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## *The Secret History of U.S. Diplomatic Failure in Afghanistan*



*A set of unpublished documents reveals a disheartening record of errors of judgment, arrogance and deception that led to the downfall of the Western-backed Afghan government.*



(Photo: Lorenzo Tugnoli/*The Washington Post*/contrast/Redux)

On April 14, President Joe Biden ended the longest war in U.S. history, announcing that the last remaining U.S. troops in Afghanistan would leave on September 11. In the weeks that followed, the Taliban conquered dozens of rural districts and approached major cities. In mid-June, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan — the fragile democratic state built by Afghan modernizers, NATO soldiers and U.S. taxpayers in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks — appeared to be in a death spiral. However, its president, Ashraf Ghani, insisted to his cabinet that the Republic would endure. At every meeting, he "gave us assurances and encouraged us," said Rangina Hamidi, acting education minister. Ghani reminded them that "the United States did not make a promise that it would be here forever."

On June 23, Ghani and his advisers boarded a Kam Air-chartered plane that would take them from Kabul to Washington D.C. to meet with Biden. As the plane flew over the Atlantic, they sat on the cockpit floor to review the meeting's talking points. Afghan officials knew Biden considered his government desperately fractious and ineffective. Still, Ghani recommended that they present "a message to the Americans" of resilient unity, which could persuade the United States to give them more support in their ongoing war against the Taliban. Amrullah Saleh, the first vice president, who said he felt "stabbed in the back" by Biden's decision to retire, reluctantly agreed to "maintain an optimistic narrative."

Biden hosted Ghani and his top advisers in the Oval Office on the afternoon of June 25. "We're not going to leave," Biden told Ghani. He took out of his shirt pocket an agenda card on which he had written the number of American lives lost in Afghanistan and Iraq since September 11, and showed it to Ghani. "I appreciate the American sacrifices," Ghani said. He then explained, "Our goal for the next six months is to stabilize the situation, and he described the circumstances in Afghanistan as a 'Lincoln moment.'

“La petición más importante que tengo para Afganistán es que tengamos un amigo en la Casa Blanca”, dijo Ghani.

“Tenéis un amigo”, respondió Biden.

Ghani pidió ayuda militar específica. ¿Podría Estados Unidos proporcionar más helicópteros? ¿Continuarían los contratistas estadounidenses ofreciendo apoyo logístico al ejército afgano? Las respuestas de Biden fueron vagas, según los funcionarios afganos presentes en la sala.

Biden y Ghani también hablaron de la posibilidad de un acuerdo de paz entre la República Islámica y los talibanes. Los diplomáticos estadounidenses llevaban años dialogando con los talibanes para negociar la retirada de Estados Unidos y fomentar conversaciones de paz por separado entre los insurgentes y Kabul. Pero las conversaciones habían fracasado, y los talibanes parecían decididos a tomar Afganistán por la fuerza. La probabilidad de que los talibanes “hagan algo racional no es muy alta”, dijo Biden, según los funcionarios afganos presentes.



La guerre plus longue, Photo © Lorenzo Tugnoli /Contrasto. Bayeux Calvados-Normandie  
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