

Afghanistan Collapse Reveals Beltway Media's Loyalty to Permanent War State

Biden's popular and long overdue withdrawal from Afghanistan triggered a big media meltdown that exposed its de facto merger with the military.

By [Gareth Porter](#)

Global Research, September 01, 2021
[The Grayzone](#) 30 August 2021

Region: [Asia](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#)

All Global Research articles can be read in 51 languages by activating the "Translate Website" drop down menu on the top banner of our home page (Desktop version).

Visit and follow us on Instagram at [@crg_globalresearch](#).

*In the wake of a remarkably successful Taliban offensive capped by the takeover of Kabul, the responses of corporate media provided what may have been the most dramatic demonstration ever of its fealty to the Pentagon and military leadership. The media did so by mounting a full-throated political attack on **President Joe Biden's** final withdrawal from Afghanistan and a defense of the military's desire for an indefinite presence in the country.*

Biden's failure to establish a plan for evacuating tens of thousands of Afghans seeking to flee the new Taliban regime made him a soft target for the Beltway media's furious assault. However, it was Biden's [refusal last Spring to keep 4,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan on an indefinite basis](#) - flouting an aggressive Pentagon lobbying campaign - that initially triggered the rage of the military brass.

The media offensive against Biden's Afghan withdrawal advanced arguments that the military could not make on its own - at least, not in public. It also provided the military with important cover at the moment when it was at its most vulnerable for its disastrous handling of the entire war.

Among the most disingenuous attempts at salvaging the military's reputation was a Washington Post article blaming the Afghan catastrophe on an over-emphasis on "democratic values" while ignoring the tight alliance between the U.S. military and despotic warlords which drove local support for the Taliban.

Playing the al Qaeda threat card

On the eve of the Taliban takeover of Kabul, [the New York Times's David Sanger and Helene Cooper fired the opening salvo](#) of the Beltway media's assault on Biden's decision. Sanger and Cooper began by acknowledging that the U.S. military had "overestimated" the results of its intervention for years, and that the failure of the Afghan government to pay soldiers for months had sapped the will to resist the Taliban.

But they then homed in on Biden's refusal to keep troops in Afghanistan for counter-terrorism purposes. Recalling that Joint Chiefs Chairman **Gen. Mark A. Milley** had tried in the Spring to compel Biden to maintain 3,000 to 4,500 troops in the country, Sanger and Cooper cited "intelligence estimates predicting that in two or three years, Al Qaeda could find a new foothold in Afghanistan."

That speculation was based on the assumption that the Taliban would allow such a development despite its well-established [record](#) of opposing al Qaeda's use of its territory to plan terrorism abroad. In fact, the Taliban's policy went back to before 9/11, when Osama bin Laden formally agreed to honor the Taliban's restrictions while secretly plotting the 9/11 attacks in Germany rather than in Afghanistan.

In the wake of the U.S. withdrawal, the Taliban has an even stronger motivation to prevent any jihadist organizations from planning international terror attacks from Afghan territory.

To support their broadside against Biden's withdrawal, the Times' Sanger and Cooper turned to the retired general with arguably the greatest personal vested interest in an indefinite U.S. military presence in Afghanistan: former U.S. commander in Afghanistan **Gen. David Petraeus**, who oversaw the war effort from 2010 through 2011 and has since led a group of former commanders and diplomats lobbying for an endless US presence in the country.

Petraeus asserted that Biden failed to "recognize the risk incurred by the swift withdrawal" of intelligence drones and close air support, and thousands of contractors who had kept the Afghan Air Force flying."

Next, Sanger and Cooper turned to Richard Fontaine, the chief executive of one of the most militaristic think tanks in Washington, the Center for a New American Security (CNAS).

As The Grayzone has [reported](#), CNAS has reaped millions in funding from the arms industry and US government institutions to advance Pentagon and military thinking inside the Beltway. Among the many Beltway media insiders that [enjoy writers in residence fellowships at the think tank](#) is the New York Times' Sanger.

For his part, Fontaine complained that the Biden administration had failed to continue providing the contractors that the Afghan Air Force depended on keep its planes in the air. But he failed to acknowledge the obvious point that contractors would be unable to function in Afghanistan without sufficient U.S.-NATO troops to provide military protection on the ground.

On August 16, after the US-backed Afghan government was eliminated, the liberal interventionist magazine, Foreign Policy, chimed in with another attack on Biden featuring interviews with "a dozen people who held posts in Afghanistan."

[According to Foreign Policy](#), current and former diplomats anonymously expressed "deep anger, shock and bitterness about the collapse of the government they spent decades trying to build." Several currently-serving officials were quoted — again off the record — about their considering resigning in protest, citing an "overwhelming sense of guilt and fear for the lives of former Afghan colleagues and local staff whom the American government left behind."

That same day, the New Yorker's Robin Wright [expressed similar anguish](#) over the

harrowing images of U.S. defeat in Afghanistan. In an article subtitled, “It’s a dishonorable end that weakens U.S. standing in the world, perhaps irrevocably,” she lamented that the United States “is engaged in what historians may some day call a Great Retreat from a ragtag army that has no air power....”

The U.S. retreat from Afghanistan, Wright asserted, is “part of an unnerving American pattern dating back to the 1970s,” starting with Reagan’s pull-out from Beirut and Obama’s withdrawal from Iraq in 2011. Echoing those insisting on an indefinite U.S. military role in Afghanistan, Wright claimed that because the Taliban had “won a key battle against democracy in Afghanistan,” the country would “again, almost certainly become a haven for like-minded militants, be they members of al Qaeda or others in search of a sponsor.”

