

Research Article

Packing Up And Leaving Afghanistan: America's Painful Lessons Of The Past

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Abstract:

When The U.S. President Joseph Biden Announced That He Is Finally Increasing The Refugee Cap To 62,500 In 2021 He Put A Smile On Many Of Those Hapless People Waiting To Be Formalized In The System. Earlier In The Year Upon Coming To Office The 46th President Left A Lump In The Throat Of Many When He Announced That He Was Leaving In Place The Low 15,000 Cap Set By His Predecessor Donald Trump, A Number That Was Determined By Many Factors Including The D disdain Of People Moving Across The Southern Borders And From Overseas Especially From Muslim Countries. But The Biden Administration Has Now Made It Clear That Aside From Increasing The Numbers It Is Further Set To Add At Least 12,500 To The Numbers Next Year And Thereupon Proportionately.

There Are Many Factors That Come To Mind On The Sudden Reversal Of The Biden Administration On The Enhancement Of Admitting Refugees Especially At A Time When Both Republicans And Democrats Are At Loggerheads On Any Immigration Bill That Surfaces On Capitol Hill. Is President Biden Trying To Mollify Critics Within The Democratic Party For Leaving All Those Stranded Persons, Including Young Children On The Borders? Or Is The New President Factoring In A Possible Deluge That Could Be In Store When The United States Finally Takes The Last Boot Away From Afghanistan By September 11, 2021, A Date Symbolized By The 20th Anniversary Of The Terror Attacks Of September 11, 2001? The Conflict In Afghanistan Has Been A Painful One Over The Last Twenty Years Or Ever Since The Bush Administration Started Pounding That Central Asian Country In October 2001 Looking For Osama Bin Laden, The Al Qaeda And Terrorist Outfits Holed Up In That Country Since The Soviet Union Packed Up Its Invasion Bags And Left In 1989. The Return Of The Taliban And Lawlessness That Prevailed In Afghanistan Ultimately Led To 9/11 And

Thereafter In An American Campaign That First Started With Massive Aerial Attacks Including Fuel Air Bombings Before American And Supportive Troops From The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato)Started To Assemble. There Were Close To 125,000 American Troops At The Peak Of The Campaign In 2015; And Down To The Currently 2500-Odd Forces That Is Scheduled To Be Phased Out Over The Next Four Months Or So.

The Human And Financial Cost For The United States In Afghanistan Has Been Tremendous—More Than 2500 U.S. Troops Have Lost Their Lives And Some Us\$ 1 Trillion Has Been Supposedly Spent In Direct And Indirect Expenditure. The Human Cost For Afghanistan Has Been Even More Dear With TheUnited Nations Estimating That An Average Of About 30 To 40 Persons Killed Every Day In The Last Ten Years That Statistics Have Been Maintained. And In All These Twenty Years Of Hostilities Pitting The United States And The Taliban There Are No Exact Statistics On The Hundreds Of Thousands Of People Of People Who Have Been Internally Displaced Or Have Sought Refugee Status In Pakistan And Iran. And This Is Not To Forget The Afghans Who Had Managed To Europe Via Turkey And Perhaps Even The United States. Internal Displacement In Afghanistan Started With The Migration Of People FromRural Areas To The City Of Kabul To Escape Conscription During The Early Stages Of War But In The Current Scenario, Two Reasons Cause Greater Internal Displacement, I.E., Disaster And Conflict/Viole nce.

