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# Can Refugees Be National Security Assets?

## Afghan American Contributions to U.S. National Defense since 1978

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**Abstract.** This article examines historical contributions of U.S. Afghans to U.S. foreign policy, especially since 11 September 2001. Since then, U.S. Afghans have served as interpreters, analysts, language instructors, and cultural advisors for the U.S. government and military. Most Afghans came to the United States since 1978, after war broke out in Afghanistan and created one of the world's worst refugee crises. This history suggests that if done properly, refugee policy can be both humane and add to the country's defense.

**Keywords:** Afghan Americans, Afghan immigrants, Afghan refugees, refugees, refugee crisis, special immigrant visas, SIV, U.S. interpreters, Marine interpreters, Cold War, War in Afghanistan, U.S. Marine Corps, immigrant history, Afghan American studies, Afghan American history

Since the summer of 2015, the United States has struggled with its response to the broader Middle East refugee crisis, a predicament exacerbated by the polarized political climate of the 2016 presidential election. What has often been lost on both sides of the debate, however, is that refugees of Islamic-world heritage have made innumerable contributions to U.S. national security. The linguistic skill and cultural acumen of Islamic-world refugees have played critical roles facilitating diplomacy and countering threats to the United States. These efforts extend back to the Cold War era but have been especially vital since

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John Baden, a history doctoral candidate at Case Western Reserve University, is currently writing a dissertation that examines immigrant communities' roles in U.S. foreign relations. It focuses on Afghans in the United States and their relations and interactions with Afghanistan since 1978.

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the Global War on Terrorism began in 2001. Thus, refugee policy should not be based on security concerns versus humanitarian objectives. If done properly, refugee policy can be humane and add to the country's defense.

U.S. Afghan communities' histories exemplify the importance of refugees to the United States' defense and foreign policy. Afghans first arrived in the United States in large numbers during the 1980s, largely as refugees from war and political persecution by government authorities. Some Afghan immigrants contributed to U.S. efforts to counter the Soviet-backed Afghan government, but most had to focus on rebuilding their lives during that decade. As Afghans who relocated to the United States adjusted to their new lives, many were economically successful. After the events of 11 September 2001, Afghans in the United States have served as interpreters, analysts, language instructors, and cultural advisors. Others used the economic and social capital they accumulated in the United States to aid the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

The process of granting refugee status has long been politicized. Although policy makers found admissions useful to foreign policy objectives, such policies have historically been unpopular among the general public.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the passage of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, immigration quotas largely restricted immigration from areas outside of northwestern Europe. Therefore, exceptions had to be made for refugees to be admitted to the United States. As a result, modern refugee policy was generally limited and crafted largely for the benefit of U.S. foreign policy objectives during the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> Refugee visas were generally given out on an ad hoc basis after crises in Communist-controlled countries. This allowed the United States to essentially save face after being accused of abandoning countries such as Hungary after the thwarted revolution in 1956 and South Vietnam after the fall of Saigon in 1975. The Refugee Act of 1980 somewhat standardized the process and criteria for requesting asylum. This act along with the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act allowed people from all over the world to immigrate to the United States. Despite the acts, refugee admissions remained heavily politicized, and American presidents still set refugee limits from a country and could admit additional people from conflict zones that were not granted asylum.<sup>3</sup>

Equally valuable to U.S. foreign policy, refugee visas facilitated the entry of thousands of anti-Communists with the valuable linguistic skills needed to carry out the U.S. Cold War mission as well as those who were defectors from U.S. adversaries. Demonstrating the importance of refugee admissions to Cold War foreign policy, the Central Intelligence Agency's original charter allowed its director, the attorney general, and the head of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to override immigration laws to allow as many as a hundred people of his or her choosing to permanently relocate to the United States each year in the "interest of national security" or "the national intelligence mission."<sup>4</sup>

This Cold War history of government action to circumvent immigration limits for refugees demonstrates that humanitarianism was not the only reason refugees were given asylum in the United States: the U.S. government recognized the importance of refugees and felt it was in the national interest to allow for an allotment of refugees. It was in this late–Cold War atmosphere that Afghans first came to the United States in large numbers.

