

Fall of Afghanistan Time-Line

By Pete Blaber, Former Special Mission Unit Commander and Author of
"The Common Sense Way"

- The purpose of the pages is to learn from what happened in the final days before Afghanistan fell. Those who fail to heed the lessons of history are damned to repeat them. If we can't learn from our past experiences then we can't adapt to future contingencies. If we can't adapt we will go the way of 99.999 % of species that have inhabited the planet--extinction. This isn't about politics it's about our most inherently human right: Freedom of choice to survive, thrive, and evolve.
- **Fall-Winter 2001-2002:** Less than 500 special mission unit personnel and their Afghan allies from the Northern Alliance drive the Taliban government and all of their foreign fighter allies out of Afghanistan
- **2001-2011:** American forces occupy Afghanistan. Their purpose: To Deny terrorist sanctuary in Afghanistan and prevent the enemy from conducting terrorist attacks on freedom loving people across the globe. We were fighting the terrorists overseas so we wouldn't have to fight them at home. This "foundational logic of why" was quickly forgotten by politicians and by proxy, most people across the globe.
- **22 June 2011:** One month after Osama bin Laden is killed by US Navy Seals, US President Barack Obama announces that troops will start to withdraw from Afghanistan.
- **Fall 2012:** During the Vice-Presidential debate between Joe Biden and Paul Ryan, Biden says the following: "We're out of there by the year—in the year 2014. My friend here (pointing to Ryan) and the governor (Romney) say it's based on conditions, which means it depends. **It does not depend for us [on the conditions].** It is the responsibility of the Afghans to take care of their own security." Biden said. He then added: "**We are leaving. We are leaving in 2014, period.**"
- **Note:** Although the human brain is the most complex system yet found in the universe, the way it makes sense is the essence of simplicity: It takes what we know (the knowledge physically present in our brains) and combines it with the adaptive stimulus of what's going on around us. From this neural process the "logic of why" we do what we do and choose what we choose emerges. $1 + 2 = 3$. To make sense it has to add up. When you employ a decision-making process that ignores the adaptive stimulus of what's going on around you, your decisions will never add up. You are flying in the blind and heading for a crash landing. Remember the quote as we go forward.
- **27 May 2014:** Obama announces plans for a full withdrawal of American troops by the end of 2016. **Note:** Not only did the withdrawal never happen, it never came close to happening.

- **4 November 2016:** Donald J Trump is elected President
- **21 August 2017:** President Trump meets with military advisors from Afghanistan and concludes that a “hasty withdraw would create a vacuum that terrorists... would instantly fill”.
- **2018:** General Scott Miller takes over as Commander of all forces in Afghanistan. One of the most competent, experienced, and knowledgeable commanders of US Forces in Afghanistan in 20 years. General Miller was there when US Special Operations forces routed the Taliban in 2001. He had lots of work to do during his first six months. One of his first orders of business was to quell the effects of the US Media fake news which was telling the world that President Trump planned to abandon the Afghans and Afghanistan. After speaking with President Trump, General Scott Miller reassured his Afghan partners and his own staff that President Trump had issued no such withdrawal orders.
- **August 2018:** In the ensuing months, the chief US negotiator for Peace talks met with senior Taliban officials, sometimes with General Miller present, other times without. During these meetings Miller informed Taliban leaders that even if the U.S. military were to begin withdrawing, they would continue to conduct airstrikes in support of Afghan forces as needed.
- **7 September 2019:** Trump cancels US-Taliban peace talks after the group claimed responsibility for a car bomb that killed an American soldier. President Trump then calls the head of the Taliban and warns him that if he continues to kill American troops, he will meet the same fate as Iranian General Qasem Soleimani
- **29 February 2020:** Trump announces a signed peace deal between the US and Nato allies, and the Taliban.
- **17 November 2020:** In the final days of the Trump administration, the Pentagon announces plans to **reduce troop numbers in Afghanistan from 4,500 to 2,500**, which was to be completed by January 2021.
- **Note:** What’s the logic of why they chose 2,500? It’s the minimum number of troops required to conduct what the military on the ground in Afghanistan determined was needed to prevent the vacuum-effect that President Trump was warned about in 2017. What were those tasks: first and foremost: to operate and secure Bagram Air Base (an air base as big as many US Air Force bases in the US. Bagram would become the sole remaining “base of operations” for US Forces, from which they would provide air support during and after the transition. In addition to operating and securing Bagram as an airbase, it would also provide support to the small agile special operations liaison teams so they could deploy throughout the country to support and advise Afghan Special Forces at their bases and outposts around the country. Why did the Afghans still need US military liaison teams? Courage is contagious and so is common sense,

