

G-7 holds emergency summit as US withdrawal from Afghanistan accelerates

Alex Lantier**24 August 2021**

With frantic US evacuation efforts underway at the Kabul airport, President Biden held an online summit of the world's seven leading imperialist powers yesterday. Ten days after the fall of the US puppet regime in Kabul, the summit was dominated by intense conflicts in ruling circles over this historic debacle. While holding open the possibility of violating agreements with the Taliban and keeping US troops in the country past the agreed August 31 deadline, as demanded by the European powers, Biden made clear that the military situation made this all but impossible.

Before the summit, Taliban officials demanded that the G-7 powers—the United States, Japan, Germany, Britain, France, Italy and Canada—respect the agreed upon deadline.

On Monday, Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen warned that violating the deadline would lead to fighting with US troops trapped at the Kabul airport. He said, “President Biden announced that by August 31 they would withdraw their military forces. So, if they extend [their presence], this means they are extending the occupation. If they are intent on extending the occupation, that will provoke a reaction.”

Biden's speech yesterday on the G-7 summit was marked by a vast contradiction. While he made clear that a humiliating US withdrawal was underway, he also said that the US government was preparing contingency plans to remain in Afghanistan. It was more or less apparent that these claims were intended above all to signal that the imperialist powers do not intend to retreat from the region.

Biden first hailed the “solidarity” of the G-7 powers over Afghanistan. He reported that US forces had evacuated 70,700 people since the collapse of the US-backed Afghan regime, including 12,000 in the last 12 hours. Speaking of evacuation operations, Biden said that US forces are “on pace to finish by August 31,” and the

New York Times reported, citing anonymous official sources, that Biden “aims to withdraw troops by August 31, citing ‘very high’ risk of attack.”

Biden nonetheless announced that Washington is preparing plans to ignore the August 31 deadline. “I've asked the Pentagon and the State Department for contingency plans to adjust the timetable, should that become necessary,” Biden said, adding: “I'm also mindful of the increased risks that I've been briefed on, and the need to factor those risks in. They are real, and significant challenges that we have to take into consideration ... It's a tenuous situation, we've already had some gun-fighting break out. We run a serious risk of it breaking down as time goes on.”

Biden pledged to maintain the capability to intervene in Afghanistan for “counter-terrorism” operations, but said that Washington did not need to have a military presence inside the country. He declared: “We run effective counter-terrorism operations around the world, where we know that terrorism is more of a threat than it is today in Afghanistan, without any permanent military presence on the ground. And we will do the same thing in Afghanistan, with our over-the-horizon counter-terrorism capability.”

The debacle of the US war in Afghanistan is again exposing the pretexts on which the 20-year war was sold to the American and world public. Trillions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of lives were spent supposedly because it was urgent to topple the Taliban and build democracy, to build a NATO military presence in Afghanistan that was the only way to prevent Al Qaeda or other terror groups from using the country as a base. These claims were political lies.

There must be an unconditional US and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan. After two decades in which Afghan men, women and children in villages and cities were bombed or targeted with US drone murder strikes,

NATO's pose of concern for Afghan refugees' human rights rings utterly hollow. The politically criminal character of the US-led wars waged across the Middle East and Central Asia, over decades following the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, stands exposed.

Stopping war requires the independent, international mobilization of the working class in a socialist anti-war movement. There is no peace faction in the ruling class, and the G-7 summit showed that EU and Canadian policy is not fundamentally different from that of Washington.

Before the G-7 summit, its main organizer, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, demanded all "the way through August 31st and beyond, safe passage for those who want" to leave Afghanistan. He added, "I am totally realistic about the Taliban, and I don't think that anybody is going to pretend that this is anything other than a very difficult situation. But that doesn't mean that we should ignore the leverage that we have."

Johnson proposed that the G-7 powers grab Afghan funds held in overseas banks and refuse economic aid to this country devastated by decades of NATO occupation. They could thus decide, Johnson said, "if those huge funds are going to be unfrozen eventually for use by the government and people of Afghanistan..."

Aggressive calls also came from European officials and from Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. "I emphasized that Canada is ready to stay beyond the 31st deadline, if it's at all possible," Trudeau told reporters after the summit meeting. He claimed that "we want to save as many people as possible, and Canadians are ready to work to try and do that."

French President Macron declared before the summit that the NATO powers had a "moral duty" to save Afghans fleeing the Taliban. However, while the Elysée presidential palace called on Biden to stay in Afghanistan past the August 31 deadline, it promised to "adapt" to the US decision.

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said, "We are in talks with the US, Turkey and others about how to keep the Kabul airport operational even after the military evacuation," adding that "the end of the military evacuation cannot be the end of the chance to get people out of Afghanistan."

The US defeat in Afghanistan is intensifying great-power rivalries in Central Asia. Tensions are mounting between US imperialism, China and Russia—as well as the European imperialist powers—over commercial and strategic influence in the region. A *New York Times*

column by Chinese Colonel Zhou Bo, titled "In Afghanistan, China Is Ready to Step into the Void," gives an idea of the vast potential redistribution of economic and political power that US and European officials fear.

Zhou wrote: "With the US withdrawal, Beijing can offer what Kabul needs most: political impartiality and economic investment. Afghanistan in turn has what China most prizes: opportunities in infrastructure and industry building—areas in which China's capabilities are arguably unmatched—and access to \$1 trillion in untapped mineral deposits, including critical industrial metals such as lithium, iron, copper and cobalt."

A US withdrawal would further China's Belt-and-Road infrastructure projects and Chinese-led economic growth and integration in the region, Zhou added. The US war in Afghanistan limited China's presence, he wrote, adding, "Afghanistan until now has been an attractive but a missing piece of the enormous puzzle. If China were able to extend the Belt-and-Road from Pakistan through to Afghanistan—for example, with a Peshawar-to-Kabul motorway—it would open up a shorter land route to gain access to markets in the Middle East."

Zhou held out hope for US-Chinese collaboration: "Neither country wishes to see Afghanistan slide into a civil war. Both of them support a political solution that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned. Therefore, Afghanistan provides an area for the two competing giants to find some common cause."

In reality, to hope that US imperialism or its European allies will peaceably reconcile themselves to a setback in Central Asia is to place a heavy bet against history. They are doubtless preparing even more reckless actions to reverse the accelerating slide of their regional and global position. The critical question is to draw the political lessons of this historic debacle of US imperialism and to build a movement in the working class against further wars of aggression.



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