This exodus out of Afghanistan began in 1978 after a coup installed a Marxist-Leninist government. Rebellions broke out against the new Afghan government, and the Soviet Union deployed its army in 1979 to ensure that the government, there remained a Soviet-allied, Marxist-Leninist one. The years following the coup and subsequent Soviet intervention were violent and destabilizing. Employees of previous regimes, intellectuals, and notable public figures were particularly vulnerable to the mass arrests and executions perpetrated by the Soviet-backed government. As a result, millions fled to neighboring Pakistan and Iran. In 1980, President James E. “Jimmy” Carter granted extended voluntary departure for Afghan refugees, making it easier for them to come to America. By 1990, 28,444 Afghans made their way to the United States.<sup>5</sup>

The Afghan refugee crisis soon became a global news story that was a public relations disaster for the Soviet Union’s international image. Although many U.S. officials appear to have felt genuine sympathy for the refugees, they also recognized the political importance of the refugee crisis for their efforts to discredit the Soviet Union. In 1982, President Ronald W. Reagan declared 21 March (Persian New Year) as Afghanistan Day. After the president signed the proclamation, an Afghan student in the United States took the stage telling the audience that she had “witnessed the killing of my friends . . . and we [Afghans] will continue our war,” before giving Reagan an Afghan flag.<sup>6</sup> During his speech, Reagan cast the Afghan struggle in the broader Cold War context: “The Afghans, like the Poles, wish nothing more, as you’ve just been so eloquently told, than to live their lives in peace, to practice their religion in freedom, and to exercise their right to self-determination.”<sup>7</sup> A number of newspaper editors around the world then published the image of the president hugging the Afghan student.<sup>8</sup>

Ronald Reagan was not the only one in the U.S. government who recognized the symbolic importance of Afghan refugees to the U.S. Cold War mission. On 5 December 1985, the Associated Press reported that “more than 70 members of Congress, citing the U.S. image as ‘a refuge for the oppressed,’ urged the Reagan administration yesterday to grant political asylum to 33 Afghans detained by immigration authorities in New York.”<sup>9</sup> The congressmen noted that “when a small number of the individuals who have fought the Soviet occupation show up on our shores, we treat them with contempt by jailing them for an indefinite period of time.”<sup>10</sup> In a similar situation, Democratic Congressman Fortney H. Stark Jr., who represented the Oakland suburbs, home to the nation’s largest

Afghan population, wrote on behalf of Afghan refugees facing deportation for not having proper visas.<sup>11</sup> Writing to White House Congressional Liaison Kenneth M. Duberstein, Congressman Stark advocated for the refugees by going around the INS. He wrote, “I am sending this directly to you rather than making inquiries at INS, since I suspect that INS is processing according to the rule-book—but the net effect may not be in accordance with the President’s view.”<sup>12</sup> The congressman continued, “I hope you can take a look at this file [which contained newspaper clippings and nongovernmental organization (NGO) appeals] to see whether INS shouldn’t be less zealous in this case.”<sup>13</sup> Additionally, in a request apparently unrelated to Stark’s, a writer only identified by the name “Steve” asked officials at the Office of Policy Development to “please take a look” at the case of the Afghans in California facing deportation. In this internal White House memo, Steve recommended to the office’s William Barr that “we should find out if INS is still taking a hard line against Afghan refugees, and help out if possible.”<sup>14</sup> It appears unlikely that the White House did intervene, but the Afghans did win the right to stay in the United States.<sup>15</sup> Although White House intervention probably did not materialize, the case demonstrates that high-level members of the U.S. government recognized the importance of refugee policy to their broader Cold War objections.

It is difficult to discern how most U.S. Afghans felt about the politicization of their situation, although nearly all Afghan Americans who published memoirs and oral histories spoke negatively about the Communist-inspired, nominally Afghan government.<sup>16</sup> Resentment of the Afghan government and its Soviet allies led to the desire of a number of Afghan immigrants to support the U.S. Cold War mission, regardless of whether they took active roles. The work provided income, a chance to contribute to the United States, and a means to subvert the Marxist-Leninist regime in Afghanistan.

Shukria Raad was one person who took the United States up on its offer to contribute her skills for its benefit and became a key figure in the Voice of America (VOA) Dari language broadcasting service. She left Afghanistan in December 1979 because the Communists took over her employer’s operation, Radio Afghanistan.<sup>17</sup> By 1982, she was broadcasting in Dari to Afghanistan on VOA, trying to counter the Soviet-backed accounts of the news.<sup>18</sup> Another Afghan who fled to the United States after the invasion, Spozhmai Maiwandi was perhaps the central figure in VOA’s Pashto service into the early 2000s.

