



Peace Education Center's Statement

On Ending The War In Afghanistan

While the Peace Education Center of Greater Lansing opposed the US military takeover of Afghanistan from the Taliban after 9/11, opposed the invasion of Iraq, and has called for an end to America's Forever Wars, we are saddened but not surprised by the rapid collapse of the Afghanistan military and government. But President Biden's decision to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan was the correct move, even if he did not see how quickly the Afghani government would collapse creating a flood of refugees seeking to leave the country.

For twenty years, the United States has committed various levels of military support, funding and other resources attempting to create a government, military and society in Afghanistan that would be strong enough to prevent the Taliban from returning to power. It is now obvious that this effort has failed dramatically. While events are still unfolding, it is difficult to provide a complete understanding of what led to this war ending with this worst-case scenario, the historical record stands clear enough that we can draw some lessons not just about the fall of Afghanistan but also about the role of American foreign policy and its over reliance on military force as a predominate tool in supporting perceived American interests.

First, the ultimate failure of the long-standing American effort to establish a viable government was predictable from the beginning based on the history of failed foreign interventions in Afghanistan; and, second, on the well-recognized inability of the US to establish a stable, honest and competent government with a legitimacy confirmed by most people. Without a legitimate government, the Afghani military could never create a fighting force with the determination to stand on its own; it would always need the full support of American resources, especially air power, to keep the Taliban at bay.

While the US withdrawal could have been organized to reduce the chaos that has ensued, it is probably unrealistic -- given the country's geographic isolation and the large number of Afghani people who had cooperated with the US -- to think that even the best organized evacuation would not have been rough given the sudden surge of Taliban power. There is plenty of time for the blame game for the initial chaos.

Third, any claim that keeping a residual military force of several thousands in Afghanistan indefinitely could have prevented the collapse or at least slowed it significantly, emerges as unrealistic. The sudden collapse of the Afghani military within a few days was a surprise, but its collapse within a few weeks or months was clearly coming even with a few thousand American forces providing some level of support -- such a small force could not keep their fingers in the

dyke forever. Eventually the weakness of the government would not have prevented the Taliban from isolating Kabul and taking control, which is what they have done now.

Now, the immediate focus of American efforts in Afghanistan must be to evacuate American citizens, foreign nationals who supported American efforts, and as many Afghani citizens who supported us as we can. But sadly, we must recognize that some will be left behind no matter our best intentions and efforts.

While the immediate inclination for some political leaders will be to start pointing blame for the sudden collapse on President Biden's decision to remove remaining American military too soon, apparently based on faulty intelligence, a more honest perspective would be to recognize that the current moment has culminated from twenty years of a bi-partisan failure to recognize the mistakes of our foreign and military policies. This should force us to think about the overall causes of the current disaster in Afghanistan.

Even as the causes for the immediate collapse of Afghanistan are debated, peace activists must draw attention to the long-term overall mistakes that have motivated American foreign and military policies. Since the end of the Cold War in 1991, the dominant foreign-policy elites have been operating under notions of America as the "Indispensable Nation" and of "American Exceptionalism." This hubris led to imperial overreach after 9/11.

This elite pursued a foreign policy that has relied heavily on either the possibility or the reality of using the American military power -- instead of diplomacy and international cooperation -- as a predominate factor to achieve our perceived interests in international disputes. This Afghani war has wasted over \$1 trillion and cost thousands of lives in this unsuccessful effort to bolster the now collapsed Afghani government. This militaristic foreign policy has led to the unwinnable "Forever Wars" we have been fighting over the last twenty years, but not just in Afghanistan. We still have military forces in the Middle East and Africa -- all over the world in fact -- that have the potential for future debacles.

This over-reliance on the military to protect our national interests has resulted in bi-partisan political support for ever increasing military spending, making it a sacred cow that even some moderate political leaders feel obligated to support. For example, President Biden proposed a record military budget of \$731 billion, but some political leaders, like our own Senator Gary Peters, have sought even more and then bragged about the money brought into Michigan. The excessive amount we are spending on the military not only deprives our country of resources needed to confront domestic and planetary needs, such as poverty, climate change and future pandemics, but also orients our foreign policy toward more fools' errands like the military operations in Vietnam, Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan.

Finally, we need to develop a foreign policy that focuses on diplomacy, on international cooperation, on respect for the national interests of other countries, and on non-military interventions rather than resorting to foolish and wasteful military adventures. A foreign policy that relies on an ever-expanding military budget has not protected our country's interests. In

fact, it has harmed them by making war instead of more creative problem solving as an easier way we address international challenges. We must reduce military spending to free vital resources to meet our human, planetary and environmental needs.

Let Afghanistan be lesson Number One in the 21st Century for protecting our national interests by creating a non-militaristic foreign policy and by reducing the military spending that has frequently made a militaristic foreign policy a predominate response to international challenges.

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