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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: Afghanistan: Where are we? What's next? What can we do to help?

The Takeaway:

- The Taliban has taken control of Afghanistan. In this week's Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief, we take a look at the devastating events taking place in Afghanistan: what's happening, what it means, and what we can, *and must*, do to help.
- The top priority — and our deepest moral obligation — right now, must be to save as many Afghan lives as possible, including by opening our doors to *all* who need refuge.
- It is all too clear that 20 years of war and occupation were a mistake. Now, we must work for justice for the Afghan people, create accountability for all responsible, follow the leadership of those impacted, and build a new, peace-first foreign policy to ensure that this never happens again.

Afghanistan: The Tragic Costs of Endless War

On April 13, 2021, after almost 20 long years of war, President Biden recognized what the people of the United States and Afghanistan alike had long known: the United States' endless war was a failure. It was time to bring U.S. troops home.

Now, we are seeing the full extent of that failure. As the final withdrawal drew near, the state that the U.S. military had spent decades trying to build collapsed in a matter of days. What has unfolded since, as the Taliban seized city after city, and ultimately the capital of Kabul, has been a tragedy. The images and chaos at Kabul Airport over the past few days as thousands of Afghans and foreign nationals await evacuation are deeply troubling and have already led to calls for congressional investigations, even as 6,000 US military personnel conduct what will likely be one of the largest airlift evacuations in history.

But what exactly is happening? How are we to understand it? And, most importantly, what can we do to support the people for whom this matters most?

The State of Play

The situation in Afghanistan is complex and shifting. But at the moment, the short of it is this: the Taliban is now the de facto government of the country. Since seizing power, they have been quick to institute their oppressive system of rule along with a powerful public relations campaign projecting moderation from their pre-2001 rule. While large-scale violence appears to not be

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happening, for now, in Kabul, there are increasing confirmed reports of retribution lists, as well as disappearances and extrajudicial killings of activists, human rights defenders, and anyone formerly affiliated with the government or international coalition outside the capital. Despite this, some have already begun bravely [protesting](#) Taliban rule.

Though the Taliban controls the capital itself, the U.S. military continues to hold the Kabul airport (Hamid Karzai International Airport, or “HKIA” in US government speak) where hundreds of families, including U.S. citizens, foreign nationals, Special Immigrant Visa and green card holders, in addition to people directly under threat from the Taliban, hope to find safe passage out of the country. Although some evacuations are [taking place](#), the Taliban is reportedly targeting some of those trying to flee to safety, and getting to the airport remains a challenge for many.

What now?

What comes next for Afghanistan is difficult to say. How and will people seeking refuge be able to enter the airport? For how long will evacuations be able to take place? What [form](#) will this new government take? And perhaps most importantly: what will happen to the people of Afghanistan, and vulnerable groups such as women and ethnic minorities in particular, under Taliban rule? Much, and of great importance, will be determined in the coming weeks as the situation plays out. To keep up to date on the everchanging state of play in Afghanistan, see our [new roundup](#) of news and analysis, updated frequently.

A Moral Obligation

Whatever happens next, one thing is undeniable: *in this moment, we must do everything we can to help save lives*. After decades of occupation, war, and destruction, we owe the people of Afghanistan a profound and irreparable debt. That means we must do all that is in our power to facilitate evacuations; remove any red tape to getting those under threat from the Taliban out of the country; expedite the processing of, and expand eligibility for, visas and refugee designations; refuse to allow “[quotas](#)” to limit the number of people for whom we open our doors; provide any necessary humanitarian assistance; reject broad-based [sanctions](#) and other punitive measures likely to harm the very people to whom we owe the most; ensure that any [funds](#) previously designated for Afghan security forces now go toward helping its people; and working through the UN and our allies to ensure humanitarian access.

This week, our partners at Afghans for a Better Tomorrow (AFBT) released [a diaspora community demand statement](#) that expanded on these priorities, which Win Without War was proud to endorse along with 60+ organizations and prominent individuals. The moment to remove as much red tape to save as many Afghan lives as possible is now.

Want to help?

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- Endorse AFBT's demand statement [here](#) (names will continue to be added over the next week).
- Take action [here](#) to urge President Biden to ensure humanitarian aid and refuge for Afghans.

