



GLOBAL FRIENDS *of* AFGHANISTAN



GFA2022



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of AFGHANISTAN

Connecting Afghans with the world



Inaugural Conference Report and Way Ahead for 2023

11 November 2022





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From the Director:

It had been a busy first year for our small but energetic all-volunteer organization. I could not be prouder of GFA's efforts to educate the world about Afghanistan issues, engage policy makers and practioners on Afghan concerns, aid the resettlement process, and help other allies of Afghans evaluate their efforts and find synergy for the future.

From the beginning in September of 2021 GFA has been about amplifying Afghan voices. Our team has been continuously engaged every single day to ensure Afghanistan does not fall out of the news cycle. Thanks to all of those who write and speak daily through various mediums. We are most active on social media on LinkedIn and Twitter, where we have over 6,000 followers combined.

Also, during our first year we created a Board of Directors and secured our United States non-profit status. We have expanded our team from a half a dozen to over 50 active GFA team-mates from around the globe. Under John Agoglia's steady hand we have increased GFA's partnership engagement to see where our experts can help those helping Afghans.

The end of our first year of effort was crowned by the inaugural GFA Conference on Afghanistan, held in partnership with Georgetown University Master of Arts in International Business and Policy Program with the McDonough School of Business and Georgetown's School of Foreign Service.

Thank you to all of my GFA team-mates and GFA partners and sponsors; it is an honor to serve beside you. A special thank you to John Agoglia, Mir Sadat, Chris Blackburn, Mariam Solaimankhil, Sarah Hearn, Mina Sharif, Ashraf Haidari, and Annie Pforzheimer for helping me weekly to shape the GFA and ensure its success. A final special thanks to Tim Torres our first GFA Military Fellow for his outstanding work as the GFA Conference Chair. The conference was an amazing success due to his herculean efforts and patience. This report will detail that effort and the outputs that will guide GFA's efforts for the next year.

My words cannot adequately express how humbled I am to have the amazing people on this team put faith in me to lead us in keeping the world focused on Afghanistan and Afghans globally.

Jason Criss Howk
Director GFA

Report Contents:

1. Conference Findings
2. Upcoming GFA Projects
3. GFA Mission and Values

Report of the Inaugural GFA Annual Conference on Afghanistan

Held September 1st, 2022, at Georgetown University

In partnership with Georgetown Master of Arts in International Business and Policy Program with the McDonough School of Business and Georgetown's School of Foreign Service.

Conference Chair: Tim Torres, GFA Military Fellow/Tillman Scholar, recent Georgetown graduate, and multi-tour veteran of the Afghanistan war



Key Conference Conclusions and Future Focal points:

1. Advocate for all Afghans in Afghanistan due to:

- Attacks on human rights, women's rights and suspected genocidal activities against non-Pashtuns;
- Potential war crimes and reprisals by the Taliban-Haqqani regime against Afghans who served and supported the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan;
- Denial of girls and women full access to education;
- Restrictions on immigration of the most threatened Afghans, especially those who supported the coalition efforts.

2. Support the ongoing immigration and integration of Afghan refugees

- Advocate for the Afghan Adjustment Act
- Help others understand that integration is a multi-year process
- Work to address behavioral health and mental health challenges of refugees and Afghan allies
- Find creative ways to provide refugees an opportunity to succeed
- Educate all about the courage and tenacity these refugees have shown overcoming obstacles in the immigration process

3. Work to provide a safe space for the Afghan people, especially the generation that grew up over the last 20 years, to discuss among themselves, as well as with the international community, what the political future of Afghanistan looks like once this terrorist regime is gone. The priority long-term goal for Afghans has to be a peace agreement. The goal of a peace agreement should be an inclusive Afghan government that is acceptable to all Afghans, upholds all human rights for all Afghans, and is consistent with Afghanistan's international obligations.

Conference Highlights:

The GFA annual conference was a first of its kind effort to gather stakeholders from across the globe to focus on Afghanistan and find synergy to sustain assistance to the Afghan people. GFA and Georgetown University plan to sustain follow-up through future annual conferences and support to smaller events throughout the year.

The conference goal was to provide a collaborative forum for Afghans and their allies to reflect on the past year since the evacuation from Afghanistan, and to identify opportunities to educate and engage policymakers, humanitarians, veterans, and the public on actions that can be taken to support and assist Afghans today and going forward.

Conference objectives:

- Acknowledge the grassroots efforts critical to the successful evacuation of Afghans last summer and identify opportunities to replicate and direct that energy toward renewed efforts to assist the Afghan people.
- Inform stakeholders about the current state of Afghan resettlement and the ongoing challenges faced by those still in Afghanistan.
- Motivate attendees to support new and continued efforts toward Afghan evacuation and resettlement and improving conditions within Afghanistan.
- Mobilize attendees to develop and act on concrete proposals to address key challenges over the next twelve months and report back at next year's conference.

Video of the majority of the conference can be found on the GFA YouTube channel or via the GFA website.

Conference Webpage: <https://www.globalfriendsofafghanistan.org/annual-conference>

GFA YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCHhmemqigFzuy-HNeqzZDKg>

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Opening Remarks and Welcome

Professor Bradford Jensen, Georgetown University Director of International Business and Policy Program, and **Professor Jason Criss Howk**, Director of Global Friends of Afghanistan (GFA)

Key messages:

- Pleased that the partnership between Georgetown University and Global Friends of Afghanistan has led to this conference
- We look forward to some healing and bonding, exploring problems and solutions with your knowledge, and the creation of new synergy and partnerships among the diverse audience so that we can all continue to help Afghans
- This effort and partnership must continue
- GFA is an all-volunteer group that started in September 2021. It does not exist to enrich anyone, or repair or promote any Afghan's reputation; we simply exist to shine a light on Afghan issues and help find solutions for them. Thanks for joining the effort.

