

Pakistan and the United States Have Betrayed the Afghan People

Washington ignored Islamabad funding and supplying the Taliban. Now Afghans are paying the price.

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U.S. President Joe Biden has defiantly asserted he does not regret his decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan even as Kabul has fallen to the Taliban and as desperate Afghans scramble for the last flights out of the country. The United States is begging the Taliban for assurances they will not attack U.S. personnel as Washington scrambles to evacuate its personnel, leaving its long-standing Afghan partners to fend for themselves as the Taliban hunt them and their families down.

U.S. officials are busy offering sanctimonious repines that justify the U.S. exit. They have announced to U.S. and international audiences that the time has come for Afghan National Security Forces to seize the reins of their nation's defense, that Afghan leaders must unite and fight for their country—that the United States has done enough. This is rank nonsense, and Biden knows it. The United States did not do enough—and even enabled the current onslaught. Biden did not come to this situation unawares. The Obama administration in which Biden served benefited from a raft of experts, including former CIA analyst Bruce Riedel and longtime South Asia watcher Peter Lavoy, who was the national intelligence officer for South Asia. Prior to the 2008 election, there were numerous assessments about the Afghanistan War and the myriad ways in which Pakistan was undermining U.S. efforts there.

Then-President-elect Barack Obama's incoming team, led by Riedel, spearheaded the so-called “assessment of assessments” and offered refreshingly blunt insight into how Pakistan, which

benefitted handsomely from U.S. emoluments, aided and abetted the Taliban and undermined U.S. efforts.

Biden, like Obama, understands Pakistan is the major force behind the Taliban. Without Pakistan's intelligence and military establishment's unstinting support for the Taliban, the group would be a nuisance rather than an effective fighting force.

The United States has steadfastly refused to do the one thing it could have done long ago: targeted sanctions against those in Pakistan's deep state who sponsor Islamist militants. Despite Pakistani authorities claiming al Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden was not in Pakistan for over a decade, he was found hiding in plain sight in Abbottabad, a leisurely stroll from Pakistan's premier military academy. Mullah Omar, founder of the Taliban movement, likely died in a hospital in the Pakistani port city of Karachi. Pakistan's ties to the Jalaluddin Haqqani network have been known and enduring. During the last 20 years, Pakistan has continued to recruit, train, and mission numerous other Islamist terrorist groups operating in India and Afghanistan. It has feted terrorist leaders as national heroes. Pakistan even requested the United Nations permit Hafiz Saeed, leader of the Lashkar-e-Taiba and an United Nations Security Council-designated terrorist, to access his frozen accounts for basic expenses.

The United States remained convinced Pakistan was too dangerous to sanction, too dangerous to punish, too dangerous to hold accountable. U.S. pundits rehearsed fears that Pakistan may collapse, provide nuclear weapons to terrorists, or provoke an escalatory and possibly nuclear war with India while it nursed its militant assets. Pakistan did not begin its forays in Afghan affairs during the Soviet invasion and at U.S. prompting and funding. In fact, Pakistan has been using Islamist organizations like the Jamaat-e-Islami to influence Afghan affairs since the 1950s. At the time, Pakistan had legitimate concerns: Afghanistan rejected Pakistan's legitimacy and post-colonial borders, nursed Pashtun nationalism, and even invaded Pakistan in Balochistan and several Tribal Agencies.

Pakistan retaliated violently in 1973 when Islamists fled a Soviet-guided modernization program into Pakistan. In 1974, then-Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto established a cell of the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's formidable intelligence agency, tasked with

rendering effective militia groups for undertaking operations in Afghanistan. Long before the Russians crossed the Amu Darya in 1979, the ISI, working with Pakistan's Frontier Corps, consolidated more than 50 resistance groups into seven major so-called mujahideen groups that would later fight the Soviet forces.

Americans consistently found expedient reasons to excuse Pakistani malfeasance. Without experiencing significant costs for its persistent efforts to squash Afghanistan's emergence as a viable and independent state, Pakistan will continue along the same lines."