

The Delray Democrat

Time to Leave Afghanistan¹

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Although not cause for celebration, I wholly concur with President Biden's difficult decision to bring American forces home from Afghanistan after twenty years, ending America's longest war. Critics correctly state that the job is not complete and there remain significant security concerns. However, that is not the question we need to ask. Biden focused on the right question – what is it we could still achieve? The answer was “very little” hence the withdrawal.

President Biden asked Pentagon leaders what would be different if we stayed one more year, two more years, ten more years... As for Afghanistan, very little would be different. We are simply the latest country to realize the folly of creating a genuine nation in Afghanistan where the people have resisted such change for generations. Most people there claim primary allegiance to their tribal authorities with little interest in a central government, especially one with real power. There is no unity of acceptance or belief in what a national government should be.

As for the U.S., if we stayed, we would continue to spend trillions of dollars, lose lives, and distract attention from other pressing national security matters. We could only consider such additional cost in lives and dollars if there were real hope of an ultimate victory. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Some in the military recognize this reality and support the policy while others question what this means for families who have lost someone or who are supporting those who have returned with medical and mental health challenges. They ask what this means about their sacrifice. Those who serve are rightfully proud of their service. Although we truly want the sacrifices in Afghanistan to mean something, that is the case. We gave the Afghan people a real chance, providing a relatively secure environment for them to grow democratic institutions and a freer society. Remaining there indefinitely without real achievement would be no more a valid recognition of that commitment than withdrawing after twenty years of heroic effort. There is simply no longer a viable military objective.

The withdrawal means we will no longer be creating thousands more Gold Star families and veterans struggling with the aftermath of war while still not achieving the ultimate victory of Afghanistan as a bona fide, independent nation state. As a veteran myself I understand the sacrifices, the planning, and the consequences more than most. I know Gold Star families who continue to deal with loss. I have led those who have come back with visible and invisible wounds and helped them try to overcome the challenges. Those who profess to care about these

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heroes and even to speak for them should emphasize the need for better treatment and other programs from the VA, et al, not the continuation of successive failed policies that exacerbate the problem.

I supported the initial invasion after the horrific events of 9/11. We took our eyes off the ball by engaging in Iraq prior to completing the job in Afghanistan. U.S. forces performed admirably in both conflicts, but by splitting our attention, we did not fully accomplish either mission. We ran up incredible debt that will inevitably lead to catastrophic financial consequences, we created generations of wounded warriors, and we left both countries vulnerable. Iraq has become unnervingly close to Iran and Afghanistan has an uncertain future with The Taliban. As important as these concerns are, the U.S. can no longer bear the cost in American lives and money.