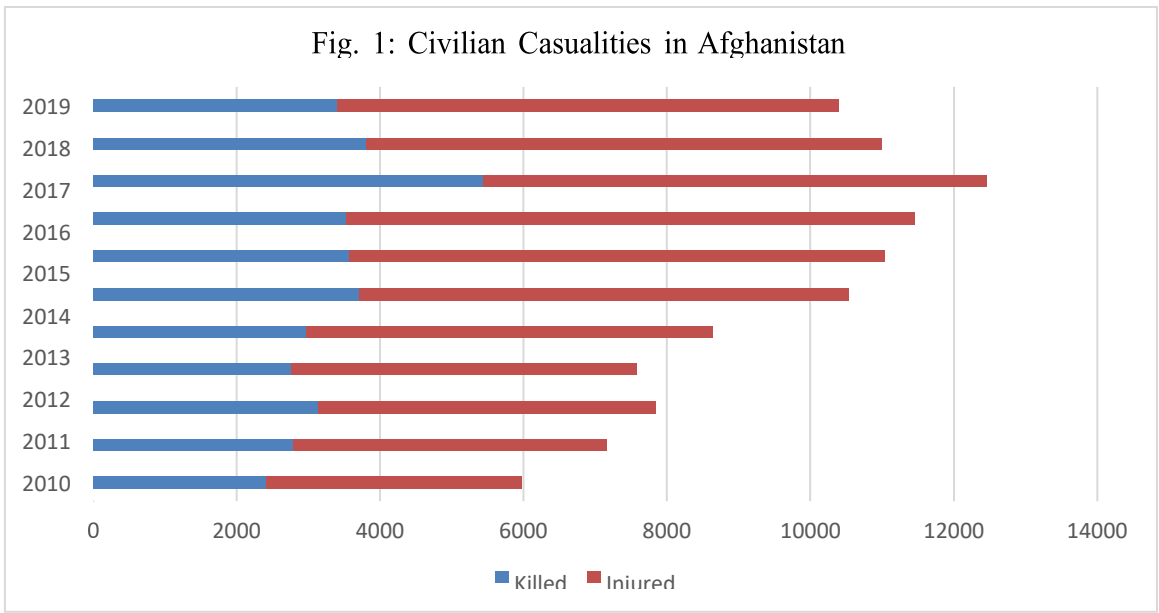
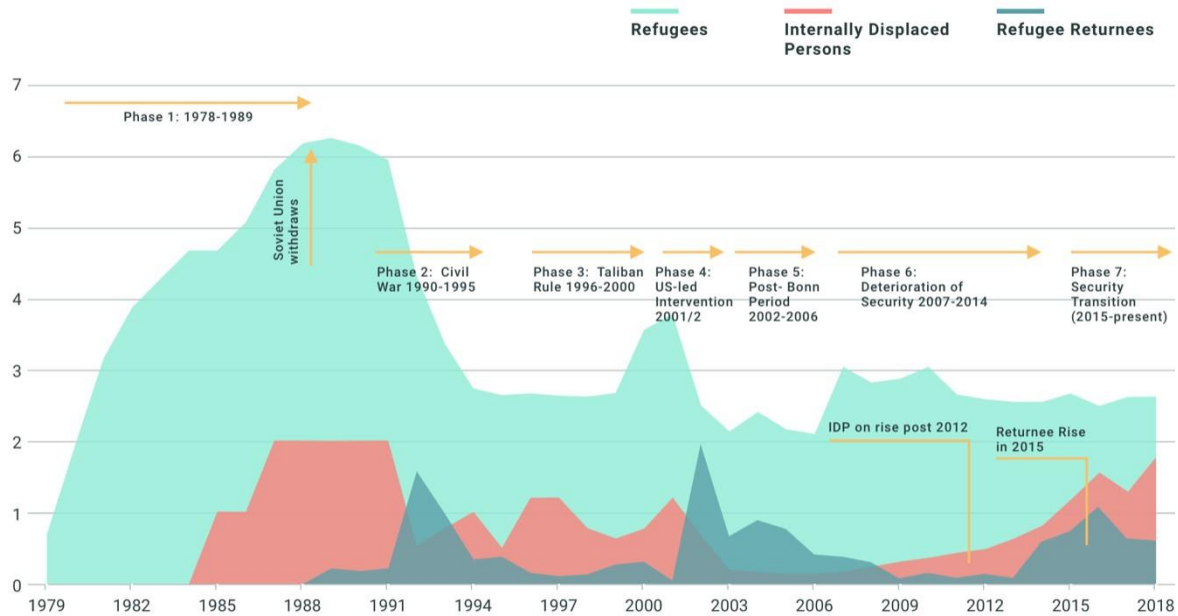


Fig. 2: Internal and External Displacement by year



Source: UNHCR (various): Time-Series Data for UNHCR's Populations of Concern Originating from Afghanistan. <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/6aac7415-621e-45b0-a5a7-51487ffe83d0> (accessed: 2-11-2018); IDMC (various): Afghanistan. <http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/afghanistan> (accessed 2-11-2018); IOM/UNHCR (2018): Returns to Afghanistan in 2017. Joint IOM-UNHCR Summary Report. https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/press_release/file/joint_returnee_report_iom_unhcr_final.pdf (accessed: 2-11-2018).
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 Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2019, www.bpb.de