Keynote Speaker: Mr. Richard Bennett



Richard Bennett, UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in Afghanistan

“Our lives have been hijacked...without the help of the international community, we can never win this battle alone”

-Statement from Afghan women to Mr. Bennett on his recent visit

Key messages:

- The takeover of Kabul in August 2021 by the Taliban-Haqqani regime is not an anniversary to celebrate
- Outline of UN SR responsibilities and mandate
- May 15th was first official visit to Afghanistan, initial assessment visit, not investigation
- Preview of future report to UN Human Rights council (final [report here](#))
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc516-situation-human-rights-afghanistan-report-special-rapporteur>
 - Abolishment of Afghan Human Rights, Parliament, Constitution, Judiciary etc.
 - Almost all Women have been removed from public positions
 - Accountability no longer exists to protect citizens
 - Ruling by fear
 - Systematic attack on women and girls' rights, education, workforce, life prospects, freedom of movement, freedom of expression, economic opportunities
 - Critical to spark Afghan economy without helping Taliban regime
 - Torture, kidnapping, illegal detention, murder are all now daily activities
 - Taliban has no intention to uphold their promises to protect human rights
 - Citizens have no recourse to address attacks against them
 - Press freedom, religious freedom, and human rights community have been repressed
 - Hazara are at high-risk and attacks against them have increased
 - Afghans in many stages of immigration around the globe need assistance
 - Afghans feel abandoned and ignored a year later
 - More needs to be done, thanks to GFA and others for working on this

Panel One: Acknowledging the Afghanistan Evacuation



- **Moderator: Tim Torres**, GFA Fellow/Tillman Scholar and recent Georgetown graduate
- Colonel Rahman Rahmani, Afghan Special Mission Wing Pilot who evacuated aviators
- Travis Peterson, Co-Founder of Moral Compass Federation
- Joy Shanaberger, Co-Founder of the Human First Coalition
- Daniel Elkins, Founder of Special Operations Association of America
- Nick Palmisciano, Co-Founder of Save Our Allies
- Kristie Cole, Vice President of Major Giving for UNICEF USA

Key messages:

- There are still many possible solutions for the nations of the NATO coalition to continue to help Afghans that are still at-risk or are part of a visa program and trapped in Afghanistan.
- When asked what prompted each of them to assist in the efforts of the evacuation. The panelists all referred to phone calls they got from friends, family, and colleagues asking if they were willing to help. Overcame the feelings of hopelessness and formed coalitions of the willing to partner with the US Government and make a difference
 - “I felt a piece of my soul pulling me to go back and help those who I had built relationships with over the years.”
 - “A call for help from a friend prompted me to quickly begin to assemble our non-profit”
- The Reality of Desperation on the Ground is still not understood by the American people. The Press has hidden the realities of the event.
- Mental health will be an issue for Afghans and all those government members and civilian volunteers who took part in this effort
 - As help began to arrive in Kabul, there was no clear plan of operation, instead everyone just did what they could.
 - Volunteers recalled situations where leaders would have to decide who could be rescued and who had to be left behind.
 - The role of “playing God” in these scenarios has taken a mental health toll on those involved.

- This moment showed the importance of the private community taking action to act in scenarios where the government fails to step in quickly.
- “It’s also family and if your family calls upon you to come and get them it’s not matter of a question... you are going to do anything you possibly can.” - Travis Peterson
- “I worry very much for everybody that was deployed to Kabul and I really hope the military invests effort in the mental health of those people.” - Nick Palmisciano
- “All of our organizations and collective work is amazing it’s an incredible feat of teamwork; the true number one heroes are the Afghans on the ground that helped navigate inside and are still keeping families safe.” - Joy Shanaberger
- “The mission is not done we have more than 30 million people held hostage by a terrorist organization. There are thousands of people still in Afghanistan that are eligible to be evacuated...they are still waiting that someday there U.S. friends and allies will come to their rescue.” - Colonel Rahman Rahmani

Guest Speaker: Gold Star Son Nick Ochsner
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Nick recounted the unbreakable bond between his Special Forces father and his Afghan interpreter, both who died in service to America and Afghanistan. He called upon the world, and the United States in particular, to not abandon Afghans and to honorably keep their commitments to the Afghan people. He asked that the death of his father be honored by actions that can help Afghans.

Recent article by Nick: <https://www.cnn.com/2021/08/17/opinions/afghanistan-us-withdrawal-leaves-gold-star-families-angry-ochsner/index.html>

Panel Two: Resettlement and Immigration Issues



- **Moderator: Professor Katharine M. Donato**, Georgetown University, Donald G. Herzberg Professor of International Migration, and Director, Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM)
- Farishta Sakhi, Senior Program Manager at Freedom House
- Seyoum Berhe, State of Virginia, Refugee Coordinator
- Sarah Cady, Executive Director for Refugee and Immigrant Services, Lutheran Social Services of the National Capital Area
- Wida Saber Popal, Afghan Refugee and Activist for Women's Education
- Kari McDonough, Senior Advisor to Welcome.US

Key messages:

- Panel will focus on the current state of Afghan settlement in the United States and recommendations for the future. This is a critical topic and we thank the organizers for including it in the program.
- With fall of Kabul to terrorists: 6 million Afghans displaced, 3.5 million internally displaced, and 2.6 million outside the country. This is on top of 2 prior waves of refugees from prior wars Taliban have not kept their promises, and as they continue to terrorize the citizens and increase the pressure on refugee systems and organizations.
- Not enough nations have opened up spaces to accept Afghan refugees, and in many places ill-treatment of Afghans and discrimination against them for employment and education continues.
- We Afghans are thankful for the United States for welcoming refugees and immigrants, Afghans worked beside Americans on the battlefield and to rebuild Afghanistan.
- A detailed retelling of a refugee's journey from Kabul to the US was given and should be heard by all. You can find it on the video.
- On track to receive 190,000 newcomers this year due to Afghan collapse and Ukraine war. Straining all organizations with record numbers of refugees.

