

Abstract

Allow them to take the reins: Why Central Asian states need to lead in Afghanistan. By: Brandon Angel

Looking at the United States' 'forever war' coming to an end in Afghanistan, the United States' foreign policy must re-establish and re-think their policy proposals for the region. The twenty-year war in Afghanistan, and the quick recapture of Afghanistan by Taliban forces, show that the cultural change wanted in Afghanistan is a failing policy for the United States. This paper argues that the Central Asian states, specifically Uzbekistan, must lead in the region's security and stability. Reasons are given that re-interventionist policy in Afghanistan will only lead to more foreign policy blunders. For future stability in the region, the Central Asian states have many reasons to want a stable Afghanistan. Reasoning included are the military cost within the NDAA, the cost of American lives, and the possible refugee crisis that will stem from an Afghanistan collapse. Ideas are discussed for allowing more funding for defensive equipment to the Central Asian states and communication equipment to bolster their borders with Afghanistan to reduce the likelihood of ISIS-K forces slipping back into neighboring Central Asian states and attempting to use Afghanistan as a 'road map' for further Islamic fundamentalism.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Central Asia, ISIS-K, Taliban, Conflict, Forever Wars, Military Funding, National Borders

The recent withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan had led many within D.C. to attest that the United States is facing a possible threat within 6-12 months from Taliban forces. Some in D.C. have stated that the United States is less safe now than before without a permanent military base.

The United States must allow Central Asian states to take a more proactive role in the country's security and diplomacy with the Taliban. The ground situation remains that ISIS-K and Taliban forces will fight for control over the country. Attacks within Afghanistan will continue as the Taliban continues to try and maintain some semblance of security within the country. The United States should not seek military intervention in the inevitable fighting and civil war that seems on the brink in Afghanistan.

The Taliban and ISIS-K forces fighting for one another could continue destabilizing the region if the Central Asian states do not take a leading role in negotiations. The United States should allow those nations to take the lead role in ensuring stability.

The United States Cannot Afford Staying in Afghanistan

The United States, in fighting this twenty-year war in Afghanistan, has lost valuable time, resources, and military members in trying to prop up a regime that was never going to work. As Forbes Magazine concluded in August of 2020, "In the 20 years since September 11, 2001, the United States has spent more than \$2 trillion on the war in Afghanistan."¹ The United States was essentially throwing money and resources at a problem that would not work. Costing the American taxpayer trillions of dollars to maintain a war of this magnitude is unacceptable. With so many domestic issues in the U.S., including lack of infrastructure, the climate crisis, and the many social problems currently occurring within the country, the cost-benefit analysis to stay in Afghanistan is lopsided. This financial burden is partly the problem with the United States' occupation. It does not also consider the military members lost because of the conflict.

Statistics from October 1 of this year concluded that, "As of October 1, 2021, the United States had lost a total of 7,054 soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan"² This

1. Helman, Christopher. "The War in Afghanistan Cost America \$300 Million per Day for 20 Years, with Big Bills Yet to Come."

2. Statista, ed. "U.S. Military Fatalities in Iraq and Afghanistan by State 2021."

report shows the high cost the servicemembers themselves have to continuously pay in defending the 'forever wars.' These statistics only show part of the problem as it is more expounded with costs to other nations' servicemembers and Afghanistan itself. A.P. News has final statistics on Afghanistan and what that means for the United States, American service members killed in Afghanistan through April: 2,448., U.S. contractors: 3,846., Afghan national military and police: 66,000., Other allied service members, including from other NATO member states: 1,144., Afghan civilians: 47,245., Taliban and other opposition fighters: 51,191., Aid workers: 444., Journalists: 72."³ The human cost of one of America's forever wars, by any account, is unsustainable. To have Americans continuously fighting for a country that fell within weeks shows that the propping of the government and its forces was never going to work.

Linda Bilmes of Harvard University reports a ripple effect of the war in Afghanistan on our veterans, "...the United States has committed to pay in health care, disability, burial, and other costs for roughly 4 million Afghanistan and Iraq veterans: more than \$2 trillion."⁴ Trillions of dollars were spent on a war to transform a nation from an authoritarian fundamentalist state into a democratic one, which has overtly failed by any standard.

The United States needs to worry about its domestic problems first.

