

# Scenario 229

## TALIBAN RE-CAPTURED AFGHANISTAN - 1

**EARLIER WAR ACTIVITY IN 2021:** On 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2021; in the last call between US President Joe Biden and his Afghan counterpart before the Taliban seized control of nearly the whole rural districts of the country, the leaders discussed military aid, political strategy and messaging tactics, but neither Biden nor Ashraf Ghani appeared aware of or prepared for the immediate danger of the entire country falling to the Taliban, a transcript reviewed by **Reuters** dated 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021 showed; they both talked for roughly 14 minutes.

**On 9<sup>th</sup> August 2021;** the US Embassy in Kabul posed a question to its 400K followers on Twitter:

*"This #PeaceMonday, we want to hear from you. What do you wish to tell the negotiating parties in Doha about your hopes for a political settlement? #PeaceForAfghanistan."*

The phrase divulged all about the changed American mind and trends in Afghan policy. Within 3 days, Ghani's Afghan government was reduced to only three major cities. President Biden, the leader of the world's most powerful nation, announced to dispatch 3,000 US troops to Afghanistan to bring back its diplomats and staff but within next two days the game was over. The US diplomats had to evacuate their fortress-like US Embassy the same day; two-decade-long misadventure ended in one day and with a trillion-dollar throwaway. Most think, Afghan citizens were left to live back in stone-age; but the time decided it much earlier than the US had planned.

For the US, it was not at all a heroic defeat – the comeback of Taliban also brought an end for supremacy myth of a global power. In history it would be captioned as the **Great Defeat** from **one of the poorest countries** on globe. The [15<sup>th</sup> Aug] Sunday's episode was even more embarrassing than of Saigon in 1975; even more humiliating than a rogue re-treat of 1984's Reagan Administration from Beirut when a suicide bomber of Hezbollah had killed 240+ US military personnel—the largest loss for the Marines in a single incident since the World War-II.

On 11<sup>th</sup> August 2021; the US intelligence reports indicated Taliban fighters could isolate Afghanistan's capital in 30 days and possibly take it over within 90. Instead, the fall happened in less than a week.

The Biden-Ghani call also underscored persistent political infighting that plagued the Afghan government. When Biden asked him [Mr Ghani] to include former Afghan President Hamid Karzai in a press conference, Ghani pushed back and said:

*"Karzai would not be helpful. He is contrary, and time is of the essence, we cannot bring every single individual ... We have tried for months with President Karzai. Last time we met for 110 minutes; he was cursing me and he was accusing me of being a US lackey."*

Biden paused before responding: ***"I'm going to reserve judgment on that."***

In a follow-up call later that day; Gen Mark Milley and US Central Command commander Gen Frank McKenzie spoke to Ghani. Reuters also obtained a transcript of that call. In this call, too, an area of focus was the global perception of events on the ground in Afghanistan. Gen Milley told Ghani:

*".....the perception in the US, in Europe and the media sort of thing is a narrative of Taliban momentum, and a narrative of Taliban victory. And we need to collectively demonstrate and try to turn that perception, that narrative around."*

*"I do not believe – the time is our friend here. We need to move quickly,"* McKenzie added.

Hidden confession of defeat was prevailing on both sides; with the US and in Afghanistan.

NOW Attend a former Soviet ambassador's remarks on the situation: ***"We meddled in Afghanistan, and then we stopped paying attention."***

In **'The Financial Times'** dated 13<sup>th</sup> August 2021, Gideon Rachman had correctly predicted that:

*"If Donald Trump were presiding over the debacle in Afghanistan, the US foreign policy establishment would be loudly condemning the irresponsibility and immorality of American strategy. Since it is Joe*

*Biden in the White House there is instead, largely, an embarrassed silence.*

*The horrific results are unfolding on the ground in Afghanistan, as the Taliban take city after city. The final collapse of the government looks inevitable."*

.....and suddenly Kabul falls down in the hands of its ex-rulers, the Taliban; America quits.

### **JO-BIDEN URGED GHANI TO HOLD:**

In the call, Biden offered aid if Ghani could publicly project he had a plan to control the spiralling situation in Afghanistan. **Biden said: 'We will continue to provide close air support, if we know what the plan is.'** Days before the call, the US had carried out air-strikes to support Afghan security forces; a move the Taliban said was in violation of the Doha Peace Agreement.

The US president also advised Ghani to get buy-in from powerful Afghans for a military strategy going forward, and then to put a 'warrior' in charge of the effort, a reference to Defence Minister Gen Bismillah Khan Mohammadi was being made. President Biden had urged:

*"The Afghan armed forces were trained and funded by the US government. You clearly have the best military. You have 3000,000 well-armed forces versus 70-80,000 (Taliban people) and they're clearly capable of fighting well."*

Days later, the Afghan military started folding across provincial capitals in the country with very little resistance to the Taliban.