- The Veteran-led efforts to evacuate Afghans and then shift towards resettlement was a huge help to the organizations that usually handle this role.
- A huge outpouring of non-profit assistance from organizations across the nation that do not typically deal with resettlement has made a huge difference, and we have been able to gather over 40 CEOs to bring in over \$240 million in goods/services/funds and to mobilize their employees to assist.
- An estimated 54 million Americans have helped welcome newcomers this past year; the challenges are deep and the system is imperfect, but we are coming together as a nation to help.
- This is the largest humanitarian effort for refugees since Vietnam; a huge shift for the resettlement community. It meant that first waves of newcomers had almost no access to US or State-level government programs, because they were not prepared.
- Issue: Long-term self-sufficiency: Cost of living in areas where many newcomers want to settle or were placed are very high, and the need for well-paid jobs will be a key part of the solution. Many of these Afghans served honorably beside us for two decades. Job training needed.
- Issue: Mental Health: Mental health concerns based on the trauma of this evacuation will make it even harder for this cohort to integrate and adjust. Mental health practitioners needed
- The *Afghan Adjustment Act* is critical to speeding up the resettlement process and reducing legal costs for Afghans and resettlement organizations petitioning for asylum.
- Biggest challenge and fear for most on panel, the mental health ramifications of this evacuation and how Afghans might struggle with integration.
- New gender situations in the US will be a challenge for some newcomers.
- During the panel discussion the Biden Administration stopped access to humanitarian parole programs for Afghans. This was shocking, painful, and disappointing to the panelists due to the high number of at-risk Afghans that still exist. It means the Afghan Adjustment Act is more important now. We will need to open more avenues to help at-risk Afghans and the SIV process must be sped up.
- ~36 million Afghans are now hostages to a terrorist regime; it will continue to impact the United States and is a threat to the world.

Panel Three: Current Afghan Concerns



- **Moderator: Annie Pforzheimer**, GFA Fellow/Former DCM Kabul
- Mariam Solaimankhil, Member of former Afghan Republic Parliament
- Ashraf Haidari, Ambassador to Sri Lanka
- Crystal Bayat, Afghan Human Rights Advocate
- Lt. General Haibatullah Alizai, the last Commanding General of the ANA
- Justine Fleischner, Director of Research for Afghan Peace Watch (APW)

Key messages:

- There are many concerns in Afghanistan and this panel will only scratch the surface. The working groups after lunch will develop many of these topics more fully, and future GFA events will aim to shine a light on other topics.
- It is clear one year later that the world is no longer focused on Afghanistan.
- Women and girls in Afghanistan feel abandoned. It makes no sense that the world continues to give the Taliban a chance to change, they will not. Put Afghan women first. The Taliban fear educated and strong women. Humanitarian aid must be highly restricted to avoid misuse by the terrorists as they care for their fighters and build infrastructure to radicalize more terrorists. Increase the pressure immensely to force the Taliban to give women full human rights. Give moral support to women via diplomacy, and more real support in the form of mental health care. Afghan men must find a way to stand with the women in their family. These women are fighting for the future of the nation, they need more support.
- Most of Afghanistan is young, under 40. The majority of them believe that government should be elected—not appointed, inclusive in every way, able to deliver security and economic opportunity, and constitutionally-based by a founding document that is created by a diverse group. Afghanistan needs a future that is fully-sovereign and respects the full human rights of all Afghans.

- The Biden Administration has abandoned a democratically vibrant Afghanistan while ignoring the Pakistan interference in the nation and support for the terrorists that murdered Afghans and NATO forces. Unless Pakistan is pressured, the terrorist scourge in the region will expand and harm the world. The world must use more diplomacy and other tools to change this status quo. The US must lead, or it will not happen.
- Afghanistan lives in a predatory region; Afghans will need friends willing to help change this behavior and allow Afghans to achieve full sovereignty. It will mean getting past the transactional relations that exist between the world and South and Central Asia nations. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have traditionally been less intrusive and more helpful to Afghanistan. But those Central Asia states must shift from containing terrorism to helping Afghans eradicate it. Afghans have less hope in any positive changes from Russia, Pakistan and Iran. India can do more and has an interest in a stable Afghanistan.
- The various factions of the Taliban and Haqqani network, and the variety of other terrorists that are being used by external actors limits the ability of Afghans inside Afghanistan from building a functional political opposition to the terror regime. There is a requirement for Afghans globally to organize to help Afghans inside the country to find ways to impact the future of the country.
- When journalists ask us to give a more positive report on Afghanistan, we tell them that there is nothing positive left. Things are truly already this bad and without urgent assistance it will not improve. The world cannot take their eye off this nation and these issues.
- If the world continues to ignore the open Pakistani involvement in destabilizing Afghanistan and empowering terrorists, it will destroy the region and it will spread.
- There is a large body of former ANDSF members that can help restabilize in the future Afghanistan, but they must be stopped from joining militia and terrorist organizations to feed their families and protect themselves. They need food, shelter and safety.
- Afghan women were empowered during the last 20 years, as a byproduct of somewhat clumsy assistance. It is clear that the Taliban are focused on eradicating that empowerment. We must see the linkage between women empowerment and decreasing the capabilities of terrorist organizations.
- It is challenging and dangerous to gather information now on the ground, and policymakers are not using the findings—which shows a terrorist safehaven where every Afghan is at risk for mistreatment or death daily, to make better policy decisions about Afghanistan and engaging with the terror regime.
- The Taliban cannot last for long, so the world needs to prepare for the post-Taliban era that will come. Engage with civil society inside Afghanistan. The last 20 years brought changes, just look at how resilient the women and girls are, engage with them and let them show you the way. Unless there is fast action against the terror regime, they will systematically wipe out all gains.
- Taliban-Haqqani regime is working to brainwash and radicalize the Afghan youth and destroy their future. Proper education is a way to block this effort to make more terrorists. There is a robust online education capability today that we lacked in the 1990s. Use it and expand it.
- The world should not stand by while China, Pakistan and Russia work with the terrorists to steal the natural resources of Afghans. They can steal the future from the young that are more prepared to utilize it. The world invested soldiers and money to improve the future of Afghans, they should not walk away from this investment.

