

## Op Ed on Afghanistan from the Syracuse Peace Council Steering Committee

The Syracuse Peace Council opposed the US invasion of Afghanistan in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. We have continued to oppose militarism and war as the solution to terrorism and oppression. As Rep. Barbara Lee wrote, “Let’s be clear: There has never been, and will never be, a US military solution to Afghanistan.” We have long called for the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, as President Biden has recently done.

Our hearts go out to the Afghan people – for what they have been through for 20 years, and what they are going through now. The frightening consequences of the US withdrawal are leading many to believe the US military should have remained in Afghanistan. We disagree.

What is happening now in Afghanistan is the result of the failure of US foreign policy that precedes President Biden. The US spent over \$2 trillion on the war on Afghanistan (which also includes Pakistan) from 2001 to 2021. Less than 2% went to Afghanistan’s infrastructure or to alleviate poverty. The rest was spent on the military (so a lot ended up with US military contractors). It’s estimated that over 71,000 Afghan and Pakistani civilians died.

Afghanistan’s US-backed and imposed regime was doomed to collapse without US support – it was corrupt and unpopular. Middle East expert Stephen Zunes notes that the US “allied with warlords, opium magnates, ethnic militias and other unrepresentative leaders simply due to their opposition to the Taliban and with little input from ordinary Afghans themselves.”

Withdrawing US troops was the right thing to do in spite of the fact that it will not end the war for the people of Afghanistan. The words of women’s rights activist and former Afghan parliamentarian Malalai Joya clarified why it is the best move for the US to take: “Women and civil society in Afghanistan have three enemies—the Taliban, the warlords disguised as a government, and the US military occupation.” Removing the US means they have one less enemy to contend with.

Further actions by the US can make a difference. Having taken the essential first step of the withdrawal of US troops, the US should:

- Make the end of the recent bombing/drone raids and CIA death squad activities permanent.
- Support UN and other international efforts to create a humanitarian corridor and guarantees of safe passage for Afghan and international humanitarian workers.
- Fund a massive international Covid assistance program for Afghanistan.

- Expand qualification categories for Afghan refugees and asylum seekers to come to the United States, reduce paperwork required to qualify, and add 20,000 new slots to match Canada's commitment to accept 20,000 additional vulnerable Afghans for resettlement.
- Given the legacy of US actions in Afghanistan, begin the process of officially acknowledging US responsibility for the war's impact on Afghan people.
- Use this opportunity to refocus US foreign policy away from military force and unilateralism to diplomacy and international solidarity.

The Syracuse Peace Council Steering Committee, on behalf of the Syracuse Peace Council  
Aly Wane, Carol Baum, Caroline Kim Tihanyi, Diane Swords, Julio Urrutia, Lleni Pach, Mariana  
Pernia Kaufman, Michaela Czerkies