

Submissions

THE SENATE

SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Australia's engagement in Afghanistan

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1. Australia's twenty-year military, diplomatic and development engagement in Afghanistan, with reference to:

I. our success in achieving the Australian Governments' stated objectives,

Australia's twenty years military, diplomatic and development engagement in Afghanistan has been the longest war fought by Australia. This in itself is a monumental achievement as it reflects the Australian values of fair go which embraces mutual respect, tolerance, compassion for those in need and equality of opportunity for all.

Their primary success can be drawn from their relentless effort and long-term commitment to disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations to defeat Al Qaeda in Afghanistan.

Over the past twenty years, Australia's contribution to Afghanistan has been positive nonetheless, as it promoted the advancement of a democratic government, human rights, women's rights, rule of law, health, education, agriculture, and different sectors including improving stabilisation and community development for all. Australia's involvement was not merely joining the United States - led coalition, rather their key focus was on women and children be it in the form of supporting various NGOs, activists, education. Australia's successful development in Uruzgan province was a primary example of this.

Australia's strong military presence in Afghanistan meant that they supported Afghan military forces by training and equipping them. Further, they played a pivotal role in bringing Afghan soldiers to Australia, to train and educate them - this was empowering on a military level. Overall, Australia's engagement was

working towards the long neglected human rights in Afghanistan. For this, the Australian Afghan Diaspora is forever indebted.

Despite the above achievements, Afghanistan's government collapsed, paving the way for the Taliban to regain power after twenty years of war. The 'war on terror' notion is pernicious. On one hand, Al Qaeda was eliminated. On the other hand, the Taliban was not restrained to regain power. We remain unsure, as to the clear disconnection of Taliban and Al Qaeda.

Albeit, the Taliban have come into agreement with the US, which stipulates they will not allow terrorism onshore. The contentious issue remains as whether the Taliban can be taken for their word?

The term Taliban 2.0 has been glorified by the Pakistani and some western media, when in fact the in-country information and countless accounts of brutality stipulates that the Taliban are the same as they were 20 years ago. Perhaps one can argue, the Taliban have learnt PR skills and are now manipulating through their leaders as to what they want the world via the media 'to see.'

It is important to mention that the presence of ISIS and other terrorist groups in Afghanistan is also a danger for the region and the world at large.

Unfortunately, the fate of the people of Afghanistan and the uncertainty surrounding the ongoing brutality is synonymous with Taliban being in power - this negates the very much accoladed achievements of Australia's engagement in Afghanistan.

II. the collapse of the Afghan Government and Afghan National Army, and the Taliban's resurgence and takeover of Kabul, following the withdrawal of coalition troops from Afghanistan,

By way of background, Afghans worldwide believe that the sacrifices and efforts made by the Afghan nationals are in vain and they find themselves 'back to square one.'

In hindsight, the collapse of the Afghan Government, ANA, the Taliban's resurgence, and takeover of Kabul following the withdrawal of coalition troops from Afghanistan is multifaceted. There are various complex issues that may have played a pivotal role as discussed below.

A-External Factors (International community):

Pakistan's Involvement in Terrorism

The international community has been silent towards Pakistan's involvement in the collapse of Afghanistan. Pakistan is known for its role in creating and harbouring extremism be it in the form of: Taliban, Mujahideen or Al Qaeda.

The US military first encircled Osama Bin Laden in Tora Bora but he was not captured at the time. Later, he was found in Abbottabad, Pakistan, not Afghanistan. It must be noted that Abbottabad is located and well close to Pakistan's Military Headquarters. Till date, the international community did not question nor condemn the gravity and relevance of such location.

Pakistan as a neighbouring country, has played no positive role in destabilising terrorism. Rather they have been the direct producer of terrorism and stabilised terrorist groups such as: Haqqani group, Lashkar e Taiba, Tahrik e Taliban Pakistan (TTP) etc. Simply put, their effort in 'peacebuilding' can be seen as a

mere opportunity to empower themselves with military and non-military aid. To this end, Pakistan distributes a great amount of their budget towards religious schools called 'Madrassa' to train extremists. Perhaps, the lack of political pressure, or condemnation by the international community has given them a reason to continue with harbouring terrorism.

