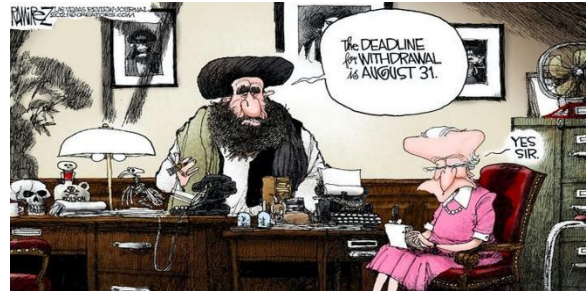


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Afghanistan and terrorism will follow us home

Steve Bakke  September 4, 2021



We're facing an incredible volume of facts, opinions, and emotions about Afghanistan and the events of the past few weeks. To evaluate these events, we first need to reduce everything to a common denominator. For me that amounts to evaluating where we stand relative to our national interests.

For some, our current exit from Afghanistan is the logical conclusion of events occurring over several years. President Obama reduced the ground forces significantly in 2014, and President Trump followed up in 2020 with a "peace agreement" aimed at withdrawing all remaining personnel. However, a review of that agreement makes it clear that, with all its conditions, full withdrawal was unlikely. I think the real goal was improved stability.

President Biden declared he was bound by that agreement to fully withdraw our troops. Given the agreement's unfulfilled conditions, that's clearly not the case. He didn't need that "agreement" as a crutch to withdraw. He had that authority. And bipartisan critics agree that his responsibility to create a careful exit plan came up short.

A careful plan would never have withdrawn military personnel before evacuating U.S. citizens, Afghan staff, and translators. A thoughtful plan would have recognized the vulnerability of Afghan forces. Perhaps a careful plan wouldn't have rushed to close the high capacity, sophisticated, and more easily defended Bagram air base.

With a thoughtful plan, tens of billions of dollars in military weaponry wouldn't now be in Taliban control, including aircraft, Humvees, rifles, and sophisticated communication equipment. We've bestowed on these terrorists a powerful military status.

It's hard to believe that records of our Afghan staff and translators, as well as U.S. citizens still in the country, were left intact due to the hasty exit. The Taliban has names and information on those who haven't been evacuated. Many of our Afghan supporters will be killed as a result.

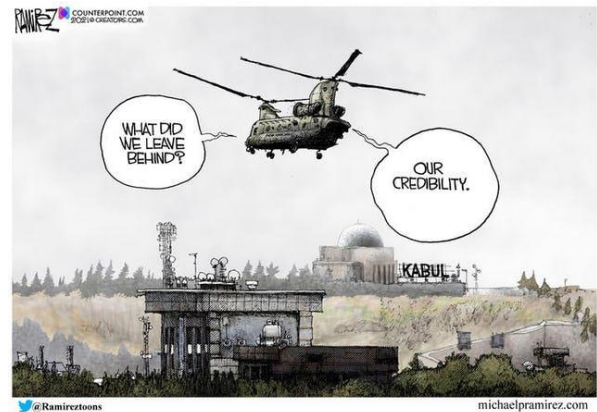
This was an evacuation and withdrawal that had the flavor of an "escape." A thorough plan would have provided enough troops to provide adequate airport security, to find remaining Americans, and to get them out. Instead, we relied on the Taliban for perimeter security and had to ask their permission to extend the evacuation date. We were denied. We had inadequate military resources to take control of the situation ourselves. That's tragic, humiliating, and damaging in so many ways.

President Biden declared that the U.S. has little national interest in Afghanistan. I disagree. In addition to our reputation, we've relinquished a lot by withdrawing. Prior to withdrawal, our ground troops were involved in very little fighting. We were providing training, intelligence, and air support to the Afghan forces. Our goal of denying terrorists safe sanctuary was being achieved. I believe we had reached a reasonable balance of peace, safety, and cost.

A relatively small contingent could have maintained the existing equilibrium had we not withdrawn. Under Taliban control, Afghanistan will now revert to being a terrorist sanctuary and training ground.

We're also giving up access to Afghanistan's plentiful natural resources such as copper, gold, natural gas, and highly sought after "rare earth metals," which are essential in electronic technology. We're leaving those valuable elements in China's care.

We've exited Afghanistan, but the war on terror continues. My thoughts quickly drift to related concerns.



I regret that the President ceased building a modern, high tech and physical southern border wall. There's no better way to bring order, control, and knowledge about who is entering the country. Delay in attaining border wall security makes us vulnerable to terrorists entering our country without being challenged. I implore the administration to secure the border.

Trump wisely exited the Iran nuclear agreement which was unenforceable and destined to merely delay nuclear proliferation. Recent events have confirmed our lack of resolve and weakness, causing serious damage to our bargaining position with Iran. Despite Biden's desire for a new agreement, I'm convinced we shouldn't even think about it.

Our leadership has exhibited weakness and uncertainty in recent events. Our adversaries are encouraged. Our allies are disappointed and perhaps afraid. Evil has gained ground. Sad things and bad things will now be inflicted on the Afghan people.

We think we've ended something, but tragically, Afghanistan and terrorism will follow us home.