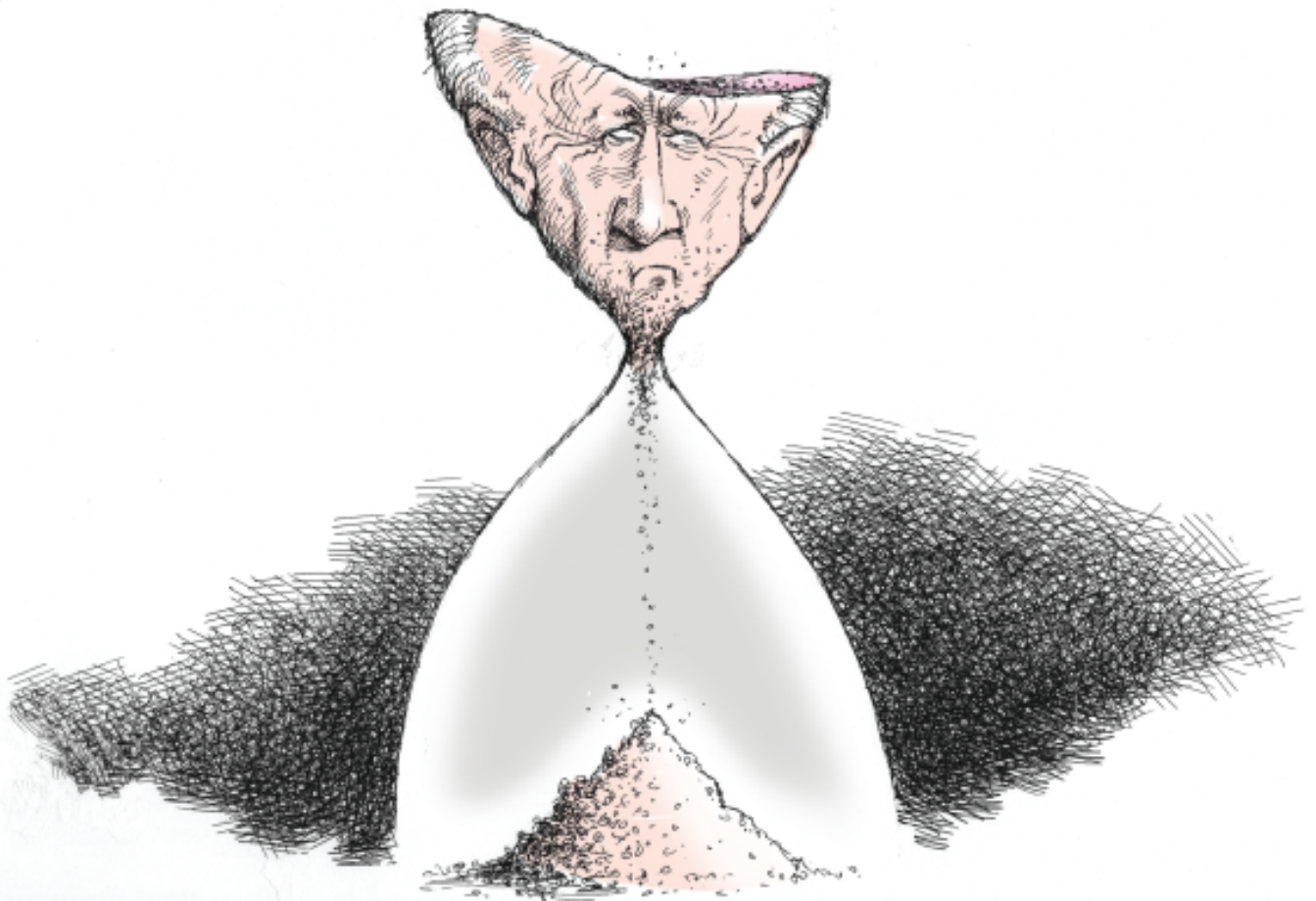


BIDEN'S FAILED RESPONSE TO THE FALL OF AFGHANISTAN

Carl Golden, August 25, 2021

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As the world watches, the United States effort to withdraw the military from Afghanistan and evacuate Americans has turned into a political, diplomatic, and public relations disaster. It threatens to define the Biden presidency, undermine its legislative agenda and become a dominant issue in the 2022 Congressional midterm elections.

In the run up to the withdrawal, the Biden strategy seemed to be:

- Order the military draw down by Aug. 31, fulfilling a campaign promise to leave the country after 20 years of warfare.
- If the effort collapses, blame former President Trump for negotiating a lousy deal with the Taliban in the first place.

- If the effort succeeds, take a victory lap, soak up the credit for ending a conflict and satisfying a war weary nation.

When television screens filled with horrific images of desperate Afghans storming the airport, climbing aboard airplanes and clinging to handholds only to fall to their deaths, the administration appeared befuddled and indecisive.

The “blame Trump” narrative was quickly undercut when critics pointed out that in the early weeks of the administration, Biden had repealed dozens of his predecessors’ executive orders and mandates and could easily have exercised the same authority to delay or negate the departure agreement.

The Biden administration next turned to a “we always knew this would happen” rationale, a stunningly callous explanation that calls into question why they failed to anticipate, strategize and react decisively. No one, the administration argued, foresaw a collapse in little more than a week, despite evidence that the capability of the defense forces was highly suspect.

Biden next chose to lay responsibility on the Afghani military forces, accusing it of throwing down their arms and fleeing in the face of Taliban forces, in effect blaming the victim.

Spokespersons for both the Department of Defense and Department of State were embarrassingly inept as they bumbled their way through news conferences while attempting to convince millions of television-watching Americans the situation was under control.

In one of the more bizarre performances, a Department of State spokesperson insisted the effort was not an evacuation, but a reduction of the U.S. footprint. While he doggedly forged ahead, he was flanked by the split screen coverage of the lowering of the American flag over the embassy in Kabul while diplomatic personnel scrambled for transportation to the airport and a flight to safety.

The administration response to the rapidly changing events on the ground was a mishmash of conflicting reports, dubious explanations and confusing rationalizations which melted quickly upon harsh examination.

Biden continued to insist the decision to withdraw the military from Afghanistan was his and his alone - never has “the buck stops with me” been invoked by a chief executive more often than it has been in the past two weeks.

The president was also struck with the out of touch brush when he claimed U. S. allies had not criticized his decision when, in fact, European leaders warned of disastrous consequences, including former Great Britain prime minister Tony Blair who publicly called the president’s decision “imbecilic.”

Biden further claimed that American citizens’ access to the airport was unhampered, only to be embarrassingly contradicted on the same day by the Secretary of Defense who related instances of Americans being harassed and beaten at Taliban-manned checkpoints.

As the situation worsened, Administration officials sought to distance themselves from any responsibility. Memos and cables were leaked to the media, an unmistakable first sign they’d begun to turn on one another to cover their actions and advice.

Biden now faces extending a military presence in the country beyond the Aug. 31 deadline, a move the Taliban warned would result in deadly consequences, including, presumably, renewal of a shooting war.

Afghanistan will cling to the Biden presidency, as Richard Nixon was defined by the Watergate scandal, Gerald Ford by his pardon of Nixon, Jimmy Carter by the Iran hostage stalemate, Ronald Reagan by the Iran-Contra affair, Bill Clinton by Monica Lewinsky, George W. Bush by

the Iraq war, and Donald Trump by the siege of the U. S. Capitol.

Coming so early in his administration, the breakdown in Afghanistan will haunt this president for at least the next three years.

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