Pakistan celebrated the so-called 'conquering' of Afghanistan by the Taliban. In fact, some of the top management, high positioned Taliban's have all graduated from Pakistan. It remains a question as to why the international community is hesitant to call out Pakistan and hold them accountable. Afghans worldwide, yet again felt defeated when no action was taken, instead they started a social media hashtag #sanctionpakistan to garner attention. Whilst this was well received by millions of Afghans, the international community did not act up on this.

Taliban's lack of involvement in the Bonn Conference 2001

The fundamental notion behind the Taliban at the DOHA peace talks, was to initiate a dialogue with the Taliban. Whilst this was a good attempt, it was viewed as 'too late.' Early prevention may have been productive i.e., the inclusion of Taliban's at the Bonn Conference 2001. The US have themselves recognised this flaw in their attempt. This led to further derailment whereby the Northern Alliance took a big share of the ministries in the Interim Administration and appointed their warlords and commanders to many provincial and district governorships and key positions in the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National police (ANP). The problem lies in the appointment of unqualified, uneducated Cabinet Ministers. The imbalance of power sharing from the inception of Interim Administration evolved the bad governance and corruption which later could not 'be fixed.'

Further, the US handed over power to infamous warlords such as Abdul Rashid Dostum (Jawzjan), Mohammad Qasim Fahim (Panjshir), Atta Mohammad Noor (Balkh), Abdul Rasul Sayyaf (Paghman) **Muhammad Mohaqiq and Abdul Ali Mazari of Hazara ethnicity (Central and North Afghanistan)**, Gul Agha Sherzai (Kandahar), and Haji Abdul Qadir (Nangahar). This handover was to the very same warlords known for their brutality, weapons, and unlawful killings.

Perhaps, it is contended that the absence of the key Taliban leaders during the 'earlier talks' was not an effective alternative dispute mechanism. Nevertheless, the prospects of such are dim considering the Taliban have not changed at all.

Doha Conference – the denial of the Afghan Government's inclusion

During the Doha peace talks, the US ignored and sidelined the Afghan Government – which was practically formed by the US itself along with the NATO alliance.

As a result, they were not given formal recognition in the peace talks which goes to show how the Afghan Government was undermined –this could also be a major contributing factor to the collapse of the Government when no recognition of them was displayed during Doha peace talks.

There was no involvement from the Afghan

Recent US Senate Inquiry about the failure of top military and CIA officials

It was found that President Biden and his security advisors were condemned – for their withdrawal without consultations.

At the same time, former British Foreign Affairs Minister (Dominic Raab) was removed from his position when found to be criticizing the US policy. Even the EU nations, who were also involved in Afghanistan – criticized Biden's policy.

B- Internal Factors (Afghanistan Government and Community)

The internal factors and the dynamics of the Afghanistan Government and Community only made this collapse more prevalent, as listed below:

- The corruption in the government.
- Even the former Mujahidin confessed regarding the US's support to Pakistan Military ISI. The upper hand was given to them when forming the Afghan Government after the US's invasion in toppling the first Taliban Government back in 2001.
- Not a unified government.
- Warlords in power. This was a problem from the onset, as they had no understanding of governance or rule of law. The concept of weapons over pens was openly used to put political pressure.

Warlords are mainly criminals and lawbreakers having a fundamental goal of maintaining and increasing their power and benefits by violence, creating conflicts, and destabilising the government, communities, and regions (Fukuyama 2017). Further, the warlords are military people or leaders of communities, nations, regions, or tribes which are not accountable to nobody including law, government, human rights, community, and country's values (Mackinlay 2000). For example, Abdul Rashid Dostum, he has been involved in brutality of all types: unlawful killing, mass rape and mental abuse of many people including women. He engaged in the killing of more than 10,000 people within a few days in the Balkh province (Williams 2008). In 2017, Ahmad Eshchi, the previous governor of the Jowzjan province, was a primary victim of Abdul Rashid

