
A Call for Political Re-Engagement in Afghanistan

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More than one year after the Taliban's nearly unimpeded takeover of Afghanistan, religious freedom and associated rights in the country are spiraling towards an all-time low. The modest gains in these freedoms made over the past two decades risk complete erasure. The withdrawal of NATO forces and subsequent rapid fall of the previous government in 2021 sparked an emergency evacuation of the international community and of Afghans who supported their work. With energies focused on the closure of diplomatic offices and the withdrawal, there has been limited contact with actors remaining in Afghanistan.

This series invites scholars, diplomats, and regional and policy experts to share their insights into the country and provide recommendations to ensure protections for religious and ethnic minorities and other vulnerable communities, including women and children, across the country.

I am often asked two questions: *how can we influence the Taliban?* And *how can humanitarian aid go to Afghanistan without empowering the Taliban?*

One year ago, the Taliban were struggling for survival. Now, they have established themselves. The Taliban want the international community — and the humanitarian aid that flows through them — to not only feed the Afghan people but also to empower their soldiers, but they don't feel obliged to contribute to the economy of the people. They claim they have increased domestic revenue — a claim that is restated in the World Bank report. However, the Taliban want the rest of the world to feed the people of Afghanistan, and they pay for their soldiers from the domestic revenue.

There is clear evidence that the Taliban have increased their security measures. In fact, they have started building new border force security measures, for instance in the border areas between Afghanistan and central Asian countries, and recruiting new forces. Why are they making these investments? The answer is that they are preparing for battle. But against who? And, we must ask, how will this impact global security?

These are serious questions. But the train seems to have left Washington, and Afghanistan is no longer regarded as a strategic foreign policy priority. Their only concern seems to be the humanitarian and human rights crises. Humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, however, is like pouring drops of water into the ocean; it is not going to secure or stabilize the country.

We know there are others taking interest in Afghanistan for economic reasons, and different regional powers are attempting to negotiate contracts on matters that are far from transparent. We also know that new geopolitical alliances are forming. The Taliban is looking to Russia and China, and, over time, it is likely they will concern themselves less and less with the U.S. and the West.

It is time to look beyond the immediate humanitarian crises. People's immediate needs must be addressed, obviously. But the more energy is focused solely on humanitarian aid without tackling political and human rights crises, the more likely it is that the humanitarian crises will expand. It is crucial to consider an overall political strategy. This is the only way to constrain further economic and security deterioration of Afghanistan and to protect global security interests.

Afghanistan, in the eyes of American politicians, is a failed democracy project. But there is no alternative to democracy for the people of Afghanistan. How will the U.S. and international community — those who initiated the project — continue to empower the people of Afghanistan in their desire for a government that is accountable to its people? The crisis could have been avoided. And even now, there is an opportunity to mitigate further deterioration, insecurity, and suffering. This can happen through a political settlement.

In retrospect, the Doha Agreement actually empowered the Taliban by rebranding them as “Taliban 2.0” and legitimizing their leadership. But the conditions on which this agreement was built have not been upheld by the Taliban. The agreement now is of no benefit or value to Afghanistan. The Taliban refer to the Agreement when their interests are at stake. But they have violated the Agreement several times, including the clause about their meaningful disassociation with other military extremists groups like Al-Qaeda. The killing of Ayman-Al-Zawhari only a few meters away from the palace is an indication of that.

On a personal level, I look at Afghanistan and feel humiliated. I am heartbroken over the suffering of my people. It is vital to note that our advocacy for a political settlement is not a sign of weakness, so please don't regard it as such. The Taliban were out of Afghanistan for 25 years, and they were never considered diaspora. So we, the elected representatives of the Afghan people who have been out of the country for only months, are not a diaspora that is detached from our community. I will never stop advocating for the people of Afghanistan or for an Afghanistan that is home to all its citizens and a reliable partner to the world

The U.S. and other governments need to develop a strategic policy approach to support our narrative for establishing constitutional and democratic order. A political settlement is not only in the best interest of Afghanistan and the region, but also for U.S. and broader global security interests as well. This will require U.S. lawmakers and the international community to shift their attention beyond the humanitarian and human rights crises, and to leverage their capacities to reinvigorate political dialogue among Afghans. This is the only way to secure long-term security of

Afghanistan—for its people and for the world.

***Fawzia Koofi** served as an Afghan parliamentary lawmaker and outspoken advocate for the rights of women, children, and democracy. Koofi was the first female to serve as the Second Deputy Speaker in the Afghan parliament and she headed the Women’s Affairs Commission. She was also one of the few women involved in the Doha negotiations with the Taliban.*

An accomplished [author](#) and advocate, Koofi humanizes the often faceless international discussion of the struggles and abuse of Afghan women, and is at the forefront of educating the international community as to the consequences of the international community’s withdrawal of security forces.



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