although the Afghan Special Forces had already proven themselves to their American Special Mission Unit advisors in battle, the Afghan military was a new army that hadn't operated by itself (meaning without US units or other govt agency advisors). A key lesson learned from Viet Nam was that we should have conducted a slower more adaptive draw-down. The Afghans did not have any experience or frame of reference for how to command and control themselves as an independent organization. These liaison teams were an integral part of the drawdown because they would allow for a gradual transition that would enable the Afghan military and its Political leaders to withstand what everyone predicted would be a full-scale attack by the Taliban as soon as the American main-body pulled out. If the Afghan military could hold the Taliban off during this period they would learn that they are strong enough to defeat the Taliban in battle, while also gaining confidence and experience to operate on their own.

- **Jan 20, 2021:** Joe Biden is sworn in as President, he quickly appoints a new Secretary of Defense (former general Lloyd Austin), as well as a new National Security Advisor (Jake Sullivan). During the transition, the members of the new administration defer to the advice and counsel of the sitting Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley. **Note:** War-time commanders recognize the potential for chaos that arises whenever political administration change during on-going combat operations. The Cdr in Afghanistan General Miller asked the new Secretary of Defense and General Milley if they wanted him to fly back and brief the President on the situation in Afghanistan. Austin and Milley told him “no-no that’s our job, we’ll handle all that on this end, you stay in Afghanistan with your team.” This should never be allowed to happen to any US President again.
- **Jan 2021:** Instead of making sure the president knew as much key information about the current situation in Afghanistan, General Milley and Sec-Def Austin had other priorities. According to excerpts from the book, "I Alone Can Fix It", in the first days of Jan., General Milley was warned by ‘a retired military friend’ that President Trump and his supporters were trying to "overturn the government" after losing the election. "They may try, but they're not going to f***ing succeed," Milley told his aides, according to the book. "You can't do this without the military," he added. "You can't do this without the CIA and the FBI. We're the guys with guns." Milley referred to the Trump supporters who were protesting election results as “the modern American equivalent of brownshirt Nazi’s in the streets.” Note: Apparently General Milley’s understanding of the Constitution he swore to protect did not include the ‘right to assemble’. He has not denied he said any of the above.
- **Feb 3d 2021:** As for the Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, in his first week as Secretary of Defense he orders a “DOD-wide stand down to discuss the problem of extremism in the ranks”. Austin and General Milley met with service civilian leaders and

service military leaders to discuss the problem of extremism. During this meeting they directed the “stand down” to occur for all military units over the next 60 days, This is so "each service, each command, and each unit can take the time out to have these needed discussions with the men and women of the force," Milley said. The ‘extremism’ stand-down ended on the 3d of April.

