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As liberal hawks take flight, Biden finds new allies on Afghanistan

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President Joe Biden found himself criticized by international allies, blasted by lawmakers even in his own party, and accused of retreat as Taliban insurgents seized control of Kabul. But new friends rallied to his side.

A coalition of groups united in the effort to end the two-decade conflict has taken up the task of defending Biden's Afghanistan withdrawal. Some of them would seem to be unlikely allies.

Biden is “displaying real courage ... showing the requisite realist spine that America needs at this moment. And for that, he should be praised, not damned,” tweeted Will Ruger, the vice president of foreign policy at Stand Together, a part of the Koch network’s think tank apparatus, and former President Donald Trump’s nominee to be ambassador to Afghanistan. Biden’s chief of staff, Ron Klain, promptly shared the tweet.

“There are going to be things that we’ll criticize. But we also want to lean in when they do the right thing. And here, President Biden showed courage and showed a kind of realism about the nature of the world, and the nature of Afghanistan, that I couldn’t help but praise,” Ruger told the *Washington Examiner*.

That is more supportive than some Democrats, who bristled at what they described as Biden's clinical tone in remarks at the White House and during an interview with ABC News, have been on this issue.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Robert Menendez, a New Jersey Democrat, said the Biden administration had disappointed him and criticized its “flawed” plan. Menendez and other lawmakers have vowed to investigate the withdrawal.

Others said that a humanitarian crisis stemming from the botched exit had shattered Biden’s claim that “America is back.”

Biden held to his position through the week, bolstered by foreign policy voices who were adamant that the Afghan government was doomed.

“Proponents of continuing the war are blaming others, especially Biden, as decisive evidence of their fiasco unfolds before the world,” Stephen Wertheim, a senior fellow in the American Statecraft Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, wrote in the *Washington Post* this week. “Within days of their latest and possibly last call for a new surge, there was no more Afghan government for which another generation of Americans could fight.”

On Monday, hours after Taliban insurgents took control of Kabul, Biden said the speed with which the U.S.-trained Afghan forces buckled showed why it was right to leave.

However, even some groups that supported the decision said there was a better way to exit.

Alexander McCoy, a Marine Corps veteran and the political director for Common Defense, a liberal advocacy group led by veterans, said the community was grappling with the challenge “between the decision to withdraw our military forces, which was correct and good, and what we want, and separately, the decision on how to responsibly handle the likely outcomes of that choice, such as evacuating refugees.”

“We’re seeing people who did not want us to withdraw our military in the first place try to conflate the disastrous handling of the refugee crisis with the decision to militarily withdraw in order to try to discredit the decision,” he said. “At the same time, the Biden admin and its defenders are trying to conflate the decision to withdraw militarily and the ongoing crisis at the airport to argue the more defensible of the two, which is the decision to militarily withdraw.”

The result, he said, is that Biden officials “act as if this botched evacuation was a necessary and inevitable piece of that.”

McCoy, who is in regular contact with the Biden administration over veterans’ and refugee issues, said he talked to officials this week, urging them to speed evacuations for vulnerable Afghans who are eligible for special visas.

Biden has suffered some political fallout from the crisis, but recent surveys suggest the long-term effects may be muted.

Support for his decision fell 10 percentage points from 50% in July in a [*Yahoo News /YouGov* poll](#) conducted Aug. 16-18. But a plurality of people favor the withdrawal, 40%, compared to the 28% opposed.

Most new opposition falls among Republicans and some independents. In July, 37% of Republicans favored the withdrawal, while 39% were opposed. Today, just 22% prefer the exit, and 57% are opposed. Support among independents went from 53% to 39%, while opposition increased 7 percentage points to 27%.

Crucially for Biden, however, 59% of adults said they agreed with a verbatim statement, drawn from his Monday speech, that “ending U.S. military involvement now was the right decision” because “American troops cannot and should not be fighting in a war and dying in a war that Afghan forces are not willing to fight for themselves.” Just 17% disagreed.

The survey polled 1,649 U.S. adults and had a margin of error of plus or minus 2.7 points.

Those who support Biden’s decision say the findings bear out.

“Americans are tired of this conflict,” Ruger said. “I don’t have a crystal ball for what’s going to happen to the future of Afghanistan, other than it’s going to be determined by Afghans. And that’s actually appropriate.”

Justin Logan, a senior fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, said the Biden administration should remember who had their back.

“My hope is that somebody in the White House is keeping track of who supported the decision and that they use that information to determine who they should talk to on foreign policy in the future,” he said.