

## August 2021 Entry (on Afghanistan)

“We went to Afghanistan almost 20 years ago with clear goals: get those who attacked us on Sept. 11, 2001, and make sure Al Qaeda could not use Afghanistan as a base from which to attack us again. We did that. We severely degraded Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. We never gave up the hunt for Osama bin Laden and we got him.

That was a decade ago. Our mission in Afghanistan was never supposed to have been nation-building. It was never supposed to be creating a unified, centralized democracy. Our only vital national interest in Afghanistan remains today what it has always been: preventing a terrorist attack on American homeland....

When I came into office, I inherited a deal that President Trump negotiated with the Taliban. Under his agreement, U.S. forces would be out of Afghanistan by May 1, 2021, just a little over three months after I took office. U.S. forces had already drawn down during the Trump administration from roughly 15,500 American forces to 2,500 troops in country. And the Taliban was at its strongest militarily since 2001.

The choice I had to make as your president was either to follow through on that agreement or be prepared to go back to fighting the Taliban in the middle of the spring fighting season. There would have been no cease-fire after May 1. There was no agreement protecting our forces after May 1. There was no status quo of stability without American casualties after May 1. There was only the cold reality of either following through on the agreement to withdraw our forces or escalating the conflict and sending thousands more American troops back into combat in Afghanistan, and lurching into the third decade of conflict.

I stand squarely behind my decision. After 20 years, I’ve learned the hard way that there was never a good time to withdraw U.S. forces. That’s why we’re still there. We were clear-eyed about the risks. We planned for every contingency. But I always promised the American people that I will be straight with you.

The truth is, this did unfold more quickly than we had anticipated. So what’s happened? Afghanistan political leaders gave up and fled the country. The Afghan military collapsed, sometimes without trying to fight. If anything, the developments of the past week reinforced that ending U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan now was the right decision.

American troops cannot and should not be fighting in a war and dying in a war that Afghan forces are not willing to fight for themselves. We spent over a trillion dollars. We trained and equipped an Afghan military force of some 300,000 strong. Incredibly well equipped. A force larger in size than the militaries of many of our NATO allies. We gave them every tool they could need. We paid their salaries, provided for the maintenance of their air force, something the Taliban doesn’t have. Taliban does not have an air force. We provided close air support. We gave them every chance to determine their own future. What we could not provide them was the will to fight for that future.

There are some very brave and capable Afghan special forces units and soldiers. But if Afghanistan is unable to mount any real resistance to the Taliban now, there is no chance that one year — one more year, five more years or 20 more years — that U.S. military boots on the ground would have made any difference.

Here's what I believe to my core: It is wrong to order American troops to step up when Afghanistan's own armed forces would not. The political leaders of Afghanistan were unable to come together for the good of their people, unable to negotiate for the future of their country when the chips were down. They would never have done so while U.S. troops remained in Afghanistan bearing the brunt of the fighting for them. And our true strategic competitors, China and Russia, would love nothing more than the United States to continue to funnel billions of dollars in resources and attention into stabilizing Afghanistan indefinitely.

When I hosted President Ghani and Chairman Abdullah at the White House in June, and again when I spoke by phone to Ghani in July, we had very frank conversations. We talked about how Afghanistan should prepare to fight their civil wars after the U.S. military departed. To clean up the corruption in government so the government could function for the Afghan people. We talked extensively about the need for Afghan leaders to unite politically. They failed to do any of that. I also urged them to engage in diplomacy, to seek a political settlement with the Taliban. This advice was flatly refused. Mr. Ghani insisted the Afghan forces would fight, but obviously he was wrong.

I'm left again to ask of those who argue that we should stay: How many more generations of America's daughters and sons would you have me send to fight Afghanistan's civil war when Afghan troops will not? How many more lives, American lives, is it worth, how many endless rows of headstones at Arlington National Cemetery? I'm clear on my answer: I will not repeat the mistakes we've made in the past. The mistake of staying and fighting indefinitely in a conflict that is not in the national interest of the United States, of doubling down on a civil war in a foreign country, of attempting to remake a country through the endless military deployments of U.S. forces. Those are the mistakes we cannot continue to repeat because we have significant vital interest in the world that we cannot afford to ignore....

I've been clear, the human rights must be the center of our foreign policy, not the periphery. But the way to do it is not through endless military deployments. It's with our diplomacy, our economic tools and rallying the world to join us....