- The internal divisions inside the regime and the continued connections with Al Qaeda, show that the US must continue to work to help Afghans find a more inclusive governance. There is still hope that this situation will not last, so it is the right time to get organized and push for change.
- Afghanistan is once-again a terrorist safe-haven the size of Texas and is attracting many global-reach terrorist organizations. The next generation of AQ and other terror groups is currently taking control of their organization. The rise of a terror regime and terror safe-haven has emboldened terrorist organizations around the globe. The narcotics trade has equally expanded and re-established their full capability in Afghanistan.
- The priority long-term goal for Afghans has to be a peace agreement. The goal of a peace agreement should be an inclusive Afghan government that is acceptable to all Afghans, and consistent with Afghanistan's international obligations. If a peace process cannot be reached there will be a civil war and could lead to 2 or 3 parts of Afghanistan.
- There is always an Afghan resistance to poor governance, but the current groups are not able to counter the Taliban-Haqqani regime. The weakness of the resistance is allowing the regime to strengthen. They need to unite in Afghanistan and outside it.
- 60% of the ANDSF has not joined a side yet. The others are divided among militant and terrorist groups. Iran, for example, is already luring former ANDSF to go fight as terrorists in Yemen. The former ANDSF will be misused by many nations and groups.
- The UN Security Council should forge consensus on this goal, and should give UNAMA a robust mandate to support inclusive peace talks. It was proposed that any eventual peace agreement should be accompanied by a UN and/or SCO peacekeeping force with strong participation of regional powers.
- The USA should engage with China, Russia and India to build regional consensus on Afghanistan around common interests to counter: terrorism, extremism and narcotics, and giving support to an inclusive peace process and government that is acceptable to all Afghans.
- If the USA no longer cares about Afghans, they should just be honest with them so they can make more informed decisions about their future.

Lunch Break, Followed by Working Group Breakout Discussions and reports.

<p>Guest Speaker: Dean Joel Hellman, Dean of the School of Foreign Service</p>
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Key Messages:

- Thanks to Tim Torres and the Georgetown students who stepped up to help Afghans last August, you lived up to the Georgetown values.
- The Rapid de-escalation and disengagement of the US in Afghanistan was a tragedy for Afghans. It is a tremendous blow the US (and the world) as we try to engage with development in difficult and war-torn areas.
- I am pleased that Tim and GFA took this moment to get those who care to engage and are pleased that Georgetown was a part of this effort. Georgetown will stand with you all as we look for solutions for Afghans.
- We want to be a part of how we think about engaging in the future, so please involve Georgetown in those plans.

Annex One: GFA Conference on Afghanistan Working Group Discussions and Findings

<p style="text-align: center;">Working Group A Women and Girls in Afghanistan: Rights, Employment, and Education</p>
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Leaders: Jess Keller and Lina Tori Jan, Georgetown University Onward for Afghan Women an initiative of the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS)

TOPIC: To provide a brief description of the situation for women and girls in Afghanistan, with a focus on the ongoing humanitarian crisis, women's rights in an Islamic framework, sources of leverage on the Taliban, and the international community's response to date.

Group Spokesperson:

Fatema Ahmadi, Civil Society leader and American University Fellow

Questions

- What is the current humanitarian situation in Afghanistan for women and girls, how is aid getting delivered, and what is possible to improve the provision of humanitarian aid given the current circumstances?
- How can policymakers and negotiators practically use a Women & Islam negotiation toolkit to support women's rights in Afghanistan?
- What can be done by the U.S. government to actually change the Taliban behavior and make progress toward peace?
- What specific points of leverage does the international community wield both with the Taliban and other key states in the region, and how can they be used without hurting the Afghan people?
- What role can regional actors and cooperation play in promoting peace and security in Afghanistan? How can regional actors influence the Taliban's actions toward women?
- What does the way forward look like?

Discussion

- **Women's Rights in Islam and the Action Guide:** How policymakers and negotiators can practically use Islamic arguments to support Afghan women's rights.
- **Taliban Positions on Women's Rights:** The failure of the Taliban to change their position on women's rights, and what can be done to actually change the Taliban behavior with an emphasis on the role of U.S.
- **Points of Leverage:** Leverage the international community has with both the Taliban and other key states, and how they should be used without hurting the Afghan people.
- **Role of Regional Actors:** Discussed regional cooperation and what role they have in promoting peace and security in Afghanistan. Specifically, on points of leverage to influence Taliban's actions towards women and calls to action for the regional Muslim countries.

Recommendations

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) should reimpose the longstanding international travel ban on Taliban leadership. UN travel sanctions imposed on Taliban leaders are among the last forms of leverage the international community has left, and the most potent source that does not directly harm the Afghan people.
- International donors should target aid and financial support to local Afghan civil society organizations, and engage with local women-led groups to direct funding and channel humanitarian assistance effectively. Alternative mechanisms for providing funding to local women, who are essential drivers of effective aid distribution, should be a central counterpart to any financial sanction effort.
- The United States and international partners should strongly engage Islamic regional countries to push for girls' education in Afghanistan as they can effectively demonstrate the compatibility of girls' schooling with Islam. It is important to note that Afghanistan is the only country in the world where girls' education is not allowed; and no other Islamic states bar girls from education at a secondary or higher level. There is no justification from an Islamic perspective to prevent girls from getting an education. The international community must leverage the influence of Muslim-majority countries in the region to model positive examples of women's education, leadership, and agency in an Islamic framework.
- The United States, UN, and the international community should formulate and uphold clear red lines in response to the Taliban's actions, sending a clear message that human rights abuses and attacks on the women and girls of Afghanistan will not be tolerated.
- The international community should ensure women's participation and inclusion in all engagements with the Taliban. The international community should also prioritize inclusion of women's and human rights in all diplomatic and economic negotiations with the Taliban, including the issues of girls' education, women's employment, and protection and security concerns.
- The U.S. and international community should pursue parallel efforts in support of girl's education – on the one hand leverage should be applied on the Taliban to formally reopen schools. At the same time, there should also be alternative forms of education to ensure women and girls aren't left behind, such as funding Afghan women teachers in rural areas. At the same time, the U.S. and international community should appropriate funds to alternative education mechanisms, including online models and funding for Afghan women teachers in rural areas, so that Afghan girls can continue to learn regardless of the Taliban's decisions and political outcomes. They should also engage Afghan women-led organizations and female-headed households as drivers of education provision and humanitarian aid.

