



# WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

REPORT FROM THE FIRST VISIT OF PAKISTANI WOMEN  
PARLIAMENTARIANS TO AFGHANISTAN



**EASTWEST INSTITUTE**  
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**Parliamentarians Network  
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EWI's Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention was launched at the European Parliament in October 2008. This international, non-partisan group has a growing membership of almost 180 parliamentarians from 58 countries across the globe. For more information on the network, please visit the website or contact the secretariat at +32.2.743.4635 or [parliamentarians@ewi.info](mailto:parliamentarians@ewi.info).

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# Women, Peace and Security

Report from the first visit of Pakistani  
women parliamentarians to Afghanistan

Kabul, April 2012





## FOREWORD

**T**he active and meaningful participation of women in political decision making is one of the hallmarks of a modern democracy. Inclusive legislatures are recognized as more effective and legitimate than those that are less representative, as they help ensure a space for women's perspectives and interests.

Since its inception, the Women's Parliamentary Caucus of the National Assembly of Pakistan (WPC) has worked to bring women together on a variety of issues to enact legislation and influence policies, provide a forum for peer learning, and strengthen their role as legislators. We fully support the efforts of our sisters in the Afghan Parliament in their endeavor to have their voices heard, especially beyond gender-specific issues.

In this context, it is a special pleasure for me to present this report of the second meeting of Afghan and Pakistani women parliamentarians, convened by the EastWest Institute (EWI) in partnership with the WPC. For the past two years, EWI has worked to strengthen the role of women in political life, in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Southwest Asia in particular. I, therefore, welcome EWI's initiative to bring Afghan and Pakistani women parliamentarians together in the spirit of strengthening contacts and building mutual trust and confidence, and I look forward to the WPC's future collaboration with EWI to this end.

The relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan is key to the development and security in both countries as well as the wider region. People-to-people contacts have a particularly important role to play in promoting and strengthening this bilateral relationship.

This report about the second meeting of Afghan and Pakistani women parliamentarians presents the discussion and conclusions of two days of very intense, in-depth debates between members of the WPC and the Afghan Wolesi Jirga in Kabul. The recommendations will be of great value to our day-to-day work and seeks to establish a concrete roadmap for cooperation between both our parliaments.

The discussions highlight once again that women parliamentarians in both countries face similar challenges and, despite their different political convictions, they share common goals. It is particularly urgent for women parliamentarians in both countries to raise the profile of women politicians beyond gender specific issues. Only if we jointly achieve that will the voices of women be heard, thereby contributing to stability and development.

As patron of the WPC, I am pleased that this vibrant forum is working not only to strengthen the role of women parliamentarians in Pakistan, but also supporting the efforts of our counterparts in Afghanistan to have their voices heard. Through this politics of sisterhood, it is my goal to build trust between both our countries and contribute the dedication and capacities of women to this end.

**Dr. Fehmida Mirza**

Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan  
Patron, Women's Parliamentary Caucus

The overall purposes of the delegation were to strengthen this new channel for building trust between the two countries and give Afghan women parliamentarians much-needed support at a crucial time.

# Introduction

**O**n April 14–16, 2012, the Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention, in partnership with the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) of the National Assembly of Pakistan, convened the first ever official delegation of Pakistani women parliamentarians to visit Afghanistan. This is the most recent activity of the network’s Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

The EastWest Institute’s Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention initiated its Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in 2010 to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the passage of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325, which declared that women’s active participation in conflict resolution is essential for building peace and stability. This group actively works with parliamentarians worldwide to strengthen the role of women in political life, and in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular.