The events we're seeing now are sadly proof that no amount of military force would ever deliver a stable, united, secure Afghanistan, as known in history as the graveyard of empires. What's happening now could just as easily happen five years ago or 15 years in the future. We have to be honest, our mission in Afghanistan made many missteps over the past two decades.

I'm now the fourth American president to preside over war in Afghanistan. Two

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Democrats and two Republicans. I will not pass this responsibility on to a fifth president. I will not mislead the American people by claiming that just a little more time in Afghanistan will make all the difference. Nor will I shrink from my share of responsibility for where we are today and how we must move forward from here. I am president of the United States of America, and the buck stops with me.

I'm deeply saddened by the facts we now face. But I do not regret my decision to end America's war-fighting in Afghanistan and maintain a laser focus on our counterterrorism mission, there and other parts of the world. Our mission to degrade the terrorist threat of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and kill Osama bin Laden was a success. Our decades-long effort to overcome centuries of history and permanently change and remake Afghanistan was not, and I wrote and believed it never could be.

I cannot and will not ask our troops to fight on endlessly in another country's civil war, taking casualties, suffering life-shattering injuries, leaving families broken by grief and loss. This is not in our national security interest. It is not what the American people want. It is not what our troops who have sacrificed so much over the past two decades deserve. I made a commitment to the American people when I ran for president that I would bring America's military involvement in Afghanistan to an end. While it's been hard and messy and, yes, far from perfect, I've honored that commitment....

I know my decision will be criticized. But I would rather take all that criticism than pass this decision on to another president of the United States, yet another one, a fifth one.

Because it's the right one, it's the right decision for our people. The right one for our brave service members who risked their lives serving our nation. And it's the right one for America." – President Biden, [Comments on the collapse of the Afghan Government](#), August 16, 2021.

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Did we need to succeed, did we need to do anything? Here's a prediction for the future: Someday in two or three generations, the people of [Afghanistan](#) will look out their tiny windows and realize that we are on [Mars](#), the [Moon](#), on our way to inhabiting the [outer solar system](#), and they were left behind living in a quasi-medieval religious fantasy that their grandparents imposed on them. They will then either decide that they like where they are and stay, or they will feel they are being left behind, living historical artifacts.

The situation with the Taliban overthrow of Afghanistan in 2021 dovetails very nicely with several issues in GGDM – Conversion, Pacification Combat, Occupation, Morale in GGDM (will to fight), logistics, Eras, mission creep – the most immediate being [modernity](#) vs. resistant indigenous populations and the loading and transport of populations discussed in [3 Expansion](#) – imagine if we had tried to remove the population of Afghanistan to colony ships for transport to another place? And who are the people crowding the [Kabul](#) airport seeking escape? Likely they represent a more skilled, educated, the Westernized class from the [capital](#) who fear what they see coming – i.e. a politically-driven [brain-drain](#) in action. The Taliban are letting them go to reduce

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resistance to their regime and to gain a favorable nod from the world community (remember, these are the guys who [destroyed ancient Buddhist statues with explosives](#), refusing an offer from several countries to simply remove them from Afghanistan for free).

The lack of “will to fight” echoes the same situation with the Iraqi forces in the face of [ISIL](#), which is discussed as part of morale in GGDM. All of the best equipment in the world did not inspire them to stand and deliver (as in "[To stand firm and perform one's duties to the best of one's abilities](#)"), the collapse of the Afghan army parallels in its entirety the infamous collapse of the Iraqi army. There are many lessons here for GGDM play, for starters, do not falsely equate [higher Era](#) technology with performance if there is no will. The president of Afghanistan fled the country (after assuring President Biden that the Afghan army would fight), and when he resurfaced, he said that he fled to avoid being hanged. Like the Iraqi commanders who fled, the Afghan president was not willing to die for his county, not willing to be a [martyr](#) for the cause of the democracy of which he was elected President; how can you expect the soldiers to fight and die for one who with the smallest provocation, fled the country to avoid death for being the duly elected President of Afghanistan?