<p>Working Group B</p> <p>How to finish the evacuation of at-risk Afghans</p>

Leader/Spokesperson Loren Voss, No One Left Behind

Questions

- What are the main challenges to finish the task of evacuating at-risk Afghans?
- What priority measures need to be adopted by the USG, civil society and others?

Discussion

- Focus on narrowing down the myriad of issues with current evacuation pathways and programs.
- Explore solutions and share ideas among the groups still aiding Afghan movement to various nations.
- Accept certain realities and be honest with Afghans about the opportunities that exist and the pace of any path to safety.
- Nations must find the political will to continue the process of moving Afghans who were promised visas, and to assist at-risk Afghans that will be executed or imprisoned for their activities in support of security and human rights over the last 20 years. None of the solutions we arrived at will work without our government showing the will to get this done. Interested groups must make getting more political willpower from the government a priority.
- The legal pathways to any nation are decreasing.
- The legal pathways that exist are opaque and it is difficult to get information about cases in progress and what the next steps will be.
- The US is no longer allowing Afghans to come to the US for processing, they are being processed in 3rd countries and then moved forward to the US. The process in every key 3rd nation is ultra-slow and not improving.
- Because the US pipeline is so slow, NGOs are taking on the role of helping Afghans through the process and negotiating directly with 3rd country nations to hold and process Afghans. This leads to confusion and the lack of US government capability means the 3rd country nations are left confused and unsure of who they can work with. Causing mixed messages.

Recommendations

- Use an emotional appeal to help drive funding, resources, awareness, gaining political will and policy changes needed to keep the evacuation going and speed it up.
- Make policy changes to allow certain Afghans to move from 3rd countries and be processed in the U.S., such as those who have previous vetting due to their work for the US and those at the highest risk for death. Expand any pathways that can take in these cases.
- Surge assets toward the processing of persons to speed it up.
- Make the process clearer with checklists, information flowcharts, an accurate contact list, and timelines at each stage will help all parties to understand the process and alleviate the mental strain on all parties.
- Fix the system itself so that it is easier to communicate throughout the process. If it remains a black box then frustration will continue to increase. A transparent system decreases the workload on State Department and immigration agencies.

- We need USG diplomatic pressure to make the process in 3rd countries a repeatable system so we don't have to recreate techniques to navigate the process. NGOs cannot do this alone, the USG needs to step in.
- We need funding and logistics from the USG or another entity to continue the NGO efforts to get the Afghans out of the pipeline and bring out the remaining at-risk persons.
- We need to be realistic and develop ways to resettle Afghans in 3rd countries as not all will make it into the US process.
- We need more collaboration between NGOs to share best practices.
- The USG can contract-hire members of the various volunteer groups for a limited time to surge personnel where needed in the USG to finish the process and streamline systems.

<p>Working Group C The future governance of Afghanistan</p>

Leaders: Yalda Royan and Nazila Jamshidi

Question

What is the ideal type of government for Afghanistan, if the Terrorist regime was gone tomorrow?

Discussion

- Scene setter: The working group had a diverse group of about 25 Afghans, and about 40% of them recently left the country. The majority of the group had worked in government or closely with the Republic during the last 20 years. The majority of the group were under 40 years of age.
- The majority of the group (90%) felt that a more decentralized government could work more effectively in Afghanistan. The emphasis was on ensuring at every level of government elections decided the leaders, and not appointment from the national government. The appointment of governors and many other positions (large and small) by a national leader was seen as problematic for many reasons. As one participant noted, “a teacher in Ghor does not need an appointment letter signed by a president.”
- The entire group agreed that kings, emirs, warlords, and terrorist groups had failed repeatedly as national leaders and unifiers. We should not return to that system.
- The role of a few major political parties was seen as a positive, over the hundreds of small parties that make elections harder and longer. Political parties must have nationally acceptable platforms that can successfully challenge the ideas of the Taliban.
- There is a need to stop ministry leaders from purging their ranks when they arrive and replacing them with friends. Dedicated government workers who are experts in their field are crucial to stability.
- Governments must be approved by the people via elections and be a system that is able to ensure the safety and prosperity of all Afghans and that sees all Afghans as equals.
- The constitution must be written by a diverse group of Afghans and aim to ensure all Afghans are equal regardless of ethnicity, religion or tribe.
- Elections, at every level, are the only way forward, and the government must represent all Afghans.
- It is important to think differently about the problem of building peace in Afghanistan. Local Afghan leaders and groups should be offered space to discuss how a peace process could work, and what an inclusive peace agreement and legitimate governance would entail. These leaders and groups do not necessarily speak English. They are not necessarily connected to the international community. They have varied perspectives, including conservative views.

Recommendations

These are the ideas that the majority agreed upon.

- If it is necessary to enact a truly representative government that values all human rights, Afghans must be prepared to fight and talk. Diplomacy may not be enough to make a regime change. If violence is necessary than Afghans must do it themselves and not allow foreign interference in the future. (There was disagreement in the group about the role of violence in enacting this better government)
- Diplomatically Afghans needs all nations to support them in calling for full human rights for all Afghans. Much international effort was spent on counterterrorism in the last 20 years and that funding should shift to human rights.
- Decentralization of governance is the best way to overcome issues of religion and ethnicity, and create a truly pluralistic government.
- NGOs, (like GFA) can be used to provide safe spaces for Afghans around the globe to meet and discuss the future, without fear of death from the terror regime.
- The Diaspora and NGOs can help with the creation of better political parties and keep a close focus on women's rights and human rights violations.
- Warlords and failed politicians should not stop the new educated generation from peacefully moving the country forward. The country has suffered for a century due to foreign interference in the nation. The cost has been too high.
- Embassies should be opened/remain open in the name of the Afghan people, not the current regime. Nations should support and recognize an Afghan government in exile that seeks a better future than the terror regime is building.
- The Afghan people must come together and create a global think tank where Afghans of every expertise can gather to put forward solutions for the future.

