In the winter of 1988-89, I spent a month in a mujahideen camp in the Argandab Valley, a few miles north of Kandahar. The Soviets had begun to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan, but MIG warplanes were still carrying out daily bombing and strafing runs, and in the slummy southern suburbs of Kandahar there was a front line against the silo walls and told me how they followed the Koran in reaching verdicts about territorial rights, adultery, theft, and so forth. After some bickering over numbers, they agreed that they had put eighteen murderers to death. Their discourse on justice went on for some time, and then the younger of the two produced a piece of paper and announced that a new edict was being sent to all the mujahideen commanders in the region. Crime had increased, and this was due, they believed, to the playing of recorded music, which was banned from now on.

The ban obviously came as a shock to the mujahideen who had accompanied me. They looked embarrassed but didn’t say much, and we left as soon as the court broke for lunch. Driving back to Naquib’s camp, the young driver pointedly inserted a tape into the cassette deck and turned the volume up even louder than it had been before. I learned later that Naquib told his men that he was not going to make a big issue of the new edict. He said that they could continue to play music, but only...
when they were in camp, and that they should keep it low. Meanwhile, he told the judges that he would comply with their order. Naquib's pragmatic way of dealing with the situation seemed to me admirable.

I thought of that rustic court recently when I visited Mullah Naquib in Kandahar, where he has been living on and off since 1992, when the Communist-backed Afghan regime was finally defeated. Naquib is a controversial figure in Kandahar because of his relationship with the Taliban. When Burhanuddin Rabbani was President of Afghanistan, Naquib was made the supreme military commander of Kandahar, but in 1994 he turned the city over to the Taliban. Many people believe that he was also involved in the recent, unexplained disappearance of the Taliban from Kandahar, and they blame him especially for the escape of Mullah Omar.

Naquib didn't remember me at first, but when he did he seemed pleased, and he began introducing me as a friend from the old days of the jihad against the Soviets. Naquib has aged badly; although he is only forty-seven, he looks much older. He wears glasses now, and his long black beard is streaked with gray. He has a bad cough. We reminisced for a while, and he offered to take me back to the Argandhab Valley to revisit the mujahideen camp where we had met more than a decade earlier. The next day, followed by a dozen or so bodyguards, he led me to the car-port in his living compound, where two late-model S.U.V.s were parked. We got into a pearl-colored VX Limited Edition Toyota Land Cruiser, and several small boys, the youngest of Naquib's eleven children, climbed into the back. The Toyota had a sunroof and a luxurious tan leather interior, and a CD player with an LCD display. It was a fine car, I said to Naquib. He chuckled. "It was Mullah Omar's," he said. "I have ten of his cars."

We took off, and I asked Naquib how he had come to own Mullah Omar's cars. "They were just parked, so I took them," he replied, somewhat glibly. We came to a gate on the security perimeter of Mullah Omar's property, which turned out to be more or less next door. The sentries at the gate saluted Naquib. Mullah Omar apparently owned a hundred acres or so on the edge of town, with about ten acres given over to a compound of living quarters and guesthouses that were surrounded by a maze of walls. We drove down a dirt road that runs through Omar's property, and soon came to the paved road to the Argandhab Valley, a rural fastness where dusty tracks lead off in all directions into the desert and the mountain ranges beyond. Omar's house was well placed for a getaway.

I asked Naquib if he had met Mullah Omar. "Lots of times," he said. He described him as "a very quiet man who never spoke to people."

As we drove through a pass between the mountains just behind Omar's land, Naquib turned on the CD player, and the Toyota was filled with Afghan music. I asked if the CD was his or had come with the car.

"It was here when I got it," Naquib said, opening the CD storage container on the armrest between the front seats. "I have ten of his cars." The song that was playing, he said, was a popular Afghan tune that vilified General Rashid Dostum, the Uzbek warlord from Mazar-i-Sharif. Its chief refrain was "O murderer of the Afghan people."