Meanwhile, [during an August 21 panel on PBS’s Washington Week](#), Peter Baker of the New York Times, Anne Gearan of the Washington Post and Vivian Salama of the Wall Street Journal formed a one-note chorus blaming Biden’s hasty withdrawal for the crowds of anguished Afghans desperately seeking to escape the Taliban at Kabul’s airport.

The implicit - and clearly fanciful - premise of the discussion was that the United States could have somehow embarked weeks or months earlier on a sweeping program to rescue tens and possibly hundreds of thousands of interpreters and other collaborators with the U.S. military, and that it could all be done cleanly and efficiently, without triggering any panic.

A second theme pressed by the New York Times’ Baker was that Biden had been heedless of the risks of his policy to U.S. national security. Baker said Biden had made up his mind a decade ago that the U.S. must withdraw from Afghanistan and was determined to do it “regardless of what Gen. Milley and others might have warned him about the danger of a collapse.” Baker made the same argument, along with the others embraced by his big media colleagues, in a long-winded [August 20 news analysis](#).

Flournoy obscures the real cause of military failure

The Washington Post’s national security reporter, Greg Jaffe, [took a different tack from most of his Beltway colleagues in his coverage](#) of the Afghanistan endgame. In an August 14 article, Jaffe implicitly acknowledged the widely-accepted fact that the war had been an abject failure, contradicting claims by military leaders. Unfortunately, the reporter offered space for one particularly credibility-deprived former official that was obviously designed to deaden popular hostility toward those responsible for the fiasco.

Among the most questionable characters to lay into Biden’s withdrawal strategy was Michelle Flournoy, who was expected to be appointed as the next Secretary of Defense until Biden froze her out because of [her role in advocating the failed troop surge in Afghanistan](#) during the Obama administration.

Flournoy had been Obama’s Undersecretary of Defense for Policy and was responsible for supporting the commanders in the field from the Pentagon. Prior to that role, she co-founded CNAS, the arms industry-backed, Democratic Party-affiliated propaganda mill for the Pentagon and military services.

In a revealing interview with the Post’s Jaffe, the former Pentagon official blamed the failure of the U.S. war in Afghanistan on an excessive commitment to “democratic ideals,” arguing

they supposedly blinded the policymakers to the realities on the ground. It all started, she claimed, with “the Afghan constitution that was created in Bonn and...was trying to create a Western democracy.” The policymakers set the bar “on our democratic ideals, not on what was sustainable or workable in an Afghan context,” she added.

But the problem was not an excessive U.S. concern for promoting democracy, but the way that U.S. policy sold out “democratic ideals” to support a group of warlords who represented the essence of anti-democratic despotism.

In explaining the Obama administration’s decision to more than double the totals of U.S. troops, Flournoy claimed that she and other U.S. officials only discovered the festering wound of Afghan corruption when it was too late, fatally dooming the military strategy. “We had made a big bet only to learn that our local partner was rotten,” she insisted.

However, Flournoy deliberately obscured the crucial fact that the U.S. war was based from its very inception on an alliance with a group of corrupt and murderous warlords. The military leadership, as well as the CIA, relied on the warlords because they had militias and were ready to oppose the Taliban. The warlords offered a steady supply of militiamen as police in the provinces and were given [well-paid contracts to provide security](#) for the constant flow of convoys to and from U.S. and NATO bases.

But the militia-police maintained their loyalty to their respective warlords, rather than to any civilian government in Kabul, and in return were given a free hand to steal from Afghans, falsely accuse them of crimes, torture them and release them only for a ransom. In many cases, the police extorted money from local families by abducting and raping their wives, daughters and sons — a pattern of abuse [documented by Amnesty International](#) as early as 2003.

The Taliban easily ousted the U.S.-supported regime from large parts of Afghanistan’s Helmand province beginning in 2005-06 because of the local population’s hatred of the lawless warlord militias designated by the U.S. military as police. And when U.S. troops re-occupied those districts in 2009, the militias returned to their brutal ways — including [abducting and raping pre-teen boys](#), prompting bitter complaints from the local residents to the U.S. marines and threats to support the Taliban if the U.S. didn’t intervene to stop them. But the U.S. military never moved to disturb its cozy relationship with the warlords.

So Flournoy’s claim that senior military and Pentagon officials were unaware of the corruption of their Afghan allies until after the Obama administration’s massive commitment of troops is simply devoid of credibility. When she and other key policymakers made their “big bet” later in 2009, they were fully aware that the U.S. was backing a group of powerful warlords whose militia-police were committing heinous abuses against the population that forced Afghans to support the Taliban as their only defense.

The patent falsehoods peddled by the Beltway press corps in response to the Biden withdrawal reveals just how tightly they have become linked to the interests of the military and Pentagon. And its flamboyant opposition to a pull-out favored a solid majority of the American public is yet another factor that will accelerate the decline of an already cratering corporate media.

*

Note to readers: Please click the share buttons above or below. Follow us on Instagram, @crg_globalresearch. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

Gareth Porter is an independent investigative journalist who has covered national security policy since 2005 and was the recipient of Gellhorn Prize for Journalism in 2012. His most recent book is *The CIA Insider's Guide to the Iran Crisis* co-authored with John Kiriakou, just published in February.

Featured image is from TheFreeThoughtProject.com

The original source of this article is [The Grayzone](#)
Copyright © [Gareth Porter](#), [The Grayzone](#), 2021

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Gareth Porter](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca