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Returning to Retaliation: Findings on Violence Faced by Afghan Allies Deported from Third Countries

Introduction:

With Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) issuance suspended, our wartime allies are being deported to Afghanistan, where they fled Taliban control, from countries in the region, including Pakistan, Iran, and Tajikistan. Afghan allies are experiencing abuse at the hands of security and immigration officials during the deportation process and targeted threats and violent retaliation for their service to the United States once they are returned to Afghanistan.

From September 3rd to September 30th, 2026, No One Left Behind conducted an online survey of Afghan allies who had been deported to Afghanistan from third countries, outside of the United States or Afghanistan. This included deportations from Pakistan, Tajikistan, Iran, and other countries where Afghan allies were avoiding Taliban detection and retaliation while awaiting processing and issuance of Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) and other pathways to safety in the United States. These Afghan wartime allies, who served honorably alongside U.S. troops and diplomats and were promised pathways to safety by the United States, were forced to flee Afghanistan due to fear of Taliban retaliation for their service. However, with SIV issuance and other pathways to the United States paused under Presidential Proclamation 10998, these wartime allies had to choose between hiding in Afghanistan or fleeing to a third country.

This survey sought to collect and share these wartime allies' stories to make clear the human toll resulting from the ongoing pause in SIV issuance for eligible Afghan allies. These stories of deportation back to Afghanistan, and in many cases the physical harm and torture that occurred as a result, are the consequences of these decisions. These are the same allies who have been extensively vetted, have proven their loyalty to the United States, have submitted extensive documentation to prove their service, and have been promised safe passage to America for their service alongside the U.S. missions in Afghanistan. Today, these allies are being deported from third countries back to Afghanistan to face Taliban retaliation despite, in some

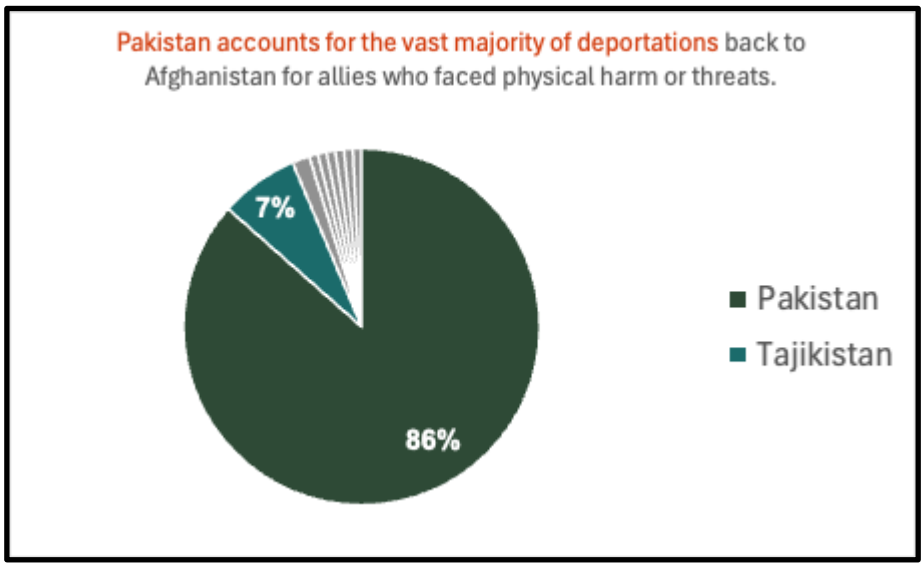
cases, having already received confirmation from the U.S. government that they completed SIV-eligible service, otherwise known as Chief of Mission (COM) Approval. The United States could, and should, bring them to safety today through a narrow exemption to Presidential Proclamation 10998.

This report highlights five key findings based on both the data collected and experiences reported by Afghan allies. We have anonymized all stories for the individuals' safety. Given the life-threatening impacts of Afghan allies' forced return to Afghanistan, we conclude with recommendations that would help secure our Afghan allies and ensure these experiences are not replicated.