In much of the call, Biden focused on what he called the Afghan **government's 'perception problem'** adding that:

*"I need not tell you [Mr Ghani] the perception around the world and in parts of Afghanistan, I believe, is that things are not going well in terms of the fight against the Taliban. And there is a need, whether it is true or not, there is a need to project a different picture. If Afghanistan's prominent political figures were to give a press conference together, backing a new military strategy that will change perception, and that will change an awful lot I think.*

*We are going to continue to fight hard, diplomatically, politically, economically, to make sure your government not only survives but is sustained and grows."*

After the call, the White House released a statement that focused on Biden's commitment to support Afghan security forces and seeking funds for Afghanistan from Congress. Ghani replied Biden that:

*"I believe there could be peace if we could '**rebalance the military solution**' but we need to move with speed. We are facing a full-scale invasion, composed of Taliban, full Pakistani planning and logistical support, and at least 10-15,000 international terrorists, predominantly Pakistanis thrown into this."*

Afghan government officials, and US experts, have been consistently pointing to Pakistani support for the Taliban as key to the group's resurgence.

Afghan President Ghani had also blamed Pakistan earlier on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2021 in an interview to **German magazine Der Spiegel** alleging that:

*"Pakistan operates an organised system of support for the Taliban insurgents, who receive logistics and financial support from there, besides carrying out recruitment.*

*.....various decision-making bodies of the Taliban were named after Pakistani cities like Quetta Shura, Miranshah Shura and Peshawar Shura, where they were supposedly based."*

The Pakistani Embassy in Washington had immediately denied those allegations with full force saying that '**....it was unfortunately an excuse and an afterthought peddled by Mr Ghani to justify his failure to lead and govern.'**

Pakistan's Foreign Office had also earlier rejected the remarks from the Afghan president calling them "**irresponsible and baseless**". PM Imran Khan had replied Mr Ghani in the same harsh tone that it was **unfair** to blame his country for the situation in Afghanistan; adding that:

*"President Ghani! Let me just say that the country that is most affected by turmoil in Afghanistan is Pakistan. Pakistan suffered 70,000 casualties+ in the last 15 years..... Pakistan wants to see the ending of the conflict at the earliest."*

By the time of the call, the US was well into its planned withdrawal from Afghanistan, which Biden had postponed from the May date set by his predecessor, Mr Trump. The US military had closed its main Afghanistan airbase, at Bagram, in early July [2021]. As the two presidents spoke, Taliban fighters had controlled about half of Afghanistan's district centres, indicating a rapidly deteriorating security situation.

Afghan government was promising a shift in its military strategy, to start focusing on protecting '**population centres**' — major cities — rather than fighting to protect rural territories. Biden referred approvingly of that strategy; he said that doing so would help not just on the ground but in the 'perception' internationally that was required to shore up world support for the Afghan government. Biden said:

*"I'm not a military guy, so I'm not telling you what a plan should precisely look like, you're going to get not only more help, but you're going to get a perception that is going to change ...,"*

Mr Ghani, for his part, assured Biden that *"your assurance of support goes a very long way to enable us, to really mobilise us in earnest."*

Within two weeks after Biden's tele-talk with Ghani, the Taliban captured several provincial Afghan capitals and the US had to say with utter disappointment that it was up to the Afghan security forces to defend their country. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby said on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

*"These are their military forces; these are their provincial capitals, their people to defend."*

### **FALL OF THE CAPITAL - KABUL:**

**On 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021;** President Ghani fled the presidential palace, and the Taliban occupied it immediately. On the same day, the next generation of the Taliban successfully took over Kabul and thus the whole Afghanistan following an accelerated sweep across the country. They had planned their operations since 2020's deal between them and the US's representative in Qatar under the then US President Donald Trump's instructions - called as **DOHA DECLARATION** in which the US agreed to a complete withdrawal of US and allied military forces.

