

# THE KABULER

**Cristina De Middel and Lorenzo Melloni**

The Kabuler is a collaboration between Lorenzo Meloni and Cristina De Middel, two Magnum photographers with different approaches and languages, who decided to work together to revisit narratives on one of the most over reported conflicts of the 21st century: the War in Afghanistan. In January 2022, they travelled across the country to document the return of the Taliban to power after the withdrawal of all foreign troops. This specific period in Afghanistan's recent history was marked by the Taliban's commitment to reframing their image to the western world— not as a guerrilla group, but as a political entity with the capacity for effective governance.

For 30 days, Meloni and De Middel interviewed local residents, politicians and Taliban members to gather first-hand perspectives on the changes taking place. They also analysed past and current data on Afghanistan's social, economic and political landscapes to offer a more comprehensive context to the reader.

Working together, they challenged their own roles and perspectives to create a publication — in the format of a western magazine — emphasising the ongoing lack of understanding about Afghanistan despite decades of reporting. The combination of Meloni's documentary and conflict photojournalism and De Middel's more conceptual approach aims at stimulating the often flat dynamics existing between text and image, whilst triggering genuine questions from the reader about the meaning of war, history and national identity. Features, interviews and opinion pieces are presented in a way that pushes the reader into active and critical participation in decoding information presented to them. In so doing, it is hoped this magazine bypasses the often simplistic and biased approaches of traditional media.

At the time of publication, Afghanistan is no longer featured on newspaper front pages. It is now a victim of an often shallow news cycle, despite ongoing challenges — including a serious deterioration of human rights and a nascent food crisis — and the realisation of some of those pessimistic predictions which the Taliban had hoped to counteract. This magazine aims to capture both an important historic moment and stand as a lasting testament, serving as a tool for deciphering the complexities of this 20-year conflict and Afghanistan as a whole.