Dostum. Eshchi is about 50 years old now who was sexually assaulted, brutally punished, all of which was recorded on mobile phones and distributed (Jalalzai 2017). Another immense example is the war among the warlords such as Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, Ahmad Shah Masoud, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Salahuddin Rabbani, Qasem Fahim, Abdul Rasool Sayyaf, Mohammad Mohaqiq (Hazara), Abdul Ali Mazari (Hazara), Karim Khalili (Hazara) in 1990-1993 in Afghanistan which they destroyed the country particularly Kabul, killed over 100,000 innocent people of Kabul and over half of million people were displaced. Furthermore, in this war the Hazara warlords above-mentioned cut the breasts of women, punched nails in the head of people and watch live delivery of pregnant women in Kabul (Blood -Stained Hands. The battle for Kabul 1993). Most of these warlords are alive and had the highest power in the past 20 years government. Historically, the warlords have always challenged peacebuilding from inside of the government and from the community level to keep their power in a sustainable manner and support themselves financially and politically. (Fukuyama 2017)

- The establishment of peace process was a great initiative but the appointments of the bodies on the board and the appointment of the chairperson Burhanuddin Rabbani, then Salahuddin Rabbani for the process was speculated correctly as the chairperson was the one who fought against the Taliban for 6 years prior to USA arrival. We think the chairperson for the peace process should have been an independent person who had no previous links to anyone involved in the war.
- There were three types of powers involved in Afghanistan which became contributing factors to the fall of the Afghan government:

1. **Local powers** such as warlords and other small political parties. They were all strengthening the fight, strengthening the uprising against the government, and continuously attempting to weaken the Afghan government for their own party benefits.

2: **Regional powers** such as India, Pakistan, and Iran. India and Pakistan have been well known rivals for decades within the region. Pakistan felt 'threatened' by India. This was because India became a strong ally with the Afghan government. Pakistan did not want India's influence in Afghanistan. This could be a contributing factor as to Pakistan's work with the Taliban against the Afghan government.

3: **International powers** such as Russia, USA, and China.

- The International community and Afghan government did not work as expected on a fundamental sustainable income-based projects or structure of development of the infrastructure of the country, to build a sustainable system. As a result, the Afghan Government depended and heavily relied on outside resources.

Example 1: instead of producing electricity in the country through building a water dam/s, it was being imported from Central Asia.

Example 2: the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) salaries were paid by the US and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries.

Example 3: the operational budget was mostly funded by the Official Development Assistance (ODA) of donor countries.

The above was well and fine when the international allies were present but not sustainable. Therefore, the absence of no resources meant Afghanistan was predisposed to collapse.

- The gap between remote communities and the central government i.e., due to corruption, imbalance power sharing, lack of security, lack of services, and high numbers of civilian casualties in the war.
- The strategic partnership agreement between Afghanistan and the US was not implemented adequately as anticipated.

III. the costs of Australia's engagement in Afghanistan.

Australia's engagement in this 'unwinnable war' remains a testament to their effort and sacrifice for the peace and stability of Afghanistan.

Undeniably, top of the list is the cost of Australian lives. The forty-one deaths on operations in Afghanistan are not the full tally. Hundreds more have died, mostly as at their own hand, suffering from Post-Traumatic-Stress Disorder (PTSD).

On the financial cost, Australia spent close to \$10 billion over the course of the war. That averages out to be about \$500 million per year.

Military disrepute and the unrest of the Afghan community upon the release of the Brereton report. The issue of war crimes was raised, while the majority proportion of Australians' who deployed to Afghanistan acted honourably, the Brereton Report points to a problem that requires a rigorous and systematic response.

Australia's presence in Afghanistan has not stemmed the tide, but for the twenty years, they made a tangible difference i.e., contributions towards: roads, infrastructure, role modelling, and instilling hope. For this Afghan Australians will always remain thankful.

2. the adequacy of Australia's preparation for withdrawal from Afghanistan, including:

I. closure of the embassy,

The closure of the Australian Embassy “being the very first diplomatic mission” had a negative impact on Afghanistan's crisis in terms of weakening the state of Afghanistan in the diplomatic arena giving the impression to fellow diplomatically involved missions and organisations that the security situation in Afghanistan is extremely dire and somehow made them to contemplate on either evacuating or closing their missions in the country.

