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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: It's well past time to end the war in Afghanistan

ONLY DIPLOMACY WILL END CONFLICT IN AFGHANISTAN

Once again this week saw a foreign policy story that probably would have been a bigger deal in Normal Times. The United States is [reportedly](#) close to reaching an agreement with the Taliban that would see most U.S. troops withdrawing from Afghanistan, in exchange for assurances that al Qaeda would not be allowed to regain a foothold in the country. In a nation that has been ravaged by war for more than 40 years, it's a chance for peace.

Of course, given that the only thing Donald Trump cares about is Donald Trump, his [main concern](#) regarding this whole process appears to be how it will affect his re-election chances. And while a timeline based solely on Trump's domestic political fortunes [carries risks](#), he also [appears to be listening to hawks in Washington](#), who—despite [sizable support](#) among the American people for ending the war in Afghanistan (who are often surprised to learn we are still at war there)—are starting to push back, warning about the supposed dire consequences of withdrawal.

DEBUNKING MYTHS OF ENDING THE WAR

Open any of the Washington establishment's favorite newspapers and you'll find dire warnings about the perils of ending a war ["too early."](#)

But as John Glaser and John Miller of the CATO Institute recently [noted](#), it's highly unlikely that the Taliban has any interest in once again involving itself with al Qaeda. Leaving aside whether al Qaeda leaders themselves have any interest in returning to Afghanistan, "[t]he last thing the Taliban would want," Glaser and Miller add, "is an active terrorist group continually drawing fire from the outside." The same goes for the local Islamic State affiliate, which "has little to no support from the local population, and the Taliban has actively fought the group on the battlefield in Afghanistan for years, making a Taliban-sponsored safe haven for that group singularly unlikely."

Moreover, those promoting a continued and sizable U.S. military presence in Afghanistan routinely set up the false choice of either permanent war-footing or complete and total abandonment of Afghanistan. But progressives know that our nation's international engagement must never be allowed to be solely defined by the presence of U.S. combat troops. In fact,

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drawing down our military presence can open up billions for humanitarian, diplomatic, and peacebuilding investments currently being sucked up by a \$45 billion per year military mission. Moreover, such engagement is likely to be more effective, as ending the United States' role as military occupier would make it a more credible actor for an inclusive and sustainable peace. (

Another key concern is protecting the rights of women in Afghanistan. We wholeheartedly agree that women's empowerment should be a primary interest of the United States in Afghanistan. Yet we must recognize that we can only achieve that goal through creative diplomacy and a sustained, non-military commitment to Afghanistan. For instance, Reps. William Keating (D-MA) and Ann Wagner (R-MO) [recently introduced](#) a bill that [recognizes](#) that "[w]omen's participation in peace negotiations increases the durability and the quality of peace." As such, this important legislation would ensure that U.S. diplomatic strategy and engagement prioritizes the inclusion of Afghan women in the peace process, in strengthening Afghan civil society, and in any future government.

And of course, if our goal is to truly end the war, the answer has never lied in a U.S. military presence. Jarrett Blanc, former deputy special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan from 2012 to 2014, [noted this week](#) that "an agreement to withdraw troops is not actually a withdrawal." Indeed, while "the Special Operations forces and air targeting teams that are the biggest threat to the Taliban are among the last [planned](#) to leave," **the ultimate goal is to end the war and normalize diplomacy, not disengage from Afghanistan.** What's more is the international community, including U.S. adversaries like Russia and China, has an interest in maintaining stability in Afghanistan, which will require U.S. leadership in sustaining aid and investment in the future of Afghanistan.

(Still not convinced? A recent [fact sheet](#) from the Center for American Progress addressed some of the other myths surrounding ending the war in Afghanistan.)

STILL FAR FROM PEACE

"The eventual U.S.-Taliban agreement resulting from nine rounds of negotiations in Doha could still present the best chance to achieve basic U.S. goals, reduce violence in Afghanistan, and make more effective counterterrorist measures possible," Barnett Rubin [said](#) this week (Rubin is the former Senior Adviser to the U.S. State Department's Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan and the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Afghanistan). However, he adds, "[m]uch also depends on how the Taliban reconcile with their enemies in the government in Kabul."

So while there's still a long way to go, true peace in Afghanistan will be a long process, particularly when factoring the rampant corruption within the current Afghan government. We cannot end 40 years of conflict overnight, or even within a year. **A sustainable peace will require a renewed commitment from the United States and the international community**

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to move toward a peacebuilding and conflict prevention approach that prioritizes local solutions to local drivers of conflict. But the first step is to cease doubling down on a military-first strategy that has only seen 18 years of failure.

TOPLINE MESSAGING POINTS

There is no military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan.

- Ongoing U.S. military operations have only served to destabilize Afghanistan and prolong war.
- A new approach requires ending the war through a negotiated settlement, addressing local drivers of conflict, and establishing a diplomatic mission to facilitate a sustainable peace.

Ending the war does not mean disengaging from Afghanistan or a leaving a vacuum for violent groups that perpetrate terrorism to fill.

- Stabilization operations should be situated within a comprehensive diplomatic and peacebuilding strategy that focuses on building local governance capacity, economic empowerment, and respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Repealing the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) is necessary to reorienting our strategy to conflict prevention.

- Multiple presidents have used the 2001 AUMF to continue the failed military-first approach in Afghanistan, as well as wholly unrelated and unnecessary conflicts in the region.
- Focusing on eradicating violent groups through more violence and the Trump administration's emphasis on countering "ideology" fuels both anti-American sentiment and Islamophobia around the world.
- None of this addresses local drivers to conflict that are most often rooted in failed governance, lacking economic opportunity, and violence-related trauma.

For more see our issue brief and recommendations on Afghanistan [here](#).

BURIED LEDES

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PUNISHED FOR OTHER FOLKS' FREE SPEECH? A 17-year-old Harvard-bound Palestinian student [had his visa revoked](#) and was deported **after border agents found social media items critical of the U.S. posted by his friends.**

The State Department has removed "Palestinian Territories" from the list of countries that [fall under the auspices](#) of the Bureau for Near East Affairs.

[NPR is just as guilty](#) as the rest of Washington, DC media in **promoting the Blob.**

[Corporate media](#) **doesn't care about anti-Muslim smears.**

[For some reason](#), **the CIA doesn't spy on the United Arab Emirates.**

Brazilian firms owned by a top donor to Trump and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell **are largely responsible for the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest**, where fires have been raging and [devastating the landscape](#).

Meanwhile, [the rest of the world](#) **is literally on fire too.** (PS - Sign up for the Global Climate Strike [here](#).)

Sixteen-year old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, who sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, [has arrived in the United States](#) **to draw attention to our country's role in the climate crisis and the need for urgent global action.**

Voters support ending U.S. assistance to the Saudi-led war against Houthi rebels [in Yemen](#). (And you might be [surprised](#) at all the other progressive priorities voters love.)

And finally, Trump wasn't the first to propose the idea: The National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration has [apparently received so many inquiries](#) over the years about nuking hurricanes that **it was forced to publish a [webpage](#) dedicated to debunking its utility.**