

POINT/COUNTERPOINT: Was the Afghanistan war worth it? The gains, losses and uncertainties of the United States' longest conflict

EDITOR'S NOTE: For the past month the Illinois Business Journal has gathered reactions to the debate over the pullout from Afghanistan from across the political spectrum. Here is a sampling of voices from the debate.

U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin, D-Ill.: "President Biden understands history when it comes to Afghanistan. He made the difficult decision to not hand over this longest of American wars to a fifth president. And had he walked away from the withdraw agreement originally negotiated by President Trump, Taliban attacks on U.S. forces would have restarted and required yet another surge in U.S. troops. How long were Americans willing to continue this cycle, particularly if the Afghan government wasn't willing to fight for its own future?"

"This endless cost in American lives and taxpayer dollars was not sustainable. And while good people can have honest debates about U.S. policy in Afghanistan, those who sat silently when Donald Trump pursued a hasty U.S. withdrawal and now cry howls of outrage reek of hypocrisy.

"We must ensure we bring all Americans, including Mark Frerichs, safely home. And we must also keep our commitment to help those Afghans who helped the U.S. effort to safely leave as well."

Michelle Dunkley, a member of the U.S. Air Force, deployed in 2016. "I think the exit should have been different. After 20 years, that's a whole generation of people. There are young Afghans I met there who looked up to the American mili-

tary. They wanted to work with Americans. There was a good living and a standard of life. Now it's gone." As told to the BBC

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign political science professor Nicholas Grossman, the author of "Drones and Terrorism: Asymmetric Warfare and the Threat to Global Security": "Americans rarely care that much about foreign policy, paying more attention to domestic politics, and many are now focused on the pandemic. According to polls, over two-thirds of Americans support withdrawing from Afghanistan, including majorities of both Democrats and Republicans. It's headline news now, and the foreign policy and national security communities will debate it for years. But the general public appears more interested in moving on, and likely won't pay attention unless there's an attack on Americans in the future.

Professor Gary Solis, a former U.S. Marine company commander and a longtime professor of law of war, including at Georgetown University and West Point. "I think that this war will be remembered as evidence that republic and democracy is seldom a successful export. And if one were a cynic, one might say that it will be remembered as America's dominion in retreat." As told to NPR.

Former Cpl. William Sutton of Illinois: "I'm starting to feel like how the Vietnam vets felt. There was no purpose to it whatsoever ... We were able to hold our head up high and say we went to the

last Taliban stronghold and we gave them hell, only for it all to be taken away. In the blink of an eye." As told to military.com

Dr. Nazanin Azizian, of the Harvard Kennedy School, the public policy school of Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass: "After the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, U.S. foreign policy focus shifted to combatting and defeating terrorism, predominantly in the Middle East and Africa. These missions would cost nearly \$5.4 trillion and approximately 15,000 American lives.

"Unfortunately, the shortcomings of the U.S. war on terror policies over the last 20 years have repeatedly prevented the U.S. from achieving its envisioned outcomes of defeating terrorism and reshaping fragile regions in its own image. The United States' inability to achieve its desired definition of success in its missions against terrorism has not been due to challenges by more powerful and strategically savvy enemies. Nor has it been due to insufficient expenditure of resources, nor to a lack of war-fighting experience. Instead, the lack of success has been far more due to shortcomings of U.S. foreign policies themselves. They have entangled the U.S. in protracted wars on terror and hindered its ability to secure its own interests in these conflicts."

Congressman Rodney Davis, R-Taylorville: "This situation was completely avoidable. Regardless of the decision to withdraw, the way in which President Biden has conducted this

withdrawal has been an absolute disaster. The deaths of our troops and Afghan civilians are a direct consequence of the President's botched, rushed withdrawal. His attempts to meet an arbitrary, political deadline has cost American lives."

Congressman Mike Bost, R-Murphysboro: "The Biden Administration announced that the last American military plane had left Afghanistan and claimed that this puts an end to 20 years of war. However, they acknowledged that there are still hundreds of Americans that were left behind. This is unacceptable. While the President and Speaker may not have a plan, House Republicans will continue to do all we can to ensure that every American makes it home safely."

U.S. Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Illinois: "Now that our airlift operations have concluded and the next phase of evacuation without U.S. troops on the ground begins, the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee should quickly begin investigating the rapid collapse of the Afghan government and forces after two decades of American investment of resources and troops, and why we were unable to better anticipate it. I will push for that investigation to be both swift and comprehensive, and moving forward I will do everything in my power to ensure the mistakes made by Administrations of both parties — as well as Congress — over the last 20 years that made this evacuation necessary in the first place are both learned from and never repeated."



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