"What is life without music?" Mullah Naquib said.

Despite a religious ban on reproductions of the human image, many Taliban had their photographs taken, often with close friends.

Many vestiges of the Taliban era remain untouched in the beat-up, dusty center of Kandahar, where the ruins of buildings that collapsed during the recent American bombing campaign lie among the ruins of older battles. Venders with carts sell "Super Osama bin Laden Kulfa Balls"—coconut candy manufactured in Pakistan and packaged in pink-and-purple boxes covered with images of bin Laden surrounded by tanks, cruise missiles, and jet fighters. The chaotic streets are full of men who look like Taliban, with white or black turbans and big, bushy beards. They roar around in Toyota...
Popal kept me company one evening as I waited for an interview with Gul Agha Shirzai, who was appointed governor of Kandahar in mid-December. Popal brought me tea, and we sat together on the floor of a large office. He apologized for the lack of chairs, and explained that the Taliban had taken virtually everything when they left—even the carpets. The cheap imitation Persian we were sitting on, he said, had been bought in the bazaar. "And those"—he pointed to some computer monitors, keyboards, and printers—"we got from some of the Arabs' houses." He was referring to members of Al Qaeda, several hundred of whom had lived in Kandahar. I noticed that none of the computers had towers. "The Americans who have a base here, just behind the palace," Popal said, "are checking the hard drives for information, and when they are done they will give them to us."

The city was crawling with Americans, mostly marines, who drove around in heavily armed convoys of sand-colored Humvees, their guns pointed and their faces masked by black balaclavas. There were also small groups of weather-beaten Special Forces commandos, who wore Afghan clothes and drove Toyota four-wheel-drive pickups. From a distance, they were hard to distinguish from the many mujahideen fighters in town. They kept to themselves.

Popal had worked at the palace under the Taliban, too. It was hard to find a job in Kandahar. His long-term goal, he said, was to improve his English, so that he could become an English-Pashto translator, and also to learn computer programming. These were both things that had been nearly impossible to do under the Taliban. "The Taliban wanted us to learn Arabic. They let us work with computers, but we could not use CDs or any programs that showed human images." He said that once, a few years back, he had been stopped by the Taliban's religious police, who said that his beard was too short. They had taken him to a building and told him that his head was going to be shaved as punishment. "The building had no running water, but there was a drainage ditch outside, full of sewage, and they made me wet my hair from it and they used a razor to shave my head. It was very dirty water."

Popal said that many Taliban officials had fled to the nearby Pakistani city of Quetta, and a few days earlier several of them, including the Taliban minister of justice, had dispatched representatives to Kandahar to meet with the new governor. "You see, the Pakistani authorities are now bothering them, saying they must leave Pakistan. So they sent their people to meet with Mr. Gul Agha Shirzai and they told him where they had hidden weapons and vehicles in Kandahar. And they asked Mr. Gul Agha Shirzai to ask the Pakistani authorities, on their behalf, to allow them to stay there. He has sent those letters today, I believe." This was a couple of weeks before the Taliban minister of justice and other Taliban officials turned up in Kandahar and were sent home by Gul Agha, much to the dismay of the Americans.

Popal had met Mullah Omar at the governor's palace. "I remember he arrived in a Toyota Corolla that belonged to someone else," Popal said. "A normal car. He came here because the father of one of the officials was ill and he wanted to wish him well. He was very quiet, gentle. He seemed to me like a good man, not like those other Taliban who shaved my head with the drainage water."

The austerity of the Taliban was particularly anomalous in the Pashtun homelands of eastern and southern Afghanistan, of which Kandahar is the prin-
Said Kamal, the proprietor of the Photo Shah Zada shop, did a brisk business in Taliban portraits. He specializes in retouched photos. Kamal's artful brushwork removes blemishes and adds color. The backdrops of his portraits are vivid greens or blues with halos of red and orange, and clothing has been transformed from the drab to the garish. Many of the Taliban sat for their portraits with heavily kohl-dosed eyes, which made them look like silent-movie stars.

