

Catastrophe for Afghans, Israel and America

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By David Horowitz

LOS ANGELES, Calif.—Like every national leader, the president of the United States has a prime obligation to safeguard the security and well-being of his citizens. And like his predecessor, Donald Trump, President Joe Biden concluded that the presence of U.S. troops and contractors in Afghanistan was having the opposite effect—that the American military deployment, as Biden put it on Monday, was "not in our national security interest."

Thousands of Americans had lost their lives in the course of the 20-year war since the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, when the Bush administration began targeting Afghanistan for harboring al-Qaeda terrorists. And Biden, inheriting an agreement to withdraw the last few thousand U.S. troops, decided to go ahead with it and, he said this week, avoid a "third decade" of war.

Israel's previous hasty exits

Before we get into the profound and dismal wrongheadedness of this decision—which in a matter of a few days has seen the United States humiliated and weakened in the eyes, most especially, of its Islamist enemies—we should note that Israel has twice in recent decades carried out its own hasty military withdrawals on our very own doorstep, under circumstances and with consequences it has to some extent lived to regret.

We left southern Lebanon unilaterally in 2000, under public pressure amid the relentless loss of soldiers' lives in the Security Zone, and were plunged into the Second Lebanon War six years later. Now we face a full-fledged Hezbollah army on that front. We left Gaza unilaterally in 2005, choosing neither to negotiate the pullout with the Palestinian Authority nor to heed the warnings that emboldened terror groups, claiming vindication, would fill the vacuum. Now we face endless friction and intermittent bloody conflict with Hamas.

Israel, in other words, is not immune to the urge to cut and run.

America cut and ran

And that is what the United States has now done in Afghanistan, to devastating effect. It has handed Afghanistan back to the Taliban—brutal and benighted Islamic fundamentalists who, when they last controlled the country, oppressed women with a methodical viciousness unparalleled by any other

regime worldwide; indiscriminately massacred civilians; restricted education; destroyed agriculture; banned culture and recreation.

In consigning Afghanistan to its grisly fate, moreover, the U.S. has shown itself to have been incapable of forging the Afghan military into a competent fighting force, despite all the training, the tens of billions in equipment, the lives lost.

And, while Biden now blames Afghanistan's political leaders for fleeing, and the Afghan army for laying down its arms, the U.S. also reveals itself to have been unable to recognize the unreliability of its Afghan allies. As recently as July 8, Biden asserted with outrageously misguided complacency that "the likelihood there's going to be the Taliban overrunning everything and owning the whole country is highly unlikely."

Israel depending upon themselves

For Israel, the debacle is a reinforcement of our insistence that we, and we alone, put our lives on the line in the defense of this country—even as we forge and nurture our alliances with our vital allies, and none more so than the United States. We do not and must not ask U.S. or any other forces to risk their lives for us, and we dare not rely on any other country or alliance to protect us from our enemies.

For Israel and its allies and semi-allies in the region, the U.S. mishandling of Afghanistan also shocks and horrifies because it gives succor to terrorist groups and extremist regimes. First and foremost of these is Iran, closing in on the bomb, toying with the U.S. in negotiations over a return to the 2015 nuclear deal, determined to destroy "Little Satan" Israel, and now even more contemptuous of the "Great Satan."

Reduced well-being of America

For the United States, however, what's ultimately worst about the abandonment of Afghanistan to some of the darkest forces on the planet is that it negates, rather than serves, that core presidential obligation to ensure the security and well-being of the American people. The U.S. deployment had been greatly scaled back, and the losses, still of course terrible, reduced to a fraction of those in earlier years. The hapless departure and its consequences, bitter experience indicates all too well, will exact a far greater cost than maintaining that deployment would have.

Biden's two immediate predecessors complained that, notwithstanding the U.S. commitment to championing freedom and democracy, it was not America's job to solve all the problems of this part of the world (Barack Obama) and fight our region's stupid wars (Donald Trump). But that the debacle is playing out around the 20th anniversary of 9/11, when 3,000 people lost their lives in al-Qaeda's horrific terrorist assault on America, serves to grimly underline the direct consequences *for the United States itself* of failing to reckon with the ruthless, amoral and sophisticated forces plotting to harm it.

Emboldened enemy

Those regressive forces, most of them strategizing in our part of the world, are murderously hostile to everything that is best about America—its defense of freedoms, its commitment to democracy, its striving for opportunity and equality, its fundamental humanity. Today, they are more confident and stronger than they were just a few days ago. And the bastion of the free world's defense against them, the United States of America, looks tired and irresolute.

This, at the risk of catastrophic understatement, is not in the U.S. national security interest.