Findings & Experiences:

Finding 1:

Allies who experienced threats and physical harm upon their deportation to Afghanistan were deported from countries around the region and beyond, including Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Tanzania, India, Iraq, Qatar, Rwanda, and Turkey. The vast majority, 86%, were deported from Pakistan, which is also where most allies reported experiencing physical abuse, harassment, extortion, and other challenges. This reality, where allies are harmed or hiding in Pakistan to avoid being harmed, killed, or forced to live in hiding in Afghanistan, is well-documented and represents a crippling challenge facing Afghan allies who served alongside U.S. troops and diplomats in Afghanistan.



Mira's Experience:

Mira provided photographs of physical harms she witnessed in Pakistani custody, including an Afghan boy in custody who had his neck burned and left untreated by Pakistani officials.[1] Mira worked for two years at the U.S. embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, and has a pending SIV application, but no pathway to safety with visa issuance paused. Mira and her family, including her children, went to Pakistan to continue their SIV applications and for fear of retaliation from the Taliban for her work with the U.S. government, especially as an Afghan female. After paying from their family savings to extend their Pakistani visa, the Pakistani government denied their visa extension and ordered them to return to Afghanistan.

Mira and her family, still fearful of the Taliban, chose to stay in Pakistan but were eventually apprehended by Pakistani authorities. After being detained, Mira described being held in a Pakistani prison for multiple days with many Afghans who had also paid for their visa to be extended but did not receive the expected extension. In this prison, while waiting to be deported back to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, Mira described harsh punishment by Pakistani police and officials. This included inadequate food and water, and physical harm inflicted on other Afghans.

Mira was subsequently returned to Afghanistan, where she lives in hiding today, hopeful that her SIV case will resolve favorably and unsure how to survive in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan if it is not.

Finding 2:

37% of allies (**88 allies in our sample) have been threatened in the last year due to their service alongside the U.S. mission since being deported back to Afghanistan**. Importantly, there are many allies who continue to hide their past affiliations with the U.S. in Afghanistan, meaning they have not received threats because their affiliations currently remain hidden.

[1] See Appendix for photographic evidence.

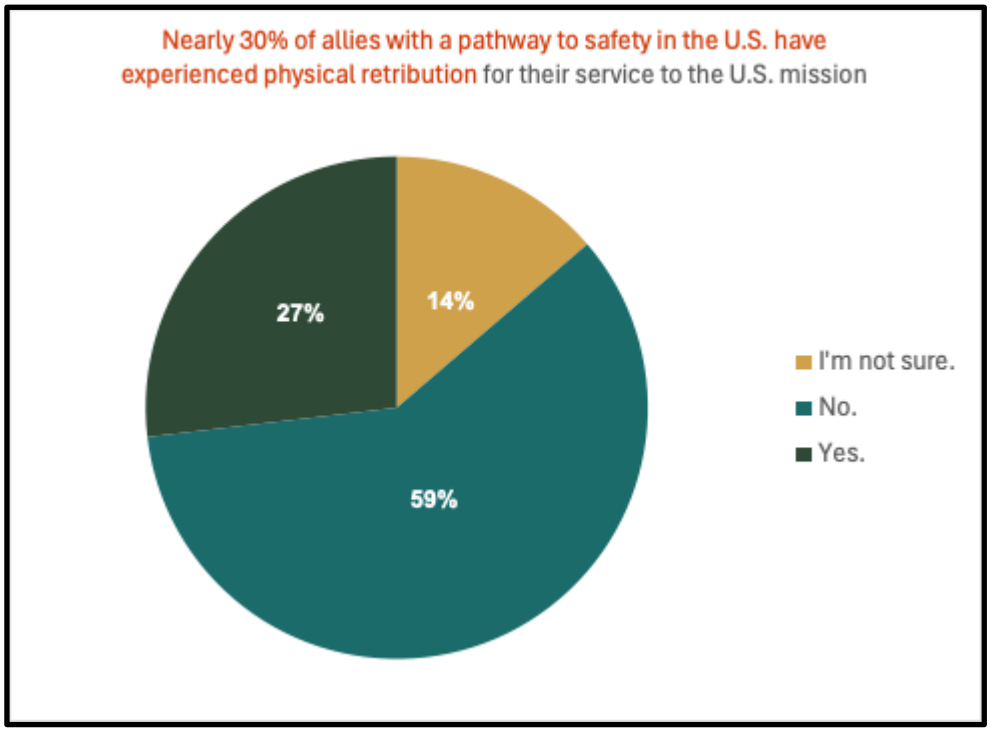
Abdul's Experience:

