



Afghanistan: A Time to Mend

An action of the 225th General Assembly (2022)



Approved by the 225th General Assembly (2022)
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Developed by
The Advisory Committee on Social Witness Policy (ACSWP)
of the General Assembly Mission Council/Presbyterian Mission Agency
www.pcusa.org/acswp or www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/acswp
See also www.justiceUnbound.org for current discussion



Recommendations:

The 225th General Assembly (2022) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) approves the following recommendations:

1. Instruct the PC(USA) Office of Public Witness and Mission to the U.N. to advocate with the U.S. government and non-Afghan governments to:
 - a. End all foreign military activity in Afghanistan, including all foreign military-like intelligence operations, especially with “over-the-horizon” air or drone strikes.
 - b. Cease supplying military equipment or ammunition to any party operating in Afghanistan.
 - c. Unfreeze assets of the Afghan government that are held at the Federal Reserve or elsewhere under U.S. control and allow them to be used for the purchase and delivery of food, medicine, fuel and other non-military goods.
 - d. Allow the IMF, World Bank and Asian Development Bank to open further opportunities for financial and technical assistance support for economic recovery in Afghanistan.
 - e. Ease the way for refugees from Afghanistan to enter the United States and other NATO countries to get education, to find gainful employment and, if they desire, to follow a path to citizenship.
2. Urge our national and local governments and PC(USA) congregations and members to:
 - a. Provide social and economic support to Afghans arriving here.
 - b. Recognize the toll of armed conflict upon military veterans and to continue to work toward a day where there will no longer be the need for any member of the U.S. Armed Forces to engage in armed conflict.
 - c. Partner with veteran organizations, the Presbyterian Mental Health Network and other organizations working to bring to light to the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder on the lives of those who have served in the armed forces and to take part in the work of Christ to heal these wounds in their lives in whatever form they may take.
 - d. Reflect prayerfully on how the example of Christ’s unconditional love can guide our attitudes and actions.
3. Urge the 225th General Assembly (2022) to:
 - a. Formally thank all those who answered the call to serve in the U.S. armed forces and recognize that many of them have done so to live out the calling in response to passages such as “we know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another” (1 John 3:16).
 - b. Observe a moment of silence in remembrance of all the lives that have been lost due to humanity’s inclination toward violence.

Rationale

As followers of the Prince of Peace, we are appalled by the waste and death associated with the U.S. misadventure in Afghanistan. Now is a time for self-examination, confession and repentance. Americans must honestly face the world as it is, rather than as we wish it to be, and admit the limitations of our knowledge and the deceptions and failures that attended America’s longest war. The manner of our departure from Afghanistan was a national humiliation. Now we need to have the humility to learn from



the mistakes made by four administrations of both political parties. As a church we have not been critical enough or have failed to offer our criticism in ways that people could hear the wisdom of it. Too many of us have been content to let others fight and die in America's forgotten war.

What should the United States do about Afghanistan after the end of our longest war? What should the U.S. government and PC(USA) do going forward? How should we relate to the new government in Afghanistan? What should we do regarding the people still in Afghanistan who worked with us and NATO allies and are endangered now because of that? How should the lessons from the Afghanistan experience inform our foreign policy elsewhere?

The U.S. government and policy community should in humility step back from plotting how best to promote development in Afghanistan. Although the analysis by supposed experts has seemed appealing at times, for two decades the collective output of the U.S. policy-military industrial complex has demonstrated that it did not know how to make Afghanistan sustainably a better place for the people living there. The United States invaded in 2001 with a muddled conglomeration of objectives — capture Bin Laden, expel al-Qaida, topple the Taliban, give education opportunities to all females, create a Western style democracy, etc. — and no definition of how much of this agenda we had to accomplish to justify an exit of our military. Nor was there adequate planning for the logistics of that exit.

By 2020–21 or sooner, most people in the U.S. and Afghanistan concluded that the unpopularity and corrupt incompetence of the Afghan government (propped up by the U.S.), the slow drip of American casualties, the steady stream of Afghani casualties and the cost of over \$2 trillion (plus the future cost of care to disabled veterans) showed that the U.S. military presence should end. Since the 2000s, U.S. presidents had been promising but failing to do this. In August 2021, President Biden finally ended the U.S. military presence there. The chaos of the exit, predictable in light of the decades of failure to prepare for it, has engendered passionate but often unenlightening second guesses about how it might have been done better.

