

- On August 15, the Taliban captured the Afghan capital Kabul and declared the war in Afghanistan over.
 - Over the last 20 years, the US has spent more than \$83 billion, training, equipping, and developing the Afghan national army, police, air force, and special forces. Yet, under the advance of an armed group carrying light weapons, the ANDSF collapsed.
 - As a result, the US and several other Western countries have had to redeploy thousands of troops to help with the emergency evacuation of their citizens and diplomatic staff from Kabul.
 - The United States' 20-year endeavour to rebuild Afghanistan's military into a robust and independent force has failed, and that failure is now playing out in real time as the country slips into Taliban control.
 - "The Taliban did not fight their way into Kabul; they drove in. There were commuters in American cities who found it harder driving to work the next day."¹
 - David Brennan of Newsweek wrote, "The American flight from Kabul will be a stain on President Joe Biden's legacy and stand as a monument to American foreign policy hubris. After two decades, trillions of dollars, and hundreds of thousands of deaths, the Taliban are back in charge."²
- How did it collapse so quickly?^{3,4}
 - It began with individual outposts in rural areas where starving and ammunition-depleted soldiers and police units were surrounded by Taliban fighters and promised safe passage if they surrendered and left behind their equipment, slowly giving the insurgents more and more control of roads and entire districts.
 - In early May, a Taliban commander telephoned Muhammad Jallal, a tribal elder in northern Afghanistan, and asked him to deliver a

¹ Withdrawing From Afghanistan May Be The One Thing Biden and Trump Agree On - NPR
<https://www.npr.org/2021/08/18/1028607717/strange-bedfellows-indeed-the-trump-biden-consensus-on-afghanistan>

² Who ordered the withdrawal from Afghanistan and when did most US troops leave? - Newsweek
<https://www.newsweek.com/who-ordered-withdrawal-afghanistan-when-most-us-troops-leave-joe-biden-donald-trump-barack-obama-1619599>

³ The Afghan Military was Built Over 20 Years. How Did It Collapse So Quickly? - The New York Times
https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/13/world/asia/afghanistan-rapid-military-collapse.html?unlocked_article_code=AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAACEIPuonUktbfqohkQFUaACbKWsljqlqPnvnGh7UyiX_3KimOVT9Eiv4cG4mMvkLMYat_bsEimj-cQntIKKQiAvxuy-sVd2pcdz6VmLrW0p!UP3dy7oupQml925-KUO5nrzPgNWT8Jeklfjisk2LdWjsDaLA0SVwdAlj9pY2d1yrymVlkvmeapN92tR03PwiAZB6VG1AMHHM56-0fk04bNaWbRjc6h00UvVaXlzRnd2b6rEGdWZCGA6MDSM_sStntoQqaJ5AN73_LhUjZMP0nb8Tb2VrJ4urDJA3LJPGtALU4Ibh b8Npl0-hEU1_Rw

⁴ Why did the Afghan army disintegrate so quickly? - Aljazeera
<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/8/17/why-did-the-afghan-army-disintegrate-so-quickly>

message to Afghan government troops at several bases in his district...⁵

- “If they do not surrender, we will kill them,”
- He and other tribal elders complied. After several rounds of negotiations, two government bases and three outposts surrendered without a fight.
- Each surrender, small or large, handed the Taliban more weapons and vehicles - and, vitally, more control over roads and highways, giving insurgents freedom to move rapidly and collect the next surrenders as the security forces were progressively cut off from ammunition, fuel, food, and salaries.
- Afghan troops were then consolidated to defend Afghanistan’s 34 provincial capitals in recent weeks as the Taliban pivoted from attacking rural areas to targeting cities.
 - This strategy proved futile as the insurgent fighters overran city after city, capturing around half of Afghanistan’s provincial capital in a week, and encircling Kabul.
- The Taliban expanded their control among the country’s 400-odd districts from 77 on April 13 to 104 on June 16 to 223 on Aug. 3.
- There was widespread corruption in Afghanistan’s defence and interior ministries where funds, ammunition and other equipment were sold on the black market, and eventually ended up in the hands of the Taliban.
 - Some commanders embezzled money by submitting fund requests for the salaries of “ghost soldiers”. As this was happening, ANDSF personnel were kept unpaid and retained on duty without permission to leave.
 - On paper, Afghan security forces numbered somewhere around 300,000 people, but in recent days have totaled around one-sixth of that, according to US officials.
 - The ANDSF had one of the highest desertion and casualty rates in the world. According to one estimate, the ANDSF’s per month attrition rate was 5,000 while the recruitment rate was 300 to 500.
 - For unpaid soldiers, the lavish lifestyles of their commanders were often too much and instead of fighting and dying, they preferred to save their lives by surrendering to the Taliban under its amnesty offers.