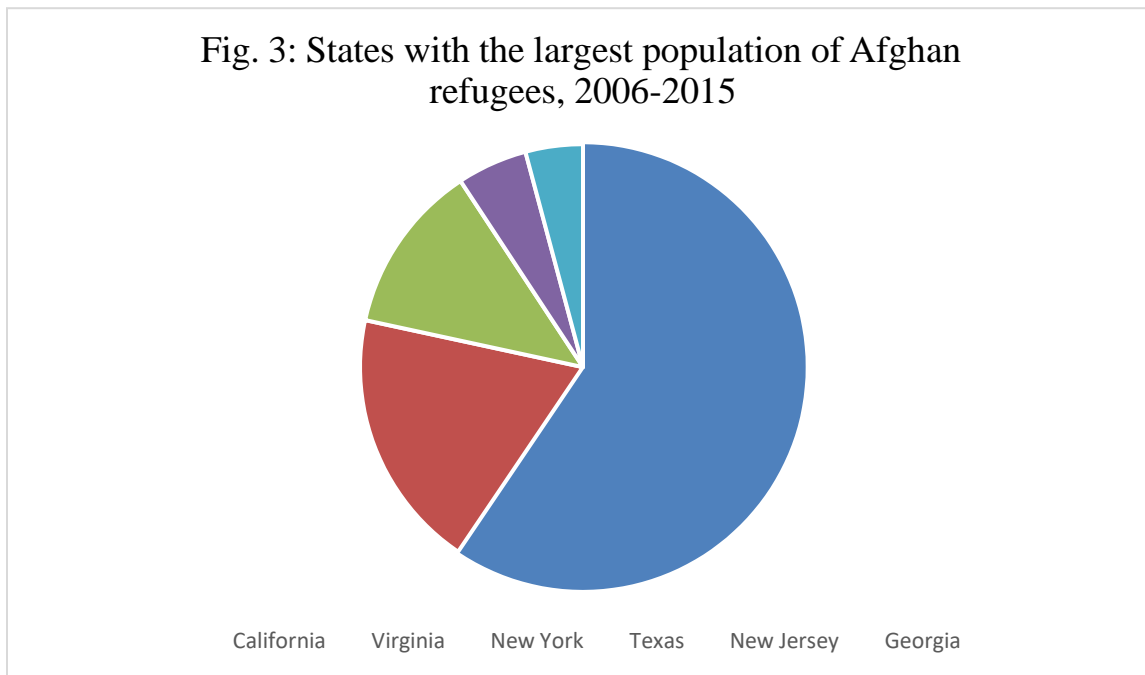


Source: Unama Ten Year Record Of Civilian Casualties In Afghanistan.

Study Shows (Fig. 1 And 2). That 578000 People Have Been Internally Displaced In The Year 2019 Which Sums Up To 4,191,000 People Internally Displaced Since The Beginning Of Wars. The First Half Of 2020 Alone Recorded 117,000 New Displacements. Though The War Kept People Displaced Most Of The Time, They Also Came Back When The Situation Stabilized. But It Was Short Until They Had To Go

Back In Exile. The External Displacement Of Afghan Refugees Was In Multiple Waves, The Recent Wave Starting In 2015. Majority Of The Afghan Refugees Choose Eu As Their Asylum. Turkey Received The Highest Number Of Asylum Applications From 2015 Through 2017. While Pakistan And Iran Remained The Immediate Neighbors To Host Them. The Numbers Stayed Steady All Through The Phases.

The United States Also Received A Steady Flow Of Afghan Refugees During The War Period. Comparing The Census Survey Between 1990 And 2016 California Always Stood At The Top Of List. It Hosted 44.3% Of The Afghan Refugee Population In The Us. Followed By Virginia At 18.2% And 14.1% In 1990 And 2016 Respectively.



Source: Based On Acs 2006–15 Report, [Available Online](#).

If By Any Chance President Biden Had Afghanistan In Mind When He Increased The Refugee Cap Numbers , He Has Every Good Reason To. As A Law Maker Sitting On The Senate Judiciary And Foreign Relations Committees, He Has Had First Hand Knowledge Of The Painful Past—Of The United States Packing Up Bags And Leaving, And In The Process Bringing With Them Or Facilitating Thousands Of Locals Who Were Desperate To Leave The Country And Only For One Reason. And That Singular Factor Had To Do With Association With Americans; Branded As A Traitor Or Informer; And Eventually Facing Imminent Death. Over The Years, The United States Has Had To Contend With Thousands Of Refugees As A Result Of War Or Propping Up Untenable Non-Democratic And Dictatorial Regimes In The Name Of National Security And Interests. And The Plight Of Thousands Have

Been Vividly Established In Records In Just Two Instances: American Involvement In Vietnam In The Re-Unification Movement In The 1960s And 70s; And In Propping Up The Shah Of Iran Between 1953 And 1979.

