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## [Intel Heads Should Roll for Predictable Afghanistan 2021 Errors](#)

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### **NO EMBEDS, NO HUMAN ASSETS TO FIND OUT ONSITE COLOSSAL AFGHANISTAN ERROR; INTEL HEADS FROM TOP SHOULD ROLL**

By Robert Weiner and Adjanni Ramos

The year 2021 is now marked in history as the year the US finally pulled its troops from Afghanistan. While the decision to leave was fine, the shadow left behind includes the unexpected and quick and total takeover by the Taliban, plus outrageous discrimination against women.

As good as the decision by the Biden administration to leave Afghanistan after 20 years was, how is it possible our intelligence failed our military leaders the way it did? Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley insisted the intelligence was solid on a "collapse" that "ranged from weeks... to years." However, it turned out to be just days. Everyone now knows the intelligence failed while the world watched. How did the president and military leaders not know the Taliban would bribe and threaten their way to power, starting months earlier in all the individual provinces?

Sen. Mitt Romney (R-UT) said, "The Taliban was running the table throughout Afghanistan, that the prospect of them continuing to run the table by coming into Kabul was a significant probability that should have been planned for."

US intelligence should have been able to easily deduce Zamadi Ahmari's car was not carrying bombs before drone strikes killed him and everyone around him. At the very least it should have given our military real-time information on the agreed-to cave state of the Afghan military. It has only failed us, as also happened with 9/11, and with no WMDs in Iraq. The fact is, our intelligence reputation has been decimated on the world stage, and our allies cannot count on it.

Employing no embeds, no human assets, in the provinces onsite to know about and understand the agreements for the caves with almost no shots fired, even finally in Kabul and in the president's offices, were colossal errors in judgment, and intel heads from the top should roll.

It is disingenuous that Milley, a Trump holdover, would assert that US intelligence never expected such a quick disintegration of the Afghan government. He insisted "the time frame of a rapid collapse, that was widely estimated... ranged from weeks to months, and even years, following our departure." At the congressional hearing on Sept. 28, General Kenneth McKenzie admitted to Rep. Don Bacon (R-Nebraska), "I did not see it coming as fast as it did. I thought that it would be a matter of into the fall or into the winter. I did not see it happen in 11 days in August."

Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with the current Afghanistan prime minister and Taliban co-founder, Adul Ghani Baradar, and did a photo-op with him on Feb. 20 of last year. In the Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America, we agreed for the Taliban to begin peace talks with the Afghan government and for the US to compel the "unity of the country, and promote social and economic advancements and the rights of citizens," and to completely pull out of Afghanistan by May 1, 2021. The Taliban then bribed every provincial and local government to not attack them when they took over and attacked or threatened any province that disagreed. We announced our date, so the Taliban set the process in motion. When the date was changed to August, the process was already underway and the Taliban takeover was already inevitable.

With no embeds or spies in the provinces, US intelligence did not know that the province of Kandahar - where officers were told not to shoot the incoming Taliban - would cave without a bullet. They did not realize this pattern was true everywhere.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin admitted during the Sept. 28 hearing that, "The fact that the Afghan army that we and our partners trained simply melted away, in many cases without firing a shot, took us all by surprise," and the U.S. did not anticipate "the snowball effect caused by the deals that the Taliban commanders struck with local leaders." How did we not have people on the ground who would have been talking to any of the provinces, at which point we would have found out about that one and the others sooner? Did we not have anyone on the ground who wouldn't have miscalculated the entrance to Kabul, and would have known that it was going to be two days, not two weeks or months?

When Milley said no one expected it to disintegrate in 11 days, and others repeated it - including Secretary of State Antony Blinken - whom are they kidding? If we did not know, it's only because we did not know what the entire Taliban and every province in Afghanistan knew, that the deal was done. After the Doha Agreement of Feb. 29, 2020, the Taliban began boasting their advantage over negotiations and offering bribes to officers who surrendered their weapons, as military morale slowly diminished.

A retired, twenty-year veteran of the CIA told us he was shocked that we blew it and did not have human personnel to be embedded in the provinces and give us intel, the same way that we blew the WMDs in Iraq.

This is not our first major intelligence failure, both in this and previous years. On Aug. 29--amid the evacuation from Kabul and days after a suicide bomber killed 13 Americans--the US launched a drone strike on Zamadi Ahmari's car. Ahmari was a humanitarian, whose water-filled jugs were confused for explosives on the way to Kabul. This intelligence failure would be less disastrous if the blast, from the twenty-pound Hellfire missile that killed Ahmari, had not also killed two adults and seven nearby children.

In the months leading up to 9/11 the Bush administration was given several memos by the intelligence community that al Qaeda would infiltrate and attack the US using high explosives, which resulted in a Presidential Daily Brief titled "UBL (Usama Bin Laden) Threats Are Real." Years before, Saddam Hussein held up a foot of documentation, showed it to the UN, and said Iraq had gotten rid of all WMDs, and no one wanted to believe him. So our intelligence has egregious errors and has for decades.

On Afghanistan, Avril Haynes, the head of the DNI, must answer. William Burns, the head of the CIA, must answer. And when the answers are insufficient, it's time for new people.

On Sept. 28, following the drone strike of Ahmari's car, MSNBC's Stephanie Rhule asked "Why should the American people trust, that the United States still has the intelligence necessary to keep us safe?" Where was our intelligence to know the Afghanistan deal was done? Don't say "no one knew." For Milley to say no one expected 11 days and not acknowledge that he was part of the Trump administration when Pompeo met with the Taliban to set the deal up, is disingenuous.

*Robert Weiner was a spokesman in the Clinton and George W. Bush White Houses. He was Communications Director of the House Government Operations Committee, and Senior Aide to Four-Star Gen/Drug Czar Barry McCaffrey and Reps. John Conyers, Charles Rangel, Claude Pepper, and Ed Koch. Adjanni Ramos is a Policy and Research Analyst at Robert Weiner Associates and Solutions for Change*