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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

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SL: **Reparative policy for Afghanistan**

The Takeaway:

- One year on from the overdue end of the United States' longest war, the U.S. has not done enough to repair the harms caused by its war in Afghanistan.
- U.S. policies have caused an economic shutdown in Afghanistan, leading to a humanitarian disaster that has hurt millions of people.
- Policy decisions currently before Congress and the Biden administration could offer immediate relief, by protecting Afghan refugees and injecting liquidity into the Afghan economy.

Consequences of the War in Afghanistan

We bring you a special edition of the Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief, guest authored by the co-founder and co-director of [Afghans For A Better Tomorrow](#), Arash Azizzada. Arash is a writer, photographer, and community organizer in the Afghan diaspora whose work has been published in [The New York Times](#), [Newsweek](#), and more. He wrote a reflection on what has transpired in Afghanistan in the year since the hard-won end the U.S. war there, and the necessity of reparative U.S. policies to address the harms people in Afghanistan have suffered as a result of the war:

When the United States first invaded Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, endless promises were made. Of course, the United States promised to permanently rid Afghanistan of al-Qaeda and to eliminate the Taliban as punishment for hosting Osama bin Laden. Then, there were more extravagant promises: the U.S. would make Afghanistan a peaceful beacon of hope as well, where women would thrive again and a western-style democracy could flourish.

Twenty years later, these promises have come to nothing. The war that followed the 2001 invasion dragged on for over 20 years, and after its long-overdue end, people in Afghanistan are left to contend with the consequences of a devastating conflict. The Western-backed government fell quickly last August after it spent its latter years awash with political infighting and corruption. While certainly political gains were made during the 20-year occupation, none of them were sustainable.

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The entirety of Afghanistan is now controlled by the Taliban, a group laser-focused on repressing its population and maintaining internal cohesion among their tens of thousands of fighters. They have ethnically cleansed various minorities throughout the country while closing girls' schools past the 6th grade. Today in Afghanistan, dissidents are arrested arbitrarily while Afghan women activists chanting for "freedom, jobs, and food" are met with violence in the streets. The U.S. withdrawal has accomplished one important goal: the armed conflict in Afghanistan has largely dissipated. But Afghans know that the way the Taliban are ruling -- exclusion, control, fear -- ensures that violence remains part of daily life. Elements of ISIS are already thriving in this environment, continuing their brutal attacks on mosques and civilians in the capital city of Kabul and elsewhere. This generation of the Taliban is good at fomenting war and brutalizing civilians; keeping the peace and governing is a whole new ball game for them.

A version of peace is here now, but this is a negative peace that has rendered women second-class citizens and deprived people of food and jobs. The economy is in total freefall, fueled in part by the Taliban's incompetence at economic governance. Much of the misery here, though, is driven by the actions of the United States and the West. Western powers have ended development aid to the country, after helping construct an economy heavily dependent on foreign aid. Afghanistan is sanctioned now due to de-facto Taliban rule, while almost \$9 billion in Afghan foreign reserves remains frozen, allowing hyperinflation to spiral out of control. The administration faced deep criticism for putting aside \$3.5 billion of those assets, pending litigation by the families of the victims of the September 11th attacks. The Biden administration is currently in talks with the Taliban to ensure a "third-party" mechanism that would allow some of the reserves to be used to stabilize the economy, allowing for some minor relief for the country's 38 million people.

The Afghan middle class has evaporated overnight. When the U.S. withdrew, it took all the jobs with it, leaving a liquidity crisis in its wake. Afghans have money saved in banks and food in the markets to sell, but the sanctions, asset freeze, and widespread unemployment are ensuring nobody can access money to buy the food in the markets. That is the story of the Afghan people today - punished for a government they do not even want.

These U.S. policies are battering the Afghan economy. Poverty has gripped every pocket and corner of the country, forcing over 50% of a country of 38 million to be reliant on imported food. An extreme drought and the invasion of Ukraine are making the situation worse, and Afghans, like all of us, are still living through the COVID-19 pandemic. Afghanistan, since last fall, has been a step away from famine. Thousands of babies have been born malnourished or died from deprivation.