After the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan collapsed in 1992, Afghanistan fell off the radar of most U.S. policy makers. As the country disintegrated into civil war, it was also more difficult for Afghans in America to travel to their home country, rally behind a common political cause, or imagine a permanent return. A number of Afghans in the United States, however, did manage to establish a number of nongovernment organizations to perform charitable work

during the decade. Although the population of people of Afghan descent born in the United States rose from 28,444 to 45,195 during the 1990s, many Afghans in the United States became more disconnected from Afghanistan's politics and changes.<sup>19</sup>

Then on 11 September 2001, Afghan Americans' relationship with Afghanistan dramatically changed. Suddenly, the country, which had become virtually inaccessible and had its news buried in U.S. newspapers, was front and center. The nonstop media coverage of the attacks and al-Qaeda perpetrators with Afghanistan connections forced Americans—Afghan or otherwise—to face the presence of this place that before had seemed so remote. Like every community, there have been debates and differing views on the proper U.S. response to these events. Many chose to directly support the United States or to help rebuild Afghanistan and have made invaluable contributions to those efforts.

Dr. Obaid Younossi of the Rand Corporation was at work across from the Pentagon on 9/11. That morning, he witnessed hijacked American Airlines Flight 73 fly over his office window just before it crashed into the Pentagon. After returning home, Younossi sensed a change within himself. Afghanistan was a country he had left long ago and had emotionally detached from. Now, Afghanistan was suddenly on the front page of newspapers, with places mentioned that he had known growing up.<sup>20</sup> Younossi recalled being overcome with emotion, trying to be a "good American" while also empathizing with Afghans facing troubling times. He wanted to help. Younossi decided the best route for himself and his family was to look for Afghanistan assignments within the Rand Corporation. He worked on projects involving security and reforming the Afghan National Army, and this work took him to Afghanistan multiple times from 2005 to 2011.

Like Younossi, many Afghan Americans shared a similar desire to help after 9/11. The United States was now at war with the Taliban and al-Qaeda insurgents in Afghanistan and needed people with linguistic and cultural knowledge to facilitate U.S. efforts in the country. For example, the Leader Development and Education for Sustained Peace Program delivered programs for the U.S. military by contracting Afghan American experts to give talks to officers about Afghan culture, politics, and history before deployment.<sup>21</sup> Afghan Americans employed at San Diego State University's Afghanistan Language and Culture Program also produced online cultural and political lessons for the U.S. Marine Corps. To prepare Marines, other Afghans participated in role-playing exercises in mock Afghan villages at infantry immersion trainer locations, such as Camp Pendleton in California. Such training settings helped prepare U.S. personnel to handle situations in Afghanistan by providing them with cultural awareness to minimize unnecessary conflict with local Afghans.<sup>22</sup>

Afghan Americans have been especially valuable as linguists and interpreters. Most of the United States' interpreters in Afghanistan were non-U.S. residents

living in the region. Jobs that required secret or top secret clearance, however, had to be filled by U.S. citizens.<sup>23</sup> According to a spokesperson for Mission Essential Personnel, the contractor employing the predominant share of linguists for the United States in Afghanistan, 1,080 of their 6,896 linguists were from the United States in October 2012.<sup>24</sup> It appears that nearly all of these positions were filled by Afghan Americans or other Americans of Islamic-world heritage. Moreover, Afghan Americans and other immigrants from Islamic majority countries have played a key role in building the military's language capabilities by serving as language instructors, either directly teaching military personnel at institutions like the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California, or teaching language courses classes attended by students with ROTC Global Officers.<sup>25</sup>

Their work was vital to the U.S. mission when few other people in the United States were qualified. In 2010, the U.S. government was in such dire need of qualified applicants that defense contractors sponsored an Afghan American soccer tournament in the Washington, DC, area to advertise their job openings. The soccer field's fences were heavily adorned with large advertisements informing attendees that they could earn "\$210K a year" as linguists.<sup>26</sup> One defense company even went as far as handing out 500 T-shirts that read in Pashtu, "If you can read this, we might have a job for you." Meanwhile, that year's television advertisements directed at Afghan Americans urged qualified individuals to serve with the U.S. agencies in Afghanistan, "For America, For Afghanistan, For Me."<sup>27</sup>