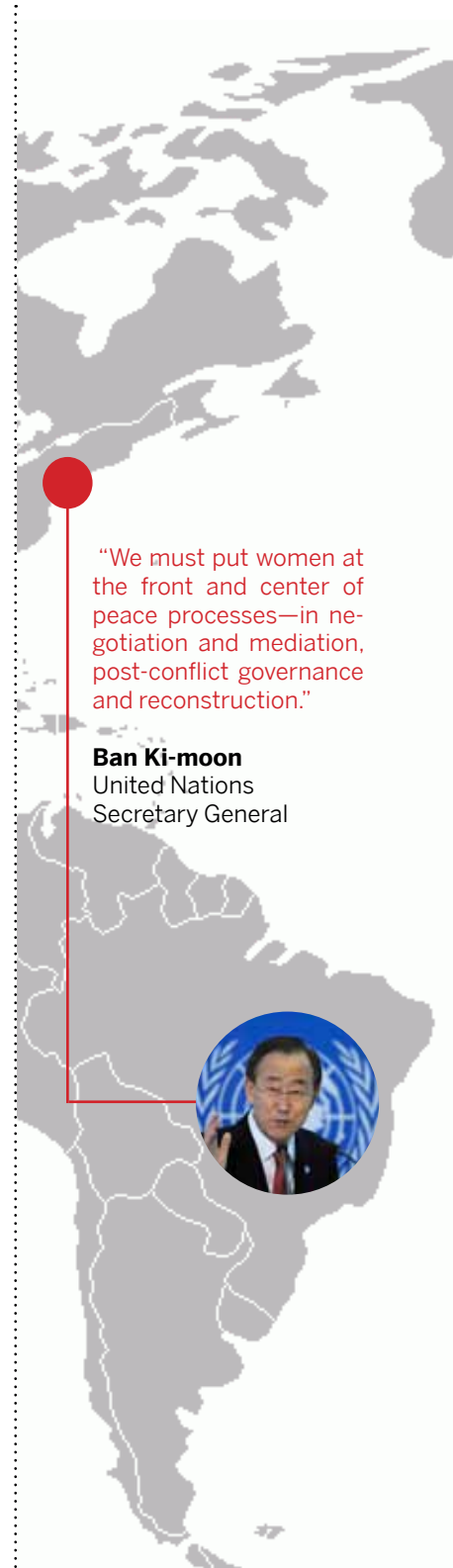
During the past two years, the group has worked to bolster the role of Afghan women parliamentarians (MPs) in their efforts to build a peaceful and prosperous region. In addition to supporting Afghan women MPs as they exert influence on political processes, the working group enhances cooperation between Afghan and Pakistani women parliamentarians as a way to increase stability in the region.

This delegation, which visited Kabul, was a step toward implementing the Islamabad Action Plan, a set of commitments outlined by Afghan and Pakistani women parliamentarians during their previous EWI-sponsored meeting in Islamabad in June 2011.

The delegation consisted of five Pakistani women MPs led by Shahnaz Wazir Ali, member of Pakistan’s National Assembly and special assistant to the prime minister. They and their Afghan counterparts met with: Afghan President Hamid Karzai; Masoom Stanikzai, advisor to the president on internal security and head of the secretariat of Afghanistan’s High Peace Council; Afghan Foreign Minister Zalmay Rassoul; Speaker Haji Abdul Rauf Ibrahimi of the lower house; and members of the Wolesi Jirga Commission on Women’s Affairs, Civil Society and Human Rights.

The overall purposes of the delegation were to strengthen this new channel for building trust between the two countries, define a clear joint program of action based on common priorities, and give Afghan women parliamentarians much-needed support at a crucial time.

This report summarizes the exchange that took place during the visit and presents the Kabul Action Plan which details the commitments of the participating Afghan and Pakistani women parliamentarians, including a return visit to Islamabad and the initiation of an inclusive women’s group in the Afghan Parliament.



“We must put women at the front and center of peace processes—in negotiation and mediation, post-conflict governance and reconstruction.”

**Ban Ki-moon**  
United Nations  
Secretary General

"This initiative is of immense importance to both countries and a great sign of a better future and instrumental in strengthening of trust building between the two nations."



