boss, that is me, will have safe keys. So, the intruders made their way to our bedroom.

The man who pistol-whipped me was unlucky. When I opened the door, I was standing under the lintel. So, he couldn't reach far to make an impact. Then I pushed out into the hallway. Now he could lunge – but the knob got caught in a tangle of wires. In the spacious hallway, there was a desktop on a table and a printer on a small cabinet. They were connected with cables hanging high. More cables led from the hallway into our room, where there were even more appliances. When this tangle of cables came crashing down on the scene, the burglars gave up.

It was clear to them that they would need a lot more time until they could get my safe keys. After that, they would still have to open the safe with the keys. The noise of the fighting had probably been heard outside. Neighbors or even the police could come soon.

Nassim's role was unclear. Had the three men climbed over the wall at the gate to our property and silently overpowered Nassim? Or had Nassim let them in? Nassim? – Badly imaginable! He was a poor man. We had helped him a lot and even bought a plot of land for him to build on.

Now Brother Jack from the Christusträger Brotherhood arrived. The Christusträger are a Protestant brotherhood that runs two clinics and a workshop in Kabul. Brother George from the same brotherhood had gone to the German Embassy and came with Helmut Gillen, who took care of the technical facilities at the Embassy, and with Mr. Hofmann, a German police officer. Nassim had some bumps on his head. Brother Jack took him to a hospital to make sure he had no brain damage. My bloody skull remained as it was for the time being. The face had been wiped a little. But the hair was full of blood, which slowly dried to scabs. Colonel Daud suffered from the sight of me and asked several times if my head could not be cleaned of blood. But I did not feel bad.



Herr Hofmann recommended that we secure our property with rolls of barbed wire along the entire outer wall. Soon after that we moved and followed this advice. This measure had not only advantages. Even before this raid, in 2006, there were riots after a bloodbath caused by American soldiers. There were lootings of properties of foreign organizations. When looters also came to our street, I climbed over a ladder to our Afghan neighbors. If there had been rolls of barbed wire on the wall, this would not have been possible.

Otherwise, we got a dog. Almost all Afghans fear dogs and do not dare to enter a property from where you can hear a dog barking. Probably the dog gave us the greatest increase in security. Besides, we have a convenient excuse for the deplorable state of our garden. Try keeping a garden in order with a German shepherd frolicking around!

The examination of Nassim did not reveal anything more serious. I sent him on a three-day recuperation leave. Then brother Jack took me to his clinic. There I had many hairs cut off and my skull was washed and disinfected. Larger wounds were sutured. The pistol butt had left more than ten wounds.

When Nassim returned after his recuperative leave, he greeted Anne Marie and me in a grotesquely submissive manner – like a dog expecting a deserved beating.

Colonel Daud came back a few more times to clarify Nassim's role and perhaps identify the perpetrators after all. Afghans assume that when a property is robbed or stolen, it always involves people who live or work in the property. This is true most of the time. Hardly any burglar enters a house of which he does not know how many people are there, what is in which rooms and which doors are locked.

Nassim had initially stated that the burglars had stolen his cell phone. Colonel Daud obtained from the phone company a list of calls that had been made from the stolen device. Lo and behold! Shortly after the burglars had fled, Nassim's wife had been called from that phone.

When Taufiq returned, he reported that Nassim had called him the night before the robbery and asked if he was indeed not in Kabul. "No, I am in Jalalabad. That's what I told you." That's all Nassim wanted to know.

The police now began an investigation. Nassim's freedom of movement was restricted. We released him. He found employment as a truck driver and had to transport material to dangerous regions. During interrogations, he now claimed that the thieves had not stolen his phone after all. Rather, he himself had called his wife shortly after the robbery. He only claimed that the theft had taken place so that I would buy him a new model. He had never asked me to do so. It would also not have fit in with his other behavior. The case against him was dropped on the basis of this new testimony. The government needed transportation to unsafe areas.