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**Subject:** ICYMI: Op-Ed in Newsweek: Lasting Peace in Afghanistan Must be Afghan Led  
**Date:** February 10, 2021 at 3:14 PM  
**To:** Damian Murphy [Damian\\_Murphy@foreign.senate.gov](mailto:Damian_Murphy@foreign.senate.gov)

Hi Damian,  
Thanks again for taking time to speak with Martin Rahmani earlier this year.

I wanted to be sure you saw the Op-Ed that ran in Newsweek today from three members of Afghanistan's parliament outlining the need for an Afghan-led peace process that results in an inclusive Afghan government. MPs [Haji Ajmal Rahmani](#), Mir Haidar Afzaly, and [Naheed Farid](#), describe the need for: continued US support; preservation of the rights of women and girls; a commitment to human rights and the nation's constitution; as well as integration of the Taliban into the government to ensure that Afghanistan does not fall into civil war but achieves a sustainable peace.

The [full op-ed is below](#). All three MPs are on the advisory board of the [Afghanistan-U.S. Democratic Peace and Prosperity Council](#).

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

All the best,

Jake

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### Lasting Peace in Afghanistan Must be Afghan Led | Opinion

Shortly before President Joe Biden's inauguration, Afghan and Taliban negotiators met in Doha, Qatar, for the first substantive talks of a peace process.

For nearly 20 years, Mr. Biden has been one of the most influential voices shaping U.S.-Afghan policy, but now his is the most important.

Afghanistan has changed and as young leaders in Afghanistan's parliament, we want the voice of our youth heard in this process, because they know better than anyone that lasting peace must be Afghan led.

When President Biden reflects upon America's sacrifice and investment in our country, he should consider the young Afghan women and men who came of age after 9/11 and constitute more than 60 percent of the country's population.

Afghan youth embody and embrace the democratic ideals and freedoms America helped us establish. Twenty years ago, there were less than 50,000 girls enrolled in school. Women were rarely allowed outside of their homes, if they dared venture outside they faced great risk and peril. Education was not universal, even for men. There were no elections, no press and no freedom for minority groups. America's sacrifices and efforts have resulted in [more than 3.5 million Afghan girls in school](#). Women now maintain important roles in our free and democratic Islamic society. They hold 68 seats in parliament, dozens of seats in district and provincial councils and sit atop two ministries. Afghan youth have come of age in a free society.

As the young leaders in Parliament, deeply appreciative of the American lives that were lost defending freedom in Afghanistan, we have sworn and commit to preserve and protect these freedoms.

We recognize the intra-Afghan peace process as the strongest opportunity our generation will have to end a 40 year cycle of war, and build a sustainable future.

We fear the outcome if we squander this chance at peace and jeopardize the lives and wellbeing of all Afghans, especially women and youth. We recognize the severe consequences of a destabilized Afghanistan on U.S., regional and global security. We understand that America cannot negotiate peace for us, it must be an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led process.

To that end, we learned from the mistakes of our predecessors, some of whom continue to use their positions to be peace spoilers, putting ego, cronyism, infighting and spreading disinformation ahead of their constituents' interests.

Despite attempts within Afghanistan to delay and derail the peace process for personal and political motives, we have brought together tribal and community leaders from all ethnic and religious groups, along with like-minded leaders in the civil service, security forces, civil society and private sector, to build momentum for the process and shape the terms of a deal that are agreeable to all sides.

For this peace to be successful Afghanistan must lead, rather than blame. It is time for us to make peace with the Taliban and negotiate an agreement recognizing their role and influence while effectively integrating them into our government.

We are willing to make the necessary sacrifices to establish a lasting peace and a stronger future. We are amenable to changes to the constitution which reinforce the Islamic values of our country and integrate Taliban forces into our security forces. We are further

...and integrate Taliban forces into our country, reform the electoral process, and ensure that the rights of women and girls are not set aside for the Taliban.

Our constitution provides Parliament the responsibility to ratify treaties, including any future peace agreement. We commit to work in good faith to reach an understanding that serves all of Afghanistan, and commit to the sacrifices needed to make it enduring. But there are points we will not compromise on.

There must be an unconditional ceasefire. The level of violence in our country is devastating, and cannot continue. The rights of women and girls and their role in society is non-negotiable. As are equal rights for all ethnic groups, universal education and healthcare, a free press, sports, entertainment, political parties, academic, social and cultural organizations and the existence of an Islamic Republic with a legislative, judicial and executive branch.

Even if we are successful in negotiating peace with the Taliban, many in Washington are skeptical of what happens afterward. Washington's skepticism is understandable due to years of empty promises coupled with erratic, even belligerent behavior from Afghan leaders.

Frankly, we are just as disappointed as Washington with the ineffectiveness and corruption that has characterized the Afghan government. Since taking office 18 months ago, this Parliament set out to raise the standards of government and its institutions. Our actions have matched our words. We will continue to be honest brokers and reliable partners to our people, government, the U.S. and international community.

In Parliament, we have passed a backlog of legislation that has been pending for nearly a decade and have dedicated ourselves to reforming government. Oversight has been central to our reforms. Through dozens of investigations and audits, we have recovered hundreds of millions of dollars of Afghan funds, U.S. tax dollars and NATO expenditures.

These investigations have resulted in criminal prosecutions for corruption up to the ministerial level, substantive changes to the national budget and the phased in, scaled adoption of new management and acquisition policies.

Rooting out corruption and overhauling the budgeting, spending and acquisition processes of the ministries is an ongoing effort, one that we are now proud to be working hand in hand with many of the newly confirmed ministers on. We have also fostered working relationships with our neighbors, the regional powers whose dedication and support are critical to achieving sustainable peace.

This Parliament is committed to an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led peace agreement, but we cannot stand alone. We must have continued leadership and support from America to encourage reasonableness and honesty among those within the Afghan government, Taliban and regional powers that may seek to disrupt or hijack the peace process in support of their own motives and interests. We need America to continue providing essential military assistance to guarantee a ceasefire and to hold the Taliban accountable to its promises, especially to women, children and minority groups. We also need America to continue its generous financial and military assistance, albeit with more effective controls and oversight.

We hope as Mr. Biden reflects on America's 20 year commitment to Afghanistan, he sees the generation of young Afghan women and men who owe their freedom to America, and chose to embrace democracy, but realizes that we cannot do it alone.

***Haji Ajmal Rahmani is an MP from Kabul and Common Coordination Leader of the Afghan Parliament.***

***Mir Haidar Afzaly is an MP from Kapisa, and Chairman of the Defense Committee of the Afghan Parliament***

***Naheed Farid is an MP from Herat and Chairwoman of the Human Rights, Civil Society and Women's Affairs Committee of the Afghan Parliament.***

***They serve on the advisory board of the Afghanistan-U.S. Democratic Peace and Prosperity Council in D.C.***

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