

# THE UNREDACTED

(Jihad Rehab)



A Film By Meg Smaker

"THE YEAR'S MOST **CONTROVERSIAL**  
DOCUMENTARY."  
- THE GUARDIAN

"AN INTERROGATIVE ACT OF  
**DEFIANCE.**"  
- VARIETY

"NOT THE BEST DOCUMENTARY OF THE YEAR.  
OF THE YEAR, FULL STOP.  
MEG HAS CREATED A MASTERPIECE  
DON'T LET ANYONE TELL YOU HOW TO FEEL ABOUT IT;  
UNTIL YOU **SEE IT YOURSELF.**"

"RIVETING **VIEWING.**"  
- THE WRAP

THIS FILM WILL ENLARGE YOUR SOUL."  
- MICHAEL DUNAWAY @ PASTE MAGAZINE

"AN UNDENIABLY **VITAL FILM.**"  
- INDIEWIRE



# THE UNREDACTED

(JIHAD REHAB)

A FILM BY MEG SMAKER

JOURNEY INSIDE THE WORLD'S FIRST  
REHABILITATION CENTER FOR "TERRORISTS"

COMING SOON | JIHADREHAB.COM

## Synopsis

A group of men trained by al-Qaeda are transferred from Guantanamo to the world's first rehabilitation center for "terrorists" located in Saudi Arabia. Filmed over three years, with unprecedented access, this film is a complex and nuanced exploration of the men we have heard so much about but never heard from.

## Logline

A group of men trained by al-Qaeda are transferred from Guantanamo to the world's first rehabilitation center for "terrorists" located in Saudi Arabia.

### What the Critics Say

**"I have never seen a film more Oscar-worthy than Meg's film."** – [Deadline](#)

**"The One Film Academy Voters Should Watch"** – [Puck News](#)

**"Riveting"** – [The Wrap](#) | **"nothing less than extraordinary"** – [Film Companion](#)

**"an undeniably vital film"** – [Indiewire](#) | **"Incredible"** – [RogerEbert.com](#)

**"#1 film at Sundance this year"** – [Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#)

**"This is a movie for intelligent people looking to have their preconceived notions challenged."** – [The Guardian](#)

**"It's hard to overstate the power of Smaker's debut documentary."** – [The Wrap](#)

**"I'll be honest: I was so provoked by the documentary that I had to cool off for a few days before writing this review. The unflinching honesty of Jihad Rehab made me angry - about the USA and its arrogance about Afghanistan, about Riyadh, about the human spirits that are restored only to be crushed again. It also made me grateful for filmmakers like Meg Smaker, who take unprecedented leaps of faith without knowing where they will land. With Jihad Rehab, she creates a fire that cannot be doused."** – [Film Companion](#)

**"a moving portrait of souls damaged and destroyed by war"** – [LA Times](#)

**"This kind of willingness and aptitude to understand the layers of the otherized has never felt more urgent."** – [Variety](#)

**"Jihad Rehab can be a vital bridge between two mindsets that instantly hate and fear each other, including our own... makes you look close at lives we as Americans have spent so long trying to look away from"** – [RogerEbert.com](#)

**"Not the best documentary of the year. The best film of the year. Full stop. Meg has created a masterpiece. Don't let anyone tell you how to feel about it; until you see it for yourself. This film will enlarge your soul."** – [Michael Dunaway @Paste Magazine](#)

**"This is one of the best documentaries I have ever seen in my life, hands down."**  
– [Coleman Hughes](#)

**"There have been some high-profile criticisms that Smaker would dare, as a white person, to tell the stories of these men. Don't listen. See this transcendent film and decide for yourself whether she did right by them."** – [Atlanta Journal-Constitution](#)

**"Megan Smaker gives viewers the rare chance to get up close and personal with the men of no nation..."** – [Hollywood Reporter](#)

## **About the Controversy**

[\*\*Sundance Liked Her Documentary on Terrorism, Until Muslim Critics Didn't\*\*](#) – **New York Times**, Pulitzer Prize Winning Investigative Journalist Michael Powell

[\*\*Inside the Shameful Cancellation of Jihad Rehab\*\*](#) – **National Review**, NY Times Best Selling Author/Journalist and Oscar-Nominated Documentary Filmmaker Sebastian Junger

[\*\*Cowardice at Sundance\*\*](#) – **The Atlantic**, Saudi Arabia and terrorism expert Graeme Wood

