

DPPC Team  Jun 3

# Afghans Must Stand United to Defeat the Menace of Terrorism

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## ***Peace Deal Must Protect Women and Children***

On Tuesday, May 12, 2020, during the holy month of Ramadan, a maternity ward within one of the busiest hospitals in Kabul was attacked in a barbaric act of terrorism and shifted into sheer panic when gunmen dressed as police officers raided the hospital killing women, children, and newborn babies.

For decades, Taliban rule and violent acts by the Taliban in Afghanistan has deprived women and children of proper nutrition, healthcare, safety and human rights. 25% of all children in Afghanistan are underweight and over 1.3 million children under the age of five suffer from acute malnutrition. 3.7 million children have no access to education and only 19% of female children are literate. In part, America's involvement in Afghanistan has been a fight to secure opportunity and dignity for Afghanistan's women and children. Yet after nearly two decades of war, many of these challenges still persist.

According to Zalmay Khalilzad, chief U.S. negotiator for U.S. - Taliban peace talks, the U.S. believes the maternity ward attacks were orchestrated by the Islamic State. Regardless of who is to blame, this horrific act of evil should awaken the world and highlight the unfortunate, ongoing issues facing women and children in Afghanistan.

The terrorist attack in Kabul comes at a time when Afghanistan's healthcare system already faces dire complications amid the COVID-19 crisis. The worldwide pandemic has forced restricted access to what limited health services are available. While Afghanistan battles the escalating COVID-19 crisis, the country is also engaged in peace negotiations with the

Taliban insurgency. Indeed, Afghanistan is fighting two different wars: terrorism and the coronavirus.

Secretary Mike Pompeo weighed in on the two attacks noting that the Taliban and the Afghan government should cooperate to bring the perpetrators to justice.

"As long as there is no sustained reduction in violence and insufficient progress towards a negotiated political settlement, Afghanistan will remain vulnerable to terrorism. The Afghan people deserve a future free from terror, and the ongoing peace process continues to present a critical opportunity for Afghans to come together to build a united front against the menace of terrorism," Pompeo concluded.

Over the past 18 years, the American people have made significant sacrifices to maintain unwavering support for Afghanistan. Since 2001, when the U.S. liberated Afghanistan from Taliban oppression, the Afghan people have been on a journey from totalitarianism to a representative democracy. Their ongoing fight against terrorism is a fight for democracy, peace, and personal freedoms for all Afghans. Without a sustained reduction in violence there is no pathway to peace. Simultaneously, women's and children's rights are crucial to a functioning democracy.

Peace with the Taliban cannot come at the expense of the personal freedoms and a democracy that Afghans have fought so hard to earn and maintain. The peace agreement must protect democracy and personal freedoms for all Afghans — especially women and children. While obstacles remain for Afghanistan to attain long-term peace, one thing is certain: Afghans must stand united to defeat the menace of all terrorism.

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