On the other hand, we assume that the announcement of the closure of the Australian Embassy in May 2021 was critical in terms of conveying a message or warning that Afghanistan will be abandoned and was a vital factor to embolden Taliban and their supporters i, e. Pakistan and Iran to intensify their efforts to overrun the country as rapidly as possible.

In the end, though, the early withdrawal for Australia was a positive decision as we saved further loss of life. The negative impact however was on the Afghan nationals, making them feel ‘abandoned.’

II. the evacuation of Australian citizens, permanent residents, and visa holders, and

Australia once again came to the rescue of Australian citizens, permanent residents and visa holders and executed the evacuation in a remarkable way with

no casualties. Given the time restrictions and limitations, they executed the evacuation based on the astute advice safely.

Together, we commend those wearing uniforms and civilians from the public service for their significant contribution. Particularly those on the ground for their bravery, sacrifice, dedication, professionalism and for demonstrating Australia's heart, humanity, and compassion.

Although, our expectations were, there would be a larger scale of evacuation ie.7,000 plus. This expectation stems from the fact that Australian forces had been privy to information since the closure of the Embassy which meant contingency planning should have occurred to have them execute a better and effective evacuation plan.

Lastly, the fate of the Australian visa holders who are stuck in Afghanistan is unknown. The Government should announce their next set of plans to give family and loved ones a peace of mind.

Further negotiations should take place with Tajikistan and Iran to provide gate passes to the 449 visa holders.

III. decisions relating to evacuation of at-risk Afghan nationals and partners and family members of Australian citizens and permanent residents.

The current turmoil is **equally** terrorising and traumatising **for all Afghans** across Afghanistan. Therefore, all future evacuations or the Australian humanitarian intake must occur with utmost due process and on merits. All Afghans at risk must be given equal opportunity to present their case to the Department of Home Affairs irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, or language.

IV. Taliban recognition should be based on their actions towards human rights and women's rights.

As at date of this submission, there appears to be a disconnect between the Taliban's promises and what is in fact happening on ground. There is enough in-country information available which negates the Taliban's credibility. For example, a massive killing spree is taking place in Kandahar, Helmand, Nangarhar and Panjshir provinces as well as other parts of the country where hundreds of people are being taken out of their homes and executed such as former defence force members or civil servants as well as ordinary people without sufficient evidence of any wrong doings. Based on the credible news, women are being forced to marry Taliban soldiers and young boys are being forcefully conscripted into their army.

Nevertheless, Australia should utilise all diplomatic channels to persuade the Taliban to stick to their promises of inclusive government, amnesty and respect for human rights and convince them not to impose harsh practices of the 1990s.

3. how the Australian Government should respond to recent developments in Afghanistan in order to:

I. protect Australia's national security,

Australia's national security is for all of us.

The Australian Government should work closely with key stakeholders from the Afghan Diaspora including the authors of these submissions.

In order to protect Australia's national security, ASIO, ADF, Australian Federal Police and Local Police should be on **high alert for Pro-Taliban Behaviour**.

Perhaps the NSW Police Force - Hate Crime Squad can collaborate closely with key stakeholders to address ethnic divisions. It is to be emphasised that the onset of the ethnic divisions in Australia stemmed from the Department of Home Affairs statement issued on 18 August 2021.

There were reportedly incidents of hate crime in Adelaide and Perth.

The Government should ensure that each visa applicant is stringently screened, and the identifications are being verified. As there may be people from ethnic groups who might be intricately linked to Fatemiyoun brigade. Further, fraudulent ID i.e., a citizen of another country posing to be an Afghan citizen. Otherwise, there will be floodgates of dangerous elements entering our social fabric here in Australia. The question remains: how is the Government going to address this? Again, each case needs to be looked at on its merits and stringent security checks to occur.