Often, we get messages from desperate Afghans inside the country. They fear the Taliban and suffer from unemployment and hunger driven by U.S. policy. Some have sold their kidneys or their children. Others have committed or considered suicide, unable to find a way out, as the

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U.S. and others have closed most immigration pathways to allow Afghans to seek safety or refuge.

The U.S. has now mostly ended its military involvement in Afghanistan, but that alone does not mean its obligations to Afghans end. A reparative policy to address the harms done by the war begins by giving newly arrived Afghan refugees a pathway to legal status and continuing evacuations of at-risk Afghans who seek safety through an Afghan Adjustment Act, which is before Congress now. Additionally, a reparative approach must involve returning seized Afghan assets to their rightful owners, the Afghan people, to allow the Afghan economy to stabilize, giving millions a chance to survive. Much pain and suffering have been inflicted on Afghans by the United States and it will take quite some time to repair that harm. Passing the Afghan Adjustment Act and unfreezing Afghan assets will be a good first step.

Buried Ledes

Last week, Kenyan Vice President William Ruto was declared the winner of the country's Presidential election. Ruto successfully [played](#) on anti-elite sentiment in the country and was popular among younger voters. However, the election has not come to pass without controversy. Ruto's opponent, former Prime Minister Raila Odinga, [called](#) the election "null and void." Claims of voter fraud led to [widespread protests](#) that have since calmed. Odinga filed a challenge in the Kenya Supreme Court (which he has done in the last four Presidential elections now).

USAID [announced](#) it would send the UN World Food Program (WFP) an additional \$68 million to "purchase, move, and store up to 150,000 metric tons of Ukrainian wheat" in response to the global food crisis precipitated by Russia's invasion. This is particularly important for the Horn of Africa, where the sudden absence of imported Ukrainian wheat is putting millions at risk of starvation. In July, Turkey helped broker an agreement between Ukraine and Russia to allow the export of wheat during the ongoing war.

Senator Chris Murphy [traveled](#) to Colombia on Monday to meet with newly elected President Gustavo Petro as well as other officials and civil society groups in Colombia. **Petro was elected as a left-wing champion, campaigning on [policies](#) that would legalize some drugs and end new permits of oil and gas exploration.** Senator Murphy is joined by Congressman Jesús "Chuy" García and Congresswoman Cori Bush. The three will be traveling to Mexico as well, where they will discuss drug trafficking and migration issues in the state of Tabasco.

The California Air Resources Board [voted](#) yesterday to require all new cars sold in the state by 2035 be free of greenhouse emissions. This will cut California's emissions by 50 percent by 2040 from levels that were expected without the new policy. Still, questions remain on infrastructure that would support electric vehicles, but as one expert put it, "this regulation will set the global high-water mark for the accelerated transition to electric vehicles." The rule

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change comes just weeks after President Biden signed the Inflation Reduction Act, which [invested](#) \$369 billion into green energy transition and pollution reduction.

The Tigray region of northern Ethiopia saw [renewed fighting](#), breaking a five-month ceasefire between the government and the Tigrayan rebels. The clashes broke out as Tigray verges on a full-blown famine for its six million people in the midst of the global food crisis. When the ceasefire began in March, the UN World Food Program was able to deliver aid. However, the “full scale offensive,” as the spokesperson for the Tigray People’s Liberation Front described the rebel group’s actions, has left the wellbeing of civilians left in the crossfire in question.

This week American Airlines announced the purchase of 20 planes that will travel faster than the speed of sound. Last year, United Airlines said it would buy 15. The Concorde era may be [making a return](#), but with an update: these planes, designed by startup Boom Supersonic, will be “net-zero carbon from day one.” The planes won’t be ready to take passengers until 2029, but take note: we could be seeing flights from Newark to London in three and a half hours.