Fahim Fazli took the call to service seriously. After watching television one night, he saw an advertisement to be a linguist and wondered, "With my gift for languages, might there be something extra I could do for America—beyond just paying taxes? Could I simultaneously help both my new country and my old?"<sup>28</sup> He had come to the United States from Afghanistan during that country's refugee crisis in the 1980s.<sup>29</sup> When his family became separated during the Afghan–Soviet War of the 1980s, he fled with his father and brothers to Pakistan. There the U.S. embassy and its Marine Corps guards helped locate his mother who had fled to the United States. With additional help from a Christian charity, Fazli was reunited with his family in the United States in 1985 at the age of 18. For the next two decades, Fazli worked various jobs before finding success as an actor. Ironically, Fazli almost exclusively played terrorists in films and on television. By 2009, his acting career had picked up, but he felt it was his time to give back to his adopted country as well as helping his country of birth. He signed up to be an interpreter for the U.S. military. After completing preliminary training at Fort Benning in Georgia, Fazli volunteered to join the U.S. Marines Corps as an interpreter despite knowing that this branch was the most likely to face combat.<sup>30</sup> Fazli served as an interpreter for 3d Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, in Helmand Province from October 2009 to July 2010. Recognizing his value, Captain Ryan Benson wrote of Fazli's service, "Fahim operated alongside the Marines of India Company facing

the same dangers and hardships they faced. . . . He has become a brother not just to me, but to each of the Marines under my charge.”<sup>31</sup>

U.S. Afghan women have also served as interpreters in specially trained female engagement teams (FET). These military units have often been the only U.S. personnel interacting with Afghan women due to cultural prohibitions against Afghan women talking to men.<sup>32</sup> As a result, they have been vital for both tracking insurgents and facilitating local development projects. Afghan American women have been among the few to qualify for such work because of the scarcity of Pashtu speakers in America and U.S. residency requirements. Nadia Sultan was one interpreter for a U.S. Army FET. As recounted by author Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, Sultan “was energized by the idea that she could make good money doing a job she believed in while also serving the nation that had given refuge to her own family when it was too dangerous to stay in Kandahar.”<sup>33</sup> Sultan worked in Afghanistan from summer of 2009 to 2011 at Bagram Air Base before transferring to an FET.<sup>34</sup> In 2011, Sultan was seriously wounded in an IED explosion that killed her FET leader and two servicemembers.

Outside of U.S. government employment, Afghan Americans have been crucial to building educational institutions in Afghanistan and helping with the country’s reconstruction. Afghan Americans founded NGOs such as Afghan Friends Network, the Children of War, Help the Afghan Children, and the Khaled Hosseini Foundation; established schools; and sponsored education for Afghans. Other organizations, such as Afghans 4 Tomorrow and Society of Afghan Engineers, have focused on health, infrastructure, agriculture, training, and building standards, as well as education.<sup>35</sup> Since Afghanistan’s government has limited capacity to help its citizens, nonprofits funded and ran by members of the Afghan diaspora have played a critical role supporting the country’s infrastructure and educational system. These contributions promote an independent and stable Afghanistan that can stand on its own.

Humaira Ghilzai, who had been director of international marketing at Sun Microsystems’s software division and Oracle, was one Afghan American who cofounded a nonprofit organization after 9/11. She recalled her disconnection from her Afghan identity prior to the tragic events of that day explaining that “from the time I went to college until 9/11 happened I had no direct connection with the Afghan community, Afghan people, Afghanistan. I really did not know what was going on there. . . . The Russians left, the Mujahideen came, the Taliban took over and I was oblivious to all.”<sup>36</sup> When Ghilzai gave her name after the 9/11 attacks, people would ask where she was from, and with that said, her “carefully built . . . nice American persona” suddenly collapsed. Her father pushed her to try and help Afghanistan since the country was once again accessible, and survivor’s guilt affected her deeply. She now refers to herself as a “born-again Afghan.”<sup>37</sup> After becoming involved in small projects, she cofounded the Afghan Friends

Network. Since 2002, the Afghan Friends Network has provided funding for the education of hundreds of Afghans in Ghazni Province as well as scholarships incentivizing students to attend college in Afghanistan. Afghan Friends Network's educational curriculum includes a gender equality program taught to 500 girls, 250 boys, and 80 women by religious leaders.<sup>38</sup> Only about 17 percent of Afghan women and 31 percent of Afghans overall are literate. The Afghan Friends Network and similar organizations make valuable contributions to education and gender equality—two of the most promising avenues for expanding opportunity to Afghans.<sup>39</sup>