In the best interests of national security, below are factors that need to be on alert:

- Links to Fatemiyoun brigade
- Links to Pakistan ISI intelligence services
- Links to so-called 'National Resistance Movement' (former Mujahidin/warlords)
- Links to Warlords
- Links to Taliban. Early intervention strategy to prevent extremism is essential.
- Links to Al Qaeda
- Links to ISIS
- Social Media (power of spread of Taliban and insurgency)

It is also essential to point out that the resettlement programs are effective. The newly arrived come with direct trauma and will need to be educated regarding domestic violence.

The issue with the Advisory Panel was and is the lack of equal representation. The Panel represents only a specific ethnicity. We need to ensure that all language and cultural barriers are met so the newly arrived Afghans feel welcomed, safe, and comfortable. This will only enhance Australia's efforts for their 'state-of art' resettlement programs for which they are known.

II. prevent or mitigate damage to Australia's international reputation, if necessary,

Australia demonstrated humanity and compassion during the Syrian crisis. This too whilst Australia was in no way militarily involved in Syria. The Australian Government ought to offer the same generosity to the Afghan nationals. Given the Australian military engaged in Afghanistan for the last 20 years, it is expected that they would do more than the allocation of merely 3,000 visas for at-risk Afghans. We ask for an undertaking to allocate 20,000 visas to Afghan nationals. This would be an attempt to at least match with other allied commonwealth countries such as Canada or the United Kingdom.

Australia should increase humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and directly channel funds to Afghan NGOs or NFP organisations to outreach ordinary or at most risk Afghans. The potential issue is they need to work with in-country information to identify credible and reputable organisations such as UN organisations, Save the Children and OXFAM.

III. extend immediate mental health support to Australian defence force personnel and veterans while the Royal

**Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide remains ongoing,
and**

**V. protect Australian citizens, visa holders, and Afghan
nationals who supported Australian forces, where they
remain in Afghanistan; and**

Over the past twenty years the ADF personnel and veterans have sacrificed more than the eye meets namely, mental health. Amongst them are also Afghan ADF interpreters and other Afghan Australians who worked with the Australia mission in Afghanistan. They all need our primary focus in extending mental health support.

Resettlement programs should entail mental health support programs. Those programs should be delivered by individuals who are equipped with language and cultural barriers. More Funding and resources should be directed at Afghan run community associations in order to build their capacity in the area of mental health. Currently the Afghan community in Australia are under immense pressure by providing mental health support to their loved ones overseas. They themselves are suffering from trauma and PTSD triggered by the current crisis.

This is important for the Australian Government, and it is equally important for them to work with Afghan Australians. We hereby extend our support and will propose a group of individuals who are experts that can work side by side with the Government. For example, the creation of organisations and support programs which will deal specifically with such cohesion.

A further proposal would be to openly invite and encourage LEE, Diplomats, Australian soldiers and ADF Interpreters to share their Afghanistan experiences to add value onshore in Australia. For example, we should actively invite them to

panel discussions on a university level, warmly welcoming them and hearing their experience. Engaging with them rather than abandoning them. The Government should also consider supporting the credible individuals and associations in making events like 'Afghan New Year' whereby the newly arrived Afghans are warmly welcomed along with our ADF personnel/veterans. This would be a fantastic opportunity where the Afghan community extends gratitude to those who sacrificed their mental health and more in the 'unwinnable war.'

4. any related matters.

People at substantial risk

a) Individuals who have worked with international forces, Australia's mission and ADF.

In-country information and direct evidence stipulates those who worked alongside international forces and organisations, civil service and Afghan forces including Australia's mission and ADF⁷ are at imminent risk. For example, Interpreters from Kandahar, Helmand and Uruzgan, Paktia, Khost, Nangahar, Wardak and many more provinces are mostly Pashtuns. Pashtuns and Tajiks served in the Army or assisted the ADF, and they are now being massacred at large.

Further, Afghan Local Police, National Police, Afghan Army and other military personnel and their families are at substantial risk as they fight against Taliban.