And like the army’s lack of will to fight, democracy and modernity would not stand in Afghanistan (or any county) where the people [lacked the will](#) for it. The will toward democracy is exactly the distinguishing characteristic ([aspect?](#)) of the [American Revolutionary](#)-era populations vs. concurrent European [monarchial subjects](#); the process did eventually filter back to Europe in fits and starts, for example, the [French Revolution](#) flop or the [Unification of Italy](#) (expelling the French and Austrians). After more than two centuries, it finally took hold firmly in Western Europe in the early 20th Century after the disasters of [WWI](#) and [WWII](#) and has a tenuous existence in Eastern Europe after the [Revolutions of 1989](#). Thus, absent a pre-existing condition favorable to modernity and democracy, we could not expect in 20 years to create a will to democracy in Afghanistan or Vietnam or Iraq while simultaneously fighting a fanatical religious-inspired insurgency.

Like ISIL, the news media noted that the Taliban had captured an enormous amount of U.S. equipment (the stuff we gave to the Afghan army and air forces, noted by President Biden) and the media asked if the Taliban would ever really be able to use it. Furthermore, you can count on the fact that they are not going to receive much training on the more sophisticated items, and they are not going to receive replacement parts or upgrades. These items are then ‘novelty tech’ items as discussed in [5 Culture](#), EN 11, p. 432 and once again goes to the issue of [logistics](#) ("Amateurs talk about tactics, professionals talk logistics."), [training](#), and [Era differentials](#) as discussed extensively in GGDM. All history and current events are story material for GGDM games, just as it is for television dramas, movies, and fiction or semi-historical literature (you know, the “inspired by true events” stuff); it just depends on the group’s creativity, story direction, and how ‘realistic’ the participants want their game to be.

Meanwhile on the domestic politics side of the story, President Biden notes how

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much [treasure](#) we spent in Afghanistan (which for example, could have been spent on infrastructure), which parallels with various RPs and supplies discussions in GGDM. And the media noted that it was President Trump who made the deal for the withdrawal and dumped it on the next president to execute the deal and own the consequences (hmmm, while he stands at his golf resort and criticizes President Biden); [Gen. McMaster](#) went so far as to say Trump signed a surrender agreement with the Taliban. As President Biden noted, his choice was either to honor the agreement or to break it – an issue discussed in GGDM diplomacy in [enforcing diplomatic agreements, breaking treaties](#).

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In the larger experience of the Afghan nation, it is very odd that in 2001 the Taliban rulers invited yet another invasion of their country by antagonizing a foreign global power. The cost of that head-shaking decision (and I was as perplexed at that time as the rest of the world was and as I am now) was a generation of the Afghan people who grew up during the [military occupation](#) (and let's call it what it was really...). Decisions have consequences and the world always has to learn from hard regrettable experience instead of [common sense](#), [decency](#) and basic [reason](#). This situation is not likely to be exactly repeated in the remainder of this century as the fate of Afghanistan will serve as a [pragmatic](#) historical caution to any other nation considering a similar course of action. The United States should, however, be careful not to be too smug in this historical 'power' and learn our lessons on mission drift (or [mission creep](#)), politics and the limits of conventional occupation vs. fanatical insurgencies using [asymmetric warfare](#). But we probably won't.

In an odd way, the Taliban achieved exactly the opposite of their stated aims: Keeping their culture in a medieval religious thrall requires keeping other world powers – especially the secular and technological kind – out. Not booting them out after they have been there for 20 years – and make no mistake, the Taliban did not 'drive' us out of Afghanistan (though their [propaganda](#) will make that claim), we left on our own. The cultural result of the American occupation of Afghanistan on the Afghan people can be viewed on many levels and in many ways, but here are two that I can think of instantly: 1) The Afghan people, through contact with American citizens (and equipment), will have absorbed some Western ideas (i.e. [enculturation](#)), a process furthered in some small measure by the 'democratic' Afghan government (whether you consider it truly [democratic](#) or just an American [puppet regime](#)) that the Taliban just overthrew (again) and 2) Some will not want to crawl back into the religious-[isolationist](#) cocoon (mmm... noting again that the former Taliban leadership in harboring Al Queda in 2001 did just the opposite of isolationism), back to a medieval religious fantasy – the genie is out of the bottle and will not go back – and the express of this is the secondary effect of the brain-drain currently in process at Kabul Airport as thousands of the likely more-educated and secular, 'exposed' parts of the urban population seek to leave the country for the U.S. and [Qatar](#), who has been assisting by providing a non-Western alternative for Afghans to migrate from the country. And those who leave now will be able to help others leave Afghanistan later...

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