



May 11, 2023

Statement in Support of Professor Hassan Abbas

We, the [American Muslim Bar Association](#) (AMBA), stand in solidarity with Professor Hassan Abbas and express deep concern and condemnation following the death threat he received from two former spokespersons of the Taliban in Afghanistan in response to his new book, *"The Return of the Taliban: Afghanistan After the Americans Left"*, an academic text published by Yale University Press. This book became available in Europe and the Middle East in April 2023 and will be released in the US shortly.

This threat is credible and dangerous, as it was posted on Twitter on public profiles with close to 1 million followers combined on May 2nd, 2023. According to a BBC Monitoring report dated the same day, in a now deleted tweet the [Taliban former interior ministry spokesman](#) said that Taliban supporters should kill critics living abroad. He also suggested that the Taliban's intelligence agency should organize and lead "volunteers" in Europe and America. He continued, "the intelligence of every country targets its enemies outside the country, why can't we?" The former spokesperson of the Kabul police command then supported these sentiments and [tweeted](#) a photo of Professor Hassan Abbas.

[Hassan Abbas](#) is an internationally respected academic. He has a PhD from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and an LLM in International Law from the University of Nottingham School of Law. Further, he has held a number of academic posts throughout his professional career and is a widely recognized expert in the area of national security studies for South Asia. He currently teaches at National Defense University in Washington, DC.

His new book is a detailed and nuanced story of Afghanistan since 2001. Professor Abbas dedicates the book to the "women of Afghanistan," and provides an in-depth analysis of the Taliban's influence on the region for the past twenty years. The book's topics range from critiques of Taliban's policies limiting the education of girls in the country, as well as of its close relationship with Pakistani intelligence, to critiques of

the previous secular Afghan government and Western policies that failed at nation building over the past 20 years. The book also attempts to provide a fair and balanced account of policies impacting the region, including citing several positive measures taken by the Taliban to secure the rights of religious minorities in the country, such as allowing Ashura processions for Shi'a Muslims.

As commentators have observed, the overarching message of Professor Abbas's book is that engagement with the Taliban would be of benefit to all stakeholders within and outside Afghanistan. For instance, Oliver-James Campbell writes in the [Times Literary Supplement](#), "In *The Return of the Taliban*... Abbas makes a compelling case for 'engaging' with the Taliban - the Doha negotiations being an indication of their temperament - but sometimes strays too close to writing as though it really has reformed. While taking his point that by engaging, we are empowering the 'moderate elements among them', we would be well advised to do so with an eye to the past." In another review in the [The Times London](#), Isambard Wilkinson writes "He [Abbas] recommends engagement with the Taliban. The basis of his argument is that the 'new Taliban' comprises pragmatists and younger members with a more modern outlook. He claims that 'slowly, we are beginning to see the shedding of the old Taliban's skin... Abbas's survey is a valiant attempt at explaining the seemingly unfathomable enigma that is Afghanistan under the Taliban."

Threats of violence against the open expression and free flowing debate of ideas have no place in civilized societies committed to peace and the rule of law. In today's age, where we see attempts to silence academics across the ideological spectrum, AMBA would like to express strong support for Professor Abbas and highlight the crucial need for academic freedom. The ability to engage with and confront ideas we disagree with while being open to criticism are essential components of achieving a more just and peaceful world among our community of nations. Consequently, we would like to remind all government actors, including our own, that the appropriate response to critique is not calls to violence or attempts at curbing speech, but more speech.

Furthermore, the ideal of intellectual criticism and exchange is not only an American one, but an Islamic tradition practiced by Islamic scholars for over 1400 years and deeply rooted in the Qur'an and Prophetic Hadith itself. As such, we invite the public to attend an upcoming virtual Book Talk with Professor Hassan Abbas hosted by AMBA to discuss his new book and engage him with thought-provoking, critical, and engaging comments and questions. Please look out for this event announcement in the near future.