As the deadline for US-army withdrawal drew near day by day, the Taliban began rapid seizures of outposts, towns, and cities and all

1 leading ways to Kabul. An immediate development on ground was the  
2 departure of President Ashraf Ghani, whose exit from the country  
3 was confirmed by Abdullah Abdullah, the Afghan Foreign Minister.  
4 On 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021 he announced on his FaceBook page that:

5  
6 ***“The former Afghan president has left the nation in this state; [for  
7 that,] God will hold him to account.”***  
8

9 In a later announcement, Ghani himself said he left the country to avoid  
10 bloodshed as Taliban forces had entered the presidential palace. By  
11 midday, a Taliban official announced the group’s plans to rename the  
12 state as the **Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan**.  
13

14 Referring to the world’s press media of that day, 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021; and  
15 to the Current Affairs programs of subsequent two weeks, the Taliban’s  
16 insurgency over the last month had seen the capture of major cities;  
17 Kunduz was the first ‘key city’ to fall following days of negotiations led  
18 by tribal elders and resulting in its surrender. After that, it was almost  
19 like a domino effect — other major towns like Kandahar, Herat and  
20 Mazar e Sharif fell to the Taliban through negotiated deals with local  
21 officials. These deals with the Taliban typically involved surrendering  
22 control of the cities in exchange for safe passage home.  
23

24 On the same Sunday morning, Taliban forces had reached city of  
25 Jalalabad, where govt forces and officials surrendered without a single  
26 shot fired. Soon, the remaining cities surrounding Kabul quickly fell into  
27 the Taliban’s hands; thus the Taliban reached the capital’s gates within  
28 hours.  
29

30 All around Kabul there was panic. Civilian flights were unable to leave  
31 the Kabul airport because on the runway people were running after  
32 the moving planes and trying to stick around the wings, wheels and  
33 landing assemblies. No one including the US and its allied countries were  
34 expecting so quick developments and even Taliban commanders  
35 themselves. Taliban openly said in press conferences that we were  
36 planning to take over in December 2021 after holding due negotiations  
37 with President Ashraf Ghani but he fled away; so coward he was – so we  
38 had to move in.  
39

40 Taliban’s strategy to take control of Kabul through peaceful negotiations  
41 instead of violent offensive proved effective. An exodus of residents and  
42 foreign diplomats began as the Taliban entered the Presidential Palace  
43 and other key government buildings. Most Afghans lined up outside the

local banks to retrieve cash as fears were growing; it was despite the Taliban's due assurance for peace and tranquility.

Referring to the daily '**DAWN**' dated 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021: The fact remained that the US spent billions of dollars supplying the Afghan military with the tools to defeat the Taliban, but the rapid capitulation of the armed forces meant that the same armaments and guns then fuelled the Taliban's battlefield successes. President Biden, while defending his decision to withdraw American forces and leaving the fight to the local Afghans, said:

*"We (the US) provided our Afghan partners with all the tools — let me emphasise: all the tools but Afghan defence forces showed little appetite for that fight and, in their tens of thousands, have been laying down their arms — only for the Taliban to immediately pick them up."*

Footage of Afghan soldiers surrendering in the northern city of Kunduz showed army vehicles loaded with heavy weapons and mounted with artillery guns safely in the hands of the Taliban rank and file was widely spread in the world media. In the western city of Farah, fighters patrolled in a car marked with an eagle swooping on a snake — the official insignia of the country's intelligence service. In the list of surrendered arsenal, there was **sophisticated equipment** like armoured vehicles, humvees, small arms and light weapons, as well as ammunition.

American experts were astonished over such hauls — on top of unacknowledged support from regional allies — provided the Taliban a massive boost. The weapons not only helped the Taliban's march on Kabul but also strengthened group's authority in the cities it had captured. With US troops all gone, the Taliban found themselves flush with the US-supplied tools, without having to raise a single penny. One expert Commented:

*"It is incredibly serious. It is clearly going to be a massive boon to them [Taliban]. Some of that weaponry was later brazenly paraded ahead of the US troops' 9/11 withdrawal deadline by the Taliban. This crisis was a worst-case scenario considered when making procurement decisions for that weaponry."*

At Kunduz airport, a Taliban fighter on a red motorbike, head-to-toe in Taliban dress, was filmed staring at a military helicopter sitting on the tarmac. It was a picture of jubilation mirrored across the Taliban-held territory. While the Taliban continued to show off these big prizes, the

aircraft at least would have no impact on the battlefield without pilots. Former CIA counter-terrorism analyst Aki Peritz said:

*"They will be for propaganda purposes only. More useful will be the light arms and vehicles used to navigate the country's rugged terrain. Coupled with the army's dwindling morale, they will boost the threat the Taliban posed to the Western-backed governments."*

As the crisis unfolded, Biden's administration said it would still equip the Afghan military that appears on the verge of collapse.