Working Group D

Supporting Afghans in Afghanistan: Humanitarian Crisis- Economic Collapse

Leaders: Crystal Bayat and Ron Smith

Questions

- What are the main causes and effects of economic collapse and humanitarian crisis?
- How to help Afghans in Afghanistan?
- Describe how nations, NGOs, and I-NGOs can best support those solutions?

Discussion

- The group discussed the economic and humanitarian situation for Afghans in Afghanistan, as well as Afghans who escaped to countries in the region.
- Almost all Afghans do not have enough to eat. According to the UN, Afghanistan has the highest number of people in emergency food insecurity in the world. 23 million Afghans are in need of food assistance, Of great concern are the 4 million internally displaced Afghans, and 3.5 million Afghan refugees in neighboring countries.
- The group also noted the elevated risk exposure for SIV applicants and families who remain inside Afghanistan. Their association with the USA negatively impacts their economic survival and ability to access humanitarian help. SIV families have also raised red flags about fears of retaliation targeting their daughters.
- Disbursing funds to Afghans in Afghanistan to address these challenges is proving extremely difficult. As most of Afghanistan's Central Bank assets are frozen through sanctions, commercial banks are reluctant to move funds to Afghanistan. This is stalling UN and I-NGO disbursements of aid and trade.
- Corruption in NGOs is also preventing funds from reaching the intended beneficiaries. It is widely believed among Afghans that Pakistan-based NGOs are misappropriating resources meant for Afghans in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Recommendations

- The Hawala system is a possible funding mechanism for some initiatives
- Create a community-based platform for delivering cash using Community Engagement Councils or other local mechanisms.
- Use local tech solutions. One US/Afghan company, called ASEEL, is able to deliver targeted humanitarian packages using a cell phone app. It has an 18% overhead using cell phones (compared to The World Bank or UN, whose overheads can be as high as 70%). The Taliban uses cell phones and the internet, so connectivity exists throughout most of the country to access the Afghans who are most in need without going through the Taliban or other corrupt local structures.
- Kick-start the Afghan banking system and trade. For humanitarian aid and trade to be relaunched at scale again, commercial banks need to lift their policies of zero-risk and over-compliance with sanctions. The US Government could also use more specific language in Federal Executive Orders on Afghan sanctions. More precise language could remove uncertainty for banks, businesses and humanitarian donors so they can deliver legitimate humanitarian aid and enable trade.

- Scrap the Doha Agreement. Replace it with a new strategy that develops a new professional class, including women, as equals. This will require working around the Taliban!
- Champion Afghan youth. Educate and train those who can govern for the next several decades.
- Encourage the US Government and other donors to fund these new economic, social and humanitarian solutions and mechanisms.

<p>Working Group E Afghan insecurity and terrorism threats</p>
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Leaders: Justine Fleischner, Afghan Peace Watch and Douglas Ramsdell, GFA Advisory Committee

Spokesperson: Geeta Bakshi

Questions:

- Does the threat of Terrorism still exist?
- Is the current Taliban regime legitimate, and can they become so?
- Does the Taliban regime pose a threat to the US homeland, US interests abroad, or Western territories and interests
- What is the Taliban interest in countering terrorism?

Discussion

- Taliban ties to regional and global terrorist organizations—AQ, Haqqani, and other groups in Pakistan. The Zawahiri strike in Kabul proves existence of deep connections, and this should be a major concern for the USG.
- The Taliban again allowing Afghanistan to be a global safe haven for terrorists. The groups today are much more sophisticated than those of the 1990s. More military capabilities and a more educated membership. There is a threat to Europe and to US interests abroad.
- The ties between the nations who wittingly or unwittingly have helped the Taliban and terrorism. China, Iran, Russia, Pakistan. The technological, arms, training, and other support to terrorist groups is concerning.
- The need to address what to do with top-tier terrorists wanted by the US and allies that are now leading the Taliban regime in Kabul.
- The Taliban did not defeat Afghan security forces, they won via a political deal to help them gain power. Yet the Taliban have not kept their word in the majority of the points in the Doha deal.
- Narco-trafficking is supporting the terrorists to a great extent
- What is the possible outcome of current diplomatic outreach. Do any changes that the Taliban say out loud have anything to do with internal changes in their ideology.

Recommendation

- The US and their allies must remain very concerned about the terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan and the Taliban “victory” over Afghans and their NATO partners.

Working Group F

Resettlement of Afghan refugees and immigrants

Leaders: John Agoglia, GFA Deputy Director for Partnerships, **Mariah Smith**, Vice Chairman, No One Left Behind

Questions

- What are the key issues impacting newly arrived Afghans in the USA?
- What are the key issues for communities and organizations welcoming Afghans to the USA?
- What lessons and recommendations can help resettlement efforts in the future?

Discussion

The Resettlement Working Group examined both issues impacting the newly arrived Afghan community and issues impacting the support structures (such as resettlement organizations and veterans' groups)

A. Issues impacting Afghans-

1. Working through the Asylum process and advocating for a clearer pathway for Afghans to citizenship.
2. The need for Behavioral/Mental health support Summary: The MH committee discussed ways and considerations to address the mental duress of Afghan refugees in the United States.
3. The intersection of Employment possibilities, Housing needs, Literacy, and English language capability.
4. Understanding the requirement to provide for multi-faceted/multi-year Cultural integration--it is not just a one-time class but a long-term ongoing process.

B. Issues impacting those that support the Afghan immigration process-

1. The ability of the Resettlement Agencies to creatively and rapidly adapt to the immigration population--an inability to know how to accept help from community-based organizations.
2. The need to help well-meaning organizations deliver meaningful help -connecting the network of resources to those in need - some areas are overwhelmed/saturated and other areas in the US have capacity.
3. No Afghan Adjustment Act - resulting in millions of dollars, both private and public, being spent to support the Asylum process instead of other key critical needs.

