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Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

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The end of the American promise to the Afghans

The US decision to stop issuing visas to Afghans and to "freeze" all asylum decisions may appear to be a technical change in immigration policy.

In reality, it represents a rewrite of something much larger – the unwritten contract that great powers make with their local allies during wars.

This decision was not made following a strategic review of the war in Afghanistan but after a shooting in downtown Washington.

A few days ago, not far from the White House, 20-year-old Army Specialist Sarah Beckstrom and US Air Force Staff Sergeant Andrew Wolfe were shot while on duty as part of Trump's plan to increase the National Guard's "crime-fighting" presence in the capital.

Beckstrom soon died; Wolfe is fighting for his life. The suspect is 29-year-old Afghan Rahmanullah Lakhanwal, who worked for years with American structures in Afghanistan, in units supported by the CIA.

Lakhanwal came to the United States in 2021 through the Operation Allies Welcome programme, which the Biden administration opened for Afghans who were assisting American forces during the withdrawal from Kabul. He received asylum this year, under the Trump administration.

President Donald Trump immediately called the shooting an “act of terror”. He publicly blamed the previous administration for bringing large numbers of Afghans into the country, and announced a "permanent pause in migration from third world countries."

In the same statement, he declared that all asylum decisions in the United States were being halted and that visas for Afghan passport holders would be "paused."

Asylum decisions suspended indefinitely

A bureaucratic step followed a day later, changing the lives of thousands. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) announced it was suspending all asylum decisions indefinitely "until it is ensured that each individual has been vetted to the maximum extent possible." This applies to asylum seekers from all over the world, not just Afghans.

In parallel, the State Department sent a dispatch to all embassies and consulates, stating that consular officers must reject any immigrant or non-immigrant visa application submitted with an Afghan passport, including applications for SIVs (Special Immigrant Visas) for Afghans who have worked for the US government or military during the 20-year engagement in Afghanistan.

> Visa issuance for "all individuals travelling on Afghan passports" has been suspended - Marco Rubio

Secretary of State Marco Rubio then summarised the policy in a one-sentence post on X, writing that visa issuance for "all individuals travelling on Afghan passports" has been suspended and that "protecting the nation is a priority."

This effectively means the door is closed on both levels. Externally, embassies no longer issue visas to Afghans. Internally, USCIS is not making asylum decisions. The system, which for years, despite its weaknesses, still admitted a certain number of Afghan collaborators, is now blocked.

Not legally abolished, but effectively extinguished

The numbers show how severe this cut is. According to data reported by Reuters, about two hundred thousand Afghans have entered the United States since 2021 through refugee and special programmes, including Operation Allies Welcome.

Another 265,000 Afghans are in third countries awaiting a response from the US system. Of these, approximately 180,000 are in the so-called SIV "pipeline" – people who have worked for the US government and are formally eligible but are waiting for the bureaucracy to complete the process.

> The aim is for "every alien to be screened and screened to the maximum extent possible" - USCIS Director Joseph Edlow

Now they know that things are not merely "slowing down", but that their lifeline has been stopped – not legally abolished, but effectively extinguished.

The volunteer network AfghanEvac, which has been working for years to evacuate Afghan translators, drivers, logisticians and their families, states openly that this is the result of months of effort towards the same goal. The president of the organisation, Shawn VanDiver, says, "There is no doubt this is the outcome they have been driving towards for months."

The official explanation is security. Trump and his associates claim that previous checks were insufficient, that a "loophole" in the system allowed a man who worked for CIA-backed units to enter the country and turn against American soldiers. USCIS Director Joseph Edlow explains that the aim is for "every alien to be screened and screened to the maximum extent possible."

No systemic failure

The problem is that the available facts do not quite fit the narrative of a chaotic, unchecked influx. Lakhanwal underwent a multi-layered security check before arriving in the United States. According to information reported by Time magazine, his family testified about severe post-traumatic stress disorder, a consequence of years spent in combat, not about infiltration by terrorist organisations.

In June, at the president's request, a review of the security screening process for Afghan refugees was conducted. The Justice Department inspector's report found no systemic failure in the way these people are vetted.

In other words, the risk exists and it is not trivial; however, it does not involve a "door" through which "unknown fighters" enter, but rather individual cases of people who have worked for the United States for years and are now facing the consequences of that war.