Taliban portraits lie under the glass of Said Kamal's front counter and hang on the wall in tin frames. He said that they belong to Taliban who fled the city, and he doesn't expect them to be picked up. I found this confusing, since Mullah Omar had enforced the Koranic prohibition on representations of the human image, but Said Kamal explained that after the ban images was announced, and the Taliban forced the photo shops to shut down, they realized that even they needed passport pictures. There was no way around it, if they wanted to travel. So an exception was made to Mullah Omar's edict. Officially, Said Kamal made passport photographs, and he formally complied with the rules, displaying no pictures of human beings in his shopwindow. But the rules were never fully obeyed by everyone. Said Kamal continued to make portraits of the Taliban, just as he continued to take clandestine wedding pictures at the request of ordinary Kandaharis.

I visited Mullah Omar's compound by myself one day after Mullah Naquib had pointed it out. It had been heavily bombed and strafed and rocketed, and untidy piles of bricks and masonry lay everywhere, but the section in which Mullah Omar lived with his wives and children was mostly still intact, thanks to twelve-foot-thick bombproof roofs. Construction materials for future additions and improvements lay alongside the debris. Mullah Omar had had plans.

He wanted to make the desert bloom. Scores of young shade saplings were planted along the driveways, and there were several flower gardens inside the compound. At one of the guesthouses, a tanker truck pumped water onto a bed of geraniums. The words "Donated by UNICEF to Kandahar Water Supply Department" were written on the side of the truck. The men holding the hose told me that they had been coming to water Omar's gardens for some time.

A pickup truck came by. Several RPG anti-tank rockets stood upright on either side of the cab, and an armed American wearing a black turban was sitting in the back. A U.S. soldier who appeared to be in his late thirties told me that the part of the compound in front of me was off limits but that I could walk around the part where Mullah Omar's living quarters were. "You can't miss it," he said. "It's the place that looks like Motel 6."

In front of Omar's house there is a small concrete mosque with several minarets, domed cupolas, and pillars with huge flowers painted on them. A sculpture of a fallen tree and boulders, painted black and green, serves as a kind of traffic island between the mosque and the house. Two or three fake date palms put up around the sculpture, which seems to serve also as a fountain, although it was dry on the day I visited. The outer walls of the house are covered with murals depicting lakes and ornamental gardens and more flowers. Omar lived with his favorite wife in a private apartment on one side of the house, painted, for the most part, pink and green. The floor is covered with plastic terrazzo tiles. The bedroom, which is small and dank, has a ceiling fan, a double bed, and two white-and-faux-gilt mini-chandeliers. Several mujahideen were resting on Omar's bed when I poked my head in; they got up quickly and adjusted their turbans. On the other side of the house, I was told, three more wives had lived with their several children. These rooms were much plainer, and there was only one, rather crude flower painted on a wall of the common hallway.

Down the road, at Mullah Naquib's house, one of his bodyguards, a sun-darkened and rough-hewn man in black, showed me Naquib's flower garden in an inner courtyard. There were clumps of carefully tended roses, daffodils, and...
dahlias, and I complimented him on their beauty. The bodyguard smiled. "This is what we've grown with hardly any water, but you should see it when we have rain."

The day Naquib drove me to the Argandhab Valley to visit the old mujahideen camp, I recognized landmarks such as the tomb of Baba Wali—a holy man whose shrine is on top of a hill that during the jihad was part of Naquib's domain—but there were many more trees than I remembered, and cultivated fields, and more people, too. Naquib said that most of the people who had fled to Pakistan during the war had returned. Now it was drought, not war, that was the problem. We drove along dirt tracks between vineyards, and then walked across fields to where the camp had been. "We've plowed it all under to grow grapes," Naquib said. The only house left standing was the war had returned. Now it was drought, but during Zahir Shah's reign a tribe, but during the nineties, "but then the civil war started, and during the chaos the Taliban appeared. There were Alokozai all over the place, not only in Argandhab but in the neighboring provinces of Oruzgan, Helmand, and even, he said, as far away as Herat.