Referring to a write-up titled as '**Unfinished problem....**' AP | Reuters | AFP Published on world media pages on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021:

*"More than 60 countries have issued a joint statement saying Afghans and international citizens who want to leave Afghanistan must be allowed to depart."*

In fact, the Taliban's quick takeover of Afghanistan raised alarm at the global level, with world leaders clamouring for the protection of human rights and bringing an end to armed aggression in the war-torn country. Some sought introspection, terming it a collective Western failure. Yet others held out an olive branch, looking to establish relations with the new regime, whose leaders were ousted from the seat of power in 2001. Some countries put their appalling remarks on all sorts of media pages.

### **'IT'S FAILURE OF THE WORLD' - UK:**

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan was termed as '**failure of the international community**', Britain's Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said next day of Taliban's take over, assessing that the West's intervention was a job only half-done. He told **BBC** television:

*"All of us know that Afghanistan is not finished. It's an unfinished problem for the world and the world needs to help it. The 20-year intervention by the US-led forces in Afghanistan wasn't a waste, it wasn't for nothing."*

*If it's a failure, it's a failure of the international community to not realise that you don't fix things overnight,"*

Mr Wallace accused Western powers of being short-sighted in policy matters and devising suitable strategies.



## ***Know the country's history before you attack: Iran***

Iran's **President Ebrahim Raisi** said on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021:

*"I'm afraid when you deal with a country like Afghanistan that is 1,000 years of history of fighting foreign powers and civil wars, you manage its problems and you might have to manage it for 100 years at least."*

America's defeat in Afghanistan was a chance for lasting peace; the 'defeat' of the US in Afghanistan must usher in durable peace in the war-racked country. The President added that:

*"The military defeat and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan should offer an opportunity to restore life, security and lasting peace in that country."*

The statement came after the Taliban seized control of Kabul.

## ***China: 'ready for friendly relations' with Taliban:***

China was ready to deepen *friendly and cooperative relations* with Afghanistan, a government spokeswoman told on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021, after the Taliban seized control of the country. Foreign ministry's spokeswoman Hua Chunying told the media that:

*"The Taliban have repeatedly expressed their hope to develop good relations with China, and that they look forward to China's participation in the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan."*

*We welcome this. China respects the right of the Afghan people to independently determine their own destiny and is willing to continue to develop... friendly and cooperative relations with Afghanistan (as a neighbouring country)."*

Hua called on the Taliban to '*ensure a smooth transition*' of power and keep its promises to negotiate the establishment of an '*open and **inclusive Islamic government***' and ensure the safety of Afghans and foreign citizens.

## ***Taliban to uphold human rights: New Zealand***

PM Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021 pleaded the Taliban leaders to uphold human rights in Afghanistan by allowing

women to continue in work and education and to let foreigners and Afghans who want to leave the country go. She added that:

*"I would just again implore those who made these moves in recent days to acknowledge what the international community has called for — human rights and the safety of their people."*

### ***Takeover of Kabul was 'unexpected': Russia***

Kremlin diplomat in Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov told the ***Ekho Moskv*** Radio Station that:

*"Russia will evacuate some of its embassy staff in Kabul in order not to create too big a presence. Some of roughly 100 Russian embassy staff will be placed on leave or evacuated in some other fashion."*

***The Taliban's swift takeover of the Afghan capital was somewhat "unexpected. Russia was too optimistic in its assessment of the quality of the armed forces trained by the Americans and NATO."***

The outside perimeter of the embassy was being guarded by the Taliban.

### ***We must focus on rescue mission: Germany***

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Germany's focus must be on its evacuation operation in Afghanistan. After a meeting with the leaders of her CDU Party, she said:

*"We are witnessing difficult times. Now we must focus on the rescue mission. The withdrawal of Western troops from Afghanistan was the 'biggest NATO debacle' since the founding of the alliance."*

With the Taliban sweeping to power after NATO troops withdrew, CDU party Chief Armin Laschet said:

*"It is evident that this engagement of the international community was not successful. It is the biggest debacle that NATO has suffered since its founding, and we're standing before an epochal change."*

### ***Concerned over rapid developments in Afgh....: Qatar***

Qatari Foreign Minister Al-Thani, in a statement on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021, said:

*"There is international concern about the fast pace of developments 1 and Qatar is doing its utmost to bring a peaceful transition, especially 2 after the vacuum that happened."*

**'Taliban must cease violence': Australia**

Australian PM Scott Morrison said on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021 that:

*"His country is working to get more than 130 of its citizens and people who have been granted humanitarian visas out of Afghanistan after the Taliban seized control of the country."*

*As a partner committed for many years to help Afghanistan build its future, we are deeply concerned at the potential for further loss of life and suffering."*

PM Morrison called for the Taliban to cease all violence against civilians, treat Afghan government officials and elected leaders with dignity and allow people to leave the country without threat or hindrance.

