

Biden, European powers in crisis talks over Afghan evacuation policy

Patrick Martin
23 August 2021

The Biden administration is under increasing pressure, both within ruling circles in the US and from its imperialist allies, particularly Britain, to extend the US military presence at the Kabul airport and provide for a longer and more extensive evacuation from Afghanistan's capital.

A virtual meeting of the leaders of the Group of 7 (US, Canada, Germany, Britain, France, Italy and Japan) set for Tuesday morning will be the first occasion for Biden to address a global forum on the collapse of the US- and NATO-backed puppet regime in Afghanistan, which fell in only 11 days to a Taliban offensive.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson holds the rotating chairmanship of the G-7 and will be the nominal host of the meeting. British officials have been the most vocal about seeking a longer occupation of the Kabul airport, which depends entirely on the presence of nearly 6,000 US troops.

UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said there might be “hours now, not weeks” left for the Kabul airlift, which has removed an estimated 50,000 people, counting diplomats and other personnel of the major imperialist powers and a much larger number of Afghan citizens, who facilitated their operations, including interpreters, clerical and service workers, drivers, bodyguards, spies, informers and many others.

Wallace rejected suggestions that British forces or those of other NATO countries could remain in Afghanistan after a full US pullout. “I don't think there is any likelihood of staying on after the United States,” he said.

British Armed Forces Minister James Heappey admitted that any extension of the August 31 withdrawal deadline would involve a clash with the Taliban, who “gets a vote” on such a decision. “It's just the reality,” he said. “We could deny them the vote; we have the military power to just stay there by force,” but added that evacuation flights could not continue with “Kabul becoming a warzone.”

In televised comments Sunday afternoon, Biden reiterated his decision to end the US role in Afghanistan in order to continue refocusing US foreign policy to the major strategic rivals of American imperialism, China and Russia. “Let me tell you, you're sitting in Beijing or you're sitting in Moscow—are you happy we left?” he asked, then laughed sarcastically. “They'd love nothing better for us to continue to be bogged down there, totally occupied with what's going on.”

This remark, a consistent theme of Biden since he first approved final withdrawal of US troops in April, underscores that the US government has not pulled out of Afghanistan in response to the mass popular opposition to “endless wars.”

Rather, American imperialism is pursuing a course of action that poses the danger of a war that could bring an end to human civilization—a global strategic confrontation with its most powerful nuclear-armed rivals. At the very time that the last US forces were being drawn down in Central Asia, the US Navy was stepping up its anti-China provocations in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, and US commanders in the Pacific region were predicting war with China within a half dozen years.

Despite the shattering impact of the rapid collapse of its puppet regime in Afghanistan, American imperialism remains committed to using its massive military machine, still the most powerful of any country, to offset the vast decline in its economic strength and maintain its position of global dominance.

That belligerence is likely to be on display at the G7 summit, where the US president will listen to the urging of his European allies, particularly the British, to stay a bit longer in Kabul. Asked Sunday what his response would be to such pleas, Biden said dismissively, “I will tell them that we'll see what we can do.”

As the British armed forces minister indicated, that depends also on the Taliban. Biden indicated that the

Islamist group has been in daily discussions with the US military at the Kabul airport, and Pentagon officials said Monday these talks were happening “several times a day.”

The Taliban has not offered military opposition to the US and NATO operations at the airport, or to incursions into the city of Kabul to remove specific groups of American and other foreign residents of the capital, including at least two cases when huge US transport helicopters were employed.

Biden and Pentagon officials also said that US forces had been able to move on the ground outside the walls of the airport, and to “expand the perimeter” around it, although they refused to give any details. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby flatly denied that Taliban fighters were accompanying US soldiers “side by side” on patrols.

Appearing on the CBS program “Face the Nation” Sunday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken was taunted with the question, “So we have to ask the Taliban for permission for American citizens to leave. True or not true?” In words that confirmed the scale of the US defeat in Afghanistan, Blinken responded, “They are in control of Kabul. That is the reality. That’s the reality that we have to deal with.”

Meanwhile the campaign in the corporate media over the plight of Afghan civilians at and outside the Kabul airport continues, in conjunction with demands by a faction of the Republican Party for a more aggressive deployment of US troops there. The Sunday television talk shows were given over to harrowing footage of the conditions at and around the airport, and to right-wing critics demanding a reversal, in part or in whole, of Biden’s withdrawal decision.

These included Representative Liz Cheney, whose father, as vice president in the Bush administration, played a major role in the original decision to invade and occupy Afghanistan. Also appearing were Illinois Representative Adam Kinzinger, a veteran of the Afghanistan war; Iowa Senator Joni Ernst, another former military officer; Nebraska Senator Ben Sasse; and former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley.

As is always the case in the corporate media, there was not a single representative of the more than 70 percent of Americans who now oppose the Afghanistan war—which Biden voted for when he was in the Senate—or anyone who criticized the military aggression from an antiwar standpoint throughout its 20-years duration, in which hundreds of thousands of Afghan civilians were killed.

The comments of Senator Sasse, a supposed “moderate”

because he voted for the impeachment of Donald Trump over the January 6 attack on the Capitol, were particularly revealing. Speaking on Fox News Sunday, he called for sending more troops, canceling the August 31 deadline, pushing the military perimeter “well beyond Karzai Airport” and for immediate discussions “to figure out if we should be retaking Bagram,” the huge military airbase outside Kabul that was handed over to the Afghan government last month and is now held by the Taliban.

“They abandoned Bagram Air Force Base in one of the stupidest military blunders in all of US history,” Sasse continued, “and now we’re left in a situation where we’re relying on a civilian airport, Karzai, that has only one runway. I don’t think the American people fully appreciate the danger and the peril into which the president has put us because one RPG ... taking down a plane onto that runway means we are stranded. So the president needs to make sure that this hostage situation into which we’re drifting, that the Taliban knows we will not stand for it.”

The precarious situation at the airport was underscored by the outbreak of a firefight between Afghan security guards working for the US military and unknown attackers early Monday morning. German and American military forces intervened and brought an end to the combat, but one Afghan guard was killed and three were wounded.

The bitter recriminations which have broken out within the US ruling elite and its military-intelligence apparatus were also given voice by the *Wall Street Journal*, in an editorial Monday headlined, “Dancing to the Taliban Timetable.” It cited Blinken’s comments about the reality of Taliban control of Kabul, and then declared, “Yes, but this isn’t the reality the U.S. has to accept. The U.S. military has more than enough force to dictate better terms to the Taliban ...”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact