

Pathway

From A5

aided the U.S. government. A major problem for the women fighters is that, back in Afghanistan, anyone who wanted to join the FTP was required to have a document filled out by the oldest male member of the family to approve their service. An unfortunate consequence of that rule is that now family members of the FTP can easily be tracked by the Taliban.

Edmondson is concerned that data systems and paper trails identifying partners of the U.S. were compromised and left behind, leaving a roster of individual U.S. ally names for the Taliban to find.

Ahmadi is also concerned for her family and fellow Afghans who helped the U.S. and are still in Afghanistan.

“I live here but all my body, my life, my heart is all thinking about my family and my other country,” Ahmadi said. “I always cry with myself, but it doesn’t help my family.”

One evening in November after a full day of work for Ahmadi and school for Shah Pari, Ahmadi looked over Shah Pari’s target practice papers from an after-school shooting class with the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC), which Shah Pari hopes to join next year.

Light from a lamp in their dimly lit apartment shined through bullseyes with tiny holes Shah Pari made by shooting a 10-millimeter air rifle.

Ahmadi said her little sister, who never fired a gun in Afghanistan, was making better progress than she had while in the Afghan military.

“I’m proud of her,” Ahmadi said. “I studied with three, four years in the shooting, and she started one month two months, and I told her, OK, you can keep [the target practice papers] because this is very important and you are good for shooting.”

Ahmadi said she misses the advice and support she received from her family in Afghanistan and she sometimes feels alone,



HEATHER ROUSSEAU PHOTOS, THE ROANOKE TIMES

Azizgul Ahmadi advocates for the Afghan Adjustment Act while speaking with a congressional aide, at far right, in Washington, D.C., in the Longworth House Office Building on Oct. 3. Ahmadi was joined by fellow veterans including members of With Honor Action, a D.C.-based nonprofit that arranged the visit on Capitol Hill. Danny Rogers, legislative correspondent from With Honor Action is seen at center right.

“I live here but all my body, my life, my heart is all thinking about my family and my other country, myself, but it doesn’t help my family.”

Azizgul Ahmadi, advocate for the Afghan Adjustment Act

but then she reminds herself she still has her sister.

“Sometimes life is very hard and sometimes life is easy,” Ahmadi said.

Ahmadi hopes with her asylum granted she can join the U.S. military and work with the U.S. once

again, perhaps as a nurse. More than anything, she hopes she and her sister can be reunited with the rest of their family and her fellow veterans can be granted the same asylum protections her and her sister now have.

“Sometimes I’m very sad to see the other people,” Ahmadi said. “Everybody’s happy. They are living with family. Why is my family not here? My heart is not calm.”

Heather Rousseau, a photojournalist for The Roanoke Times since 2015, is the 2022-23 Secular Society Fellowship recipient. Her work is focused on refugees and immigrants in the Roanoke region. Heather Rousseau (540) 981-3394 heather.rousseau@roanoke.com



Azizgul Ahmadi looks over Shah Pari’s target practice papers while in their apartment on Nov. 8. Shah Pari, who is an 11th-grader at Blacksburg High School, joined the shooting class after school through the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC), which she hopes to join next year.

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