**'The clock has run out': EU Commission**

EU Commission Vice President Margaritis Schinas tweeted:

*"The clock has run out on how long we can wait to adopt the complete overhaul of Europe's migration and asylum rules we need."*

**'Endless US presence in Afghanistan not acceptable': America**

President Joe Biden addressed his colleagues and allies on Afghan war that:

*"One more year, or five more years, of US military presence would not have made a difference if the Afghan military cannot or will not hold its own country. And an endless American presence in the middle of another country's civil conflict was not acceptable to me."*

**'All abuses must stop': UN**

United Nations Chief António Guterres on 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021 expressed concern, saying:

*"The conflict in Afghanistan was forcing hundreds of thousands to flee amid reports of serious human rights violations."*

Later that day, the UN Secretary General Guterres told an emergency UN Security Council meeting on Afghanistan in New York that:

*"The world should work together to suppress the global terrorist threat in Afghanistan'. The international community must unite to make sure that Afghanistan is never again used as a platform or safe haven for terrorist organisations.*

*I appeal to the Security Council — and the international community as a whole — to stand together, to work together and act together (in the given situation)."*

Guterres urged all nations to use all tools at [their] disposal to suppress the global terrorist threat in Afghanistan and to guarantee that basic human rights should be respected.

The Secretary General urged the international community to '*speak with one voice to uphold human rights in Afghanistan. **Afghans deserve our full support.** 'It was essential that the hard-won rights of Afghan women and girls are protected.'*

#### **'We are heartbroken': Canadian PM**

Canadian PM Justin Trudeau, while speaking to media reporters on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021, said:

*"Canada is constantly monitoring the rapidly evolving situation to get the latest developments on ground in Afghanistan. We are heartbroken at the situation the Afghan people find themselves in.*

*Our ongoing work to bring Afghans to safety in Canada under [the new Special Immigration Measures program] remains a top priority, and we will continue to work in close collaboration with partners and allies on this commitment."*

More than 60 countries issued a joint statement saying Afghans and international citizens who want to leave Afghanistan must be allowed to depart and added that airports and border crossings must remain open, the US State Department said late on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

#### **AFGHANS DESERVED SAFETY & HELP:**

According to **Reuters**, the US government and countries including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Republic of Korea, Qatar and the UK said in a joint statement that:

*".....those in positions of power and authority across Afghanistan bear responsibility — and accountability — for the protection of human life and property, and for the immediate restoration of security and civil order.*

*....The Afghan people deserve to live in safety, security and dignity. We in the international community stand ready to assist them."*

The European and neighboring countries immediately stepped in to help civilians evacuate the country — the United Arab Emirates [UAE] and Pakistan started facilitating the evacuation of foreign diplomats and staff through their airports; Germany sent its military planes to evacuate German nationals and Afghan support staff – and so did the UK. The US Embassy employees and citizens scrambled to go for evacuation before the Afghan capital was taken.

One can peep back into a very rare two-party consensus in America — the leaders of both political parties decided it was time to leave Afghanistan and to leave the country with the Taliban. The only dispute remained was whether the President Trump, which had committed to withdrawal by May 2021, could have directed the retreat more competently than President Biden, who faced one of the most humiliating debacles in the American history.

Poor Americans were in a fix – who to blame for those dreadful moments; what was the purpose of the US intervention in Afghanistan. The answers would shape one's views about the lost 20 years. The intervention was to defend the US from terror attacks as well as to destroy the Taliban and al Qaeda being allegedly responsible for 9/11.

Of course, since 9/11 the US went free of notable *jihadist* attacks – but it remained a fact also that right-wing domestic terrorists killed more Americans at home than *jihadists*. The 20-year mission got accomplished at the loss of fewer American combat deaths in Afghanistan than the number of civilians killed on 9/11 itself.

Referring to **Robin Wright's** essay titled '*Does the Great Retreat from Afghanistan mark the End of American Era*' appeared at **newyorker.com** on 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021:

*"In 2011, the United States pulled out of Iraq, opening the way for the emergence of ISIS. The repeated miscalculations challenge basic Washington policy-making as well as US military strategy and*

intelligence capabilities. Why wasn't this looming calamity - or any of the earlier ones - anticipated? Or the exits better planned? Or the country not left in the hands of a former enemy? **It is [no doubt] a dishonourable end.**"

NOW the history would be written with truths that George W Bush's '**war on terror [WOT]**' was an ill-written drama-script; despite having mobilized NATO's 136 countries to provide various types of military assistance, and 23 countries to host US forces deployed in offensive operations; even the America's vast tools and tactics proved ill-equipped to counter the will and endurance of the Taliban and allegedly their Pakistani backers. In the long term, its missiles and warplanes were unable to subjugate a movement of about 60,000 fighters in a small devastated country, Afghanistan.