- **14 April 2021:** Joe Biden announces to the world that all troops (and civilian contractors) will be withdrawn from Afghanistan by 11 September, the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. This edict was delivered to the Military and CIA without any explanation for the “logic of why” it made sense. The U.S. had 2,500 to 3,500 troops in Afghanistan when Biden announced the decision. “Speed is safety” Biden said as he announced his decision to override his military commanders on the ground. **Note:** Joe Biden did not consult General Miller before he made the decision. Why would you reduce your military foot-print to less than 700 when the US embassy in Kabul still had ~4,000 state department personnel on the ground? It didn’t make sense then and it doesn’t make sense now.
- **15 April 2021:** US military on the ground in Afghanistan are stunned as their Afghan military and political allies look to them for answers. The foundational logic upon which the entire withdrawal plan had been built and based was that Bagram would be the base of operations for the remaining US Forces and their Afghan Special Forces counterparts. Bagram has everything the Kabul Airport doesn’t: secure stand-off range around the entire perimeter, multiple 10,000 foot run-ways, Advanced Air Traffic Control radar, and hundreds of buildings and hangars that could be used to house and process the 86,000 Afghans who had already been Biometric vetted and registered. The 2d order effect of Bidens decision to renege on the US commitment to leaving 2,500 military forces behind was painfully obvious to all military and CIA personnel on the ground at the time: without the 2,500 troops the military would no longer have enough manpower to operate and protect Bagram airfield.
- **4 May 2021:** As expected by on-the-ground military, The Taliban were emboldened by the announcement and launched their first major offensive on the Afghan military in the Helmand province. They also attack several nearby provinces. Requests to interdict the Taliban convoys and use US ISR assets (Intel-Surveillance-Reconnaissance) were denied.
- **14 May 2021:** The massed Taliban forces continue maneuvering to other provinces in Afghanistan without so much as a single pick-up truck being obliterated. With each passing day the lack of US response emboldens the Taliban to consolidate their gains and continue moving northward toward Kabul.
- **Mid-June 2021:** After landing in DC for meetings at the Pentagon, A high-ranking member of the US military staff in Afghanistan contacted me to discuss what was going on in Afghanistan. Here’s what he said: “*Afghanistan is a shit show, we are dealing with*

a bad decision, but that part would be okay if the administration didn't try to mitigate the bad decisions political fallout on the backs of its military forces. We are in for a rough ride." "What was the bad decision?" I asked, "the pulling of the 2,500 troops and contractors which means we can't operate or defend Bagram. The administration told us that we must use the final 600 + troops to guard the US embassy and its diplomats as well as Kabul International Airport", which would now by default become the primary exfil airfield.

- **Last week of June 2021:** The US military in Afghanistan continues to send 'alternative courses of action' to the Pentagon where General Milley has taken operational control over the Afghanistan withdrawal. The Pentagon response was that "the decision was final" and that they were "super busy" with other late-breaking events. What could possibly be more important than the collapse of Afghanistan?
- **24 June 2021:** General Milley testifies alongside Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin at a House Armed Services Committee meeting, here's what he said: "I want to understand white rage, and I'm white... What is it that caused thousands of people to assault this building and try to overturn the Constitution of the United States of America? ... I want to find that out," he screams while pounding his fist on the table. **Note:** While Milley chose to focus all his energies on understanding and obsessing over his man-made-up concept of white rage, he also chose to ignore the real crisis unfolding in Afghanistan and thus did nothing to address it. The House Armed Service Committee meeting is exactly where he should have been pounding his fist on the table and screaming that we need to re-consider the decision to pull the final 2,500 forces out of Afghanistan. **Note 2:** I always write down or say out loud my first reaction whenever I read or experience a traumatic or serious situation. When I re-read the above paragraph on General Milley in the context of the fall of Afghanistan and the deaths of 13 Americans in Kabul less than two months later, the first words that came to mind were 'Dereliction of Duty'. What we have here is a leader who has his priorities upside down. He's the living breathing embodiment of someone who has made a conscious decision to water his front lawn while his house (with family inside) burns to the ground.
- General Miller and his staff continue to send updates as the situation continues to deteriorate in Afghanistan
- **One week later (2 July 2021):** The U.S. Army tells all commands (to include those remaining in Afghanistan) to prepare to administer mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations to the entire force by as early as Sept. 1st, in anticipation of full approval of the vaccines by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).
- **2 July 2021:** The US quietly withdraws all personnel from Bagram Air Base. On the ground the Afghan military was confused and life or death concerned. 'How can we operate without Bagram?' one of the Afghan Special Forces leaders asked his trusted US

advisor. The advisor couldn't answer so he just shook his head in embarrassment and said nothing.