**Hamid Karzai**  
Afghan President

"There is no other option but for Afghan and Pakistani women lawmakers to work together, if we would like to change the face of politics in the region"

**Dr. Fehmida Mirza**  
Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan



"The world would be a better place if more women were in positions of power and women of the region were brought closer together. Bringing together women of the region will make this region more tolerant, more peaceful and more secure."

**Asif Ali Zardari,**  
Pakistani President



**In December 2010, EWI and the Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention brought together women parliamentarians from Afghanistan and other Muslim countries, as well as Western advocates, at the European Parliament.**

The goal: to support Afghan women politicians, who are largely isolated from their counterparts even in countries as close as Pakistan, in their efforts to legislate, advance human rights and work for peace. For many participants, the highlight of the conference was the rare chance to hear women MPs from Afghanistan speak directly about their experiences, from the real personal risks they took running for office to the difficulties of making policy in a society traditionally ruled by men.

One of the strongest recommendations from the conference was the idea of creating a standing regional group to connect Afghan women with women from other Muslim countries. Another recommendation was to establish an international network connecting Western parliamentarians with Afghan women lawmakers.



**In June 2011 EWI convened the first-ever delegation of Afghan women parliamentarians to Pakistan.**

The Afghan delegates and their Pakistani peers met with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari and Speaker of the House Dr. Fehmida Mirza. They agreed on a plan for a regular, ongoing dialogue between Afghan and Pakistani women parliamentarians.

Participants called for women to take an active role in ongoing reconciliation efforts with the Taliban. They further suggested that, to bolster their political position, Afghan women parliamentarians should revive the Women's Parliamentary Caucus, looking to the successful Pakistani model as an example of how this can be done effectively.

They also called for Afghan and Pakistani MPs to work closely on a range of security issues in the region, with an emphasis on fostering sustainable development and inviting private investment in the volatile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).



# Common Challenges Call for Joint Solutions

Women parliamentarians in both countries—because they face similar challenges and have identified common goals—are well-placed to overcome traditional barriers in the bilateral relationship.

From extremism and terrorism to economic underdevelopment, the most pressing challenges faced by Afghanistan and Pakistan demand joint solutions. According to participants in the April meetings, peace and prosperity in one country will not be possible without peace and prosperity in the other. Efforts toward increased regional trade were discussed with a sense of urgency, as Afghanistan seeks to become less dependent on donor funds in the lead-up to 2014.

Participants identified ways to drive both countries to jointly work toward mutually beneficial scenarios in order to overcome mutual distrust and eroded confidence.

Participants suggested that greater cooperation will only be possible through confidence and trust building measures. Regular interaction between Afghan and Pakistani parliamentarians helps to build trust person-by-person, and helps improve the strained bilateral relationship. The firm determination of parliamentarians from both countries to continually engage was reinforced by their call for EWI to continue its efforts to facilitate dialogues in the region.

“This initiative is of immense importance to both countries and a great sign of a better future,” President Karzai said, calling for more contacts between women parliamentarians in both countries. Those visits, he said, are “instrumental in [the] strengthening of trust-building between the two nations.”

Women parliamentarians in both countries—because they face similar challenges and have

identified common goals—are well-placed to overcome traditional barriers in the bilateral relationship. Their commonalities serve as a solid platform for trust and confidence building between the two countries. For example, Pakistani women parliamentarians work in a similar cultural, religious and social context to their Afghan counterparts, yet they have made far more political headway, serving in such influential posts as prime minister and minister for foreign affairs. In Parliament, Pakistani women overcame party, religious and other divisions in order to forge the National Assembly’s first multi-party caucus, the Women’s Parliamentary Caucus (WPC). Through this body, Pakistani women parliamentarians have been able to garner necessary support to pass groundbreaking legislation, including the “Prevention of Anti-Women Practices” bill. Afghan women parliamentarians have called for more support from their colleagues in the region, and EWI’s Parliamentarians Network has facilitated a series of dialogues to answer that call.