Think about the major repercussion of this American defeat. **Shariah won a key battle against democracy**; the US and the West's top arsenal with billions of dollars in aid could not defeat a true and sincere ideology [*West say it hard-line doctrine*] with majority local following. If the world would not accept the Taliban truly and realistically, with whatever features they keep, Afghanistan might again become a safe haven for like-minded warriors to whom they used to label as militants or *Jihadists*.

**Robin** has correctly analysed through ill-based interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq. The actions unambiguously proved that the US could neither build nations nor create armies out of scratch, especially in countries that have a limited middle class and low education rates. It takes generations. Ethnic and sectarian divisions thwart attempts to overhaul political, social, and economic life all at the same time; Pakistan is also an example to be cited here. The US spent 88 billion dollars training and arming an Afghan force of some 300,000 men, more than four times the size of the Taliban's militia, but lost once more. About a month earlier, President Biden said that:

*"....he trusted the capacity of the Afghan military, who is better trained, better equipped and more competent in terms of conducting war - (but) all gone with the wind...."*

America's Great Retreat is at least as humiliating as was the Soviet Union's withdrawal in 1989 from the same country, an event that brought end to its empire and Communist rule. The Soviet Union had spent about 50 billion dollars during the first seven of its ten years stay here and the US spent much more. However, no difference; the

Americans flying out on their helicopters were no different than Soviet troops marching across the Friendship Bridge from Afghanistan on February 1989.

Both of the big powers left Afghanistan as losers, with their tails between their legs, leaving behind chaos – so had left the Britain after **The First Anglo-Afghan War in 1839-42** when about 17,000 British troops and civilians were mercilessly slaughtered by the same Afghans in Kabul.

Referring to **David French** in weekly **TIME** of 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021:

*"The jihadist military had suffered a grievous blow [in December 2001] but the extremist theology lived on. We [Americans] could not extinguish an idea, and the idea still possessed power....At every stage, the Taliban and their al Qaeda allies were the second-strongest force in the land."*

In nut shell, the Americans could not destroy the Taliban or al Qaeda - despite 20 years of military attacks, they still existed; the US took a long time to understand their capabilities. In December 2001, a small force of the US-army, supported by local allies, and American air power had out-routed the Taliban quite easily; then what went wrong later - why the US allowed them to flourish again.

In the end, the above referred weekly **TIME** correctly ended up with:

*".....we should have pulled out long, long ago ....our leaders have misled Americans about the reality of the conflict....There is no realistic prospect of taking back Kabul, much less the rest of Afghanistan..... And, thanks to the bipartisan failure to lead, al Qaeda has won a long and critical battle against the most powerful nation in the world.... This victory [of Taliban] did not end the 'endless war'. Instead it made our enemy more dangerous."*

One blog of 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021 on the internet media held that:

*"Yes,... If the people doing the subjugation are their own tribesmen then what is our business to intervene? The Taliban are a force of (hardly) 80,000 in a country of 38m. How have they achieved control when Afghani forces number approx 300,000? The only possible way is through the complicity of the population; some of them are women. We had no business establishing ourselves in Afghanistan in the first place."*

**THE BURDEN OF SHAME – ON BIDEN:**

Referring to UK's **main-line press** dated 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021: the US President Joe Biden has been criticised by media across the political divide; see the world's media comments below:

A CNN columnist **Stephen Collinson** said:

*'The **debacle of the US defeat and chaotic retreat** in Afghanistan is a political disaster for Joe Biden, whose failure to orchestrate an urgent and orderly exit will further rock a presidency plagued by crises and stain his legacy.'*

**Wall Street Journal opinion [Editorial]:**

*'President Biden's statement on Saturday washing his hands of Afghanistan deserves to go down as one of the **most shameful in history** by a Commander in Chief at such a moment of American retreat.'*

**George Packer** in **The Atlantic** said:

*'The Biden administration failed to heed the warnings on Afghanistan, failed to act with urgency—and its failure has left tens of thousands of Afghans to a terrible fate. This **betrayal will live in infamy**.*

*There was enough blame attached for the Afghanistan crisis to fill a library of books, condemning the betrayal of the Afghan people as he placed the **burden of shame** on Biden.'*

An opinion made by **David E. Sanger** in **The New York Times** claimed:

*'.....Biden would go down in history, fairly or unfairly, as the president who presided over a long-brewing **humiliating final act** in the American experiment in Afghanistan'.*