Both Vietnam And Iran Ended Up In Disasters For American Foreign Policy With Washington Having To Bear The Burden Of The People Who Had Associated With The United States In One Fashion Or Another. The Need To Fend For Local Political Cronies And Hacks Aside, Successive American Administrations Had To Take Care Of The Safety Of Ordinary Locals Who Served As Cooks, Cleaners, Gardeners, Security Guards, Translators, Office Typists, Language Specialists Including Teachers And Drivers, To Mention A Few. Over The Years Documentaries And Movies Have Been Made Depicting The Last Days Of The American Pullout From The Mission Complex In Saigon, Now Renamed Ho Chi Minh City In South Vietnam With Vietnamese Precariously Hanging On To The Under Belly Of Helicopters As A Part Of Evacuation From The Embassy Complex. The U.S. Navy Had To Dump Hardware Into The Sea Including Choppers To Accommodate The Vietnamese Who Were Being Repatriated!

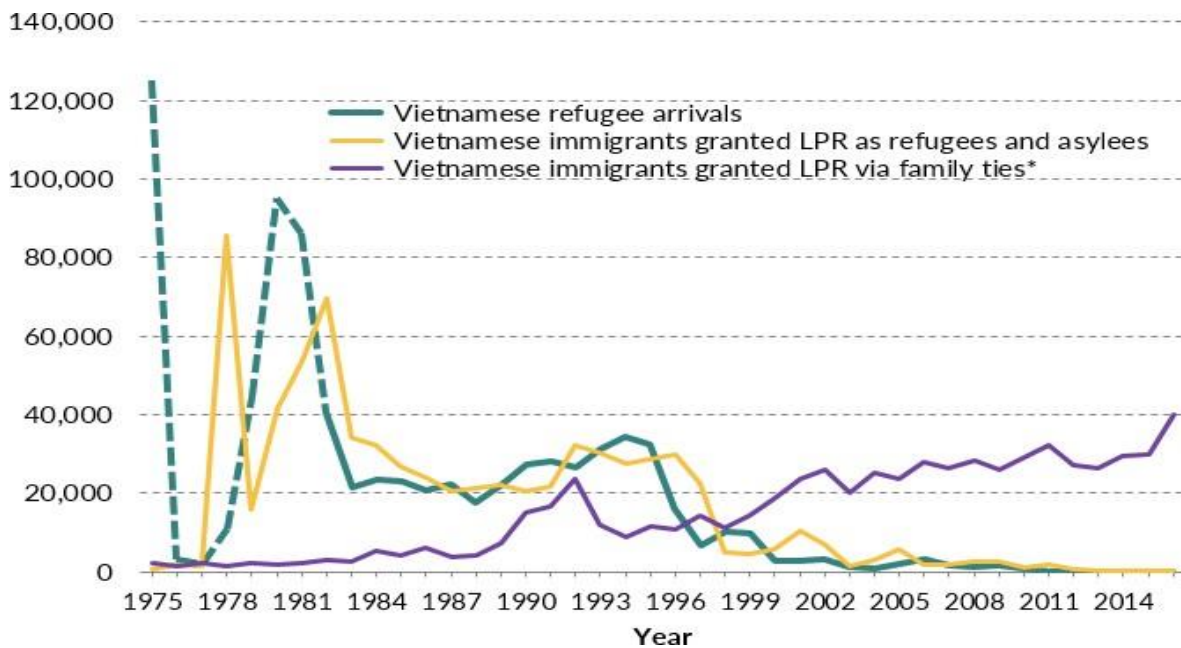


Fig. 4: Vietnamese Immigrants Between 1975 And 2014

Sources: Mpi Tabulation Of Data From Department Of Homeland Security (Dhs), 2016 And 2002 Yearbook Of Immigration Statistics (Washington, Dc: Dhs Office Of

Immigration Statistics), [Available Online](#); U.S. Immigration And Naturalization Service (Ins), *Statistical Yearbook Of The Immigration And Naturalization Service* (Washington, Dc: U.S. Government Printing Office, Various Years); Ins, *Annual Reports* (Washington, Dc: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1977, 1976, And 1975);