Based on national and international research, the highest numbers of widows, casualties, disability, closed schools, lack of access to schools, health, development projects, and media are located in the geographical locations where there was the 20 years' war, which are mainly Pashtun populated provinces. Further to this, Tajiks are at risk due to the perceived notion of the Northern

Alliance 'resistance' - this has led to the Tajik civilians being at imminent risk - as pawns of the ongoing battle.

b) Fight against Taliban such as ANA, ANP, ALP and women. Women at Risks - Activists/Civil Servants

Based on the data and information available to the authors of these submissions, most casualties were killed in Pashtun geographical locations. This is because the majority of the Afghan Army 'make up' are from Pashtun and Tajik ethnicity. Further to this, most casualties were killed in Pashtun geographical locations: Kandahar, Helmand, Wardak, Paktia, Nangarhar, Kunar and many other provinces. Currently most killings are taking place where people fight against the Taliban.

The one side role of Australian Media/Community Organizations

Afghanistan now has an approximate population of thirty-six million. Given the national atrocity and humanitarian crisis - every single living individual is at risk. However, the individuals who are at imminent risk i.e., hiding, or have family members on the run are being sidelined by the media.

Some of the biggest organizations have been approached for campaigns for prioritization of matters, we were told "if you are a Hazara we will help." Another example is when ABC shunned an Afghan community leader "We will not pitch your story if you are a non-Hazara." For the independent Media to have this preconceived notion is a dangerous narrative and will only traumatize other Afghan Australians who already feel sidelined by the Australian Government and Media.

To put things into perspective, a NGO such as RACS - only puts social media quotes from one ethnicity. There is this pre-conceived notion that if you are not a Hazara - 'you are not at risk.' This is not fair to the millions who are suffering and those who are at risk from other ethnic groups. It is essential, the Government works closely with other ethnicities to ensure a balanced and sensitive approach is taken.

The Department of Home Affairs will review each application on its merits; therefore, the Australian Media and NGOs should be warned against such hostile campaigns.

Impact of the 20 years' war on Afghanistan and Australia

In general, the entire population of Afghanistan has been affected by the war, specifically those who were in the frontline fighting the Taliban. Also, those of geographical locations in the south and east of Afghanistan.

It must be highlighted that victims of war are not based on ethnicity. The victims of war are targeted based on ideology. This means, whoever opposes the Taliban, and their ideology is perceived as the Taliban's enemy. Therefore, their perceived animosity is not based on ethnic division. Contrary to beliefs, Pashtun, Tajik and Hazara are the biggest tribes in Afghanistan. For instance, if the President was a Pashtun, the Vice President was Hazara and Tajik. Ministers are appointed from all ethnicities that are Pashtun, Tajik and Hazara.

Further, Hazara women were appointed as senior government officials including the provincial governor for Bamiyan. To conclude Hazara, Tajik and Pashtun are not minorities; they were equally involved in politics and power sharing. The

minority tribes in Afghanistan are considered to be Pashaei, Nooristani, Hindus and Sikhs - those who have limited or no representation in the government.

Pashtuns have had the most casualties compared to others and this needs to be acknowledged by the Australian Government as the 20 years' war existed mostly in the Pashtun provinces.

Educational perspectives: Most of the Pashtun -populated areas (Paktika, Urozgan, Helmand, Zabul, Kandahar, Khost, Paktia, Nimroze, Wardak) - access to education i.e., no schools built or remote locations.

For example, extremely limited girls found their way to universities each year from the Pashtun provinces because of lack of their access to school (in areas of war zone). For instance, the following table shows the data of three provinces as an example (Sherzad 2017).

Province	Population	No of girls' that passed universities' entry exam
Paktika	434,742	2
Kunar	428,800	58
Paktia	551,987	79

As indicated in the above table and aforementioned, the limited access of women to schools and universities marginalised Pashtun women politically across the country. This is in contrast to provinces where there was no war in the past 20 years such as Daikundi and Bamyan. As a result, it was great to see there were

active schools of children and graduates over 1000s girls each year. This is surely a good asset for Afghanistan.

In Daikundi and other provinces where there was no war there was active schooling. The promotion of education and activism were great.

In Ghazni/Northern provinces - there has been a positive impact on women rights advancement.