**New York Post editorial** said:

*'President Biden says he inherited Trump's withdrawal plans, but that is a lie. He could have taken more time, tried to at least secure the capital, and left a small peacekeeping force. Instead, we pulled out in the dread of night, so quickly we had to send troops back just to make sure our embassy was safely evacuated. It's as humiliating an end as the **rooftop scramble in Saigon in 1975**.'*



**Max Boot**, columnist for **the Washington Post** commented:

*‘Strengthened by the copious U.S. weaponry they have captured — and by the prestige that comes with having humbled a superpower — the Taliban will now be more dangerous than ever. This is on Biden, and it will leave an indelible stain on his presidency.’*

**Paul Brandus**, columnist in **USA Today** held:

*‘Biden is in charge now, this catastrophe is appearing on his watch, and he will have to take his lumps. That’s the way it goes. Life and politics are often unfair. Yet as bad as things look for Biden today, I wonder just how much **long-term damage** this will actually do to him and the America.’*

**Kyle Smith** in the **New York Post**:

*‘The utterly nauseating and unnecessary abandonment of Afghanistan to its fate recalls a similar humiliation at the hands of Islamist radicals in the Jimmy Carter administration. President Biden’s profligate spending policies are unleashing inflation that is sparking voter distrust so noticeable that even NPR is sounding the alarm.’*

**Trey Gowdy** on **Fox News** said:

*‘Thousands of lives taken [or] have been lost in defence of our nation. Tens of thousands of our sons and daughters have been injured. And more than a trillion dollars of our money has been spent in Afghanistan alone. And **we are left to wonder why.**’*

**Senator Joni Ernst** on **Fox News** said:

*‘.....condemn the **slap on the face to the thousands** of men and women who served in this war and a total abandonment of a country and its people by Biden.*

*The rushed and haphazard withdrawal of US forces in Afghanistan is not **the strategic shift** President Biden sold to the American people. Instead, it’s a total abandonment of a country and its people – and a gift to the Taliban.’*

A columnist in the **British Press** also hit at President Biden that day. Commons Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Tom Tugendhat wrote in

**The Times** that:

*'The fall of Kabul is **the biggest foreign policy disaster** since Suez. The operation to seize the canal in 1956 symbolised the end of Britain's global ambition and refocused us on NATO and alliances. It showed conclusively that the US could limit our actions and change our policy.'*

A columnist **Ian Birrell** in the 'T' wrote:

*'The withdrawal, begun by a Republican president and speeded up by his Democratic successor, is driven by domestic concerns rather than the slightest consideration for people they are leaving to suffer. It is a **betrayal of Afghanistan's people**, of our wider strategic interests and all those troops killed or maimed fighting for its future.'*

The **Financial Times'** Editorial note said:

*'A desire in the White House to wrap up nagging foreign policy problems so it can focus on China is understandable. But the **abandonment of Afghanistan** raises doubts over the depth of US commitment to supposed allies, and its determination to see military entanglements through to the bitter end.'*

**Mark Almond** wrote in the **Daily Mail** that:

*'What makes this debacle different from the Americans' hasty retreat from Saigon in 1975 is the existence across the West of small cells of radical Islamists who will be inspired by our **humiliating retreat from Kabul**. There were no Vietcong cells in London waiting to be activated then. Today things are different. The humiliation of the West in Afghanistan has set Islamist fundamentalism back on a roll.'*

**Nick Timothy** in the **Daily Telegraph**:

*'It is ludicrous to think Britain – alone or in concert with all the militaries of Europe – could or should have fought a new Afghan war alone. First Donald Trump did a deal with the Taliban promising the withdrawal of troops by May this year (2021). Then President Biden declared he had **zero responsibility to Afghanistan**, insisting his sole obligation was to protect America's national self-interest. As his predecessor might have put it: **America first (?)**'*

**Simon Tisdall in the Guardian:**

*'What will it take for Joe Biden to admit he is **disastrously wrong about Afghanistan**? The US leader struck a defiant pose last week. Sounding like a slightly desperate Olympics coach, he told Afghans it was their country. If they want it, they have to fight for it. In American politics-speak, this is called tough love - without the love.'*

**Leo McKinstry in the Daily Express:**

*'Over the last 20 years, Britain is estimated to have spent almost **£40 billion in Afghanistan, while 45S of our brave personnel** have lost their lives in the struggle, yet those heroic sacrifices tragically look like they were made in vain.'*

**The Sun editorial:**

*'Biden **ignored repeated warnings** then withdrew crucial air support for the Afghan army it has spent billions arming over 20 years. It was an action which borders on the criminal; a total and unnecessary moral failure which left Britain powerless.'*

**TALIBAN PROMISED SECURITY FOR ALL:**

The takeover of the sprawling capital city had been years in the making, but was ultimately accomplished in a single day. The Taliban had conquered nearly all provincial hubs in Afghanistan during the week earlier, faced little to no resistance as they entered the city through its major traffic arteries. By evening of 15<sup>th</sup> August 2021, the Taliban were giving TV & Media interviews in the lavish presidential palace, just hours after Ghani had departed Afghanistan.

