

World Insights: Blame game intensifies in Washington on Afghan debacle

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 18 (Xinhua) -- Blame game has intensified in Washington as the White House is scrambling to contain the fallout of a humiliating end to the 20-year war in Afghanistan and Republicans are sparing no efforts to exploit President Joe Biden's handling of the messy withdrawal from Kabul.

"I don't think it could have been handled in a way that ... but the idea that somehow, to have gotten out without chaos ensuing, I don't know how that happens," said Biden in an interview with ABC News on Wednesday.

Reiterating his defense of the withdrawal from Afghanistan, Biden blamed the Afghan government and the U.S.-trained Afghan military for not more forcibly defending the capital of Kabul which fell to the Taliban militia on Sunday.

The militia, which the U.S. overthrew in 2001, has taken over Afghanistan just two weeks before the United States was planning to complete its withdrawal of troops from the war-torn country.

In a televised speech from the White House on Monday, Biden made similar remarks during which he also cast blame on his predecessor for the unfolding crisis in Afghanistan.

"The choice I had to make as your president was either to follow through on that agreement or be prepared to go back to fighting the Taliban in the middle of the spring fighting season," Biden said, referring the deal former U.S. President Donald Trump inked with the Taliban to withdraw U.S. forces by May 1.

In an interview with Sean Hannity on his Fox News show Tuesday night, Trump called Biden's handling of the situation "the greatest embarrassment in the history of our country while blaming Biden for not getting American soldiers and civilians out of the country in time.

The two senior politicians actually started to play the blaming game on Saturday when the threat of Kabul falling to the Taliban loomed large.

Biden then criticized Trump for empowering the Taliban and leaving them "in the strongest position militarily since 2001." Trump responded with a statement that Biden had "ran out of Afghanistan instead of following the plan our Administration left for him."

The Biden administration is about to face a grilling from both the House and Senate over the bungled U.S. exit from Afghanistan, reported The Hill, a U.S. political website, on Wednesday.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy sent Biden a letter on Wednesday requesting a briefing or call next week for the "Gang of Eight" -- the top four congressional leaders and top members of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees, said the report. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has also requested three briefings.

Democrats "largely support Biden's ultimate endgame of withdrawing U.S. troops from Afghanistan" while Republicans are launching "heavy broadsides against Biden, viewing the Afghanistan exit a messy misstep of his own making," it said.

"This is President Biden's Saigon moment," House Minority Whip Steve Scalise said Sunday on CBS' Face the Nation, referring to the chaotic departure from Vietnam in 1975.

A number of U.S. media outlets blasted Biden for what they called a mishandling of the troop withdrawal too.

On Sunday, CNN's Jake Tapper on "State of the Union" labeled the issue a foreign policy "disaster" that caught the president "flat-footed."

The Atlantic Monthly, a moderate liberal publication, ran a headline referring to what the magazine called Biden's "Betrayal of Afghans."

In an email to reporters, Harry J. Kazianis, senior Director at the Center for the National Interest, founded by former President Richard Nixon, said: "While we should not place the entire blame of Afghanistan's rapid collapse on Joe Biden's shoulders, we should rightly criticize the haphazard way in which U.S. forces left Afghanistan with very little thought to what happens after to the population."

Jason Campbell, policy researcher at the non-partisan RAND Corporation, said in an email to reporters: "While things are currently developing fast on the ground, the position the Taliban currently find themselves in did not occur overnight."

"The Taliban has powerful reasons not to govern as in the 1990s, if they want aid and recognition-but we will see," Michael O'Hanlon, a Brookings Institution senior fellow, told Xinhua.

Washington's initial objective, 20 years ago, was to kill or capture key al-Qaeda leaders that the Taliban was harboring.

Since then, Washington has spent nearly 1 trillion dollars on defending the nation against the Taliban, and many lives were lost in the effort.

"Over two decades," said Malou Innocent, an adjunct scholar at The Cato Institute, "U.S. military strategists had become engulfed in mission creep, in a failed attempt to create a Western-style Democracy in the embattled nation."

"It was a gross misrepresentation to assume that we could graft Western institutions onto inhospitable local conditions," Innocent told Xinhua.

David Harper, a retiree and military veteran in the U.S. state of Virginia, told Xinhua it's "sad" that U.S. troops who defended Afghanistan from the Taliban for two decades "died for nothing." He blamed Biden for the Taliban takeover. Enditem

