

Bill Kaplan: U.S. veterans support Biden's ending Afghan War

Posted on Monday, Jul 12, 2021

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America's longest war is finally ending. President Biden said: "Our military mission in Afghanistan will conclude on August 31st. The drawdown is proceeding in a secure and orderly way, prioritizing the safety of our troops as they depart. Our military commanders advised me that once I made the decision to end the war, we needed to move swiftly to conduct the main elements of the drawdown. ... Nearly 20 years of experience has shown us that the current security situation only confirms that 'just one more year' of fighting in Afghanistan is not a solution but a recipe for being there indefinitely."

Although polls show most Americans back the U.S. pullout, it may surprise many that nearly a dozen U.S. veterans groups support Biden's ending the Afghan War. The conservative American Legion earlier said: "Our servicemembers accomplished their original objectives in Afghanistan long ago at great cost We understand the value of alliances and certainly favor the elimination of imminent threats. But imminent is not the same as permanent." Moreover, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America wholeheartedly support Biden, as does the conservative Concerned Veterans for America (founded by the Koch brothers). Why?

Biden explained - "We went (to Afghanistan) for two reasons: one, to bring Osama bin Laden to the gates of hell, as I said at the time. The second reason was to eliminate al-Qaeda's capacity to deal with more attacks on the United States from that territory. We accomplished both of those objectives - period." Biden emphasized: "We did not go to Afghanistan to nation-build. ... no nation has ever unified Afghanistan. No nation. Empires (British and Soviets) have gone there and not done it."

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Former Wisconsin Democrats Representative Dave Obey and Senator Russ Feingold presciently made the same points. They both spoke truth to power – Presidents Bush and Obama. Moreover, Obey and Feingold courageously wanted the war “paid for.” And, Wisconsin Democratic Senator Tammy Baldwin long ago raised similar concerns. Baldwin recently said: “I honor the service and sacrifice of the troops who served in Afghanistan, and I support President Biden’s plan to bring our service members home to their families in a safe and responsible manner. I also believe we need to recommit ourselves to doing more for our post 9-11 war veterans and their families.”

Although Trump and many Republicans support U.S. troop withdrawal and ending the Afghan War, others like Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell have issued partisan potshots. The conservative Washington Examiner said: “Republicans gear up to hammer Biden as Taliban advances” Moreover, Wisconsin GOP Senator Ron Johnson will have more loaded questions: “Are we going to sit back and just watch? Wring our hands and mourn the fact that we had made so much progress?”

However, Wisconsinite Chris Kolenda, U.S. Army Colonel Ret., Afghan War veteran, said he agreed with ending the Afghan War: “I think our presence ... was doing very little good A war that goes on inconclusively for 20 years is not acceptable.”

- Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 - 2009.