Afghanistan has been called the graveyard of empires for multiple reasons, and the United States has joined the list of countries that have tried turning the country into something more palatable for the aggressor nation. The Soviet Union, British Empire, Mongol Khanate, and the United States have all tried to turn a more conservative Islamic country into something that resembles a 'democratic' state. The problem for Americans is that the culture there is not something that will transform into a new democratic state in Central Asia fundamentally because of those cultural differences. The idea that the Afghan population should accept a complete change to their culture and society will not take hold.

Many within the foreign policy establishment in D.C. believe that the Afghan people will accept the benevolence of the United States to make their country better and more democratic. To think about the situation from the Afghan side, they will not accept an aggressor nation to come in, change their government and society, to a side that they deem decadent and impure. Afghanistan was never

3. Knickmeyer, Ellen. "Costs of the Afghanistan War, in Lives and Dollars."

4. Bilmes, Linda. "The Long-Term Costs of United States Care for Veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars."

going to be a democratic state, nor should the United States try and change a fundamentally Islamic country into a democratic one. Instead, the United States should look inwards at its' problems and show the upsides of democratic liberalism if they wish more countries to change. The riots and hyper domestic partisanship that has been on display for many years is not how to show a liberalized democracy is the correct government to move forward. Allowing the United States to be pulled apart domestically only shows to the international community that we cannot solve our problems and Afghanistan's. By forcing liberal tenants on another country, that only spikes the resentment of the home country and nationalist tendencies of the population there. The United States continues to try and push liberal policies on other countries in an attempt to say they are only trying to help the country in question. In his recent book, *Great Delusions*, John Mearsheimer, Professor at the University of Chicago, states, "In these circumstances, liberal great powers regularly dress up their hard-nosed behavior with liberal rhetoric."⁵ Liberal policies abroad, and the attempt to liberalize countries, only backfires when they attempt to push those policies on others.

The Partisan animosity between the two major political parties in the United States and the significant problems that the United States has only shows the Afghan people that we cannot handle issues. Since the United States has so many domestic issues, the United States should look to its significant problems before trying to go abroad to spread democracy. For one problem, the infrastructure of the United States is at, according to a CFR backgrounder, "averaged a "C-," up from a "D+" in 2017...[and that] an "infrastructure investment gap" of nearly \$2.6 trillion this decade that, if unaddressed, could cost the United States \$10 trillion in lost GDP by 2039."⁶ The infrastructure problem and the many social woes of the country, including racial issues, voting rights, and congressional deadlock in passing any beneficial legislation, do not show the Afghan people any good governance. Instead, the problems show that the American democracy is currently faltering and that major domestic fixes need to occur before any country can look towards the United States as a 'city on a hill.'

A continuing ISIS-K and Taliban war will sap each other of strength.

5. Mearsheimer, John J. *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*.

6. McBride, James, and Anshu Siripurapu. "The State of U.S. Infrastructure."

Colin Kahl, the undersecretary of defense for policy, stated in a recent United States intelligence report that, “The intelligence community currently assesses that both Isis-K [Islamic State Khorasan Province, the Afghanistan-based group] and al-Qaida have the intent to conduct external operations, including against the United States, but neither currently has the capability to do so. We could see ISIS-K generate that capability in somewhere between six or 12 months,”⁷ This intelligence does come at a time when American attitudes towards terrorist attacks and the awareness of attacks on Americans is highly volatile regarding the Afghanistan withdrawal and the 13 American service members killed. American interests are, first and foremost, to ensure that no more American service members die, nor American citizens die at the hand of a terrorist sleeper cell or lone wolf target within the United States.

However, according to a CSIS reporting in 2018, “ISIS-K has a fighting force of between 600 and 800 militants as of October 2018. These numbers are down from peak levels in 2016 when its fighting force numbered between 3,000 to 4,000 militants.”⁸ This group is consciously trying to recruit more members, especially from more hardline elements within Afghanistan and the Central Asian states that see the Taliban as a threat to Islam and their ‘pure’ ideology. A report by Asfandyar Mir at the Wilson Center explains that tense relationship, “The enmity between the two groups has been aggravated by sustained military hostilities, but the main cause remains their sectarian difference. ISIS-K subscribes to the Jihadi-Salafism ideology — and plays up the ‘purity’ of its anti-idolatry credentials. The Taliban, on the other hand, subscribe to an alternative Sunni Islamic sectarian school, the Hanafi madhhab, which ISIS-K regards as deficient. The two groups also differ over the role of nationalism. ISIS-K fiercely rejects it, which runs counter to the Afghan Taliban’s aims of ruling over Afghanistan.”⁹ The two terrorist powers within Afghanistan seem to be at each other’s throats instead of attacking the United States. To see the Taliban and ISIS-K, in a civil war for the country brings about ideas of how the United States had to deal with Taliban attacks in the past. The United States had to fight an enemy that used suicide bombings and IED (Improvised Explosive Device) attacks against their forces. The Taliban now must deal with an enemy that has replicated the same attacks

7. “Islamic State in Afghanistan Could Have Capacity to Strike US next Year.” *The Guardian*.