For a couple of hours, we walked from one sharecropper's home to another. Invariably, the peasants kissed Naquib's hand deferentially. He inspected irrigation systems and asked questions and gave orders. Then we drove to his house, near the village of Charqulba, and sat on large mats and cushions that his men fetched for us. His bodyguards fanned out vigilantly, and we talked about what had happened to him after I left Afghanistan. He was the military commander in Kandahar during the Rabbani regime in the early nineties, "but then the civil war started, and during the chaos the Taliban appeared. When the Taliban movement started, Hamid Karzai came to see me and told me not to fight against them. And Rabbani also called me and told me not to fight. At the time, we all thought the Taliban were fighting for the King—for the restoration of Zahir Shah to the throne—"and they told me, 'You should surrender the garrison and your guns.' Rabbani wasn't sending money or ammunition to me. How could anyone fight against the Taliban under those conditions?"

After he handed over Kandahar, Naquib said, the Taliban ordered him to go back to Charqulba to live. "I stayed here for a few years, and then I was wounded in an assassination attempt, and went to Islamabad for treatment." Naquib pulled up a sleeve and a trouser leg to show me his scars. He'd been hit by a bullet in his left leg and another in his left elbow, and he pointed to his chest, where, he said, he'd received a rocket fragment. The six men travelling with him had been killed; he was the only survivor. The attackers had been apprehended, he told me. "They claimed that it had been a case of mistaken identity. They said they thought I was a Taliban official." Naquib shrugged, and continued with his story: "I stayed in Islamabad for about two years, and Hamid Karzai and I met with some American officials there. The Americans wanted to know about Al Qaeda, so that they could act against it. We also met with the Italian ambassador. They all told us they would not let Pakistan interfere anymore in our country. And afterward, when I returned home to Kandahar, Hamid Karzai stayed in touch with me."

Naquib lived in Kandahar for about two years after his return from Pakistan, he said. "But then when September 11th happened, and the Americans started bombing, I came to this house in the village, and I was in touch with Hamid Karzai. He gave me a satellite phone." In early December, Naquib said, when Karzai was chosen as Afghanistan's interim leader, "Mullah Omar and the Taliban agreed to leave, and Karzai agreed that the Taliban would transfer power in Kandahar to me. But by the morning after the night the BBC announced the transfer, the Taliban had all left. Gul Agha entered the city, and Karzai appointed him governor and myself corps commander. I have some health problems, so I refused the job, and gave it to my deputy, Khan Muhammad."

"What do you mean, 'Not tonight, I have a headache'? You're a prostitute."
quib and Gul Agha had been intense, and many people had expected fighting to break out between them in the days after the Taliban left the city, but Naquib insisted that he had no bad feelings toward Gul Agha, and I didn’t press him, because he seemed to like his version of events and wasn’t about to change it. He was more candid about his health problems, which were “mental.” He had been to two hospitals in Germany for treatment. “I was crazy,” he said, and laughed, and all the men who were gathered around now, listening to us, laughed, too, evidently at the memory of his behavior. “I was not myself. I would get tense and have headaches. The doctors told me that I had a heavy workload and it had damaged some of my brain cells.” Naquib’s symptoms had appeared after the Taliban took over Kandahar, but he said that the problems might have been caused by the explosion of a Russian mortar shell near him during the jihad. “A piece of the shell hit me here,” he said, pointing to his forehead. “It was just a small piece, but maybe it had something to do with it.” He pulled out a strip of capsules. He had been given a prescription for Risperdal, an antipsychotic. “Each pill costs three hundred rupees,” he said, or about four and a half dollars.