Justice, Accountability, Peace

In the short term, our focus must be on saving lives *now*. In the long run, we must reject the military solutions that brought us here and take a new approach to Afghanistan — one rooted in peace, accountability, and justice. Decades of occupation, thousands [killed](#), millions [displaced](#), and four decades of militarized intervention — including a two-decade war and occupation that the majority of the public [agrees](#) never should have been fought. To help the Afghan people, we must forego unilateralism and work with the United Nations to support humanitarian access and peacebuilding efforts. We must [reckon](#) with and hold accountable the people, the policies, and the decisions that led to this disastrous war. We must rid ourselves of the corrupting influence of the war industry. We must repeal the 2001 and 2002 [Authorizations for Use of Military Force](#), stop [fueling](#) the war machine, and go beyond troop withdrawal to [end every aspect](#) of our forever wars. Above all, we must learn a very simple lesson: [war is not the answer](#).

The Cost of Endless War

The events in Afghanistan are nothing short of tragic. As we mourn the past, present, and future suffering of people in Afghanistan, as we do everything in our power to help save lives now, and as we join in solidarity with Afghans struggling for peace and justice around the world, we must not lose sight of what is all too clear: the invasion, and twenty year occupation, were failures. When the characteristic amnesia of the beltway pundits strikes — when the march to the next U.S. war begins anew — we must remember this moment, harden our resolve, and make sure that what our government has done in Afghanistan never happens again.

The Real Experts

If you wanted an informed opinion on the events in Afghanistan, who would you go to? War profiteer [Erik Prince](#)? War criminal [John Bolton](#)? War spin doctor [David Petraeus](#)? In the last few days, major U.S. media outlets have turned to some of the last people in the world whose opinions we need for their takes on Afghanistan. So here's a quick reminder: expertise is not defined solely by professional titles. It is also found in the lived experience of those who bear the impacts of U.S. foreign policy decisions. Below are just a few of the many Afghan organizers, activists, and experts that we *should* be following instead of... John Bolton.

- [Arash Azizzada](#), journalist, co-founder, [Afghans for a Better Tomorrow](#), [Afghan Diaspora for Equality and Progress](#)
- [Halima Wali](#), organizer, co-founder, [Afghans for a Better Tomorrow](#), [Afghan Diaspora for Equality and Progress](#)
- [Zuhra Bahman](#), Afghanistan Country Director, [Search for Common Ground](#)
- [Mena Ayazi](#), Program Officer, [Search for Common Ground](#)

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- [Samira Hamidi](#), Afghanistan Campaigner, Amnesty International
- [Bilal Askaryar](#), [Welcome With Dignity](#) campaign lead at Women's Refugee Commission
- [Shkula Zadran](#), 2020 Youth Representative of Afghanistan to the UN
- [Pashtana Zalmay Khan Durrani](#), executive director, LEARN

And here are some key resources from the Afghan Diaspora to guide us in the weeks ahead:

- Take action from [this](#) Afghans for a Better Tomorrow-compiled list.
- Consider donating to one of the organizations and fundraisers [compiled](#) by the Afghan American Foundation, including the [Panah Charity Foundation](#).

BURIED LEDES

No length of newsletter could do justice to the complexity, and profundity, of the events in Afghanistan. That's why, in the hopes of providing further reading, lesser-known stories, and novel analysis, we've chosen to focus this week's Buried Ledes solely on Afghanistan.

Almost **two-thirds of the U.S. public now recognize** that the war in Afghanistan wasn't **worth fighting**, and a *large* majority [supports](#) Biden's decision to withdraw. Endless war is a failure, and the people know it.

In 2001, Representative Barbara Lee of California cast the solitary vote against the authorization for war in Afghanistan. She was castigated for it. But **history proved her right...**

...And she continues to fight on the right side of history today. In an interview with *Vanity Fair*, **Rep. Lee urges the country to learn from this moment and reject the doctrine of endless war** (and yes, she shouts out Win Without War in the process 😊).

Leave it to the business press to "say the quiet part out loud" and remind us that **one reason for the occupation of Afghanistan was a desire to profit from its plentiful [natural resources](#)**.

Speaking of profiting from occupation: "**Defense stocks [outperformed](#) the stock market overall by 58 percent**" in the post-9/11 era. War is a racket.

["White Feminists Wanted to Invade."](#) It's time we reckon with the ways that **feminism was twisted and abused to rally support for a disastrous war...**

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... and part of that reckoning means rejecting those who treat Afghan women as living justifications for militarism today. To “[help Afghan women](#),” we must build a new, [feminist foreign policy](#) that recognizes their agency, and builds their power.

As the news cycle produces post mortem after post mortem on the failed war in Afghanistan, there’s one guilty party that most outlets are ignoring: themselves. **The media systemically [failed](#) us on Afghanistan...**

... and **it continues to do so today, ignoring [anti-war voices](#), and [the people](#) of Afghanistan themselves.**

And finally, a [moment](#) to recognize the sheer [bravery](#) of Afghanistan’s women journalists.