[\*\*A Tale of Cancellation\*\*](#) – **Sam Harris' Making Sense Podcast**, Author of five New York Times best sellers

[\*\*'Jihad Rehab' started a furor at Sundance\*\*](#) – **Los Angeles Times**, Journalist and Film Critic Lorraine Ali

[\*\*Jihad Rehab is about compassion, not bigotry\*\*](#) – **Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism**, Investigative Journalist Zaid Jilani

[\*\*The One Film Academy Voters Should Watch\*\*](#) – **PUCK**, Founding Partner Matt Belloni

[\*\*Sebastian Junger Among Journos Who Exposed Fallacy of Smear Campaign on 'The UnRedacted'\*\*](#) – **DEADLINE**, Film Reporter Mike Fleming Jr.

[\*\*Running Scared: Why Film Festivals Are Steering Clear of Controversial Movies\*\*](#) – **Variety**, Executive Editor and Award winning journalist Tatiana Siegel

[\*\*How the Sundance Film Festival Lost Its Cool\*\*](#) – **Los Angeles Magazine**, Contributing Editor Peter Kiefer

[\*\*Social Panic at Sundance\*\*](#) – **Quillette**, Writer, Journalist Michelle Pollino

[\*\*Jihad Rehab: A Tale of Cancellation\*\*](#) – **Conversations with Coleman**, Writer and Host Coleman Hughes





## Director's Statement

Before I was a filmmaker, I was a firefighter. I loved it, and I thought I'd always be one. Then 9/11 happened. When the towers came down, my understanding of the world came crumbling down with them. The world presented to me by popular media – a simplistic world of good and evil, us vs. them – seemed to answer none of the questions burning inside of me, raised by the events of that day and its aftermath.

My father used to say, there are only three types of people in the world:

- Those that when you hit them, they hit you right back
- Those that when you hit them, they run away
- And... those that when you hit them, they ask, "Why did you hit me?"

I've always been in that third camp.

So about six months after 9/11, I traveled to Afghanistan to find those answers for myself. And was immediately humbled by my own ignorance of the world.

As America carried out bombing raids and ground operations with Allied forces in Afghanistan, I



was staying in a small village in the northern province of Balkh. A local family had taken me into their home, fed me, clothed me, and treated me as one of their own. Though they did not speak any English, we were able to communicate through my rudimentary grasp of Dari and my (only slightly better) abilities at charades. One day, the grandfather of the house and I were walking through the local market when another man began beating his fist in the air and shouting at me. Though I had no idea what he was saying, the anger and disgust on his face made his meaning clear.

Almost immediately my surrogate grandfather ran up to the man, grabbed him by the collar, and started shaking him and shouting back. This exchange lasted only a few seconds, but resulted in the man saying "Sorry," in Dari and then, "Welcome to Afghanistan," to me in English.

Weren't these the people who were supposed to hate us "because of our freedoms?" Why would this elderly man, this stranger, defend me against his neighbor whom he'd probably known for years? Me – an American, whose country was at that very moment bombing and occupying their land. But here was a family who despite not knowing me, welcomed me into their home and treated me with hospitality, kindness, and grace. My preconceived notions of this country and its people were so wrong it shook me to my core, bringing my whole worldview into question.

I was 21 years old, and it was the first time I was humbled by my own ignorance of the world, but it definitely would not be the last.

My time in Afghanistan taught me that my understanding of the world was extremely limited, but also that the way to broaden it was to spend time with people different from me and to try to see

the world as they saw it. This was the driving force behind my decision to move to Yemen and to study Arabic and Islam.

Learning Arabic helped me get a job as the head firefighting instructor at a fire academy in Sana'a, the capital of Yemen. While running the cadets through some fire drills, I overheard a conversation between three of the men. There had been a terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia. The perpetrators who had been caught were a group of al Qaeda members, half of them Yemeni, the other half Saudi. According to the cadets, the Yemenis had been executed but the Saudis had been sent to something they referred to as "Jihad Rehab."

It was the first time I'd heard about the center. Saudi Arabia was not known for being progressive. Yet here they were running a rehabilitation center for terrorists?

That story always stuck with me, and years later when I finally became a filmmaker, I knew it was something I had to explore.