Despite significant contributions from refugee communities, such as those of the Afghans, the fear of terrorist infiltration has made many people uneasy about allowing refugees from Islamic-majority countries into the United States. Terrorism is indeed a significant international problem, and safeguards will need to be implemented in the United States to prevent admitting extremists with violent ambitions from around the world. Yet most people do not understand how rare these attacks have been, and the role Muslims and refugees from the Islamic world have played in preventing them. It is true that a small number of people in the United States from Islamic-majority countries have committed acts of terror against the United States. Two Afghan Americans, in fact, were arrested for plotting to attack New York's subway system.<sup>40</sup> The 2015 attack in San Bernardino, California, was inspired by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization, but the attackers were not Afghan. Such acts are inexcusable, but perspective on violence and mass killing is needed. Attacks from international terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda and ISIL, gather much of the media's focus, but are extremely rare thanks in no small part to Muslim American communities.

After 11 September 2001, there were approximately 147,000 murders in the United States from 2002 to 2010, but only 33 deaths came as a result of Muslim American acts of terrorism.<sup>41</sup> The role of anti-Muslim xenophobia becomes more apparent considering that two white shooters acting independently in Tucson, Arizona (2011), and in Sandy Hook, Connecticut (2012), took nearly the same number of lives in their two acts alone. Sadly, the 2015 San Bernardino shootings added to this tally of deaths by Muslim American terrorists, but it took place alongside numerous other mass shootings in that year that were perpetrated by white, often nonreligious-based, shooters. In fact, it appears that since 9/11, more deaths have been attributed to U.S. Far-Right-wing terrorism than Muslim American terrorism.<sup>42</sup>

People of all religious affiliations and ethnic groups in the United States perpetrate violence, and it appears that only a small portion of it comes from Islamic-world refugees. These statistics are similar to the data on attacks in Europe, which show that jihadist-affiliated terrorist groups garner the most attention

but account for minor contributions to the overall violence, even after the tragic 2015 attacks on Paris. From 2001 to 2014, only two attacks by Islamic-extremist affiliated terrorist organizations in Western Europe killed more than 10 people.<sup>43</sup> Homicide statistics are still difficult to obtain for 2015, but in 2012 there were a combined 2,989 homicides in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Out of these, only 17 people died from terrorist attacks (not just Islamist-extremist affiliated ones) in the entire European Union.<sup>44</sup> Although the 2015 Paris attacks were horrific, the continent's worst mass killing that year came when a white Germanwings company copilot crashed an airliner, apparently deliberately, into the Alps with 150 passengers onboard.<sup>45</sup>

Some critics have claimed that Muslims are reluctant to condemn terrorism, but in reality nearly every major U.S. Muslim organization has condemned terrorism in general and such groups as ISIL and al-Qaeda specifically.<sup>46</sup> While it is true that a minority of people living in Muslim-majority countries have indicated in polls that terrorism can be justified in some cases, the results have varied considerably and have seldom been compared to views from non-Muslim countries. A 2009–10 Gallup poll indicates that respondents from countries that are Organisation of Islamic Cooperation members were slightly less likely to support violence against civilians than respondents from other countries. For example, 22 percent of Americans and 15 percent of Canadians believe that “individual [implying nonmilitary] attacks on civilians are sometimes justified,” while 18 percent of respondents from Organisation of Islamic Cooperation countries expressed this view.<sup>47</sup> These findings substantiate the results of an earlier poll conducted by the University of Maryland in 2006.<sup>48</sup> Whereas respondents from Muslim-majority countries, such as Indonesia, Pakistan, and Nigeria, had lower numbers polled and lower acceptance of attacks against civilians.<sup>49</sup>

Terrorist attacks perpetuated by U.S. Muslims in the United States have been rare, and the U.S. Muslim community has been vital to keeping these numbers low. For cases in which data exists, officials cite Muslim Americans as the source of 40 percent of all initial tips disrupting terror plots attempted by Muslim Americans in the United States from 12 September 2001 to 2010.<sup>50</sup> If national security is used as a justification for immigrant and refugee exclusion, security concerns should also be a reason for allowing more immigrants and refugees from the Islamic world to immigrate to the United States. Moreover, international terrorists can attempt to enter the country through temporary tourist, student, or work visas regardless of U.S. immigrant and refugee policies. Recent experiences suggest, however, that Muslim Americans, as well as refugees from Muslim-majority countries, can be among the most effective at combatting terrorism.