8. “Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K).” *Center for Strategic and International Studies*.

9. Mir, Asfandyar. 2021. “The Isis-K Resurgence.” *Wilson Center*.

against them. The ISIS-K troops fighting against the Taliban forces will only continue to sap each other of strength instead of mounting any concentrated effort to fight the United States. The two sides in the continued fight will have to win sides, and the majority of citizens of Afghanistan, to maintain their power. Therefore, the Taliban government will have to figure out a way to ensure that they stay 'pure' to their ideological movement without isolating the even more extreme individuals that may stray to ISIS-K.

If the Taliban must continuously worry about ISIS-K threats and attacks, they do not have the time to coordinate attacks against the west. They will have to worry about their own security and the humanitarian crisis looming within the country. ISIS-K is stepping up the attacks to ensure that the Taliban know that they are there to fight what they deem to be an 'impure' version of Islam and are willing to die to make the country 'pure' in their eyes. The disenfranchised youth that may not be able to escape from Afghanistan, and see that the Taliban are brutal oppressors, may join the ISIS forces to arm themselves against what they see as a threat.

The Central Asian states should handle the refugee problems

The biggest denominator that kept ISIS-K and the Taliban from fighting each other was the American forces within Afghanistan. With American troops gone, the two powers will only continue to fight one another in an inevitable civil war that will perhaps kill thousands, with millions displaced or living under a terrible humanitarian crisis.

One of the biggest problems that will occur under this coming fight is the refugee crisis that will cause problems within the region and abroad. The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) has projected that "a half million Afghans may seek to leave by the end of 2021."¹⁰ These refugees will be leaving to try and make a better life, many of them seeking to get out before retribution can be brought on them, especially those families and individuals that worked with the American forces when they were stationed there.

This refugee crisis very well may occur if the Taliban cannot guarantee safety, security, and a return to normalcy for the 40 million Afghan citizens against the ISIS-K forces. The World Food Programme reported on October 25 that, "the lives, livelihoods and access to food for 22.8 million people will be severely impacted...more than one-in-two Afghans will face Phase 3 crisis or

10. "Half a Million Afghans Could Flee across Borders - UNHCR." *Reuters*.

Phase 4 emergency levels of acute food insecurity from November through the March lean season, requiring an urgent international response to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe.”¹¹ Such a significant humanitarian crisis could see Afghan refugees trying to escape the problem and migrate into better situations abroad.

The Central Asian states, having the land borders to Afghanistan, have the first responsibility in helping out the refugees. Being that the central Asian states have a closer heritage and societal similarities with Afghanistan than the United States and the European States, they should be the ones to handle the refugees first. They should be the ones to do the first vetting process and the initial contact and humanitarian aid that the refugees may need

Americans should continue to help those refugees and interpreters that worked with American forces, especially those with language skills. A BBC report in August concluded that, “As many as 50,000 interpreters have worked with the U.S. military. Since 2008, some 70,000 Afghans - interpreters and their families - have moved to the U.S. under a special immigrant visa awarded for their service. But some 20,000 interpreters and their families are still seeking a way out.”¹² Veterans of all stripes are aware of the interpreters' sacrifices to help the American forces in Afghanistan and see them as brothers in arms. In serving alongside our troops, many Americans believe that these individuals deserve the right to come here and should be given special immigrant visa status as soon as possible. These individuals who have sacrificed their livelihoods to make Afghanistan better did so at enormous personal risk. They cannot go back into Afghanistan without massive personal risk to themselves and their families.

The Central Asian states need to take a prominent role in Stabilizing Afghanistan

Each of the Central Asian states, especially those on the land border with Afghanistan, will have to take a much more prominent role in policing their borders, as well as dialogue and discussion with the Taliban government. The security threats and destabilizing effects of Afghanistan may ripple over into their countries. Without a proper response by each, they could see threats of their own or possible terrorist groups acting in unison.