The Story Of Refugees Seeking A Better Way Of Life In The United States Is Different For Every Situation. In South Vietnam, It Was A Bloody Conflict With Forces Of North Vietnam Knocking On The Doors Of Saigon In April 1975. Although Refugees From Vietnam (Fig. 4) Had Slowly Been Going Up From The Mid 1960s, The Real Acceleration Started Only In The 1970s With The Peak Coming After 1975 And Lasting For Five Years In The Name Of “Boat People”. The First Stop For Majority Of The Refugee Groups From Vietnam Were Their Immediate Neighbors In The Region But Due To The Change In Policies They Were Soon Forced To Seek New Asylum Which Directed Them Towards United States And Canada. These Countries Were Called “First Asylum” There Are Records Stating That For Every One Vietnamese Refugee Who Left The “First Asylum” Three More Would Come.

President Gerald Ford Who Was Not Involved In The Execution Of The Vietnam War But Only Coming In The Final Stages To Preside Over An Inglorious End Ensured That Vietnamese Who Had Been Associated With The United States Were Not Abandoned Even If Only 38 Per Cent Of The American People In An Opinion Poll Favored Large-Scale Repatriation, A Situation That President Jimmy Carter Faced In A Different Crisis.

The Iranian Revolution Of 1979 Culminating In The Overthrow Of The Shah Of Iran, The Rummaging Of The American Embassy And Taking Of Diplomats As Hostages—A Drama That Would Go On For 444 Days—Had A Different Take On The Iranians Fleeing To The United States Or The Thousands Of Nationals Already In America Staying Put. Unlike The Nixon And The Ford Administrations, President Carter Did Not Have To Face With A Large Scale Forced Exodus Of Iranians Clinging On To Helicopters For Safe Passage.

Fig. 5

Year	Iranian Immigrants	Total
1960	429	3,459
1965	804	6,494
1970	1,825	13,450
1975	2,337	26,863
1980	10,410	59,602
1985	16,071	122,068
1990	24,977	214,459
1995	9201	282,815

Fig. 6:

Year	1961-1970	1971-1980	1981-1990
Number of Iranian Students Admitted In TheUs.	10,291	46,152	154,957

Sources: U.S. Department Of Homeland Security, Office Of Immigration Statistics

Movement Of People Between Iran (Fig. 5) And The Us Was Constant And Minimal Before The 1960's. Post 1960 The Trade Between Us And Iran Increased Which Made Many Iranians Choose The United States As A Haven For Education. As Shown In Fig. 6, The Number Of Students (Fig. 6) From Iran Was Only About 10291 Until 1970 But The Number Increased In The Years Leading Up To The Revolution. The Difference Between The Students Admitted Before And After The Revolution Is Most Of Them Went To The Us On Student Visa And Majority Of Them Returned Back To Iran. The Reason For Iranians To Choose Higher Education In The West Is For Improving Their Job Opportunities And Developing Infrastructures Back Home. But Post Revolution The Students Enrolled In The Us Came

Along With Their Parents Using Immigrant Visa. Only 10% Of Them Returned Back To Iran. The Student Population Among Engineering Colleges Were High Before Revolution And Drifted Towards Social Science And Research In Post Revolution Period. Thus Iranian Migration To The United States Can Be Put In Three Categories: Iranians Who Were Forced To Stay Back In The Us Due To The Revolution; Student Community; And Refugees Who Had To Travel To A Third Country To Acquire Us Visa Due To The Hostage Situation. In The 80's The Iranian Population Doubled Up Than It Used To Be And 80% Of Them Were Foreign Born, Making Them First Generation Iranian Americans (Askari Et Al., N.D.).

But The Carter Administration Enacted Into Law The Refugee Act In 1980 Or What Is Being Referred To As The Modern Day Refugee Resettlement Program Of The United States. Among Other Things, The Act Put In Place A Process For Persons Coming To The United States Fleeing War And Persecution. Under The 1980 Law The President, In Consultation With Congress Sets A "Ceiling" On The Number