Health perspectives: access to health services including for women and children in war zones has been limited. This is in contrast to areas that were not war zones. Mortality rates were high in war zones versus other areas that were not war zones.

Mental Health: people/women/newborns were and are strongly impacted by the war. Again, this is in contrast to non-war zones such as Bayman, Daykundi. Now, post-Taliban invasion, Panjshir is considered as a war zone and no doubt the impact on the civilians especially women and children are the same as areas of war zone in the last twenty years.

This can be illustrated such as: a girl born in 2001 in Bamyān graduates university. They had the ability to advocate and communicate in English versus a girl born in Helmand where there was no support/parents/access to general health - living a delusional life.

Disability: this was prevalent in war zones - due to strong impacts of bombings, direct fights, poverty, violence, no access to justice, human rights. This means people in war zones were far greater predisposed to being the more primary victims of the war.

Economy- the budget was not equally distributed. War zones became areas of low socio-economic status. This was a direct result of not gaining any security for projects or NGO to be formed and functioning. This meant there was no chance of international donors to implement any strategies/mechanisms. Hence there was structural damage to areas of the war zones.

As a result - different data nationally and internationally stipulate the highest number of primary victims were those who lived in geographical locations/ war zones.

Advisory Panel

The formation of the Advisory Panel on Australia's Resettlement of Afghan Nationals announced on 30 August 2021 caused immense distress and anguish within the Australian Afghan Diaspora.

Afghanistan is a multiethnic country consisting of numerous ethnolinguistic groups such as Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Pashaei, Aymaq and others. The national culture of Afghanistan is not uniform, which makes it a diverse and rich country. Having said that, the Advisory Panel does not reflect that cultural and linguistic diversity– which has serious implications as support programs or settlement processes will be proven ineffective otherwise. This will further ignite the endured experiences of torture and trauma many arrivals from Afghanistan come with.

It is of high importance that immediate action is taken to ensure relevant stakeholders and community leaders are invited to be part of the Advisory Panel which reflects the diverse Afghan diaspora. Simply put, to ignore such a proposition - is to deny new arrivals of the comprehensive support they would need to get established and settled in Australia as fast as possible. To not

acknowledge this would go against the fundamental social fabric Australia is known for – multiculturalism.

We request that all practical steps are taken to ensure that the Advisory Panel represents the Australian- Afghan community in an equal and propionate. Alternatively, the Panel needs to be resolved. This is because there has been too much tension between the major ethnicities such as: Tajik, Pashtun and Hazara. There has been a diversion from what needs to be done for the newly arrived Afghans.

The Advisory Panel has reduced the gap between the Afghan Australian community and the Government.

A major concern is the perceived role the Afghan individuals play within the Panel. Given they are from NGOs - there appears to be a conflict of interest - whereby it is feared they will put their visa applications for priority. Further, those in the panel are not experts in re-settlement programs. Despite the Government official assurances to the Afghan community - this remains a huge fear factor.

Recommendations

- Increase intake of humanitarian visas (20,000)
- Increase humanitarian aid
- Recognise the real victims of war
- Recognise the perpetrators of Taliban - Pakistan. International community must condemn them for their active role in the creation of Taliban and other terrorist groups. Sanction must be considered and implement reasonable methods afforded by International Law.

- The international community narrative needs to change as to who are the real victims of war.
- Removal of the Advisory Panel - it has caused a problem. I.e., Settlement programs who have over 40 years' experience are not on the panel, and Afghans who are not as experienced are -the preferential selection of the advisory panel has fuelled underlying issues from the Afghan diaspora.
- The formation of a sub-committee/sub advisory is apt.
- More attention as an international strategy towards Australian National Security.
- Work closely with the wider Afghan Australian diaspora to close the gap.
- We should encourage the wider Australian community to assist in helping the large Afghan families with housing or collaborate with Airbnb to help with housing support.
- The Australian government should also open a tendering process for Refugee organisations and employers to provide employment opportunities for the newly arrived Afghans.
- Large incentives should be offered to families who wish to live in regional areas of NSW.