Abdul is an Afghan ally who worked with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for five years and has received Chief of Mission (COM) approval on his SIV case, meaning the U.S. government has verified his substantial, SIV-eligible service to the United States. Abdul is fearful that his children will be "kidnapped or worse" because of his past work with Americans and emphasizes that even his children face "grave danger" every time they go to school. He describes the dire situation in Afghanistan, with "mounting danger" for those who served the U.S. mission as the Taliban continues carrying out retributive kidnappings, killings, and jailings against partners of the U.S. missions and their families. Abdul states that when he leaves for work in the morning, when he can find work, he leaves in fear that he won't return at the end of the day to see his wife and children.

Abdul sees that extremists in Afghanistan, including the Taliban, continue to blame the United States for their misfortunes and therefore focus their anger on anybody they can find who worked with the U.S. in Afghanistan. With a COM-approved SIV case, Abdul could be close to receiving his SIV, traveling to America, and sending his children to school without fear that they will be kidnapped or killed by the Taliban. Instead, Abdul continues living in Afghanistan, fearing for his life and the lives of his children and wife because SIV issuance remains paused.

Finding 3:

Of the respondents who indicated they had received COM approval for their SIV or had another pathway to the U.S., **71 report being physically harmed as punishment for their service to the U.S. missions in Afghanistan or indicate that they are not sure.**



Sahal's Experience:

Sahal is an Afghan ally who worked on USAID-funded projects in Afghanistan from 2008 to 2024, continuing even after the fall of the Afghan government and the U.S. military withdrawal from the country. He has a COM-approved SIV application for his service alongside the U.S. mission in Afghanistan. Still, he has been unable to receive his visa and travel to the U.S. due to the ongoing pause in SIV issuance.

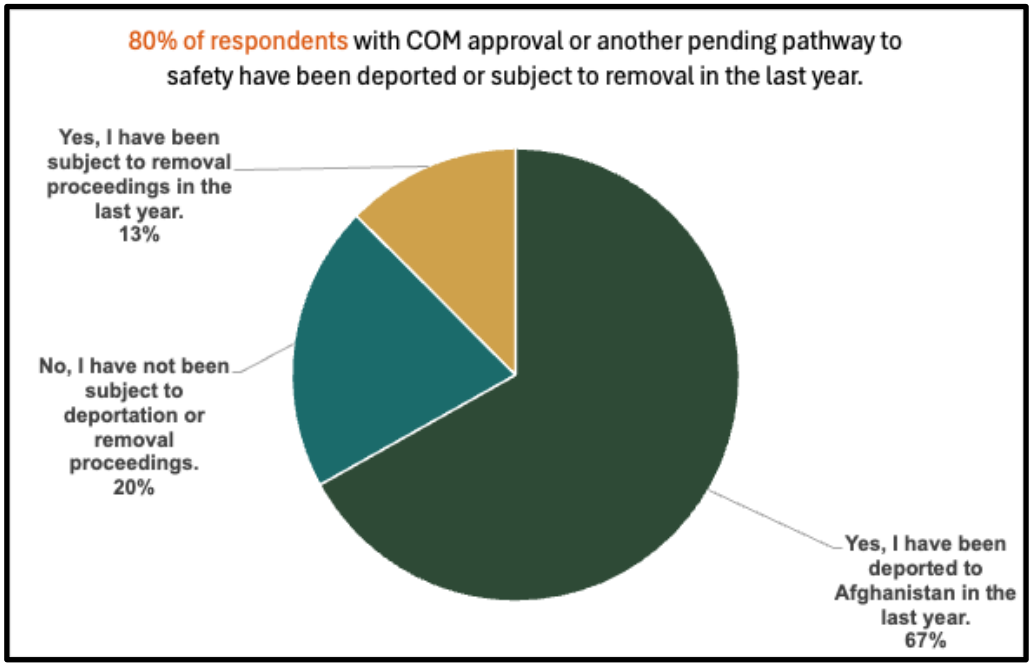
Sahal spent months in Pakistan waiting for his SIV case to finish processing, paying for him and his wife to live, eat, and conduct their medicals for their SIV case. When he and his wife attended their SIV interviews in November 2025 at the U.S. embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan, the embassy retained their passports, a normal step in processing an SIV case. However, during this time, the Pakistani police came to Sahal's residence and deported him and his pregnant wife back to Afghanistan without their passports.

