

The US retreat from Afghanistan

The news from Afghanistan is worrying. Twenty years after the first military actions by the US and her allies in Afghanistan President Biden announced a rapid withdrawal of US forces. I have no disagreement with the aim of getting out. I agree that the UK also had to leave quickly as soon as the larger US force left. We were a smaller part of a coalition force and had to think of the safety of our forces in a volatile situation. I do have a disagreement with the sudden speed of the USA planned departure, and the apparent shortcomings in reassuring the Afghan government and leaving in place enough advice and support to make their task easier.

It is surprising that given the longer term cross party aim in the USA to leave defence and policing to Afghan forces that more successful plans were not already effective for advice and training of the now considerable Afghan forces. A lot of effort had we are told gone in to allow them to handle any insurgency or violent subversion of the state. There was a good argument to say that keeping foreign forces there for too long to suppress violence could be seen by some Afghans as a provocation that helped recruit more opponents against democratic government. There was an even better argument that at some point to prove Afghanistan has become a self sustaining democracy it has to be left to Afghan people and institutions to defend its new order and to subsume critics within a democratic system to resolve or handle differences. They can of course ask for advice or specialist help from allies, but Afghan forces should take full responsibility for law and order.

Russia and now NATO have found Afghanistan a difficult place for operations. President Biden seems to lack a clear vision of what if any role he wishes the USA to assume in the Middle East. We know he is not as pro Israel and as anti Iran as President Trump, but we do not yet know what he is trying to achieve and how he sees the new threats instability bring in the region.