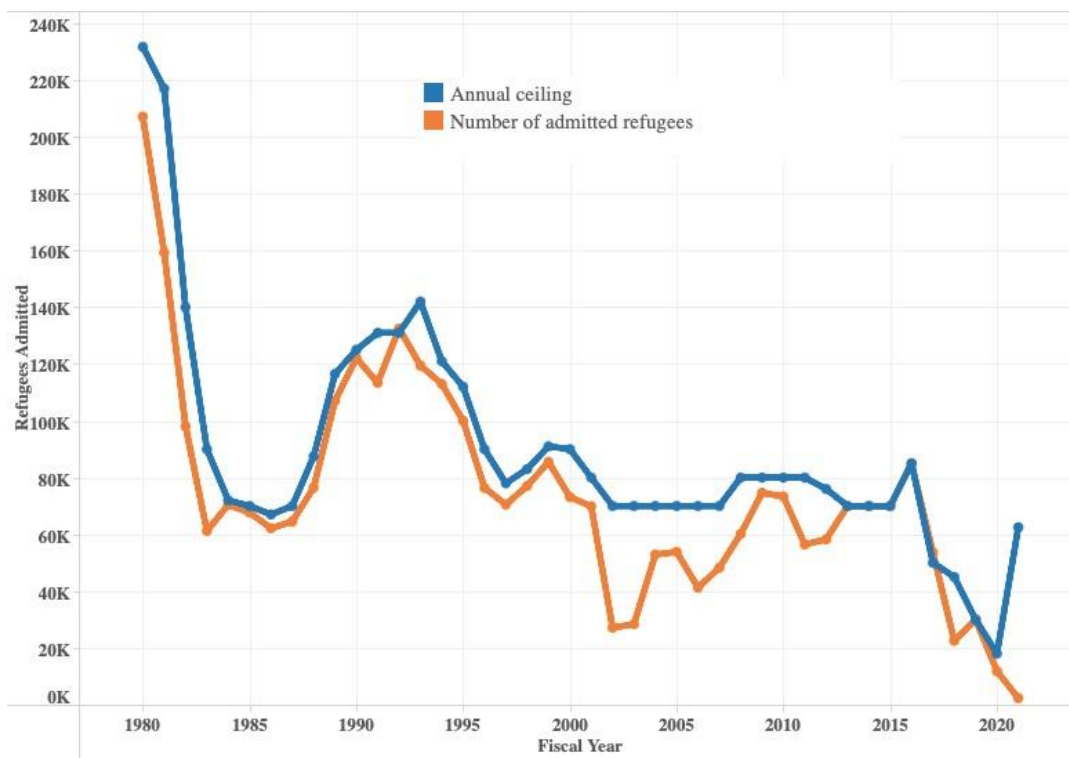
Of Refugees That Can Be Resettled In America In A Year. And This Number Must Be Justified Either On Humanitarian Or National Interest Grounds. For Several Decades Presidents Cutting Across Parties Have Generally Set This Cap At Around 95,000 Per Year Until Such Time President Trump Walked Into The Oval Office.

The Numbers Dwindled To A 2020 Cap Of 18,000 (Fig. 7). But That Was Not The Full Story: The Trump Administration Not Only Re-Wrote The Numbers; It Also Essentially Changed The Parameters Of *Who* Could Enter And Resettle. Under The Trump Manifestation, The Needs Based Aspect Gave Away To "National Interest" Leaving Critics To Argue That Refugees Based On Vulnerability Are Being Rejected And Instead The United States Is Favoring Groups In A Special Interests Category Like Religious Minorities, Iraqis, Refugees From Central America And So-Called Refugees Of Concern.

The Bottom Line: The Most Vulnerable Of The Refugees Have Been Left Behind With The Classic Example Being That Of The Middle East And South Asia Where Admission Rates Have Fallen 92 Per Cent Between The Fiscal Years Of 2016 And 2019. With More Than 50

Per Cent Of All Refugees Needing Resettlement Come From These Two Regions, Only 17 Per Cent Of Them Have Been Admitted As Of Fiscal 2019. And This Is An Ominous Pointed To The Biden Administration As It Plans To Completely Pullout From Afghanistan Given The Potential In The Number Of Afghans Who May Wish To Tag Along Given An Apprehension Of The Return Of The Taliban In Spite Of All The Positive Remarks By The Current Afghan Government In Kabul. The Recent Bomb Blast Leaving More Than 20 School Going Young Girls Dead Is Seen As A Pointer Of Things To Come, Not Just From A Security Point Of View But In All The Social Ramifications Associated With It.

