

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد
بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم
از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

BY MELVIN GOODMAN

03.08.2021

The Washington Post Won't Let Go of Afghanistan



Home-made sign (2015) in Devine, Texas, south of San Antonio, welcomes returning troops from the war in Afghanistan. Photograph Source: Billy Hathorn – [CC BY-SA 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/)

After twenty years of futility and failure in Afghanistan, the naysayers are targeting President Biden for ending a U.S. war that should have ended in 2002. They say nothing about the 2,400 young men and women who have been lost, along with \$2 trillion spent. The fact that over 800,000 men and women served in Afghanistan in this “fool’s errand” is missing from their jeremiad, along with the fact that a significant percentage of U.S. troops served five or more tours. U.S. presidents and secretaries of defense played “Russian roulette” with the lives of young combatants who deserved better.

Meanwhile, civilian casualties in Afghanistan reached record highs in May and June, with women and children making up nearly half of the losses. The Afghan air force killed and wounded more than twice as many civilians in that period as in the first half of 2020. During one five-month period in Afghanistan, nearly 90 percent of the people killed by U.S. drones were not the intended target. The source of the latter information, whistleblower David Hale, was just given a 45-month prison sentence for leaking documents with this information. President Biden's Department of Justice was seeking a nine-year sentence.

The critics of the withdrawal make very little sense; they are led by David Ignatius, the national security columnist of the *Washington Post*, who typically shills for the military and intelligence communities. Last week's column ("Biden's options on Afghanistan are shrinking") is a stunner in view of the fact that the United States has been trying to negotiate an end to this miserable war with one foot long out the door. Ignatius believes the Biden administration should have left our thousands of contractors in the country to "help the Afghan army continue its operations." But who would protect the U.S. contractors? With the Afghan army, including members of the elite commando corps, beating a hasty retreat from the Taliban, there is no reason to believe the so-called Afghan government could do so.

Ignatius believes that Biden "still has some leverage" to stop the panic in Afghanistan following the departure of U.S. troops. He sees leverage in sending a "special U.S. military envoy to Kabul immediately to recommend measures to assist the Afghan military." We failed at this task with a force of more than 100,000; how do we succeed with the 650 U.S. troops left in Kabul to protect our embassy? Ignatius favors retired Gen. David Petraeus for this task, the former commander of U.S. and coalition forces, who lost wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. There are no indications of the measures such a military envoy would be able to introduce.

Ignatius sees leverage in appointing U.S. special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad as an international mediator to encourage a peaceful transition between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Is there a credible Afghan government? Is there any reason why the Taliban should suddenly agree to a compromise? Ignatius argues that Pakistan, India, Russia, China, and Iran oppose a military takeover by the Taliban, creating a regional consensus for stability. No regional consensus would deter the Taliban, and in any event Pakistan has favored the return of the Taliban to Kabul for two decades. On July 28-29, moreover, Chinese officials held high-profile meetings with a Taliban delegation, and

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called the Taliban a “pivotal military and political force.”

Ignatius argues that the United States should “demand” that Afghan President Ashraf Ghani “create a leadership council that includes all major forces across the country that oppose the Taliban.” Unfortunately, the groups in Ignatius’ “big tent” oppose Ghani, and aren’t susceptible to his belief that America has “carrots and sticks in hand.” Carrots?? Sticks?? The Taliban are Pushtuns—the dominant ethnic group in Afghanistan—which limits outside, let alone U.S., leverage.

Finally, Ignatius warns that if Afghanistan “turns out to be a free-wheeling disaster,” it will erase our “gains in the battle of influence with Russia and China.” Ignatius doesn’t tell us what these gains are because they are non-existent. The same argument was used in the case of Vietnam fifty years ago, yet the United States improved relations with both Moscow and Beijing in the wake of our withdrawal. And no dominoes fell in the wake of the withdrawal either.

Of course, Ignatius isn’t alone in his criticism of Biden’s decision to withdraw from this unwinnable war. CIA director William Burns muddled the waters by testifying to the intelligence committees that it will be more difficult to collect intelligence in Afghanistan without a military presence. But technical means of gathering intelligence and intelligence from foreign liaison should suffice. Several U.S. generals warn that there will be civil war in the wake of a U.S. withdrawal. The civil war began in 1973 with the coup against the King; it has raged intermittently for nearly half a century.

Former ambassadors to Afghanistan Ryan Crocker and Ronald Neumann have written editorials in the *Washington Post* criticizing Biden’s decision. Neumann believes that technology is an “enormous combat multiplier,” and that withdrawal of U.S. troops and technicians will compromise this advantage. Well, insurgencies are not won with technology (see Vietnam), and insurgents with sanctuaries are virtually unbeatable (again, see Vietnam). At least, the United States has never defeated one. Crocker, a former colleague at the war college, is unfairly critical of Biden for “breaking faith” with the Afghans.

This week, Neumann, a former student of mine at the National War College, struck again in the *Washington Post* calling for “symbolic actions” such as more “airstrikes from aircraft based outside Afghanistan.” These “symbolic actions” will increase civilian casualties in urban areas and prolong the suffering of the Afghan people. Neumann’s belief in the efficacy of air power is a military anachronism.

Finally, Max Boot, a conservative commentator who typically supports U.S. use of force in the *Post*, calls Biden's decision to withdraw "impetuous" and "ideological," even "Trumpy." There is nothing impetuous about Biden's decision. He encouraged President Obama to withdraw from Afghanistan more than a decade ago and warned against getting "boxed-in" by the military. Obama believed that Afghanistan was the "good war," and ignored Biden's advice not to increase the U.S. troop presence in 2009. As for Boot, his reference to Afghanistan's "pro-western government" is a head-scratcher.

There is at least one legitimate criticism of the decision making of the Biden national security team and that is the failure to arrange special immigrant visas (SIV) for the 18,000 Afghan translators, linguists, and technicians who assisted the U.S. military. The House of Representatives had an opportunity to increase the number of SIVs, but failed to approve visas for those Afghans who worked in non-military roles such as maintenance and security. As Ambassador Crocker acknowledges, "we can and must do better."

Melvin A. Goodman is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and a professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. A former CIA analyst, Goodman is the author of [Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA](#) and [National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism](#). and [A Whistleblower at the CIA](#). His most recent book is "American Carnage: The Wars of Donald Trump" (Opus Publishing), and he is the author of the forthcoming "The Dangerous National Security State" (2020)." Goodman is the national security columnist for counterpunch.org.

CounterPunch 02.08.2021