With the drawdown of international military involvement and presidential elections coming in 2014, Afghanistan faces significant challenges—challenges that can only be met if women are part of the solution. History has shown that a sustainable peace cannot be built by a select few: Nearly 80 percent of ongoing armed conflicts are the result of failed peace processes. In each failed case, not a single woman participated in the negotiating process. The inclusion of women will not guarantee peace, but excluding half of the population from the outset severely diminishes the prospects for success. “If half of the body is not working, the whole body will be weak,” one participant said.



From the top:  
 President Zardari with the Afghan delegation during the first meeting between Afghan and Pakistani women parliamentarians in Islamabad, June 2011; President Karzai with the Pakistani delegation in Kabul; Pakistani delegation in Kabul: from left to right: Fouzia Ejaz Khan, Shahnaz Wazir Ali, Tahira Aurangzeb, Donya Aziz, Asiya Nasir.



If women lack an active voice, issues that disproportionately affect women and may be crucial to avoiding future conflict may escape notice. Beyond their contribution to reconciliation, the full and active participation of women in decision making helps ensure their continued political representation and helps prevent the passage of discriminatory legislation.

Participants recognized that the incredible economic potential of the region has been thwarted not only by years of conflict, but also by the underutilization of women in economic life. Research from the United Nations and the World Bank indicates that a higher rate of participation of women in the labor force is strongly correlated with a country's overall economic growth.



Parliamentarians have a key role to play in addressing the barriers women face to entering the labor force, and their efforts to promote women as drivers of economic growth deserves wider support. While both Pakistani and Afghan women parliamentarians have been actively working towards these goals, Pakistani women parliamentarians have passed legislation on combating harassment of women in the workplace.

The Pakistani Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), a financial aid program that works to alleviate poverty of disadvantaged women, was also discussed as an initiative that could provide Afghans with lessons and best practices.

Real change in the region means that women must play a more active role in political and economic decision making, and cooperation can reinforce their growing role in public life.





Afghans walk on a bridge on the outskirts of Jalalabad (AP Photo)



# From Women in Parliament to Women in Policy

As international security forces are withdrawn, aid is greatly reduced, and Afghanistan assumes responsibility for its security in 2014, many questions loom about the future of Afghanistan, and its women in particular.

Many participants in Kabul said they feared a return to Taliban rule and a subsequent retraction of women's rights. In fact, according to a Thomson Reuters Foundation study, 90 percent of women fear that the withdrawal of NATO forces in 2014 will leave them in danger. It will not be possible to develop a stable and prosperous country if half of the population feels threatened.

The women's rights agenda made substantial headway during the last 10 years. For example, the 2004 Afghan constitution recognizes gender equality, and girls currently make up nearly 40 percent of students in Afghanistan. But numerous factors hinder further progress.

Although Afghan women make up nearly a third of seats in parliament (in large part due to a constitutional mandate reserving seats for women), they struggle to make their voices heard in a traditionally patriarchal environment. The 1964 constitution granted Afghan women the right to vote and hold political office, but three decades of conflict and Taliban rule divided and disenfranchised Afghan women, and, consequently, they are generally politically inexperienced compared to many of their male peers.

One of 18 permanent commissions of the Afghan Parliament does in fact deal with women's issues. The Commission on Women's Affairs,

Civil Society and Human Rights has made impressive strides—most notably by its recent successful push for a decree on combating violence against women. Because of the way parliamentary groups are structured, however, not all women parliamentarians are able to participate in such efforts. Without political parties or other associations to bring them together, there is currently no inclusive forum where all Afghan women parliamentarians can participate and develop a common agenda. As a result, the majority of Afghan women parliamentarians operate largely independently of one another.