Fig.7: U.S. Refugee Admissions And Refugee Resettlement Ceilings, Fiscal Years 1980-2021



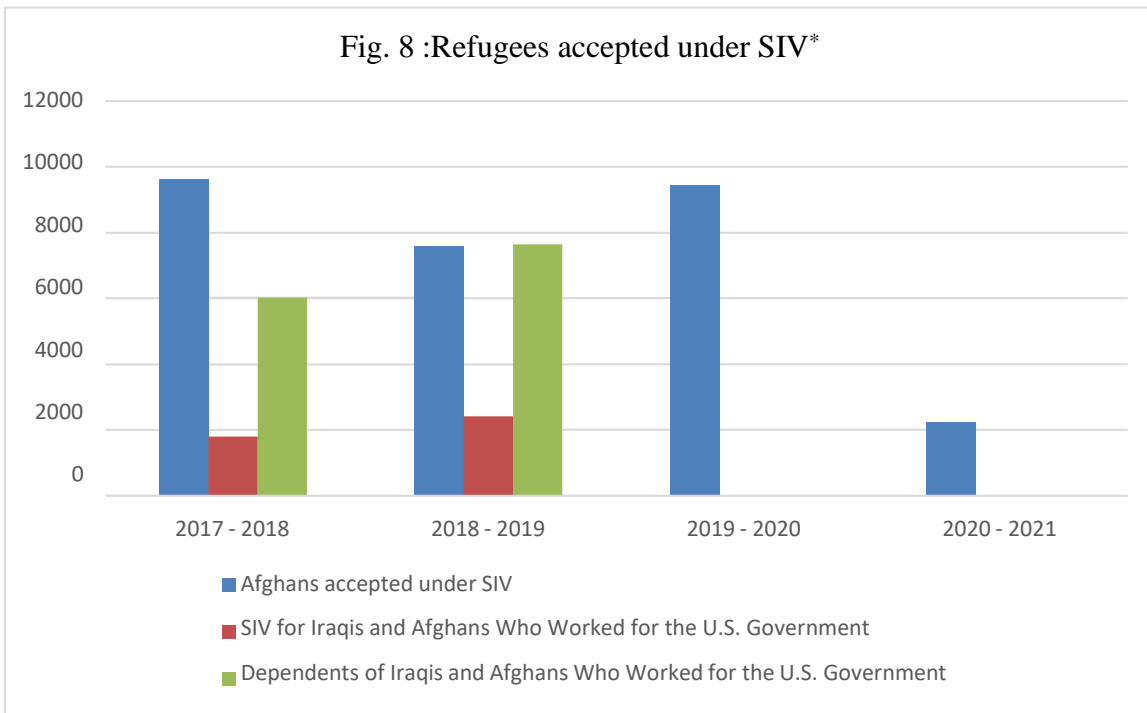
Source: Migration Policy Institute (Mpi) Analysis Of Wraps Data From The State Department Bureau Of Population, Refugees, And Migration. Available At www.wrapsnet.org/admissions-and-arrivals/.

From A Political, Geo-Political And Strategic Perspectives, American Involvement In Afghanistan Cannot Be Compared To That Of Vietnam, Iran Or For That Matter Even Iraq Even If From A Refugees Resettlement Point Of View There Could Be Some Similarities. For Instance There Is One Aspect Of The American Involvement In Vietnam—And To Some Extent In Thailand By Virtue Of That Country Being A Rest And Recreation Facility During The War Years. It Has To Do With Amerasian Children That Both Vietnam And Thailand Had To Deal With; That Is Of Children Born To Vietnamese And Thai Women As A Result Of Their Intimacy With American Service Personnel. According To A Research Done On The Conditions Of Amerasians Who Moved To The Us During The 1990's, Only About 47,299 Amerasians Along With Their Family Members Were Admitted Into The United States.

The Exact Number Of Amerasian Children Is Not Officially Recorded Till Date. Though Operations Like "Operation Babylift" Evacuated As Much 2500 Orphans Which Also Included Amerasians. It Is Estimated 20000 To 30000 Were Left Behind By The End Of War. Amerasians Living In Vietnam. Though The Vietnam Government Approved About 500 Of Them To Move To The United States, The Idea Of Reaching The Land Of Their Fathers Is Still A Distant Dream. According To A Survey Conducted By Bemake In 1991 Of 170 Vietnamese Amerasians, Only 33% Of Those Who Had Moved To The United States Knew Their Father's Name; About 76% Wanted To Return Back To Vietnam; And 14% Attempted Suicide. This Is Due To The 30 Years Of Trauma That This Community Had To Go Through And Their Status Of Not Being Considered As Americans In The Us And The Status Of Being Labeled Misfits In Vietnam.