During their forced removal, he and his eight-months-pregnant wife were physically mistreated by Pakistani police, as well as being separated and interrogated by the Taliban upon their deportation to Afghanistan. Sahal, his wife, and their newborn

son remain in Afghanistan today. They report living in fear of Taliban reprisals, while also fearing any attempt to return to Pakistan due to the physical harm they endured by Pakistani authorities. Sahal, his wife, and their newborn continue waiting for their COM-approved SIV case to move forward so they can access the safety they earned.

Finding 4:

Of the 127 respondents who indicated they had COM approval or another approved pathway to safety in the United States, 101, or **80%, reported being deported or subject to removal in the last year.** This is a troubling confirmation that third-country deportations have not slowed for Afghan allies despite continued reprisals in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.



Ahmad's Experience:

Ahmad worked with U.S. diplomats and investigators in the Attorney General's office in Afghanistan, uncovering corruption, fraud, embezzlement, and other justice-related misdeeds. Through this work, Ahmad also worked on counter-

narcotics and anti-terrorism cases, where he frequently investigated and contributed to the arrests of prominent Taliban officials. Because of this work, Ahmad has been a priority target of Taliban retaliation since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. Ahmad has an approved pathway to the United States through the Refugee Assistance Program (USRAP). Still, he has been unable to access the safety he earned due to the travel ban on Afghan nationals.

In Afghanistan, Ahmad was targeted by what he believes were Taliban officials who placed a magnetic explosive device on his vehicle.[2] Ahmad's father was killed in the attack. After this, Ahmad fled to Pakistan, where he is hoping to avoid being returned to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Ahmad reports continuing to receive threatening phone calls and messages from Taliban members who threaten him for his service alongside the U.S. missions.

If he is deported from Pakistan, he will face Taliban interrogation or worse, as other allies described. Allies like Ahmad need the SIV they earned to rebuild their lives safely outside of Taliban reach.

Finding 5:

One in four COM-approved Afghan allies reported that their deportation led to family separation. The pause in SIV issuance is directly resulting in cases of family separation for COM-approved Afghan allies, and Afghan allies who have already received an SIV.

Zara's Experience:

Zara is the spouse of an Afghan SIV recipient. She also worked for the U.S. mission in Afghanistan for nearly 15 years. Zara's husband received his SIV before the issuance pause and has lived in the United States with three of their children as lawful permanent residents with green cards. However, Zara and their remaining children have been unable to reunite with the rest of their family in the U.S. due to

[2] See Appendix for photographic evidence of the targeting.

the travel ban on Afghan nationals. They are currently in Tajikistan waiting to be reunited with the rest of their family.

