

Washington Examiner



US scrambles to avoid Vietnam moment in Kabul as panic spreads through Afghan capital

Jamie McIntyre

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‘A TEMPORARY MISSION WITH A NARROW FOCUS’: With the Taliban offensive gaining momentum at a startling pace, and more provincial capitals falling with each passing day, the United States is dispatching three infantry battalions, roughly 3,000 troops, already forward deployed in the region, to the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul for what is described as a short term mission to provide security for emergency evacuations.

“These forces are being deployed to support the orderly and safe reduction of civilian personnel at the request of the State Department and to help facilitate an accelerated process of working through SIV [Special Immigrant Visa] applicants,” said Pentagon spokesman **John Kirby**. “This is a temporary mission with a narrow focus. As with all deployments of our troops into harm's way, our commanders have the inherent right of self-defense, and any attack on them can and will be met with a forceful and appropriate response.”

In addition, a joint Army-Air Force support element of around 1,000 personnel will deploy to Qatar to facilitate the processing of SIV applicants, and a combat brigade numbering around 3,500 troops from the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg will be on standby in Kuwait, in case things go south.

The evacuees will be airlifted out on U.S. military planes, a move the Pentagon previously said would be unnecessary.

THE SPECTER OF SAIGON: As soon as the news broke that the U.S. was sending thousands of U.S. troops back to Kabul to draw down embassy staff and qualified Afghans, a colleague emailed me, “We've reached the Saigon moment.”

It's an analogy the Pentagon has been anxious to avoid, an ignominious episode captured in an [iconic 1975 photo](#) by a Dutch photographer of Americans scrambling to get on one of the last helicopters out of Saigon, as the Viet Cong overran the city.

It wasn't long before others began citing the embarrassing chapter in American history. “Weeks ago, **President Biden** promised the American people that we would not have a Saigon moment in Afghanistan,” said Alabama **Rep. Mike Rogers**, ranking Republican on the House Armed Services Committee. “Now, we are watching President Biden's Saigon moment unfold before us.”

Inevitably at yesterday's Pentagon briefing, Kirby was asked how the U.S. would "avoid the parallel with the fall of Saigon."

"We're not walking away from our commitments to the Afghan forces, we're not completely eliminating our diplomatic presence on the ground. We're still going to have diplomats there," Kirby said. "So, nobody is abandoning Afghanistan, it's not walking away from it, it's doing the right thing at the right time to protect our people."

"I want to be very clear about what this is and what this is not," said spokesman **Ned Price** at the State Department. "This is not abandonment. This is not an evacuation. This is not the wholesale withdrawal. What this is is a reduction in the size of our civilian footprint."

'ALL WE NEEDED WAS A PLAN': The frenzied dispatch of U.S. troops back to the airport they left just over a month ago drew sharp criticism from Republicans, including Senate Minority Leader **Mitch McConnell**.

"Afghanistan is careening toward a massive, predictable, and preventable disaster. And the Administration's surreal efforts to defend President Biden's reckless policy are frankly humiliating," said McConnell in a [statement](#). "The Biden Administration has reduced U.S. officials to pleading with Islamic extremists to spare our embassy as they prepare to overrun Kabul. Absurdly, naively, our government is arguing that bloodshed might hurt the Taliban's international reputation, as if radical terrorists are anxious about their P.R."

"Our allies are watching as Afghanistan rapidly deteriorates, and President Biden still claims he does not regret his unconditional withdrawal. Make no mistake, the consequences of President Biden's haphazard withdrawal will be felt for decades," said Rogers. "All we needed was a plan to avoid this very moment. Mr. President, where is the plan?"

Good Friday morning and welcome to *Jamie McIntyre's Daily on Defense*, written and compiled by *Washington Examiner* National Security Senior Writer **Jamie McIntyre** (@jamiejmcintyre) and edited by **Victor I. Nava**. [Email here](#) with tips, suggestions, calendar items, and anything else. Sign up or read current and back issues at [DailyonDefense.com](#). If signing up doesn't work, shoot us an email and we'll add you to our list. And be sure to follow us on Twitter: [@dailyondefense](#).

HAPPENING TODAY: The Taliban continue to encircle Kabul, and the latest reports say three provincial capitals in southern Afghanistan have fallen into their hands. After heavy fighting, Afghan government troops have retreated from Kandahar, Herat, and Lashkar Gah.

Kandahar, the original home of the Taliban, is Afghanistan's second-largest city. Herat is the third largest. With the latest string of victories in the south, the Taliban are estimated to now hold over two-thirds of the country.

BIDEN HIDIN'? As Afghanistan descends into chaos, **President Joe Biden** has no public events planned for the next three days. The White House schedule has him getting his daily intelligence briefing at 10 a.m. at his home in Wilmington, Delaware, and then departing at 1 p.m. for Camp David, Maryland, where he will remain over the weekend.

THE 'PEACE' TALKS: Meanwhile, in Doha, **Zalmay Khalilzad**, the U.S. special representative for Afghanistan reconciliation, has been desperately trying to revive talks between the Taliban and Afghan negotiating teams.

This morning, Khalilzad issued a statement “on behalf of regional and international stakeholders,” calling for an acceleration of the peace process “as matter of great urgency.”

“We demand an immediate end to attacks against cities, urge a political settlement, and warn that a government imposed by force will be a pariah state,” he tweeted.

‘THE NEGOTIATIONS ARE A SMOKE SCREEN’: In an interview on *PBS NewsHour*, **Bill Roggio**, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said it’s clear that the Taliban have no interest in a peace deal unless it amounts to a total surrender by the Afghan government.

“The Taliban's objective is to seize control of Afghanistan, to reestablish Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, that's the name of its government prior to the U.S. invasion. It will do it by force, or it will do it via diplomacy, and via diplomacy means the Taliban will accept the Afghan government's surrender,” Roggio said.