⁵ Collapse and Conquest: The Taliban Strategy That Seized Afghanistan - The New York Times
https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/18/world/asia/taliban-victory-strategy-afghanistan.html?action=click&pg_type=Article&state=default&module=styln-afghanistan&variant=show®ion=MAIN_CONTENT_3&block=storyline_levelup_swipe_recirc

- On one frontline in the southern Afghan city of Kandahar, a cardboard box of potatoes was supposed to pass as a police unit's daily rations. They hadn't received anything other than potatoes in various forms in several days, and their hunger and fatigue wore them down.
 - "These French fries are not going to hold these front lines," a police officer yelled, disgusted by the lack of support they were receiving in the country's second largest city.
- There was also no ideological cohesion within the army or a sense of national duty. In fact, there was significant mistrust towards the country's political leadership. No Afghan soldier was ready to fight and die to defend President Ashraf Ghani or the government.
 - This environment of doubt and suspicion further undermined Afghan soldiers' resolve to resist the advance of the ideologically cohesive Taliban, whose fighters were driven by a desire to establish an Islamic emirate and drive out foreign troops they saw as occupiers.
- Despite receiving years of training and billions of dollars, the ANDSF never developed the capacity to stand on its own. It was entirely dependent on the US and NATO troops to protect urban areas.
- The Taliban arose in 1994 amid the turmoil that followed the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989. The Group was rooted in rural areas of Kandahar Province in the south.
- In Feb. 2020 Donald Trump signed a deal with the Taliban that promised to pull all US troops out of the country by May 1, 2021.⁶
 - Roughly 2,500 troops remained in Afghanistan when Biden took office.
 - In April, Biden announced he would follow through with plans first announced by Trump to withdraw US forces from Afghanistan.
 - Joe Biden did not reverse this course when he took office, although he did push back the withdrawal to September and later shifted it to Aug. 31
 - In a statement released this week, Donald Trump criticized Biden by saying,
 - "Afghanistan is the most embarrassing military outcome in the history of the United States. It didn't have to be that way! Can anyone even imagine taking out our military before evacuating civilians and others who have been good to our country and who should be allowed to seek refuge?"
 - Trump added in a separate statement, "In addition, these people left topflight and highly sophisticated equipment. Who can believe such

⁶ Biden, Trump battle over who's to blame for Afghanistan - The Hill
<https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/568022-biden-trump-battle-over-whos-to-blame-for-afghanistan>

incompetence? Under my Administration, all civilians and equipment would have been removed.”

- But as criticism ratchets up, the White House has harkened back to Trump-era decisions that they believe set the stage for this month’s breakdown. Setting a deadline of May 1 allowed the Taliban to wait out the US, they argued, and Trump’s Camp David invite to the Taliban granted the group legitimacy.
 - Biden said on Saturday, “When I came to office, I inherited a deal cut by my predecessor - which he invited the Taliban to discuss at Camp David on the eve of 9/11 of 2019 - that left the Taliban in the strongest position militarily since 2001 and imposed May 1, 2021 deadline on US forces.”
 - He continued. “Shortly before he left office, he also drew US forces down to a bare minimum of 2,500. Therefore, when I became President, I faced a choice - follow through on the deal, with a brief extension to get our forces and our allies’ forces out safely, or ramp up our presence and send more American troops to fight once again in another country’s civil conflict.”
- While an Economist/YouGov poll this June found only 1 in 5 Americans opposed the US withdrawing from Afghanistan, a Morning Consult survey that followed the fall of Kabul found a plurality of 45% opposed to withdrawal if it meant a Taliban takeover.⁷

Recommended

Videos

Why It Took So Long To Leave Afghanistan: Antiwar.com’s Scott Horton - https://youtu.be/6nGPjx_NEQQ