Zara describes being fearful of having their Tajik visas revoked and being forced back into Afghanistan as a female who served the U.S. missions and whose husband did as well. Zara's children are scared to go outside, even in Tajikistan, for fear of interacting with immigration officials and being sent back to Afghanistan despite their valid Tajik visas. Due to the travel ban on Afghan nationals, Zara and her children have been separated from their father and siblings for more than one year. By resuming SIV issuance, especially for family reunification cases, the U.S. could end this prolonged family suffering and reunite Afghan allies who served for over a decade alongside the U.S. missions.

Insights, Conclusions, Recommendations:

Insights:

- Violent reprisals are ongoing against Afghan allies returned to Afghanistan, and allies face physical abuse from third-country security forces as well, as described through photographic and documented evidence provided by respondents.
- With 81% of deportations initiating in Pakistan, this data makes clear that Afghans in Pakistan, particularly those who have provided substantial service to the United States, or even fled to the United States, are at great risk of being deported back to Afghanistan.
- 90 respondents who indicated that they had a COM-approved SIV application report being deported in the last year. Whereas Afghans in vetting with the U.S. embassy previously had limited protection while their application was active, the suspension of visa issuance has ended that safety. SIV-eligible allies face greater danger today, despite having escaped Afghanistan, because all pathways to access visas to the United States have suspended visa issuance for our wartime allies.
- The threats made to our allies are not empty. Respondents included photos and videos of family members killed by retaliatory Taliban bombings, a young Afghan boy with significant burns in Pakistani holding facilities, and their spouses imprisoned for extensive interrogations. Respondents also

described targeted killings of family members by Taliban forces, having food and water withheld in squalid and cramped holding cells, and their children receiving direct threats from Taliban officials.

Conclusions:

This survey highlights and confirms the impact of third-country deportations on Afghan allies who served honorably alongside U.S. forces and diplomats for years.

First, our wartime allies continue to face clear and ongoing danger due to their service to the U.S. missions in Afghanistan. Ahmad, who lost his father to a Taliban explosive device placed as retaliation for Ahmad's commitment to uncovering corruption and implementing law and order in Afghanistan, illuminates this fact. Second, family separation is a tangible result of the ongoing travel ban, and the implications are lasting. Zara, who, alongside her children, has been separated from her husband for over one year, shows that family separation remains an unresolved issue and has impacts on children of Afghan allies. Third, for Afghan allies who are forced to flee the Taliban, but are waiting for SIV issuance to resume, there are few safe places to go. 71% of respondents with a COM-approved or in-processing SIV application, have been deported in just the last year. This is an ongoing danger. Finally, Afghan allies will clearly not be allowed to safely remain in Pakistan under the SIV issuance suspension, leaving Afghans in Pakistan at particular risk for deportation to Afghanistan. Most respondents who were deported back to Afghanistan were sent back from Pakistan, and those that weren't were largely protected by their ability to pay off corrupt Pakistani authorities. If Afghan allies are sent to Pakistan, regardless of any potential agreements a country may have with Pakistan, there is a credible fear they will be sent back to Afghanistan or extorted for a chance to avoid Taliban retaliation.

The long-term result of failing to secure our Afghan allies and allowing them to suffer instability, punishment, or death at the hands of the Taliban is a weaker and less flexible U.S. national security. These allies who remain in hiding or on the run around the region were essential partners to the U.S. missions in Afghanistan who served for years, even decades, working to combat the Taliban's terrorist vision of Afghanistan. Their stories of physical, emotional, and mental harm faced by the

Taliban and other authorities, and the fact that they continue to be deported from third countries back to Afghanistan, will indefinitely color the view of other potential U.S. allies.

Recommendations:

These outcomes are preventable. U.S. policymakers have opportunities to secure our Afghan allies and rebuild American reliability. To do so, policymakers should:

1. Resume Afghan SIV issuance through a tailored exception to Presidential Proclamation 10998, like the exception that was in place for the original travel ban on Afghan nationals.
2. Prioritize eligible and vetted Afghan allies for admissions through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program for Fiscal Year 2027.
3. Establish bilateral agreements allowing a select population of Afghan allies whose SIV applications or USRAP referrals are under active consideration to remain in the third country until their vetting for these pathways to safety in the United States is completed.
4. Continue working to complete processing and vetting Afghan SIV applications in the statutorily mandated timelines and with urgency, due to America's wartime allies facing violence abroad.
5. Assign appropriate staffing and resources to ensure swift, thorough vetting, visa issuance, and relocations and resettlement through relevant bureaus, including the Bureau on South and Central Asia's office of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE).

