**Countdown of the Taliban and Imran Khan**

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After two decades, the Taliban are now in Kabul. 20 years back, the US ousted the Taliban from Kabul. The Taliban have removed Ashraf Ghani–the last of American puppets from the scene of Afghanistan. They have completed lightning advance across Afghanistan by taking control of Kabul all but guaranteeing a national takeover. With Ghani having fled Afghanistan and the US rushing to evacuate its personnel from Kabul as Afghan Taliban leaders work to form a government, the reality is setting in. After two decades and some $2 trillion spent, the US nation-building effort appears to have once again failed. That will likely have far-reaching consequences, not only for Afghanistan but also for American foreign policy and the world at large. Joe Biden should be admired for his willingness to be transparent about his reasoning and to defend his decision to the Americans. There will be much-deserved criticism of the execution of the endgame of America’s military engagement in Afghanistan, and Biden accepted that. Perhaps, if his predecessors had been willing, to tell the truth about the mission’s likelihood of success, or if the US had not allowed itself to be distracted by false intelligence about Iraq, things would have turned out differently. But Biden can’t be held solely responsible for 20 years of poor choices. He could merely play the hand he was dealt, and it was a poor one indeed.

While pride, affection, and concern for US troops were palpable, the tone he used to describe the Afghan military and civilian government was uncharitable. Quite tone-deaf at a time when the airwaves are dominated by heart-wrenching scenes of desperate Afghans trying to escape a nightmare they thought they’d awakened from long ago. Even more telling was the single passing mention of women and girls and the unimaginable future they face under a restored, emboldened Taliban. Biden did take the opportunity to blame China and Russia. China’s shadow loomed large over the speech. For all of Biden’s arguably correct analysis of the pros and cons of continuing military involvement in Afghanistan, one fact remains: for this administration, China is the true threat that animates action. Being bogged down in Afghanistan any longer was a distraction from that mission, but the goals of the Chinese mission are no less ill-defined and vague than the nation-building exercise Biden so clearly disagreed with within Afghanistan.

Four decades of violence have scarred innocent Afghans. They have been betrayed by the foreigners who promised to fight for them and, even more painfully, by their leaders in whose hands they entrusted their future. Afghans deserve better.

The decision to withdraw was defensible.

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There are many victims of poor planning: interpreters who will never escape, Afghan soldiers who are attempting to hide, and the women and children who are now left without a future.

The US’s single-worst failure came at the beginning, with the attempt to create a strong, multiethnic central government with control over the entire country something which had never existed before in Afghan history. Through constant practice of give-and-take, in which local power centres are alternately bought off and bullied by the central government, something resembling lasting stability may have been achieved. It would have been stability bought at the cost of more aspirational goals, but also stability, which would not have melted away in a week or so like ice cream.

The Taliban leadership has stated its willingness to undertake a peaceful transfer of power in Afghanistan. This is being met with a sigh of relief for the international community. If this goal is met, the Taliban would consolidate their control over the country rapidly. In the first media interaction, the Taliban have given a complete picture of their mature and calculated conduct. A very professional, confident and composed Zabeh Ullah Mujahid dominated the press briefing.

It is a wise move to make things clear and avoid international condemnation, sidestep an emergency resolution at the UN Security Council, and ensure that aid distribution continues so that the Taliban are not blamed for any possible humanitarian crisis. The Taliban have stated their willingness to undertake a peaceful transfer of power in Afghanistan.

Unnecessarily, the entire world has started dictating Afghan Taliban leadership. Pakistan should keep itself completely away from Afghanistan’s internal matters and maintain a multilateral balanced political and diplomatic relationship with different political parties of Afghanistan. Before the fall of Kabul, Pakistan has continuously been denying any level of influence on the Afghan Taliban but if Pakistan continues poking its nose inside the internal matters openly, the world would understand its undenied influence on the Taliban.

If successful, the resourceless Taliban in Afghanistan will set no excuses for Imran Khan’s failed governance. The clarity and commitments of Madrassa-educated Taliban leadership with the Afghan nation will shatter unfulfilled commitments, incapability and incapacity of Oxford graduate Imran Khan in the days to come. The countdown of the Taliban and Imran Khan has commenced. The Taliban are committed to establishing Riyasat-e-Madina like government in Afghanistan while Imran Khan has purely been using the word Riyasat-e-Madina as a political stunt. A completely unfulfilled stunt.

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