

Biden announces US military withdrawal from Afghanistan

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14 April 2021

US President Joe Biden announced Wednesday afternoon that the remaining American troops in Afghanistan would begin pulling out on May 1 and that all of them would be withdrawn from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021.

The choice of a final withdrawal date was intended to reinforce the longstanding lie by Washington that its invasion and occupation of Afghanistan were in response to the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. In reality, the attack on Afghanistan was in preparation well before that date, and the invasion was aimed at accomplishing long-term strategic aims for American imperialism.

The televised statement from the White House and the accompanying media buildup, however, could not dispel the atmosphere of futility and failure that surrounds the withdrawal—if, indeed, the final pullout takes place on schedule.

Biden reportedly rejected pleas by Pentagon and CIA officials that any pullout should be “conditions-based,” i.e., conditional on some sort of agreement between the Taliban insurgents and the Kabul puppet regime established by the United States. By one account, citing an unnamed “senior administration official,” Biden viewed such an approach as “a recipe for staying in Afghanistan forever.”

While warning the Taliban not to attack American forces or their NATO allies during the withdrawal period, Biden indicated that there were no circumstances in which he would reverse his decision. He only left open the threat that US military force could be employed against any possible terrorist threat to the United States, a warning that applies to virtually every country in the world.

While there are officially 2,500 US troops in Afghanistan and another 6,500 from other NATO

countries, press reports indicate that the actual number of American soldiers is 3,500. This does not count thousands of other American personnel, from CIA agents to mercenaries to Special Forces paratroopers, who are likely to continue operations in that country as long as Washington feels it necessary to prop up the Kabul regime, which has no other base of support.

Afghanistan will remain a free-fire zone for US drone missiles, like nearly all the vast swath of territory from Central Asia through the Middle East and across northern Africa.

There were mixed reactions in Congress to the Biden decision, and the split was not along party lines. Some Democrats applauded the action, mostly those from the Sanders-Warren wing of the party, while those closest to the military gave tepid backing, including Adam Smith, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, and Robert Menendez, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Senator Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire, a member of the Foreign Relations Committee, said she was “very disappointed” by the decision and cited the likelihood that government in Kabul would collapse.

Republicans were publicly divided, with the most strident pro-Trump senators, including Ted Cruz and Josh Hawley, hailing the pullout, while Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell denounced it as a capitulation to terrorism. “It is a retreat in the face of an enemy that has not yet been vanquished, an abdication of American leadership,” he said Tuesday on the Senate floor.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken informed Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani Tuesday of Biden’s decision and also relayed the proposed action to his NATO counterparts before a meeting in Brussels, which is expected to ratify similar actions by Germany and other countries with forces on the ground in

Afghanistan.

Ghani, for whom the announcement is something of a political death sentence, said he would have no comment on the US withdrawal until after Biden's official declaration.

Speaking off the record to the press, top administration officials underscored the necessity for the United States to turn away from lesser conflicts, like that in Afghanistan, to more important strategic opponents like Russia and China, as well as North Korea and Iran. "Afghanistan just does not rise to the level of those other threats at this point," one official told the *Washington Post*.

In his remarks Wednesday, Biden referred to the 2,300 American soldiers killed in Afghanistan, the tens of thousands of wounded and \$2 trillion expended on 20 years of war. He made no reference whatsoever to the catastrophic impact on the Afghan people and on Afghanistan as a society, one of many destroyed by American imperialism over the past two decades, along with Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen and large parts of northern Africa.

Similarly, there has been virtually no mention in the US media of the damage and the colossal loss of life inflicted by American forces. Instead, there were crocodile tears about the savagery of the Taliban and the likelihood of severe setbacks for women's rights should the fundamentalist religious group come to power again in Kabul.

One of the most cynical efforts to portray Biden's decision as a humanitarian and even progressive action came from David Sanger, the designated recipient of leaks from the CIA and Pentagon at the *New York Times*. He wrote that Biden was pulling out troops at least in part because "he wants the United States focused on a transformational economic and social agenda at home," adding that in Biden's view "the priorities are fighting poverty and racial inequities and increasing investment in broadband, semiconductors, artificial intelligence and 5G communications—not using the military to prop up the government of President Ashraf Ghani." He concluded, "In the end, the argument that won the day is that the future of Kenosha is more important than defending Kabul."

The resources squandered by American imperialism in Afghanistan will not go to rebuild deindustrialized cities in the Midwest, however. They will be

redeployed against the major targets of Washington, in Russia and China.

The real strategic thinking in Washington was expressed in a typically blunt and bloodthirsty column by Anthony Cordesman, one of the top analysts for American imperialism, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), written just before Biden's formal announcement. He noted that the Taliban was gaining strength, and the regime in Kabul is "hopelessly divided, corrupt and ineffective."

Cordesman backed not only the withdrawal of military forces but the cutoff of all US military and civilian aid. "It will be a tragedy, but the time has come for the strategic equivalent of a mercy killing," he added.

While Afghanistan would likely be viewed as an American failure, he argued, "the first benefit is to shift the burden of Afghanistan and the focus of any extremist activity outside its borders to China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran." In other words, the wreckage created by the American intervention in Afghanistan would now become a problem for its neighbors, all of which are targets of US imperialism.



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