Allowing refugees from the Islamic world into the United States has taken on a special importance recently because of U.S. involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq. As U.S. troops have withdrawn, local personnel working for the United

States have been left vulnerable to reprisals by insurgents. As in past conflicts, such as those in Vietnam and Cuba, many U.S. policy makers and veterans believe that leaving U.S. allies vulnerable to reprisal threatens American honor and international credibility. Despite congressional legislation providing special immigrant visas for personnel who completed their work in good standing, the process has been mired in bureaucratic missteps and red tape. The *Washington Post* reported that, in 2012, the State Department awarded “just 32 visas for more than 5,700 Afghan applications.”<sup>51</sup> Although improvements have been made to the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program, thousands of former U.S. employees remain stranded in Afghanistan.<sup>52</sup> Inaction could adversely affect the United States’ ability to hire personnel to perform vital work and convince Afghans that they have their best interests in mind.

Former interpreter Sami Khazikani’s experience highlights the dangers former U.S. personnel have faced in recent years. He had been forced to leave Afghanistan after his in-laws learned of his service to the U.S. Marines and received death threats. Khazikani had applied for a SIV from the United States, but still had not received it; the visa appeared to be stuck in the application process. He and his family fled to Turkey and, after being told to leave by officials, then sailed to Greece. During the journey, his boat nearly sank in the Mediterranean while other nearby boats succumbed to the sea. After arriving in Greece, Khazikani and his wife and daughter lived on the streets of Athens before trekking on foot to the Hungarian border. As of this writing, Khazikani is living in a German refugee camp with his wife and daughter.<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately, Khazikani is not alone in his predicament. In 2014, approximately 6,000 Afghans were stuck in the SIV application process, and visa advocates argue that in 2015 thousands of former U.S. personnel, such as Sami Khazikani, were attempting to make it into Europe as refugees.<sup>54</sup>

Many Americans have shown their support for former interpreters and refugees, and U.S. veterans have been at the forefront of these efforts.<sup>55</sup> After seeing coverage of the developing refugee crisis in September 2015, former Marine Sergeant Aaron E. Fleming personally contacted the interpreter with whom he worked, the aforementioned Sami Khazikani. Fleming learned through social media that Khazikani and his family were refugees in Greece. Fleming took action and formed a team to launch an online fundraising campaign to help his former interpreter. One of those who helped Fleming raise funds for Khazikani, Gunnery Sergeant Emir Hadzic, was once a Muslim refugee from Bosnia who served in Afghanistan alongside Khazikani. Hadzic had joined the Marines “hoping to pay my debt to America,” when the United States began sending peacekeepers to Bosnia and made a long-term commitment after 9/11.<sup>56</sup>

In 2013, Afghanistan veteran Matthew Zeller learned that his former interpreter, Mohammad Janis Shinwari, was receiving death threats in Afghanistan and

was unable to escape the country. After waiting two years, Shinwari received a U.S. visa, but the U.S. government revoked it shortly thereafter.<sup>57</sup> Shinwari had saved Zeller's life twice in Afghanistan, and Zeller felt he owed Shinwari. Zeller lobbied the State Department and Congress on Shinwari's behalf. Due in part to Zeller's efforts, Shinwari had his visa reinstated and moved to the United States with his family. Once in America, Shinwari and Zeller founded No One Left Behind, an organization that helps former interpreters in Afghanistan and Iraq resettle in the United States.<sup>58</sup> The efforts of former servicemembers and nonprofits suggest that the U.S. government's approach to its former Afghan interpreters is severely lacking. Qualified interpreters have already served the United States and could continue to do so on American soil.