Early one morning, a gunfight broke out in a residential neighborhood in Kandahar, not far from my hotel. At first, people said that it was a confrontation between Mullah Naquib and Gul Agha, but it turned out that one of Gul Agha’s commanders, who claimed that he hadn’t been paid his salary, had led his soldiers on a robbery expedition, and the local police chief had foiled it. Things had been resolved by sunset, when I stopped by the governor’s palace. The commander had barricaded himself in a police station and threatened to blow himself up with grenades, but he had finally surrendered. He and his men had been beaten and put in jail, a guard at the palace told me.

Gul Agha was receiving visitors in a long room that had a red carpet and chandeliers. A framed portrait of King Zahir Shah was propped on a desk at one end of the room. Four or five uniformed soldiers carrying rifles stood around, and a couple of dozen venerable-looking petitioners sat attentively on red sofas awaiting their turn to speak with the Governor. Gul Agha is a squat, bushy-haired man with a big belly and a rubbery face. He wore a brown shalwar kameez and sandals, and I noticed that his toenails were long and untidy. He was sitting in a chair next to the door, talking to a group of Noorzai tribal elders from the western province of Farah, an eight-hour drive from Kandahar. They had come to see him because they were having problems with mujahideen who had recently arrived from Iran. Gul Agha smoked a Benson & Hedges Special Filter cigarette and listened to the elders, and when they had finished he told them that he was aware of what he termed, darkly, “the Iranian interference” in their province, and that President Karzai was also aware of it. The problem would be dealt with soon. Gul Agha lisps clumsily, as if his tongue were too big for his mouth. “Before now,” he said loudly, “there were commanders with autonomous power. But now I am the over-all commander of the whole area.”

While Gul Agha was speaking, a soldier passed out cold cans of Pepsi-Cola to some of the guests. I took one and sipped it and then placed the can on the floor next to my feet, but almost immediately someone stuck his hand under my chair and grabbed it. I turned around and saw a soldier sitting on the carpet behind me, holding the Pepsi and snickering to a friend. I reached over and swiped it back.

When it was my turn to speak with the Governor, I asked him to describe his role in recent events. He had been governor of Kandahar during Rabbani’s tenure, although Mullah Naquib, as military commander, had more power than he did then. When the Taliban took over Kandahar in 1994, Gul Agha moved to Quetta, across the border in Pakistan. “I went into business,” he said, “trading goods between Pakistan, Japan, the United Arab Emirates, and other countries. When the Taliban and Al Qaeda became strong in Afghanistan, I wrote three separate letters to Mullah Omar, advising him not to do what he was...
doing, because he'd bring disaster upon Afghanistan. When he didn't listen to us, we began to fight against him, just as we fought against the Russians. The Afghan people have a long history, more than five thousand years old, and they have never accepted foreign invaders and have always fought to resist them. We have told the U.N. and U.S. troops at the airport that they are here to stop the foreign interference."

Gul Agha then complained at length about how some foreign powers, namely Iran and Russia, were still meddling in Afghanistan by backing fundamentalist warlords, including former President Rabbani. "These men all have the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood," Gul Agha said. They were trying to sabotage the interim government of Hamid Karzai by disseminating propaganda, sending their gunmen to his territory, and generally stirring up trouble. "We want an end to foreign interference in Afghanistan," he repeated. "We want peace in Afghanistan and we ask Allah to help us have honest government. We want rights for women, and we are against drugs and terrorism. My greatest hope and wish is that there will be a broad-based government in Afghanistan without friction between different groups."

The Governor sat back in his chair, apparently satisfied with his oration.

Since he had brought up the subject of friction, I asked, what was his current relationship with Mullah Naquib? "Mullah Naquib himself agreed to leave the government," Gul Agha replied, "and he has no duties now." He said that he had told Hamid Karzai that he did not want to work with Naquib. "It was he who brought the Taliban and Al Qaeda to Kandahar," Gul Agha said, and he had helped the Taliban leaders escape. "The world is not happy with him, and the Americans are not happy with him. So maybe he will be brought to justice."