Partly because of what happened on 9/11, I wanted to know more about the people who had killed so many of my fellow firefighters. But I also wanted to know more because Yemen had become my second home. I had people there I considered family, and still do to this day. While living there I saw the devastation America caused in this region in the name of "fighting evil" and the "War on Terror." But who were these "evil" people? Throughout all those years living in Yemen and the Middle East, I had never met one. I was torn. As a firefighter I saw America as a victim, but living in Yemen, I also saw the U.S. as a perpetrator of violence.

I had one foot in each world. But I still didn't fully understand.

As children we are told stories about good and evil: the good witch and the bad witch. The roles are very clear. The good witch is good because... she was just born that way. Same for the bad witch. It's a clean and comforting view of the world. Though we're told these stories as children, I think many of us struggle to ever evolve past this worldview. We have allies and enemies. We are good and they are bad. And that is where the understanding stops. I know because I also held this view – far past childhood.

I held it until I was kidnapped.

My kidnapping is also a big part of why I made this film. And where my obsession with understanding the "other" probably stems from.

I was kidnapped in Colombia for 10 days in 2003. During my captivity, my kidnappers disemboweled and decapitated seven people in front of their families. Afterward, the captors pillaged and burned the villages of those victims to the ground. It was the very definition of evil.

But it wasn't the killings or the beatings or the destruction of the villages that really changed me. It was what happened after.

Being kidnapped isn't like it is in the movies. There are no big explosions or men dressed in all black performing long diatribes. With no access to the internet or forms of distraction, being kidnapped can actually be kind of boring. Most of the time, you're just sitting around and talking: talking with fellow captives, and eventually, talking to your captors. With nothing to do, you have time to talk about the most random things, and to pass the time our conversations would go on for hours. As we talked I began to feel more and more unnerved. Not from the deeds they had just done, but from how normal they all were. Far from the blood-thirsty psychopaths I'd imagined, these were just your run-of-the-mill young men and women. They talked about high school crushes, their favorite football teams, and eventually, we talked about why they joined this rebel group of mercenaries.

One of the young women recounted her story. Her parents had been killed by the FARC and in her mind the only logical thing to do was to join the rival group, the AUC. It was the AUC's job to

hunt down the FARC and any FARC sympathizers. When they found them, they were to “send a message” by disemboweling and then cutting off their heads in front of their family to dissuade anyone else from helping the FARC.

This was it. She was the monster I read about as a child. Doing evil things to innocent people. But she was no monster at all – just a young girl. Her trajectory from teenage girl to executioner had nothing to do with being born evil. It wasn’t about good and evil at all, it was simply about time and circumstance.

The lens through which I had so confidently viewed the world was once again thrown into question.

This was part of the catalyst that pushed me on this lifelong journey of trying to understand the world’s “evildoers”: Pirates in Somalia, warlords in Afghanistan, and terrorists in Saudi Arabia. Somehow, it’s like a safety blanket. Like if I can understand a thing, then it’s no longer so scary to me.

There’s this quote I read years ago in a Dostoevsky novel: “Nothing is easier than to denounce the evildoer; nothing is more difficult than to understand him.”

I suppose this film I made is trying to do that difficult thing. Because I never got into documentary filmmaking to save the world, I just wanted to better understand it.

## Director’s Bio

Before becoming a filmmaker, Meg Smaker served as a firefighter for over a half decade. She spent almost 10 years living and working in the Middle East, five of them in Yemen, where she learned Arabic and studied Islamic culture while teaching firefighting to Yemeni men.

As a filmmaker, Meg likes to explore controversial subjects from unorthodox viewpoints. Her films have won numerous awards, including **Best Short Documentary at SXSW** (South By Southwest) and a **Student Academy Award**. Her film, “Boxeadora,” received critical acclaim as “one of the best boxing films of all time” by Paste Magazine. Meg was also featured in the **Hollywood Reporter’s “Next Gen”** issue as one of the film industries most promising new nonfiction filmmakers, and in 2021 **Filmmaker Magazine** named her one of the “**25 New Faces of Independent Film**.” Meg’s most recent film, The UnRedacted (Jihad Rehab) - her debut feature length documentary, premiered at **Sundance** in 2022 to rave reviews from film critics. Meg received an MFA in Documentary Film from Stanford University, Graduate Certificate from Stanford Graduate School of Business, and a BA with honors in Political, Legal, and Economic Analysis (PLEA) from Mills College.

## Website

<https://jihadrehab.com/>

## GoFundMe Page

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/the-unredacted-jihad-rehab>