The end of a military and militarized CIA presence in Afghanistan should not spell the end of U.S. engagement with the country, although that will certainly become more limited. One of the lessons from Vietnam, where Vice President Harris met this summer with the Communist government to negotiate improved trade and cultural relations, is that we should not have walked away totally after the humiliating end to our military venture there. The new Afghan government needs help rebuilding its institutions and economy. Understandably the new government will not trust or rely on U.S. help, and it is already making links with China and Russia. The U.S. should not block Afghanistan's efforts there or with European and South Asian countries. The U.S. is too large and important in the world, however, to do nothing.

The United States should use the financial resources it controls (several billion dollars of Afghan money locked up at the federal level and in disbursements we put on hold at the World Bank and IMF) to support but not dictate positive developments. This should start immediately with some humanitarian aid



flowing through NGOs and U.N. agencies on an unconditional basis. The U.S. budget had allocated several billion dollars for the Afghan military, which dissipated in the face of the Taliban. Now those funds should be made available for humanitarian relief. Over half of the population now faces acute hunger or worse, and other resources are needed to get more refugees out and to keep some good things going, like girls' schooling.

Because history shows that we really do not know what is best for Afghanistan, whatever we do there should be nonviolent. The exit of the U.S. military should not morph into militarized CIA presence supporting insurgency against the Taliban or successor governments. At least some of the large militarized CIA presence was shut down as part of the military withdrawal, and it should not be reintroduced, although information gathering operations by the CIA will continue to be necessary. Similarly, U.S. drone strikes in Afghanistan should end, except if they are against confirmed activities threatening the U.S. mainland or ships in international waters. The drone attack at the end of August, which killed many innocent people and was based on poor information, demonstrates the need for ending our violent interventions in Afghanistan. The Taliban-dominated government faces armed resistance from a more extreme jihadist group (ISIS-K); factions of warlords and others (some of whom once allied with the U.S.) are likely to arise against the government. The U.S. should avoid supporting these disruptions of government efforts to rebuild the economy and society, even if we do not approve of how they are doing it. Any U.S. attempts to micromanage affairs in Afghanistan will backfire and increase the credibility of groups opposing us.

On the question of refugees, U.S. policy should continue encouraging the Afghan government to allow the exodus of those wanting to leave. Thousands have already been allowed to leave. The U.S. should lift the caps on the number of refugees we will accept. The U.S. has a moral duty to help evacuate and admit to the U.S. the Afghans who are in danger because they worked with us and NATO allies. Our military and nonmilitary agencies should immediately let our immigration authorities access the names of all those who assisted them. The Taliban government has required those seeking to leave to have the necessary travel documents, including those from the U.S., and we should make such documents readily available. The U.S. authorities will check to avoid admitting those seeking to harm the United States. Our national and local governments and PC(USA) congregations and members should provide social and economic support to Afghans arriving here.

Leading up to and following the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, many people became more aware of the impact of this prolonged conflict upon those who have answered the call to serve as part of the U.S. armed forces. So many of our veterans and their families have paid serious sacrifices to serve our country — injuries to the mind, body and spirit — death, physical injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental health and social problems. For many who served or lost loved ones, the withdrawal from Afghanistan opened up deep wounds and called into question the value of their sacrifices. All of this will have enduring impacts on lives around the world, in our communities, and among those who fill the pews of our denomination. We must use this opportunity to find better ways to offer support and healing as well as to confront our nation's inclination to engage in violence around the world.



This should be an occasion for the United States to engage in a broad reevaluation of our national purpose in the world. Who appointed us as the world's police? Why were we so susceptible to the illusion that with war we could remake another country in a positive way? Why did we so uncritically receive false reports of progress? Why was it so difficult for our leaders to tell us the unvarnished truth? Despite this strategic disaster, the United States is still a powerful nation with worthy traditions — commitments to democracy and human rights, for example — even if we have imperfectly followed them. We have a responsibility to work with other nations to build a better world where all God's creatures can flourish. This is an opportunity to adopt a better, humbler and life-giving path. If we fail to do this work, it will empower extreme voices who will blame their political enemies and seek another military adventure to recover national honor.





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