Women are better able to exert their influence and have an impact when they forge a single constituency with a common agenda. Participants agreed that one collective voice would be much louder than the voices of myriad individuals. Participants therefore identified the need for an inclusive women's group in the Afghan parliament in order to develop and work together toward a common agenda (beyond women's issues in particular) and provide mutual support. Without such a unified, critical mass, the voices of individual Afghan women parliamentarians are likely to continue to be ignored by many of the traditional power holders. "Only if women work together will they have their voices heard and safeguard their rights," one participant said.

Afghan participants thereby committed to taking steps toward the creation of an inclusive women's group in the Afghan Parliament, an initiative that has the backing of President Karzai. Participants speaking for Pakistan's WPC pledged their ongoing support to their Afghan colleagues and invited them to Islamabad for an EWI-facilitated follow-up visit later this year.

Women are better able to exert their influence and have an impact when they forge a single constituency with a common agenda.

# Moving Forward

Participants committed to the Kabul Action Plan (see appendix), which outlines the outcomes of the April delegation, including the principles and priorities for further cooperation and the commitment to meet again later in 2012. As the dialogue process is institutionalized, participants identified the following joint advocacy points:



## Strength in numbers

In order for women in the Afghan parliament to maximize their influence, there needs to be a forum for all Afghan women parliamentarians to come together to develop a common agenda and a strong, collective voice on politics beyond women's issues.



## Representation and influence

Women must not merely be represented in delegations, negotiations and the like. They must also be positioned to fully engage and contribute to decision making. Participants committed to raising this need for greater participation of women in all political life with the political leadership in their respective countries.

## Parliament as an instrument of peace

Participants called for enhanced bilateral relations through more people-to-people contact, especially through parliamentary exchange. This includes, in particular, the women's dialogue process, as supported by President Karzai and Speakers Mirza and Ibrahimi. Participants further recommended the activation of parliamentary friendship groups, and Speaker Ibrahimi agreed to re-energize the Pakistani Friendship Group in the Afghan Parliament.



## Promote a culture of peace

Countering extremism and violence against women calls for more multifaceted engagement. Media and religious leaders can play a critical role in countering the misuse of religion and raising awareness on women's rights.



## Women's rights are non-negotiable

Women's rights—one of the justifications for international involvement in Afghanistan—cannot be compromised. While emphasizing the importance of engaging with those Taliban who are willing to negotiate and constructively discuss a peaceful resolution, participants emphasized that the Taliban must accept the 2004 Afghan constitution which recognizes that women and men have equal rights and responsibilities under the law. Afghan Foreign Minister Rassoul and Karzai adviser Stanikzai agreed that there can be no rollback on women's rights in post-2014 Afghanistan.



## Economic cooperation

Both countries need to work more closely on creating circumstances that encourage long-term investment and regional cooperation, which will be critically important as international forces and support is reduced. The Regional Economic Cooperation Conferences on Afghanistan (RECCA) needs to be strengthened, and business-to-business contacts should be encouraged.



## Women's Parliamentary Caucus of Pakistan

Parliamentarians, as legislators and representatives of the people, are well placed to effect change. Their ability to represent the interests of their constituencies, hold the executive accountable, and pass timely legislation, are hallmarks of a strong democracy. When women are excluded from these processes, the efficacy of the entire system is suspect.

The Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) was formally established through a unanimous resolution in Pakistan's National Assembly in 2009. Since that time, under the patronage of Speaker Fehmida Mirza, it has worked to strengthen the role of women parliamentarians by creating a single platform for their work. As a direct result, numerous pieces of gender-sensitive legislation were passed, including the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, and the Prevention of Anti-Women Practices law. In addition, issues relating to internally displaced persons (IDPs), acid burn victims, and women police officers were brought to the fore in the National Assembly.

The caucus has been instrumental in bringing women from across party and ethnic divisions together to enact policies and improve their overall performance in the National Assembly. While there are certainly differences in the Afghan case, Afghan participants agreed that they could profit from the experiences of the WPC and called upon EWI to continue to facilitate opportunities for peer learning.