Ahmed Wali Karzai, one of the President's younger brothers, lives in Kandahar, in a heavily guarded house a few miles from the governor's palace. He speaks fluent American-accented English. "I spent ten years in Chicago," he explained. "I opened the first Afghan restaurant there." His Chicago restaurant was one of a family-owned chain of Afghan restaurants in the United States, all of them called the Helmand, after Afghanistan's longest river.

"We're trying to get things functioning here again," Karzai said. "Our main concern is security. We want to get the gunmen off the streets, and we've asked the commanders to have no more than one or two bodyguards." Karzai was reasonably sanguine about the town rivals, Mullah Naquib and Gul Agha. It was just a matter of keeping a lid on things until international peacekeeping forces took over and an Afghan national army was in place.

Karzai was less circumspect about Naquib's relationship with the Taliban. "In the early days, we did kind of help the Taliban," he said. "But you have to understand that in the beginning they were mostly commanders who had fought against the Russians. There weren't any Arabs and only a few Pakistanis." The Karzais began campaigning against the Taliban a little over three years ago. "In July, 1998, my brother and I talked to Mullah Naquib and asked him to go to Bonn"—for a meeting of Afghan opposition leaders—and even gave him a ticket and a passport, but he didn't go," Karzai said. "He didn't want to leave his land, and he said that if he were to go to Bonn he would not be safe in Kandahar afterward. And I think this was the truth. But the fact is Naquib never took any action against the Taliban."

In November, when Gul Agha was approaching Kandahar from the south and Hamid Karzai was north of the city, Mullah Naquib was given the satellite phone to help him get involved. "But he said he was under too much surveillance," Ahmed Wali Karzai recalled. "All he did in the end was arrange for the talks between the Taliban and my brother. Mullah Naquib called me in Quetta to say that Mullah Omar was ready to talk." Karzai said that it was the Taliban's idea to hand the city over to Naquib. "But it didn't happen the way it had been agreed. We expected them to stay in the city, although we never expected Mullah Omar to remain."

Karzai said that the assassination attempt that almost killed Naquib in 1998 had been ordered by the Taliban security chief. They had done an investigation and had evidence to prove it. An influential businessman in Kandahar told me the same thing and claimed that the Taliban flew Naquib to Pakistan for medical treatment in one of their own helicopters to cover up their complicity in the attempted murder. Why, I asked the businessman, would the Taliban have wanted to kill Naquib? "Because Naquib was the only powerful figure remaining in Kandahar from the time before the Taliban came," he said. "In Argandah, the people
consider him their tribal leader. He represented a potential threat to the Taliban.

The Taliban may have had reservations about Mullah Naquib, but in December, when they realized they had to leave the city, they turned to him to make the arrangements. A man named Khairullah, an intellectual in his sixties who is a distinguished elder in one of the city's tribal councils, told me that the Taliban had bequeathed Naquib many of their weapons when they left. Naquib had complained to me that Rabbani had withheld weapons from him, yet he seemed to have them now, and was vague about where they came from, just as he was vague about the acquisition of the ten Toyota Land Cruisers. Khairullah also said that, as far as he knew, Naquib didn't have any serious health problems, mental or otherwise—certainly nothing incapacitating.