Next day, the Pentagon was speeding in additional troops to assist with the withdrawal of US personnel after the **American flag was lowered** from their adorned embassy. The footage of Taliban fighters occupying the palace and rolling up the Afghan national flag stood as a defining image of a failed US effort to transform Afghan society at the cost of a trillion dollars and thousands of lives lost. As the Taliban encircled and then entered Kabul on 15<sup>th</sup> [it was Sunday], the US personnel at the embassy in Kabul were being shifted to the airport along with acting US ambassador Ross Wilson, with the American flag.

Asked about comparisons to the US departure from Vietnam in 1975, Secretary of State Blinken said on ABC News:

***'This Week is manifestly not Saigon.'***

Taliban co-founder, Abdul Ghani Baradar, emerged as the undisputed winner of America's longest war, issued a video statement on behalf of the Taliban's political bureau, recorded in Doha in conciliatory tone:

*"We have reached a victory that wasn't expected - we should show humility in front of Allah. Now it's about how we serve and secure our people and ensure their future to the best of our ability."*

**The Washington Post** of 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021 is referred.

President Biden's key-colleagues, friends and foes all blasted at this ***'chaotic retreat'*** following his decision to withdraw the remaining US troops, though not asked for a return to war. Foreign Secretary Blinken took defended the Biden administration's decision at various TV shows, arguing that the Taliban's current offensive would have happened even if US forces remained in Afghanistan; adding that:

*"If the president had decided to stay, all gloves would've been off, we would've been back at war with the Taliban attacking our forces, the offensive you've seen throughout the country almost certainly would've proceeded."*

Blinken did not directly answer the question of how the US failed to anticipate the speed of the Taliban's takeover; just a week before, the US military had estimated that collapse could take 90 days. Instead, it took 10 days, with provincial capitals falling one after the next.

The Taliban sent squads of 15 armed men each to all government HQs, embassies and diplomatic missions to protect them, and had set up checkpoints along the city's entrances and main streets. On WhatsApp, the group message proclaimed that ***'...we are in charge of security for Kabul.'*** The messages listed telephone numbers in various areas that citizens could call if they saw problems such as looting or robbery, extortion or irresponsible behaviour on the part of armed individual Taliban. One message said:

***"The Islamic Emirate assures you that no one should be in panic of feeling fear. Taliban is taking over the city without fighting and no one will be at risk."***

Taliban's political and military opponents pleaded them to refrain from 1 revenge. Former  
Afghan president Hamid Karzai appeared in an online 2 video and said that: 3

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.....he hoped that the problems of our country and our capital ...  
will be solved and that the Taliban will guard the safety of the people's  
lives and property."

**Vince Cable**, a British MP from Twickenham, while making a speech on  
Remembrance Sunday said:

***"Yes, the Taliban have humiliated the west – but more importantly, did  
our soldiers die in vain. The narrative that the USA and its allies are in  
terminal decline will have been reinforced by the crisis in Afghanistan.***

*After the UK commitment to a continuing NATO-led force in  
Afghanistan in 2006, every year mention was made of Britain's dead  
soldiers in Afghanistan and the many thousands wounded, some of  
whom also brought their physical injuries and mental scars to my  
advice surgeries."*

Ref: Daily the '**INDEPENDENT**' dated 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021.

The fact remained that outside of Kabul, apart from minor modernisation,  
little changed for centuries and life continued to stagnate. *'For someone  
born in Afghanistan, by Western values he is unfortunate, particularly  
females but that does not give us the moral or legal Right to interfere by  
imposing other values'.*

A British Bolger opined: The narrative that the West did some good and  
that *'millions of women got education'* became a curse ultimately; it  
proved to be rubbish. Those women would never get to use their  
education for anything useful; they could be equally cowed and enslaved  
like ever – wait for a harsh misery to come. He added:

*"The ugly truth is that 'Great Britain' does what the Americans tell us  
to do: no more, no less. With this week's instructions – RUN – comes  
a tragic, unforgivable sense that those who served and died over two  
decades did so in vain."*