An Afghan woman carries goods up the stairs in the old town of Kabul (AP)

## Kabul Action Plan

On April 14 - 16, 2012, the first Pakistani Women Parliamentarians delegation visited Afghanistan. Facilitated by the Parliamentarians Network of the East-West Institute (EWI), in partnership with the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) of the National Assembly of Pakistan, Pakistani parliamentarians representing all major political parties met with representatives of Afghanistan's Wolesi Jirga and Government. The purpose of this delegation was to advance ideas on how to bolster the influence of women parliamentarians in peace and security issues, and help to contribute to regional security through trust building and deepened dialogue.

As an outcome of the discussions, the participating parliamentarians adopted the following Action Plan:

- **Recognizing** that women in Pakistan and Afghanistan face similar challenges, they can significantly profit from experience sharing and joint efforts towards common goals, such as combating extremism and terrorism.
- **Reaffirming** commitment to the June 2011 Islamabad Action Plan which emphasizes the vital role women play in political decision making and peace processes and pledges support to developing a strong regional network of women parliamentarians. Firmly appreciating the support of President Karzai, the Honorable Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, and the President of the Wolesi Jirga of Afghanistan to this end.

- **Recognizing** the parliament as a tool to strengthen trust and confidence between countries and improve bilateral relations.
- **Commending** the Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC), the first multi-party caucus in the National Assembly of Pakistan, for providing the necessary framework for Pakistani women parliamentarians to exert their collective influence on politics at the national level.
- **Commending** the achievements of Afghan women parliamentarians, including the Commission on Women's Affairs, Civil Society and Human Rights in the Afghan Parliament for working to create the space for Afghan women to legislate and take up women's issues. The Commission is a significant element of an Afghan women's parliamentary strategy.
- **Identifying** the need for an inclusive forum which will enable all Afghan women parliamentarians to develop a common agenda and work jointly on matters of shared interest, beyond women's issues. A designated, inclusive women's space in the Afghan parliament would constructively forge the unity necessary to maximize impact of individual Afghan women parliamentarians.

### Participants commit to:

- Participants reaffirm their commitment to sustain and strengthen dia-



logue between women parliamentarians in the region. Participants will meet again in Islamabad later in 2012 to further develop a common agenda of priority issues, especially related to peace and security.

- Each delegation will nominate three women to participate on a bi-national Steering Committee composed of three women from each side. These focal points will collectively represent the needs and interests of each side and the committee will galvanize support and act as an incubator of ideas between face-to-face meetings.
- The Afghan delegation resolves to maintain and consolidate support for the creation of an inclusive group of Afghan women parliamentarians. To that end, the Afghan delegation will determine the initial agenda for the women's group, based on broad consultation with stakeholders in the Afghan parliament. Such a forum should necessarily appreciate the rich ethnic, linguistic, and tribal diversity of Afghanistan and permit all Afghan women parliamentarians to collectively influence the otherwise male-dominated environment. The Women's Parliamentary Caucus pledges its full support and will elicit support for the establishment of such a group.
- Jointly support strengthening the capacity of women parliamentarians to enact legislation in both countries

(including laws that safeguard and promote women's rights); in particular, the Afghan women are invited to benefit from the research support and capacity building services of the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS).

- Re-energize Friendship Groups in both parliaments as an avenue to further parliamentary dialogue and understanding. Collaboratively infuse a women's perspective in Friendship Group agendas and activities.
- Advance the profile and visibility of women parliamentarians in both countries through advocacy opportunities in the region and beyond.
- **Jointly advocate for the following:**
  - » Greater representation and full engagement of women in political life, calling on governments to live up to the commitments and principles of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1888, and 1889.
  - » Strengthen political ties and promote people-to-people contact between Afghanistan and Pakistan, particularly through increased parliamentary exchange;
  - » Enhance education and outreach efforts with regards to women's rights and boost efforts to fully implement and enforce existing laws.



