

Stop the Afghanistan Collapse

President Biden Should Reverse the
Withdrawal Decision and Save Millions of
People from Dictatorship and Deprivation

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Commentary

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President Biden, alone, has the power to stem the tragedy currently unfolding in Afghanistan. By announcing a reversal, or at least an indefinite halt to the withdrawal, he can probably halt Taliban momentum, prevent more cities from falling, and give the Afghan government time to reconsolidate its military forces. A pause might allow for the creation of an interim government. I urge the President to make this decision. He can use the present deployment of nearly 4,000 additional NATO troops into Afghanistan to create space to rethink the process of responsible disengagement.

The President's decision to withdraw U.S. military forces from Afghanistan triggered the Taliban advance and the rolling collapse of Afghanistan's security forces. For the last twenty years, the United States and its NATO allies have created a military that is heavily dependent on Western air, logistics, and moral support. Whether or not President Biden believes twenty years should have been sufficient time to allow the Afghans to stand on their own, it clearly was not.

As of today, August 13, 2021, at least ten Afghan provincial capitals have fallen to the Taliban. Kandahar, Afghanistan's second largest city and the anchor point for control of the south, is now under Taliban control. Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, is being squeezed from all sides. Plans to sustain the government with aid money are moot.

As a result of this collapse, tens of millions of Afghans are already, or soon will be governed by the Taliban. Millions of Afghan women and children will be subjected to the same kind of mistreatment they experienced under Taliban rule through 2001. The weak Afghan democracy will be destroyed, probably to be replaced by dictatorial religious rule. Thousands of former interpreters and their families offered sanctuary in the United States will be abandoned. Millions of Afghans are, or soon will be fleeing to escape this brutality. They will suffer terrible deprivations in bleak and remote camps.

In March 2021, President Biden signed his Interim National Strategic Guidance, a document intended to set an idealistic standard for the defense of democracy worldwide. It is clear and thoughtful. It contains exactly the kind of language needed to help rebuild American credibility. President Biden wrote:

When we strengthen our alliances, we amplify our power and our ability to disrupt threats before they can reach our shores...When we defend equal rights of all people...we help ensure that those rights are protected for our own children here in America.

Unfortunately, it appears that withdrawal has undermined American power and emboldened threat groups including Al Qaida and the Islamic State. Without American military support, equal rights in Afghanistan will not be protected.

This is not the responsible ending to the Afghanistan war the President has repeatedly called for. It is almost certainly too late to save all of Afghanistan from the Taliban. But it is not too late to try to enact the President's noble ideals and achieve his strategic objectives by protecting as many Afghans as possible.