> It is easier for the United States to change its practice than to admit it is breaking its promise

To understand the gravity of the current decision, it is necessary to recall what the Special Immigrant Visa actually means. The SIV is intended as a formal thank you.

An Afghan who has worked for the US military, embassy, USAID, or other organisations, often under constant threat from the Taliban, is promised that he and his family will be able to move to the United States if there is a withdrawal or deterioration in security. In a world where working for a foreign military carries the stigma of being a traitor, it serves as life insurance.

Now, Reuters clearly states that the programme is "effectively suspended". The State Department dispatch specifically instructs consular officers to refuse SIV requests, even though the law has not formally repealed those visas.

This means it is easier for the United States to change its practice than to admit it is breaking its promise.

The message is simple

This move does not only affect Afghans. It sends a signal to all who may one day find themselves in a similar role.

Ukrainian translators working today with American advisers, officers and intelligence partners in Africa or the Middle East, and local networks in potential crises areas around Taiwan or in the South China Sea – they are all watching what is happening with the Afghans.

The message is simple: one shooting in Washington can undo everything you were promised, even if you have worked for us and gone through years of background checks and procedures.

> Trump signed a new version of the travel ban that suspends the entry of citizens of twelve countries, including Afghanistan, into the United States

Most analyses so far focus on domestic politics. This year, Trump signed a new version of the travel ban that suspends the entry of citizens of twelve countries, including Afghanistan, into the United States, explaining that those countries cannot guarantee the validity of travel documents or have a high degree of "overstay" visas.

After the shooting at the White House, he had an opportunity to further tighten the policy, first rhetorically, by announcing a "permanent pause in migration from third world countries", then operationally, by a complete pause in asylum and visas for Afghans.

But the more important effect is external.

Caught between revenge and closed doors

Modern great power wars are usually fought without traditional armies of occupation. They are conducted by a combination of small contingents, special forces, unmanned systems, and local partners. Without local partners, there is no effective intelligence work, no translation, and no access to closed communities.

These local partners take the risk because of a specific offer. It is not just the salary that motivates them. They are motivated by the conviction that, if necessary, they will be able to relocate their families to the country they serve.

The Trump administration's decision changes the offer, making it fully visible.

> Will the European Union and individual member states take part of responsibility for the Afghan collaborators now "stuck" in third countries?

For the United States, it may seem like a tough stance in the short term – the president responds after the attack, "protects the nation", and restricts legal immigration. In the medium term, it signals to all those involved in future military and intelligence operations to reconsider before committing to Washington.

If you believe that a shift in the political climate in the White House could trap you between retaliation from your domestic enemies and closed doors in America, the logical course of action would be to avoid exposing yourself.

For European allies, this raises an uncomfortable question. Will the European Union and individual member states take part of responsibility for the Afghan collaborators now "stuck" in third countries? Some have already established their own programmes, but their capabilities remain restricted.

What comes next?

The simplest scenario is that nothing significant changes. The pause remains in effect, the SIV remains "formally alive, practically dead", the embassies continue rejecting all the demands of the Afghans, and the story slowly withdraws from the front pages.

Trump declares that a "permanent pause in migration" from poorer countries will become the norm, not a temporary response

In that case, the new norm becomes clearly established. An alliance with America means material support while the war lasts, but it no longer guarantees an exit when the war ends in any way.

Another, less likely but still possible scenario is that a combination of pressure from veterans, the military, and parts of Congress forces a narrow exception – perhaps a limited "corridor" for Afghans who can prove years of service, with additional checks and quotas.

The damage to trust would have been done, but at least there would be an attempt to preserve the idea that those who served faithfully are not left completely alone.

To recap: USCIS has halted all asylum decisions, with no date for when processing might resume. The State Department, through a clear dispatch and public announcements, has ordered that no visas be issued to Afghans, including those who have worked for the American government for years and have already passed all checks.

The president declares that a "permanent pause in migration" from poorer countries will become the norm, not a temporary response.

Under this framework, the crucial question no longer revolves around whether the tragedy in Washington could have been prevented. The key question is who will apply next time when the American embassy in a future war is looking for local collaborators, translators, analysts, or guides.

Those reading dispatches and reports from Afghanistan these days are not just looking at visa statistics. They are seeing what the end of one kind of promise looks like.