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Norwegian Red Cross*

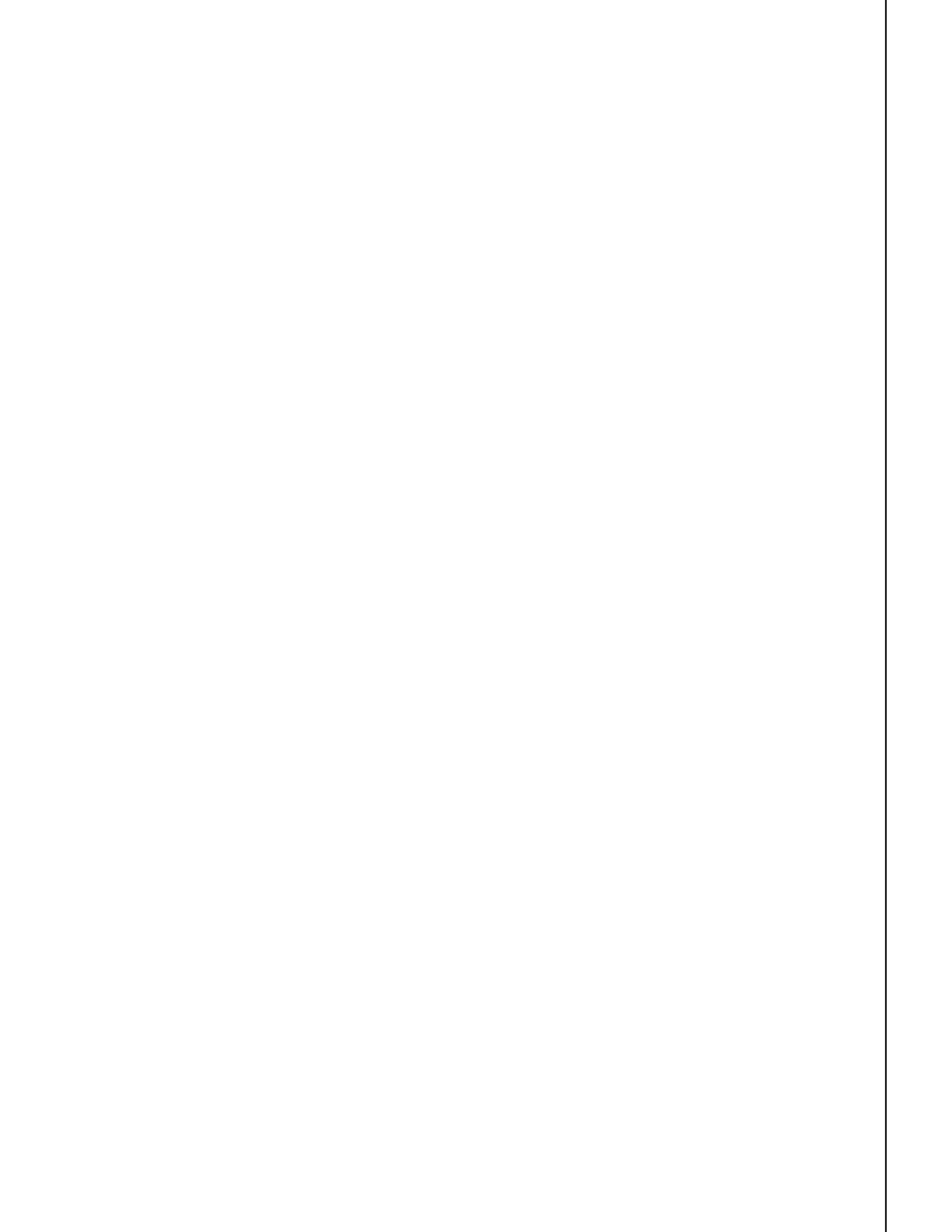
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