“The negotiations in Doha are a smokescreen. It's designed to give false hope to the United States, to NATO, and particularly the Afghan government that there will be a negotiated solution. The Taliban's position has been the same for two decades now ... the only acceptable outcome of this war would be the reestablishment of the Islamic Emirate.”

‘GREATEST INTELLIGENCE FAILURES IN DECADES’: Roggio says the Taliban strategy has been over a decade in the making as they bided their time until the Americans left.

“What the Taliban did since the U.S. handed over security to the Afghan forces in 2014, they focused on taking control of rural areas. U.S. generals, the commanders, they dismissed this and said we're going to focus on the population centers. The Taliban said that's fine, we'll work on the rural areas. We'll stage from there, and we'll expand our control outward,” Roggio told PBS.

“I think this is one of the greatest intelligence failures in decades — certainly, in U.S. military history. The Taliban organized this offensive, it planned it, it prepared, it organized, it recruited, it deployed fighters, it prepositioned war material all under the nose of the U.S. military, NATO, and Afghan intelligence.”

WHAT NOW? “Here’s what should happen now,” said **Mitch McConnell** in his statement. “President Biden should immediately commit to providing more support to Afghan forces, starting with close air support beyond August 31st. Without it, al Qaeda and the Taliban may celebrate the 20th anniversary of the September 11 attacks by burning down our Embassy in Kabul.”

“Unless President Biden adjusts course quickly, the Taliban is on track to secure a significant military victory,” McConnell said. “The Taliban doesn’t believe in a political settlement. They want military victory and bloody retribution.”

The Rundown

Washington Examiner: Afghanistan’s inevitable and predictable backslide into the clutches of the Taliban

Washington Examiner: US troops 'will temporarily deploy' to Afghanistan to help evacuate diplomats

Washington Examiner: ‘They are sitting in the same room now’: US touts peace talks as Taliban offensive continues

Washington Examiner: McConnell slams Biden's 'reckless' Afghanistan strategy and urges more military support

Washington Examiner: Trump claims Afghanistan withdrawal would be 'much more successful' with him in office

Washington Examiner: Department of Veterans Affairs to expand vaccine mandate

Washington Examiner: Army veteran found guilty in connection to plot to bomb California rally

Washington Examiner: Hamas rocket fire at Israel in May was a war crime, Human Rights Watch says

Washington Examiner: Authorities encountered 213,000 people illegally crossing border in July, most in 21 years

Washington Examiner: Opinion: Sorry Joe, the Taliban don't want your respect

Breaking Defense: STRATCOM Chief Warns Of Chinese ‘Strategic Breakout’

Washington Times: China Building Third Missile Field For Hundreds Of New Icbms

AP: Russian Hypersonic Technology Expert Accused Of High Treason

Stars and Stripes: Army Lieutenant General Gets Fourth Star And Becomes Second Female Combatant Commander In History

Task & Purpose: Here’s what will happen to US troops who refuse mandatory COVID-19 vaccines

Military Times: Anonymous Social Media Accounts Sow Seeds Of Distrust Over Military Vaccine Mandate

Talk Media News: Biden oversaw the reopening of U.S. Embassy In Kabul In 2002; Today he authorizes troops to help evacuate embassy personnel and others.

Defense News: The Pentagon Is Exploring Its Options For A More Efficient And Powerful F-35 Engine

Bloomberg: FTC’s Khan Urges Blocking More M&A as Lockheed Deal Looms

USNI News: Raytheon Says it Can Meet U.S. Naval Strike Missile Demand

Air Force Magazine: USAF: New Engine Technologies Can’t Be Retrofitted to Existing Fighters

Air Force Magazine: Uzbekistan a Candidate for U.S. ‘Over-the-Horizon’ Support to Afghanistan

AFP: ‘Strategic’ U.S. Military Exercise Held In Niger

Navy Times: Audit: Some Navy Sub Cybersecurity Inspections Were Neglected In Recent Years

19fortyfive.com: India's First Homemade Aircraft Carrier Passes Its First Big Test

19fortyfive.com: The U.S. Navy Is Holding Its Biggest Exercise Since 1981

19fortyfive.com: South China Sea Drama: A British Aircraft Carrier 'Target Practice' For China?

The Cyber Brief: Remembering a True Leader Through CIA Crisis and Controversy

The Cyber Brief: Opinion: Decision Time on JCPOA

Calendar

FRIDAY | AUGUST 13

1 p.m. — Cato Institute virtual book discussion on *Reign of Terror: How the 9/11 Era Destabilized America and Produced Trump*, with author **Spencer Ackerman**, contributing editor at the *Daily Beast*; **Abigail Hall**, associate professor in economics at Bellarmine University; and **Erin Simpson**, former co-host of the Bombshell podcast from *War on the Rocks*. <https://www.cato.org/events/reign-terror>

THURSDAY | AUGUST 19

1 p.m. — George Washington University Project for Media and National Security Defense Writers Group conversation with **Rear Adm. Bruce Gillingham**, U.S. Navy surgeon general. <https://nationalsecuritymedia.gwu.edu/>

2:30 p.m. — Center for a New American Security event: “Against the Clock: Saving America's Afghan Partners,” with **Rep. Seth Moulton**, D-Mass; **Richard Armitage**, former deputy secretary of state; **Richard Fontaine**, CEO, Center for a New American Security; **Lisa Curtis**, senior fellow and director, Indo-Pacific Security Program, Center for a New American Security. <https://www.cnas.org/events>

MONDAY | AUGUST 30

TBA — Ukrainian President **Volodymyr Zelensky** visits the White House.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

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Bill Roggio, senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and editor of *Long War Journal*, on the *PBS NewsHour*.