Methodology:

Respondents answered a series of questions about their service alongside the U.S. missions in Afghanistan, whether they had been deported to Afghanistan from a third country while awaiting decisions on their applications to come to the U.S., and what these experiences entailed. At every stage of the survey, respondents were asked to provide corroborating documentation to the best of their ability to prove their claims and verify our data.

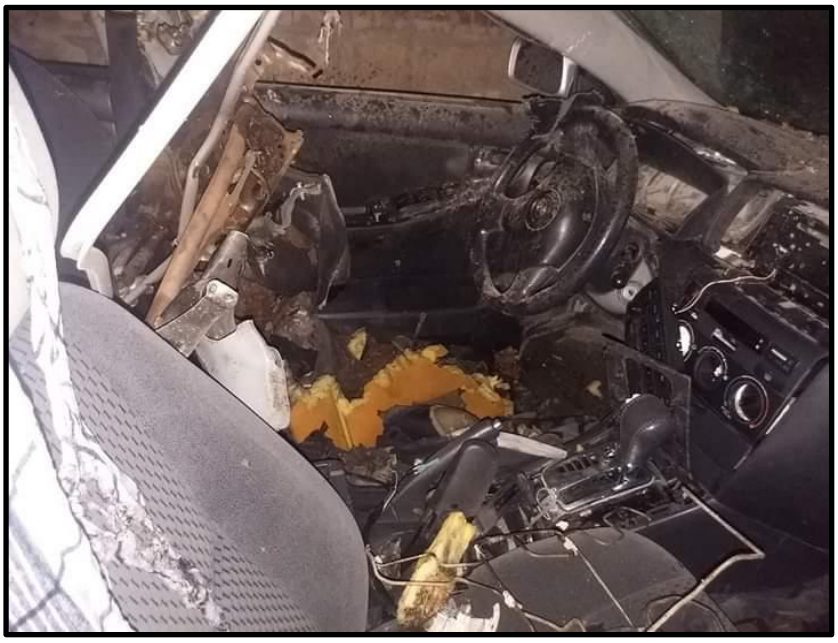
Within the window outlined above, we received 236 total responses. This included 183 respondents who indicated they had applied for the Special Immigrant Visa pathway to the U.S., and 117 of those who indicated that they had received Chief of

Mission (COM) approval for an SIV. Of the additional 52 respondents who did not indicate they had applied for an SIV, 14 indicated that they had applied for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), 6 indicated that they had applied for another pathway, 1 indicated that they had applied for humanitarian parole, and 32 left the question unanswered.

All names of Afghan allies have been anonymized to protect their safety while they wait in Afghanistan for their cases to be processed and SIV issuance to resume.

Appendix: Photographic Evidence

1. Vehicle interior following explosion



2. Vehicle exterior following explosion



3. Young Afghan boy who was burned in a Pakistani holding facility



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About This Report

Data Collection:

This report was published on October 30, 2026; all information contained within this report is current as of that date. Our data collection period ran from September 3rd at 12:00 AM EST to September 30th, 2026, at 12:00 AM EST. We could not independently verify the date of every reported event or the identities of all respondents; however, many participants submitted supporting documentation.

Who We Are:

No One Left Behind is the longest-serving veterans-led charitable organization focused on supporting former interpreters and U.S. government employees eligible for the Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) programs. We work to keep the promise because of these wartime allies' service to U.S. national security.

For more information on this report, our policy priorities, or the Afghan and Iraqi SIV programs, please contact No One Left Behind at info@nooneleft.org.