Spencer Ackerman: Today’s Crisis in Kabul Is Direct Result of Decades of U.S. War & Destabilization - <https://youtu.be/UtaLWHI9HQ4>

As Taliban Sweeps Into Power, Look Back at How the U.S.-led War Began | FRONTLINE - <https://youtu.be/u-jeTXRcRCE>

⁷ Poll: Support for Afghanistan withdrawal plummets as Taliban seize control - POLITICO <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/08/16/poll-afghanistan-withdrawal-taliban-505165>

Ex-Official Matthew Hoh, Who Resigned over Afghan War, Says U.S. Mistakes Helped Taliban Gain Power - <https://youtu.be/y9Scb8nlPeQ>

“People Are Thirsty for Peace”: Afghans Wary of Taliban as Group Vows to Uphold Rights - https://youtu.be/P_oIU4W615g

Afghan Scholar: The U.S. Can't Distance Itself from Chaos Unfolding Now After 20 Years of War - <https://youtu.be/kv4Of5ZZ2BE>

Obama's War (full documentary) | FRONTLINE - <https://youtu.be/v3-FDWSRabM>

“The Afghanistan Papers”: Docs Show How Bush, Obama, Trump Lied About Brutality & Corruption of War - <https://youtu.be/bixeuaa2r58>

Movies

The Outpost - <https://www.netflix.com/watch/81276140>

Restrepo - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restrepo_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restrepo_(film))

Medal of Honor, Romesha - <https://www.netflix.com/watch/80170097>

Books

Fool's Errand: Time to End the War in Afghanistan - <https://amzn.to/3y0E7op>

Enough Already: Time to End the War on Terrorism - <https://amzn.to/3mA2mI3>

The Black Banners (Declassified): How Torture Derailed the War on Terror after 9/11 - <https://amzn.to/3z8oZXp>

Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001 - <https://amzn.to/3sCe0Br>

The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11 - <https://amzn.to/3ggPgvd>

Directorate S: The C.I.A. and America's Secret Wars in Afghanistan and Pakistan - <https://amzn.to/3y3MQWD>

Anatomy of Terror: From the Death of bin Laden to the Rise of the Islamic State - <https://amzn.to/2Wc3re9>

Jawbreaker: The Attack on Bin Laden and Al Qaeda: A Personal Account by the CIA's Key Field Commander - <https://amzn.to/3kc5dE0>

Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib - <https://amzn.to/3AZ2Riz>

The Killing of Osama Bin Laden - <https://amzn.to/380BsQK>

Blowback - <https://amzn.to/3gjLt02>

The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic - <https://amzn.to/3sDoWA9>

America's War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History - <https://amzn.to/3D86TqU>

The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War - <https://amzn.to/3zbUgIU>

Reign of Terror: How the 9/11 Era Destabilized America and Produced Trump - <https://amzn.to/3j6OBOG>

WAR - <https://amzn.to/3y7Yik2>

Washington Rules: America's Path to Permanent War - <https://amzn.to/386AVg8>

Articles

United States invasion of Afghanistan - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_invasion_of_Afghanistan

Doha Agreement (2020) - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doha_Agreement_\(2020\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doha_Agreement_(2020))

Fall of Kabul (2021) - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Kabul_\(2021\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fall_of_Kabul_(2021))

Afghan peace process - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghan_peace_process

Taliban - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taliban>

Afghanistan's military collapse: Illicit deals and mass desertions -

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/08/15/afghanistan-military-collapse-taliban>

Was Biden handcuffed by Trump's Taliban deal in Doha? -

<https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-middle-east-taliban-doha-e6f48507848aef2ee849154604aa11be>

Horrific video of 'Afghan caught in landing gear of C-17 after clambering on to plane' and humiliating photo of American soldier cradling US embassy flag out of Afghanistan emerge while guns and body armor are dumped at Kabul airport -

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9901013/Horrific-video-Afghan-caught-landing-gear-c-17-clambering-plane-emerges.html>

Frontline Clip - <https://twitter.com/chrissspangle/status/1428144892870635524>

Up to 15,000 Americans remain in Afghanistan after Taliban takeover. -

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/15-000-americans-remain-afghanistan-after-taliban-takeover-n1277033>

China Warning - <https://twitter.com/globaltimesnews/status/1427267130467119104>