- **July 12:** General Scott Miller is unexpectedly told to relinquish command and return to the United States to prepare for retirement. General Miller had overseen U.S. and NATO forces since 2018, he was with me as one of the first-in back in 2001-2002 and had been in Afghanistan on and off every year since. He knew the people, he knew the culture, he knew the terrain, he knew the enemy, critically, he also knew the history. General Miller's departure is even more difficult to comprehend amid the surge in violence from Taliban militants who had launched coordinated offensives across the country. At the time the administration tried to spin it as 'prudent' due to the imminent threat, but this is contradicted by the fact they left the US Ambassador and his massive and defenseless staff on the ground in Kabul.
- **Note:** Just as Biden's decision to renege on the 2,500 stay-behind troops was responsible for the inability of US forces to run or operate Bagram, the Pentagon's decision to recall General Miller was responsible for sending the Afghan President and the Afghan Army Generals into full panic mode. All mammals have what are called mirror neurons, these neurons evolved to enable mammals to react quickly and avoid falling victim to predators. When one deer lifts its head and goes stock-still rigid, the other deer around it take notice. When that deer takes off running the entire herd follows suit, that's their flight of fight instincts. The human nervous system works the same way as the deer. When one human panics, everyone around them panics too. Panic like calm is contagious. General Miller was the most trusted American in Afghanistan. He had built and earned that trust over the previous 3 years. Now, he was gone. Afghan leaders were in panic mode. The fall of Afghanistan was now imminent.
- **July 13, 2021:** Afghan President Ashraf Ghani begins preparations to exfil Afghanistan (this was not done quietly). His aides mirrored his actions and every other high-ranking government and military official mirrored them all the way down to the special operations units that provided the last bullwork against Taliban victory. The Afghan Special Forces never fully trusted any of their political leaders to "have their backs." What they were witnessing now simply confirmed that mis-trust.
- **July 23, 2021:** Joe Biden speaks by phone with President Ghani for roughly 14 minutes on July 23 in what would be their final call before the Taliban overran the government and Afghanistan descended into bloody chaos. According to a transcript and audio obtained by Reuters, much of the call was focused on what Biden referred to as the Afghan government's "perception" issue. *"I need not tell you the perception around the world and in parts of Afghanistan, I believe, is that things are not going well in terms of the fight against the Taliban,"* Biden said. *"And there is a need, whether it is true or not, there is a need to project a different picture."* Biden also told Ghani that 'Afghanistan's prominent political figures — including former Afghan President Hamid Karzai — should give a joint press conference that backed a new military strategy on how to defeat the Taliban', saying:

“That will change perception, and that will change an awful lot, I think.”

- **13 August 2021:** Kandahar, Afghanistan’s second-largest city falls to the Taliban. **Note:** This was one of the trip wires that the previous plan (prior to Apr 14) had accounted for. If Kandahar falls a full military response should follow. The Taliban were now massed and out in the open. The main artery between Kandahar and Kabul is Hwy 101 which runs through the unpopulated flat-lands in the middle of the country. Military leaders on the ground saw one last opportunity to stave off an all-out Taliban victory. As the Taliban convoys began making their way north, we could have used Drones, AC-130’s, and Air Force Attack Aircraft to destroy more Taliban in a day than we had in the last 10 years of skirmishes and hit and run attacks. The Pentagon’s response was ‘stick with the plan’. Not a single bomb was dropped.
- **14 August 2021:** US President Joe Biden puts out a [statement](#) confirming the deployment of approximately 5,000 US troops to help with the evacuation from Afghanistan. He also reaffirms his desire to leave the region by Aug 31 (instead of the original date he gave the military of Sept 11). *“One more year, or five more years, of U.S. military presence would not have made a difference if the Afghan military cannot or will not hold its own country. And an endless American presence in the middle of another country’s civil conflict was not acceptable to me.”* (**Note:** why not have the 5,000 troops re-occupy Bagram? The all-out Taliban attack is no longer hypothetical. The Taliban were on the door-step of Kabul. Bagram was still empty, and we still had 86k biometrically vetted Afghans we had to get out. One reason they didn’t take Bagram is because there was no one on the ground to suggest it. After recalling General Miller and his staff there was no institutional knowledge that could credibly suggest the concept much less how to go about executing it.
- **15 August 2021:** Afghan President Ashraf Ghani leaves the country along with the US acting Ambassador. The US embassy is evacuated Kabul is seized by the Taliban. Afghanistan is now leaderless.
- **15-30 August:** Chaos in Kabul as American forces find themselves surrounded by Taliban and thousands of civilians trying to escape the imminent blood-shed. As anyone who has flown in and out of Kabul International Airport knows, it is indefensible. It has no stand-off capacity, slums butt up against one side, while the other side is overwatched by high-ground from which a few enemy with small arms could--with impunity--take down a large transport plane or a soldier in the open.
- **26 Aug. 26, 2021:** suicide bomber kills 13 members of the American military who were guarding the airfield and providing humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people.
- **18 August 2021:** The central issue quickly becomes: how did this happen and why in the world did we close Bagram? During a briefing, General Milley said that “securing Bagram requires a significant level of military effort of forces, and it would also require external