In 2018, Amerasians Without Borders Identified 400 Vietnamese Amerasians Living In Vietnam. The Humanitarian Crisis Of Amerasians Does Not Confine Only To The Borders Of Vietnam. The Issue Extends To Other Asian Countries Including Thailand, Cambodia, Philippines, Japan And South Korea. In The 1970s And 1980 This Issue Was A Major Bone Of Contention With Long Lines Outside American And Vietnamese Governmental Facilities In Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi And Bangkok Not An Uncommon Sight. This May Not Be A Major Problem For The United States In Afghanistan Given The Religious-Cultural Contexts.

Three Months Is A Long Time In Foreign Policy Especially In The Context Of Military Situations. The Biden Administration Is Staying With The Decision Of Its Predecessor Dispensation On Pullout Except Perhaps Stretching A Bit The Time Line. Washington Has Maintained That If Situation Warranted It Could Intervene Again, But Perhaps Only Through A Show Of Air And Drone Power. The Question Of Sending Boots On The Ground Seems A Remote Possibility Given The War Fatigue Of Both Republicans And Democrats. But The Similarity Between Vietnam, Iraq And Afghanistan Is Undoubtedly The Extent To Which The Biden Administration Is Going To Care For Those Who Had Been A Part, Or Seen As A Part, Of American Operations For The Last Two Decades. There Are Horror Stories Of Witch Hunting Already In Progress, Courtesy The Taliban, Al Qaeda And Even The Isis. What Afghanistan Needs Right Now Is A Separate And Massive Resettlement Re-Settlement Program, Not Something That Is Susceptibl Political Vagaries On Capitol Hill. e To



Notes: The Data Provided For The Fy 2020-2021 Is Only From October 2020 To April 2021.

*Special Immigrant Visa, Established For The Resettlement Of Refugees From Afghanistan And Iraq.

Source: Wraps; Data Provided By The U.S. Department Of State Bureau Of Population, Refugees And Migration (Prm) Refugee Case Management System. Fiscal Year Arrivals (Single Fy). [Available Online](#).

The Trickle Of Refugees From Afghanistan Has Already Begun (Fig. 8) And American Media Has Already Started Playing Out Desperate Cries Of Afghans Who Are Either Being Hunted Down By The Taliban And Their Allies Or Just Plain Worried Of The Consequences That Are To Follow Should Instability Raise Its Head All Over Again. Even If The Government In Kabul Including President Ashraf Ghani Is Confident Of Stabilization And Dealing With The Menace Of The Taliban In The Aftermath Of The Pullout Of The United States, Ground Intelligence Suggests Something Otherwise. Just Recently A Bomb Blast Near A School Left At Least 50 Kids, Mostly Girls, Dead. The Taliban Denied Responsibility For The Attack But Not Many Have Taken This On Face Value. Only Before This Dastardly Attack There Was Another Blast That Killed 20 Persons, All Actions Raising Questions Of What Kind Of A Deal Was Reached Between The Warring Parties During The Last Days Of The Trump Administration That Would Have Seen The Last Of American Troops By May 1.

“... The Announcement Of The U.S. Withdrawal Is Another Phase In Our Long-Term Partnership With The United States. Afghanistan Has Been Through Consequential Withdrawals Before. In 2014, The Year I First Took Office, 130,000 U.S. And Nato Forces Withdrew, Allowing Afghans Full Leadership Of The Security Sector And Of The Institutions That Our International Partners Had Helped Us Build. Since Then, The Afghan National Defense And Security Forces (Andsf) Have Protected And Upheld The Republic And Made It Possible For The Country To Carry Out Two National Elections. Today, Our Government And Our Security Forces Are On A Much Stronger Footing Than We Were Seven Years Ago, And We Are Fully Prepared To Continue Serving And Defending Our People After American Troops Depart” President Ghani Said In A Recent Article In *Foreign Affairs* Adding That The

Drawdown Also Represented An Opportunity For Kabul To Achieve Real Sovereignty.

“The U.S. Decision Surprised The Taliban And Their Patrons In Pakistan, And It Has Forced Them To Make A Choice. Will They Become Credible Stakeholders, Or Will They Foster More Chaos And Violence? If The Taliban Choose The Latter Path, The Andsf Will Fight Them. And If The Taliban Still Refuse To Negotiate, They Will Be Choosing The Peace Of The Grave” He Warned.

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