Since the 1980s, Afghan refugees were given the chance to rebuild their lives in the United States, and many have made significant contributions to securing their adopted home. Today, millions of displaced people from such locations as Syria, Libya, Iran, and Pakistan long for the ability to pursue economic opportunity and live in the relative safety that life in the United States can provide. The U.S. government is neither going to take in every refugee nor is every refugee admitted into the United States going to agree with all U.S. foreign policy. Any significant number of refugee admissions, however, goes a long way to assure the world of U.S. intentions and values. Refugees' successes in the United States counter extremists' hostile portrayals of America and offer a positive example of the country's best values of inclusion and opportunity. As the United States has witnessed in Afghanistan, distant refugee and "failed state" crises of today may unfortunately become the U.S. battlefields of tomorrow. If that is the case, the United States will need people who understand the cultures and dialects of the region. It would be unwise to solely admit refugees on the expectation of service for U.S. security. Yet, former refugees—including Obaid Younossi, Fahim Fazli, Humaira Ghilzai, Nadia Sultan, and countless others—have made the United States more innovative, skilled, and safe. Our recent history suggests that many of today's refugees will do the same.

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## Notes

1. For historical polls on refugee admissions, see Frank Newport, "Historical Review: Americans' Views on Refugees Coming to U.S.," Gallup, 19 November 2015, <http://www.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/186716/historic-review-americans-views-refugees-coming.aspx>.
2. Prior to immigration restrictions enacted in the late nineteenth century and the 1920s, there was little need for a refugee policy. Nearly anyone with the resources to come the United States was allowed to immigrate. After 1924, Congress effectively restricted immigration to the United States outside of northwestern Europe. See American Immigration Council (AIC), "An Overview of U.S. Refugee Law and Policy," AIC, 18 November 2015, <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/refugees-fact-sheet>.
3. For an extensive list of historical executive actions that facilitated immigration, especially refugees, see "Executive Grants of Temporary Immigration Relief 1956–Present," AIC,

- October 2014, [http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/executive\\_grants\\_of\\_temporary\\_immigration\\_relief\\_1956-present\\_final.pdf](http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/docs/executive_grants_of_temporary_immigration_relief_1956-present_final.pdf). For an overview of foreign policy and domestic politics concerns regarding refugee policy, see Carl J. Bon Tempo, *Americans at the Gate: The United States and Refugees During the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).
4. Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949, 50 U. S. C. §7 (2012), <http://www.legcounsel.house.gov/Comps/CIA49.pdf>. For their part, refugees in the United States courageously served in such government agencies as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) throughout the Cold War, often taking on shockingly high casualty rates. The CIA's attempted Bay of Pigs Invasion to overthrow Fidel Castro's regime is the most well-remembered incident, but countless refugees perished on U.S.-supported missions throughout the world. For more on refugee involvement in CIA operations, see Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).
  5. Campbell Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Table 3. Region and Country or Area of Birth of the Foreign-Born Population: 1960 to 1990," U.S. Census Bureau, 9 March 1999, <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/tab03.html?cssp=SERP>.
  6. United Press, "Afghan Gets Reagan Hug," Afghan Refugees, William Barr Files, 1982–1983, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library, Simi Valley, CA.
  7. Ronald Reagan, "Remarks on Signing the Afghanistan Day Proclamation" (speech, White House, Washington, DC, 10 March 1982), American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=42248>.
  8. United Press, "Afghan Gets Reagan Hug."
  9. Associated Press, "73 House Members Ask U.S. Asylum For Afghan Refugees," *San Francisco (CA) Chronicle*, 5 December 1985.
  10. Ibid.
  11. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that the district Immigration and Naturalization Service involved with the case's decision "indicated that they would not be returned to Afghanistan," but rather he intended to deport the individuals in question to another country. See Randy Shilts, "Afghans Face Ouster Ousted by U.S.," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 18 February 1982; and Congressman Fortney H. Stark Jr. to assistant to the President for congressional liaison Kenneth M. Duberstein, newspaper article, ID #079793, IM 079433-080097, WHORM: Immigration, box 7, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library.
  12. Stark to Duberstein, 24 May 1982, ID #079793, IM 079433-080097, WHORM: Immigration, box 7, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library; "Steve" to William Barr, 31 May 1982, folder "Afghan Refugees (OA 9094)," William Barr Files, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library; and Bill Soiffer, "Judge Disregards Fake Visas: Afghan Refugees Can Stay," *San Francisco (CA) Chronicle*, 11 August 1982.
  13. Ibid.
  14. "Steve," to William Barr.
  15. A response to Congressman Stark written by Alan C. Nelson, Immigration and Naturalization Services commissioner, offers no indication that the White House would intervene and only clarifies that "consistent with Administration policy, no Afghans are being returned to Afghanistan, given the conditions in that country," but that some could be returned to a "third country." Additionally, the statement reiterates that fake passports were used to enter the United States. See Alan C. Nelson to Congressman Fortney H. Stark Jr., 20 July 1982, ID #079793, IM 079433-080097, WHORM: Immigration, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library; and Soiffer, "Judge Disregards Fake Visas."
  16. Examples of criticism of Soviet-backed government include Fahim Fazli, *Fahim Speaks: A Warrior-Actor's Odyssey from Afghanistan to Hollywood and Back*, with Michael Moffett (North Hills, CA: Warriors Publishing Group, 2013); Saima Wahab, *In My Father's Country: An Afghan Woman Defies Her Fate* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012); Maryam Quadrat Aseel, *Torn Between Two Cultures: An Afghan-American Woman Speaks Out* (Herndon, VA: Capital Books, 2003); and Suraya Sadeed, *Forbidden Lessons in a Kabul Guesthouse: The True Story of a Woman Who Risked Everything to Bring Hope to Afghanistan*, with Damien Lewis, (New York: Hyperion, 2011).
  17. Frank Ahrens, "Crackling Signals," *Washington Post*, 10 November 2001, <https://www>

