

By Failing to Deliver, Biden, Like Trump, Further Undermined Global Trust in US

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It is ironic that former US president George W. Bush, who invaded Afghanistan in 2001, should criticise incumbent Joe Biden for withdrawing US troops from that country, leaving it wide open to a resurgent Taliban. In an interview last month with Germany’s Deutsche Welle, before the Taliban offensive had achieved its current momentum, he predicted “the consequences are going to be unbelievably bad and sad”, particularly for Afghan women, translators and contractors who worked with the US. “It seems like they’re just going to be left behind to be slaughtered by these very brutal people. And it breaks my heart.”

These are mawkish words from the man who, without provocation, invaded and occupied Iraq in 2003 before Afghanistan had been secured from a Taliban return. Instead of wrecking Iraq and promoting instability in the Eastern Arab World, Bush should have tackled US ally Pakistan which fostered, financed and fielded the Taliban before and after the US occupation of Afghanistan. He and none of his successors followed this prescription. Hence, the Taliban is back and advancing on multiple fronts in Afghanistan.

Biden did not need to abide by his predecessor’s decision to withdraw US forces, precipitating the pull-out of all NATO contingents from Afghanistan. If Biden had been pragmatic, instead of trying to court US voters, he would have stayed on, examined why Afghan forces remain ill-prepared to defend their country after 20 years of US tutelage, and remedied the situation with the aim of withdrawing in years to come. Biden mistakenly took the view that once Donald Trump proclaimed the abandonment of Afghanistan, this was written on stone. Biden’s pull-out could be a war crime if it leads to the mass slaughter, repression and exodus of Afghan civilians, just as Bush’s war on Iraq was a war crime.

Biden wisely did not maintain Donald Trump’s foolish withdrawals from the Paris climate change accord and the World Health Organisation (WHO). Both these decisions were disastrous. Due to Trump, the world lost four crucial years in the campaign to limit global warming, leaving us all at the mercy of unprecedented heat waves, cold snaps, cyclones, tornadoes and fire storms from flaming forests. Thanks to Trump, the WHO was financially stretched and crippled when it needed vast resources to combat the COVID-19 pandemic as it spread around the world. Trump also empowered anti-vaxers who have convinced millions

of people to reject the vaccines which could save lives and slow and, ultimately, curtail the spread of COVID.

While he strives to repair the negative impacts of these wrong-headed Trump decisions, Biden has refused to reverse a second Trump folly: his abandonment of the 2015 agreement mandating Iranian limitations on its nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief. Biden pledged to take return the US to the deal during and after his campaign but his negotiators have, instead, stalled, by calling on Iran to revert to compliance first and agree to follow-up talks on its ballistic missile programme and involvement in regional affairs.

Tehran rightly argued that Washington should act first since Trump abandoned the deal in May 2018 and Iran abided by its terms for a year in the expectation that Europe would breach US sanctions. When Europe failed, Iran enriched and stockpiled uranium in violation of limitations imposed by the deal and reduced cooperation with International Atomic Agency teams monitoring Iran's nuclear facilities.

Once they conceded that they could simultaneously recommit to the deal, the US has continued to stick to its demand to negotiate on missiles and regional activities although Iran has refused to discuss these issues. Biden's Secretary of State Antony Blinken has repeatedly warned that the talks cannot go on indefinitely although Washington is primarily responsible for the crisis caused by Trump's withdrawal and Biden's delay in re-joining the deal.

Biden has not, as promised, re-engaged with the Palestinians after Trump dismissed and ostracised them for refusing his totally one-sided "deal of the century" plan. This denied their right of self-determination and authorised Israel to annex parts of the West Bank. While Biden has partially restored funding for the UN agency caring for Palestinian refugees and other programmes, he has done nothing about Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, although its status is meant to be determined in negotiations with the Palestinians, and Trump's legitimisation of Israeli colonisation, deemed illegal under international law.

Biden's disengagement has emboldened Israel to mount yet another devastating attack on Gaza, continue colonisation, demolish Palestinian hamlets and homes, shoot and arrest Palestinians in the West Bank, and maintain its siege and blockade of Gaza, preventing its reconstruction and recovery after the May blitz.

On the regional front, since Biden took office, Israel has stepped up attacks on what it says are pro-Iranian militiamen in Syria as well as Syrian military sites and conducted cyber attacks and sabotage against Iranian nuclear and other facilities. When Iran is accused of responding by targeting two ships in the Gulf, the Biden administration, adhering to the usual double standard, has led Western powers in condemnation, called for the UN to hold Iran accountable, and, even, promised to join Israel in retaliating.

Biden's policies have left Afghans to face the Taliban once again, brought talks on Iran's nuclear programme close to collapse, continued Palestinian isolation and dangerously exacerbated rather than diminished tensions in this region. By failing to deliver, he also further undermined global trust in the US. Trump destroyed that trust by pulling out of solemn commitments, issuing unacceptable proposals and undermining the US democratic system of governance. Out of office, he continues his wrecking efforts and, apparently, plans to run again for the presidency in 2024.

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