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Pulse Check

Supporting Afghanistan Allies

September 2021

The recent withdrawal of all remaining troops from Afghanistan, as well as the evacuation of both U.S. citizens and Afghan allies, spotlighted the chaotic end of the United States' longest war. Blue Star Families sought to better understand the feelings surrounding this issue from military- and Veteran-connected families by conducting the Supporting Afghanistan Allies Pulse Check from September 3rd-7th, 2021.

This survey captured the responses of 1,723 respondents who identified as an active-duty spouse (38%), Veteran/retired service member (23%), spouse of a Veteran (18%), military parent (13%), and active-duty service member (6%). Respondents included 200 service members or Veterans/retired service members who served in Afghanistan, and 494 family members of a current service member or Veteran/retired service member who served in Afghanistan.

Key Findings

Military and Veteran families, regardless of service in Afghanistan, strongly support the obligation to resettle Afghan allies.

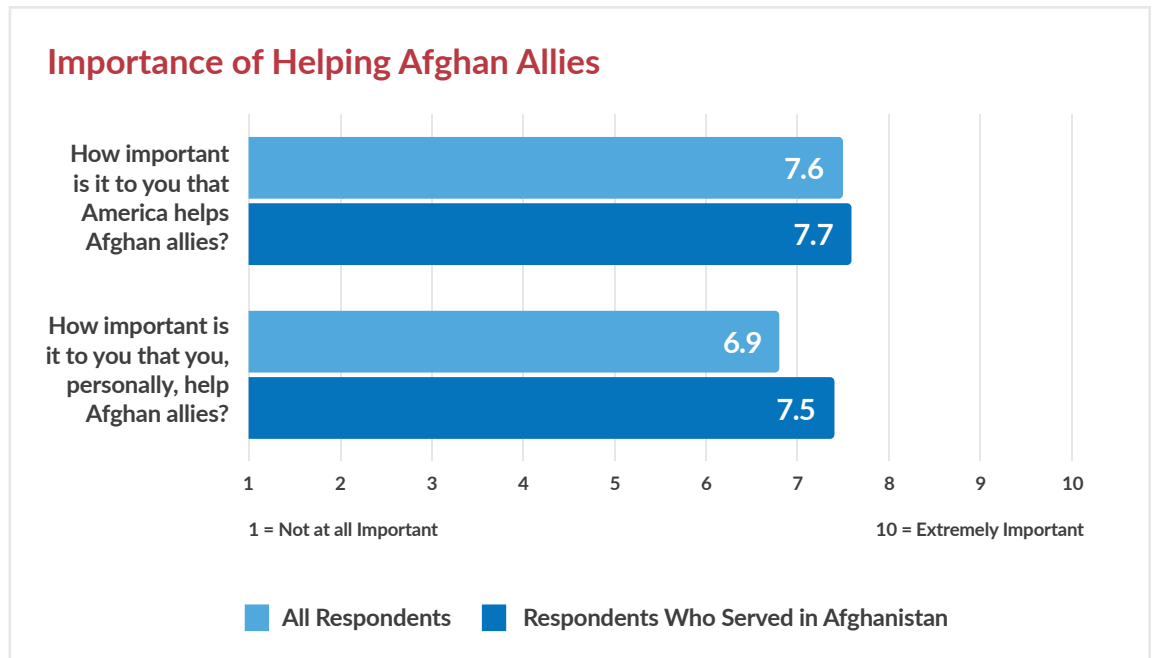
Three-quarters of all respondents (77%, n=1543) and those who served in Afghanistan (78%, n=196) agree that America has an obligation to help Afghan allies. Most respondents also agree that the U.S. has an obligation to allow Afghan allies to resettle in the U.S. (64%, n=1493), and that the U.S. should properly vet all Afghan refugees resettling in the U.S. (86%, n=1448).



77% of all respondents agree that the U.S. has an obligation to help Afghan allies.

Helping Afghan allies, both as a nation and as an individual, is very important to all respondents, but especially those who served in Afghanistan.

Respondents were asked, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it to you that America helps Afghan allies?” with the scale from 1 (Not at all important) to 10 (Extremely important). The mean for those who served in Afghanistan is 7.7, while the mean for all respondents is 7.6. Furthermore, respondents



were asked how important it was to them that they personally help Afghan allies. The mean for those who served in Afghanistan is 7.5, compared to the mean of 6.9 for all respondents.

Military and Veteran family respondents, particularly those who served in Afghanistan, look for opportunities to help resettle Afghan allies to improve their well-being or mental health.

Respondents were asked, “On a scale of 1 to 10, to what degree would an opportunity to help resettle Afghan allies improve your well-being or mental health?” with the scale from 1 (Not at all) to 10 (Extremely). The mean for those who served in Afghanistan is 6.1, while the mean for family members of those who served in Afghanistan is 5.8. Almost half of those who served in Afghanistan (46%, n=195) and over a third of all respondents (35%, n=1484) had already taken action (donated, volunteered, or shared information) to help Afghan allies.

46% of respondents who had served in Afghanistan had already taken action to help Afghan allies.



The withdrawal from Afghanistan evoked powerful, emotional responses from survey respondents.

The most commonly reported emotions from all respondents in response to the withdrawal from Afghanistan were sadness, disappointment, anger, and betrayal. Open-ended responses, however, also identified feelings of relief (12% of total responses), and that the withdrawal was necessary (13% of total responses).

“Relieved that we’re getting out after so long and that we won’t lose any more lives there. Disappointed that the Afghans weren’t able to take over the reins after we left. Alarmed for the safety of the people and their families that helped us. Heartbroken for the recent young American lives that were lost. Worried about the mental health of those who served there and their families . . . my social feeds and personal conversations are heavy. Deeply concerned that this is getting politicized to the detriment of military and Veteran families.” — Army Spouse

Respondents are concerned about the impact of the Afghanistan withdrawal on Veterans’ well-being.

Eighty-four percent of all respondents and 81% of those who served in Afghanistan agree that “Veterans of the war in Afghanistan are going to have a hard time processing the end of the war.” Furthermore, when asked, “On a scale of 1 to 10, to what degree has the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan negatively impacted your well-being or mental health?” with the scale from 1 (Not at all) to 10 (Extremely), the mean for those who served in Afghanistan is 5.6, while the mean for family members of those who served in Afghanistan is 5.2.

Opportunities for Action

- **Provide opportunities for service members, Veterans, and their families, particularly those who served in Afghanistan, to take action to support Afghan allies.** Taking action — particularly meaningful action — to support Afghan allies may provide an outlet for the intense and sometimes conflicting emotions service members, Veterans, and their families are possibly experiencing right now. Making meaning of complex events is an important component of resilience. Activities that help create meaning and offer a sense of purpose can support military and Veteran family resilience at an emotionally intense time.
- **Surge mental health support for those who are struggling.** Providing resources for formal mental health as well as general self-care and well-being to service members, Veterans, and family members of those who served in Afghanistan — particularly those who have experienced losses — can support healthy responses to this profound moment in history.