11. “Half of Afghanistan's Population Now Face Severe Hunger.” *World Food Program USA*.

12. Honderich, Holly, and Bernd Debusmann. “From Afghan Interpreter to US Homeless - The Long Road to the American Dream.”

With the election of President Sadyr Japarov, Kyrgyzstan has only continued to fuel nationalist sentiment and Islamic fervor. In outlawing Islamic political groups, the oppressive rule of the President could and will spur more individuals within Kyrgyzstan to join ISIS-K forces. When individuals feel targeted for their religious or personal beliefs, some may look for an outlet or a group to latch on to. Many of these individuals may join ISIS-K as returning from Afghanistan as veterans of the war there. Seeing the disenfranchised Kyrgyz people, these ISIS-K recruits could use Afghanistan as a road map to overthrow an unpopular government and install an Islamic rule of their own. An Atlantic Council report concludes that, “Allowing the government of Kyrgyzstan to entrench itself by scapegoating the United States and other Western powers has the potential to fuel dangerous anti-American sentiment that could manifest itself in organizations like the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), which has recruited from Kyrgyzstan.”¹³ The Kyrgyz government is upsetting the more extreme elements of Islamic fundamentalism in their country. Without a proper vetting of individuals crossing from Afghanistan, some fighters may attempt to recruit more individuals. The hardline veteran elements of the Afghanistan war may see the Kyrgyz government as weak and try to lure individuals of their disenfranchised population to the ISIS-K group.

Along with the possible ISIS forces returning home to Kyrgyzstan, there are also the border problems that each of the Central Asian states faces. The countries bordering Afghanistan, specifically, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, must deal with the possible refugees and possible fighters entering their countries. A report by Mansur Mirovalev in Al Jazeera states, “All three ramped up security, held military drills and moved more servicemen and weaponry to their borders with the war-torn nation in recent weeks. Uzbekistan’s [border] is 150 kilometers long (93 miles), and the main crossing across the Amu Darya River is the Soviet-built Friendship Bridge that has for decades been a major transport hub. So far, more than a thousand refugees, including servicemen, have been let in since the fall of Kabul and the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif that lies only 80 kilometers (50 miles) from the border.”¹⁴ Thousands of refugees are already pouring into Central Asian states. A claim that Uzbeks reportedly let in former Afghan vice president and chameleonic strongman Abdul Rashid Dostum, a 67-year-old ethnic Uzbek who sided with the Soviets, the US-backed mujahideen, the anti-Taliban

13. Posner, Lillian. “The Gathering Threat to the US in Kyrgyzstan.”

14. Mirovalev, Mansur. “Afghanistan's Central Asian Neighbours Panic, Reject Refugees.”

15. Ibid.

Northern Alliance, and the US-led NATO coalition has also surfaced.¹⁵ If these countries are going to vet the individuals coming into their countries fully, they will need the support and backing from some other countries to ensure that the individuals they are allowing into the country are not linked to terrorist organizations.

Having these border countries be the first ones to monitor who is crossing into their countries allows them to deal with the more extremist elements instead of having the United States intelligence be on the ground to deal with fundamentalist elements of the region. The Central Asian states, in doing their own intelligence, allow them to deter the hardliners and help stabilize the region.

Tajikistan, which shares a 1,347 km border with Afghanistan, has decided to take a more prominent role in policing its border. In an article by Umida Hashimova in *The Diplomat*, she reports that, “On July 5, Tajikistan ordered the mobilization of 20,000 military reservists for the reinforcement of country’s border with Afghanistan. Tajikistan’s President also visited two Afghan-Tajik border posts to check the readiness of military assets.”¹⁶ The Tajik government sees that they must police their border alongside the other Central Asian states and take a more direct role themselves instead of relying on other states. The Tajik government knows what the Afghan withdrawal may mean and decided to start training with military exercises. Another article by Umida Hashimova for the *Diplomat* explains that, “On March 11-14, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan conducted their third annual military exercises... Also in 2018, Tajikistan hosted the first military exercise with Uzbekistan in August, in which the border troops of both countries fought back notional Islamists entering from Afghanistan. Within a month of the first exercise, Tajikistan hosted a larger anti-terrorism exercise in September 2018. One hundred Army officers from Uzbekistan and 500 Army officers from Tajikistan participated.”¹⁷ The Central Asian states will have to ensure a ‘firm but negotiable’ role when dealing with the Taliban government without isolating the citizens of their own countries. The more authoritarian Central Asian states, if they push too much against the more fundamentalist elements, may only hurt their sovereignty.