Recommendations

A1. Speed up asylum process and pathway to citizenship through -

- More immigration attorneys helping with the asylum process. Afghans who are here on parole/asylum can be limited in the types of meaningful employment.
- Some Afghans have family members who escaped to Iran but the US is limited in how we can help Afghans in Iran. Need UN and International organizational help to help Afghans in Iran get to somewhere else where the US/US organizations could then assist.

A2. Provide and Promote Mental Health / Behavioral Health Support through 3 Approaches -

1. Proactive Outreach by Support Givers:

- Defined as: Frictionless, proactive mental health, removes all barriers to mental health by having Support Givers call the people. Barriers are the absence of resources, 18 steps on average to access resources, stigmas, and most importantly our own fear of asking for support.

2. Afghan Peer-based Outreach:

- Defined: Peer-based emotional support are calls coming from non-clinical people who are specially selected for high emotional intelligence, voice and tones, trained in support and validation – a basic human need. Non-clinical keeps costs low and avoids legal red tape.

3. Tailored Terms, Communications

- Defined: “Mental Health” is not a term or concept with which all Afghans can conceptualize, understand, or allow. To ensure adoption and support to the Afghan refugees, we need a term without stigmas and that is relatable.

A3. Employment/Housing/Literacy needs

- Online English language classes can be difficult to access when Afghans don’t have the language ability or computer literacy skills to access the class. Need in-person classes to also discuss cultural adjustments. One model that works well is a circle of 10-15 people who are in the community network of support for a newly arrived refugee family, the network helps find housing, furnishings, employment.
- Leading role for Afghan community who is established in the US - helping the newly arrived Afghans with housing, employment and literacy needs.

A4. Cultural Integration is a multi-year process

- This is where Afghan-Americans settled in the community can help, as can other community partners, to develop programs and activities for integration in US society.

B1. Resettlement agencies need to adapt to meet specific needs of population and determine how to accept and integrate help from community organizations

- More bespoke responses are needed from resettlement agencies to specifically address things like applying for insurance (different last names, name duplication, etc). Many refugees are eligible for benefits they aren’t made aware of
- ORR needs to sync with Department of Health and Human Services

B2. Connect the network of those willing/able to help with those who need help

- The needs of the newly arrived extend beyond the 6 months of government help. This is where the community-based organizations can step in.

B3. Promote support for the Afghan Adjustment Act

- The Afghans who don’t know if they will have permanent residency here - it is very hard to start a life and get stability

<p>Working Group G</p> <p>New Paths for the Diplomatic community engaging the Taliban-Haqqani regime</p>
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Leaders: Ambassador Ashraf Haidari and Annie Pforzheimer, GFA Fellows

Questions

- What should be US and international diplomatic priorities for engaging with the Taliban?
- What new pathways can be explored?
- What are the risks and challenges involved in such engagement?
- What are the roles of nations, international organizations and NGOs?

Discussion

- Engagement is defined as talks with a purpose (rather than talks for their own sake.)
- There is a massive ideological gap with the Taliban.
- The Taliban are not truly legitimate or capable representatives of the Afghan people. The Taliban are not flexible.
- There is a lack of international consensus on goals for engagement.

Recommendations

- Maintain pressure on the Taliban via sanctions and talking to resistance forces (there was disagreement on anything beyond talking to the ARF.)
- Eliminate all references to the Doha agreement, and the agreement itself, as invalid since it has been abrogated.
- Press for strong implementation of the UNAMA mandate and help the new SRSG to succeed in UNAMA's priorities of providing good offices, and supporting human rights, women and children's rights and gender equality, and delivering humanitarian aid. This would be the best use of US power.
- Press for accountability for the human rights violations and other actions of the Taliban by those sponsoring the Taliban.
- Work with the tools of the religion and culture to promote more inclusive discussions about the future governance of Afghanistan (for example, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Ulema.)
- Consider a UN peace enforcement operation to create a zone for negotiation with the ARF and others.
- Widen international engagement to the whole Afghan society, not only Taliban or former warlords.

-End Report

Thanks to all of the sponsors and donors, panelists, moderators, and participants that helped make our conference successful. If we have forgotten to, or were unable to name you in this report, we have not forgotten your efforts.

In Partnership



Conference Sponsors



Annex Two: The Way Forward for GFA in 2023

Building on the lessons from the first year and the inaugural annual conference on Afghanistan GFA will focus on the following key areas

A) Help Afghans inside and outside Afghanistan discuss the future of their nation

Support burgeoning efforts to bring Afghan voices together on the topic of a sovereign, stable, and peaceful future Afghanistan that protects all human rights for all Afghans. By reframing the political debate, GFA's goal is to explore viable political alternatives to the non-inclusive, internally illegitimate, and externally unrecognized Taliban-Haqqani regime that violates human rights daily and has turned Afghanistan into a global terrorist safe-haven. GFA's network and experience would be used to operationalize intra-Afghan dialogues, whether at a grassroots level or broad global forums which feature in-person working groups that break down silos and preconceptions that keep Afghans from unifying as a nation and have allowed Afghans to be held hostage by a terrorist regime.

**See GFA project 001 below*

B) Amplify Afghan voices and educate key leaders about Afghan concerns

Keep Afghanistan and the plight of the Afghans fight for full human rights and safety for Afghans around the world on the minds of policymakers, the press, and the general public by writing, convening forums, public speaking, conducting interviews, and using social media.