One afternoon, a man waiting outside Gul Agha's palace approached my translator, Qias, and said he had an Al Qaeda prisoner to sell. He was holding him in his house and would hand him over for two thousand dollars. Qias came back to our hotel to give me the news. He was excited. "What do you think?" he said. "What should I tell him? Will you pay the two thousand dollars?" I reminded Qias that I was not a Green Beret or a C.I.A. agent. Where would I keep him over for two thousand dollars? Qias went downstairs to tell the man to come see me. He showed up a couple of hours later, and Qias went downstairs to talk to him. It turned out that the man's story had been a lie, bait to see if we were interested. He didn't actually have a prisoner in his house. He had come from a village in eastern Afghanistan about a day's drive away, where, he claimed, there were a hundred or so Al Qaeda members. The villagers sympathetic with them and took turns taking them food and other supplies. He had delivered food to the cave himself a few days earlier. But he was willing to betray the men for two thousand dollars. He would guide us to the exact spot, so we could capture them, he said.

Qias invited the man up to my room, but when Qias said that I was a journalist, the deal was off. The man didn't want to talk to a journalist. He wanted to do business. In that case, Qias said, the best thing for him to do was to go out to the Kandahar airport and approach the Americans stationed there, who ran a detention camp for Al Qaeda members. The man thanked Qias and left.

I had been offered purloined Al Qaeda documents in Kabul and Jalalabad, and it didn't seem odd that an enterprising man from a village in eastern Afghanistan had raised the level of entrepreneurship. He must have assumed that if the Americans would pay twenty-five million dollars for Osama bin Laden they would pay a fair price for lesser souls.

Afghanistan was teeming with opportunists. It was not the country I had visited more than a decade earlier, when Mullah Naquib and his men were fighting a rather simple war over ideas of faith and nationhood. Or perhaps it just seemed simple then. Perhaps the jockeying for power, the hypocrisy and naked ambition and mendacity had just not had a chance to flower.

I asked Qias what it would take for me to set myself up as a warlord in Afghanistan. "It would be easy," he said. "You hire a hundred gunmen for a month, get a few Toyota pickups, and you're in business." He estimated that it would cost about ten thousand dollars. Gunmen came cheap, and most of them had their own Kalashnikovs already. In any case, Kalashnikovs were cheap, too. We might, he suggested, spend a bit more to add some muscle. We could buy a few RPG rocket launchers and a heavy PK machine gun or two, for instance.

O.K., I said. But once I have this army, what do I do? It is cheap enough to get going, but how do you sustain it?

This was also easy, Qias said. "In the first month, you find ways to make money so that it doesn't cost you anything more." You went to wealthy local people, merchants and traders, and asked them for money, and they paid.

Qias seemed to be talking about setting up a protection racket. Extortion was only the beginning, of course, he explained. Most of the mujahideen commanders in the Northern Alliance, for instance, were also involved in the opium and heroin trade.

Qias is young, maybe twenty-two, and his enthusiasm for whatever enterprise presents itself to him will serve him well in the new Afghanistan, just as Naquib's pragmatism and canny methods of dealing with the authorities have enabled him to prosper and to survive sudden and dangerous shifts in power. I even began to wonder about Naquib's illness, which conveniently removed him from a confrontation with Gul Agha that he probably wouldn't have won. His Risperdal capsules reminded me of Vincent (the Chin) Gigante, shuffling around Greenwich Village in his bathrobe and pajamas, trying to avoid racketeering charges. But then perhaps I had been in Afghanistan too long.
The United States began bombing Afghanistan on October 7th. Air strikes targeted buildings used by Al Qaeda and the Taliban, including
this house in Kandahar, which Osama bin Laden once used. On December 7th, the city fell to anti-Taliban forces.
When the Taliban controlled Kandahar, the city's prison held several hundred captured Northern Alliance soldiers as well as Al Qaeda.
members who were incarcerated for common crimes. They emblazoned the walls with graffiti signed in Farsi and Arabic.
Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, lived in a large compound on the edge of Kandahar. It has several flower gardens, and the walls are...
covered with murals depicting nature scenes. Interior rooms throughout the compound are decorated in a flower motif.
The grounds of Mirwais Hospital in Kandahar. Civilians injured in the American bombing shared space in the hospital with soldiers.
including a group of Arab fighters who arrived with grenades strapped to their bodies and established a standoff with authorities.