16. Hashimova, Umida. “Greater Coordination in Central Asian Responses to Afghan Border Troubles.”

17. Hashimova, Umida. “Uzbekistan and Tajikistan Engage in Joint Military Exercises.”

Continuing the military exercises by using their military instead of relying on the United States or outside forces benefits the Central Asian states and the United States. The United States, in a show of support for the enhanced roles that the Central Asian states are playing, should be supportive of the military actions. Having the Central Asian states take on the more prominent role of security in Central Asia allows the United States some breathing room in the region and a minor role for the United States to play.

The Central Asian states are aware that the Taliban takeover of the country could have spillover effects into their regions. With the Central Asian states taking a more significant role in the security of the area and their borders, it allows them to understand better what is going on within Afghanistan and frees of American spending on defense in Afghanistan.

The Central Asian states should be the first to have discussions with the Taliban

The withdrawal from Afghanistan brought about some harsh realities. They will have to rely more heavily on the Central Asian states to take a more front-seat approach to security in the region, and it cannot change the society and culture of a nation. Considering these lessons, the United States should rely more on communication and intelligence equipment sales to Uzbekistan to cooperatively work together to curb terrorism and continue to vet individuals coming into their countries. The short-term goals of the United States are to be mindful of the failures of Afghanistan and help the Central Asian states come to terms with those failures. The Central Asian states will need funding to ensure they can take on more robust security in the region while the United States takes a backseat role to their security forces. There needs to be a realistic approach to looking at what they may be and the United States' trade-offs to ensure that happens. It is not ideal by any means to continue to fund other states' militaries and training; however, ensuring a 5-year commitment plan that that funding ends, with no option to renew, will ensure better stabilization in the region. The Uzbeks are already provided funding by the United States, but to stabilize the situation, Uzbeks have the best position to help the situation and will need more funding.

The Uzbek Prime Minister, Sardor Umurzakov, met with the Taliban government on October 16 to discuss “trade and economic interaction, ensuring border security, cooperation in the field of energy, international cargo transportation, and transit.”¹⁸ These discussions that the Uzbek government is already having with the

18. Radio Free Europe. “Uzbekistan Holds Talks with Taliban on Trade, Energy, Railway Projects.”

Taliban government can be a start for stabilizing relations and the situation in Afghanistan. These discussions with the Taliban government may allow further talks on humanitarian grounds. The Uzbek government can lead the other Central Asian states in different talks with the Taliban government and should continue to do so. This dialogue opens the possibility of normalized discussions over matters instead of going to war to solve problems.

The countries that border Afghanistan, specifically Uzbekistan, will need more equipment to ensure a secure but peaceful negotiation with the Taliban government. The State Department fact sheet states, “The United States has \$79 million in open government-to-government sales cases with the Central Asian states under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) system. Uzbekistan is purchasing equipment, valued at \$40 million, for its armed forces through a combination of national funds and Foreign Military Financing (FMF).”¹⁹ The United States will have to continue to expand this program to allow the countries to do the process themselves of defending against Islamic fundamentalism. These sales need to be communication and intelligence-based, and no offensive technology should be sold to the Central Asian states. More training to police their borders free up the United States to be a second vetting process for individuals if the Central Asian states' vetting process is not as thorough. The equipment sold should not be high technology drones or offensive capabilities but instead more communications equipment, and training on that equipment, so that they can better suit their border control needs. Allowing the Central Asian states to protect themselves instead of relying on American forces defeats multiple problems. They will need the tools, mainly the equipment and border patrols, to vet fundamentalist elements correctly. Although the Taliban have stated they will not go into other Central Asian states, the ISIS-K group wants a larger Islamic Caliphate. To reduce the likelihood of those fundamentalist elements, the Central Asian states will have to vet those entering and defend the national sovereignty of their borders.

The United States' change in policy must have Central Asian states taking the lead role.