- Expand the global conversation about issues in Afghanistan and help amplify Afghan voices by organizing forums and participating in Afghan-related conversations.
- Produce and promote Afghan-only and co-authored Afghan/non-Afghan articles, studies, commentary, and social media posts to educate and advocate ideas that can help Afghans secure full human rights and safety.
- Identify and support education institutes helping educate Afghans inside Afghanistan with a focus on those serving girls and women barred from education centers.
- Conduct art contests and other events for Afghan girls unable to attend school

C) Continue Supporting Immigration, Resettlement, and Integration of Afghan refugees

Continue to advocate for safe passage and resettlement of all qualified Afghans and the evacuation of all non-Afghans seeking to leave Afghanistan. Continue to partner with citizen-led, government, and humanitarian efforts like Welcome.US, Aseel, and the Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Afghanistan and identify other likeminded and focused organizations to partner with. Work in coalition with European, Canadian and Australian support networks

D) Build our fundraising team and start long-term fundraising

Build on the partnerships that GFA has created with various donors and sponsors to create a robust and proactive fundraising team that will allow the funding of GFA priority projects and develop a capability to fund fellows, scholars, and researchers, and eventually compensate GFA leadership in accordance with the GFA Board of Director's guidance.

GFA Project 001: Supporting Global Afghan Conversations and Organizing Efforts

GFA contends that essential elements to a legitimate and sustainable dialogue are:

- the contributions of organized peace and civil society groups still within Afghanistan, particularly the voices of younger Afghans who did not get a chance to hold influential leadership positions inside the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan governments dominated by the 1980's era generation;
- advice, but not dominance, from Afghan technocrat and professional experts with government experience;
- pursuit of a variety of views, rather than a push for a single convergent position, on the key questions including: national government power and centralization, selection of provincial and local government, ethnic/ancestral representation in government, the role of religion in daily life, and Afghanistan's relations with its neighbors and the global community. These various policy options would be the seeds for political debate in a rules-based system, potentially through political parties that are platform-based rather than ethnic enclaves or personality-driven.

GFA would operationalize gatherings staffed and led by Afghans in the diaspora and within Afghanistan. As appropriate, experts from Afghanistan or from host nations would also participate. In the best-case scenario, these would be small enough to operate even under Taliban-Haqqani control; if they cannot take place in person they would be hosted virtually. GFA would provide a suite of support services (convening template, transcript control, interpretation costs, and conference facilities.) Participants would be responsible for their own time (unpaid contribution) and transportation (self-funded or fundraised) to share the cost burden.

GFA would report the findings of these convenings on a regular and confidential basis to Afghan civil society leaders and diaspora leaders, and to policymakers, keeping all names and specific statements fully confidential. GFA would seek an Afghan institution(s) to become a permanent partner in creating working platforms for future political entities.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Lisa Curtis, Center for a New American Security: congratulated GFA for the conference. She remarked that amid the ongoing devastating humanitarian and human rights crisis, and the presence of terrorists, it is crucial that US reconsider its Afghan policy and be informed by Afghan voices. This conference allowed policy practitioners, humanitarian specialists, Afghans, and others to come together to exchange ideas for a better Afghanistan, reflect on the chaotic evacuation and discuss ideas to complete the evacuations to those remaining trapped; and review resettlement challenges; the humanitarian and human rights crisis, and new ways to engage the Taliban. It's clear the Taliban haven't changed their human rights abuses or terrorist accommodation, and international policies must reflect this. The Taliban must be prevented from travelling abroad; the US should downgrade its engagement and rely on Doha-based diplomats to meet with the Taliban; and they should firmly oppose the Taliban trying to gain UNGA credentials and keep frozen assets out of Taliban hands. The establishment of an international trust fund is a good option to get funds where they are needed. Let us keep meeting to get Afghans to overcome the current humanitarian crisis and secure its rights and freedoms.

Amb Verveer, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security: the issue of Afghanistan has to go back on the front burner; the Taliban has not changed, and women's rights are very much under threat. Restrictions are overwhelming – girls' aspirations extinguished, women pulled out of the workplace; mobility is restricted. It's about making the women of Afghanistan invisible. We must be smart about all the areas discussed today. The Taliban have not paid a price for this or their support of Al Qaeda and prevent the travel waiver from returning. We must do a better job about where support is going and avoid it being diverted; women have to pay a role in disbursing it. The UN needs to show strong leadership on the ground, and in the Human Rights Council – a monitoring and fact-finding mission is necessary. And the Afghan Adjustment Act is crucial – parallel to Cuban and Vietnamese.

Mariam Solaimankhil MP: Afghans have felt like we're screaming into the void for a year, and Georgetown opened its doors. We do not communicate well, but it's time for unity. When (not if) the Taliban collapse, are we going to be prepared? The warlords and technocrats had their time, if we get another chance it will be the time for Afghan women. And it's not enough to worry about sending girls to school, we have to make sure they are really being taught. Once we have our identity and freedom back, then we can disagree, productively, through political parties.

Amb Haidari: Expressed his gratitude to Georgetown for its support. The internal issues are real but most serious security challenges are external. The United States must go back to the bipartisan support of the past, promoting democracy and the strategic partnership as set out in the Bilateral Security Agreement. We need a regional approach, the US and our neighbors can agree on Afghanistan if nothing else. All countries should support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We need the UN Secretary General to be a much stronger voice for the Afghan people, to be an activist and advocate. We need a fact-finding mission and to act.

Mission: Global Friends of Afghanistan is a US-based 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, that educates people about the history, culture, and current events affecting Afghanistan.

- Founded in 2021, Global Friends of Afghanistan works to help Afghans by engaging with Afghans, policymakers and the media.
- We are creating long-term solutions to help Afghans to stay engaged with the global community.
- We are educating North America and Europe on Afghanistan.
- Our team is dedicated to educating the world about Afghanistan while sharing and amplifying Afghan voices.
- We share values with Afghans now targeted by the Taliban-Haqqani regime and other terrorists. We want to safeguard them and to help the world learn about the challenges they face.

Our Vision: A democratic and prosperous Afghanistan at peace with itself and the world.

Our Values: Defending the Universal Declaration of Human Rights- United Nations (1948), Democracy, Respect for Afghan Sovereignty, Stability, Diversity, Inclusion, Dignity, Transparency

Inaugural Conference Report and Way Ahead for 2023

11 November 2022

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