support from the Afghan Security Forces which disintegrated along with the U.S.-backed Afghan government this month as Taliban fighters swept across the country. Our task given to us at that time, our task was to protect the embassy in order for the embassy personnel to continue to function with their consular service and all that,” he said. “If we were to keep both Bagram and the embassy going, that would be a significant number of military forces that would have exceeded what we had or stayed the same or exceeded what we had,” Milley added. “So, we had to collapse one or the other, and a decision was made.” **Note:** This answer isn’t even an answer, its more like a salad of senselessness. With regards to the ‘disintegration’ of the Afghan Special Forces, they did not ‘disintegrate’, once they realized they were leaderless they simply fell back in order to fight again another day.

- **26 August 2021:** During his press conference following the terrorist attack in Afghanistan that killed 13 U.S. servicemembers, President Biden blamed his generals for the decision to leave Bagram Air Base behind and did not deny reports that his administration gave the Taliban a list of Americans stranded in the region.
- On the issue of Bagram Air Base, President Biden said that he made the decision to essentially abandon the location upon his generals’ advice: “*On the tactical questions of how to conduct an evacuation or a war, I gather up all the major military personnel that are in Afghanistan, the commanders, as well as the Pentagon, and I ask for their best military judgment. They concluded, the military, that Bagram Air Base was not much value-added, that it was much wiser to focus on Kabul. So I followed that recommendation.*”
- **Note:** Biden never gathered the commanders on the ground and asked them “what's your recommendation?” before making his fateful decision to renege on our commitment and common-sense plan to leave 2,500 forces behind and prevent the “vacuum effect” that every commander warned of going back to 2017. Additionally, he never once spoke with General Miller during the months leading up to the Taliban takeover. Perhaps he didn’t have time, the white house log shows that he works less than 4 hours per day. Instead, Biden solely depended on the advice of General Milley and Sec-def Austin who were also advising him on the administration top priorities: learning about the made-up concept of white rage, teaching our troops about CRT and extremism in the military, and of course mandatory vaccines.
- Despite Bidens, Milleys, and Austin’s efforts to deflect blame, the time-line of events reveal the irrefutable truth.
- Lesson Learned: Leadership matters. The time-line of the decisions leading up to the collapse of Afghanistan reveal that the key leaders involved lack some of the most important qualities needed by those who lead and govern: discernment, wisdom, prudence, the ability to listen to their people and anticipate unfolding events, the

capacity to make the right decision based on incomplete information, and the flexibility and willingness to change their mind based on “the adaptive stimulus of what's going on around them.” To put it in simple terms, Joe Biden, the Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, and General Mark Milley lack common sense and the ability to make decisions and solve complex problems.

- **Note:** This timeline is a living document, as key information continues to come out we will update the time-line as appropriate