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18. Analyzing the effectiveness of Cold War VOA broadcasts is outside the scope of this article. Obviously, progovernment forces in Afghanistan made attempts to jam the broadcasts, which often made it difficult for the United States to broadcast into Afghanistan. Still, VOA broadcasts were heard in Afghanistan, and Spozhmai Maiwandi reported receiving listener mail from people in Afghanistan. She listened to a VOA Dari broadcast the night before fleeing Kabul, Afghanistan. Spozhmai Maiwandi, interview by Mae McKernan and Shaista Wahab, 8 September 1983, Afghan Oral History Project, audiocassette, University Library, University of Nebraska at Omaha.
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  20. Obaid Younossi, telephone interview with the author, September 2015.
  21. Robert Tomasovic, telephone interview with the author, September 2015.
  22. Tony Perry, "Mock Afghan Village at Camp Pendleton Aims to Prepare Troops for Combat," *L.A. Now* (blog), *Los Angeles Times*, 16 November 2010, <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2010/11/my-entry.html>; and Carl Nasman, "Marines Get Crash Course in Afghan Culture in California Model Village," PBS NewsHour, 6 March 2012, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/military-jan-june12-afghanvillage\\_03-06/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/military-jan-june12-afghanvillage_03-06/).
  23. Steve Wartenberg, "The Language of War," *Columbus* (OH) *Dispatch*, 8 November 2009, [http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/business/2009/11/08/Mission\\_Essential\\_ART\\_ART\\_11-08-09\\_D1\\_FCFIUBU.html](http://www.dispatch.com/content/stories/business/2009/11/08/Mission_Essential_ART_ART_11-08-09_D1_FCFIUBU.html).
  24. Mission Essential Personnel's prominent role in providing linguists for the United States in Afghanistan can be seen in the fact that, as of January 2013, the office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Program Support) reported there were only 5,796 translator/interpreters in Afghanistan employed by U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). Compare this with Mission Essential Personnel spokesman citing that 6,896 linguists worked on behalf of the U.S. government in October 2012. See Jesse Ellison, "As War Nears an End, Our Afghan Translators Are Being Left Behind," *Daily Beast*, 21 October 2012, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/10/21/as-war-nears-an-end-our-afghan-translators-are-being-left-behind.html>; and Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD), *Contractor Support of U.S. Operations in the USCENTCOM Area of Responsibility to include Iraq and Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: DASD, 2013), [http://www.acq.osd.mil/log/ps/.CENTCOM\\_reports.html/5A\\_Jan2013.doc](http://www.acq.osd.mil/log/ps/.CENTCOM_reports.html/5A_Jan2013.doc).
  25. While there are no widely available statistics for the percentage of foreign-born employees at such institutes as the Defense Language Institution, its website states that "applicants must have near native language proficiency in all skills." This suggests that one would probably be a native or heritage speaker of the language to receive the job. For information on the ROTC Global Officers program, see "FAQs," Project Go, <http://www.rotcprojectgo.org/faqs>.
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  28. Fazli, *Fahim Speaks*, 114.
  29. Ibid., 48–50.
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  31. Capt Ryan P. Benson, "From Formal Evaluation of Fahim Fazli by Captain Ryan Benson, USMC," in Fazli, *Fahim Speaks*.
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