

Afghanistan's Best and Brightest Seek Asylum Abroad

The [Washington Post](#) recently reported on a sharp spike in asylum seekers coming from Afghanistan. The increase corresponds with the U.S. troop surge, and a feeling in the country that a peaceful future is no longer possible.

[caption id="" align="alignright" width="342" caption="Sometimes "flight" is wiser than "fight.""]



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The number of Afghan asylum seekers has surpassed the number of people fleeing Iraq and Somalia, making Afghanistan the leading producer of asylum seekers in the world. In 2009, 27,057 Afghans sought official protection in foreign nations. The numbers are expected to be somewhat lower for 2010, but Afghanistan will remain the largest source of asylum seekers in the world. According to the Washington Post:

The vast majority of the refugees are young men in their teens, 20s and 30s, often well educated and with the financial means to pay \$20,000 or more to human smugglers for passports and visas to Pakistan or Iran, then on to Europe, Australia, Canada or the United States.

Because of the difficulty in coming here, the United States received only about 113 Afghan asylum seekers in FY 2010.

In my own practice (in Washington, DC), during the last two years, I have seen an increase in asylum cases from Afghanistan. My firm filed 12 or 13 Afghan asylum cases in 2010 (so I suppose I represented about 10% of all Afghan asylum applicants in the United States for the year). About 2/3 of my clients were men, and most of them were young, fluent in English, and very well educated. Most of my male clients were journalists or somehow involved with the media. Others were working closely with the U.S. military. My female clients were women's rights activists or "Westernized" students (or both). All the cases that I worked on so far have been successful, which reflects the Asylum Office's view that the situation in Afghanistan is dangerous (and hopefully also that we are doing a good job).

I feel that my clients face a dangerous--and often life threatening--situation in Afghanistan. Several of them have had relatives murdered by the Taliban. However, I can't help but think that Afghanistan is worse off without these well-educated and committed men and women. Before they left, they were contributing in important ways to the development of the country, and they were working against extremism. Unfortunately, it is just such people who are targeted by the Taliban. Indeed, these are the types of people that every repressive regime targets (the most well-known examples are the scientists, academics, and artists who fled from the Nazis).

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Like many refugees before them, the Afghans I represent have made a decision to leave families, friends, and promising careers to seek safety in the West. While I feel sad that Afghanistan is losing so many talented individuals, I respect their choice to leave. And while I hope the situation in their country improves, I am proud that our country offers protection to those Afghans who need our assistance.