Firstly, allowing the Central Asian states more funding reduces the likelihood of American forces being used in border control actions alongside the Central Asian states. The United States may see a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan akin to mass starvation and want to re-intervene in Afghanistan. This policy will only allow the United States to get drawn into a more significant conflict again and be right back at square one with Afghanistan. By allowing the Central Asian states to

19. “U.S. Security Cooperation with Central Asia - United States Department of State.” *U.S. Department of State*.

take a more direct approach to police their borders, they are responsible for what happens. They can better help with the humanitarian problems—allowing them to get the tools needed to combat the extremist elements that may want to enter the countries, more cooperation between the states will be required. The Central Asian states should continue to vet those returning to Central Asia to ensure that fundamentalist elements do not spread. The Central Asian states have a common heritage, background, and history that they can leverage to negotiate and patrol their borders. By having American forces doing it, Americans are seen as imperialists in the region for their own gains. We must ensure that American forces take the backseat to reduce the unpopular image of American troops abroad in search of monsters.

Secondly, allowing Central Asian states to take a more prominent role in defending their national sovereignty could help limit the American forces sent to Central Asia. The United States has two bases in Central Asia in which a report by CFR (Council on Foreign Relations) states, “The United States maintains two bases in Central Asia, one each in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, for its postwar operations in Afghanistan.”²⁰ Having American military forces in Central Asia only ensures more nationalist and fundamentalist sentiment among the populations to push out the American forces. The Central Asian states, in taking the more prominent role of their security, ensure that Tajiks are defending Tajikistan, Uzbeks are defending Uzbekistan, and so on. This change reduces the chance of unpopular foreign American forces taking the leading role in fighting possible fundamentalist elements.

Next, the United States Congress should advocate for higher spending within the NDAA to support counterterrorism efforts of the Central Asian states. The state department fact sheet concludes, “Central Asia FMF historically has ranged from between \$3-5 million per year, though Congress appropriated \$10 million in F.Y. 2021. The United States, under the FMF program, has supported border security and counterterrorism capabilities of partner security forces in Central Asia, including through the provision of vehicles, communications equipment, training, and sustainment.”²¹ The Central Asian states will need more funding to ensure that their borders are secure and have the proper resources. Providing that the sales to Uzbekistan and the Central Asian states are limited to communication equipment and border patrol equipment ensures that the region's stabilization is put first instead of offensive equipment to destabilize the region further. By being precise with the equipment sold to the central Asian states, the United States can

20. Beehner, Lionel. “Asia: U.S. Military Bases in Central Asia.”

21. “U.S. Security Cooperation with Central Asia - United States Department of State.” *U.S. Department of State*.

ensure the best of U.S. technology, and arms are not used in any offensive wars. The United States must maintain that offensive arms are not going to be the way to ensure stabilization, but a 'strong and negotiable' dialogue continues between the Central Asian states and the Taliban government. The cost of continued American operations in Central Asia, especially with trying to mitigate the Taliban, is astronomically impossible to do. The Central Asian states will need more funding to do it themselves, but that is a small drop in the bucket of the NDAA and what the Afghanistan war has already cost the United States. Instead of spending trillions of dollars to change Afghanistan into a democratic state, the Central Asian states should defend their borders and use their intelligence operations to see what fundamentalist groups are working there. The cost trade-off between re-intervention by the United States or possible short-term funding of Uzbekistan to provide that security for the region is best suited.

The hard lessons of Afghanistan will mean that the United States needs Central Asia to step up

The Central Asian states' security must have them take a more prominent role in stabilizing Afghanistan. The Taliban government wants stabilization to occur so that they do not have to fight with ISIS-K forces, and the Central Asian states can help facilitate those discussions. Americans would much more likely favor funding other countries instead of having American soldiers do the heavy lifting against fundamentalist groups abroad. Americans need to have a realistic approach to what Central Asia may look like in the future and how they will need to engage with the region.

Allowing for more cooperation between the Central Asian states and having them take over the main haul of military border operations grants them the opportunity to be responsible for their security. The United States would look like a more reliable ally if the United States were not consistently involved with having troops on the ground of many of these countries. Having the Central Asian states take over the leading role in which they have a vested interest looks better to the international community and the Muslim communities of the Central Asian states. It allows the United States to achieve a better international image if they were not always having their soldiers garrisoned in many countries worldwide to 'stabilize' a region.

The possible refugee crisis and humanitarian problems that Afghanistan has for the region can only destabilize the region unless the Central Asian states start to take more responsibility for what happens next door. The withdrawal from Afghanistan should be studied, and better relations with the Central Asian states

will have to be fostered. A possible re-intervention policy in Afghanistan will only continue to drain the United States through financial means and ensure that even more of our military members must fight in a drawn-out conflict.

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15. Ibid.
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