

Leaving Afghanistan – One Year Later

The VFW marks the anniversary of US withdrawal from its longest war

Aug 30, 2022

WASHINGTON — We all knew the war had to come to an end, but as the world watched the U.S.'s chaotic and heart-wrenching withdrawal from Afghanistan, we never expected it to end that way.

Today marks the one-year anniversary of the end of the longest war in U.S. history. From the U.S. invasion shortly after the devastating attacks on Sep. 11, 2001, to the last U.S. Air Force C-17 that lifted off the Kabul International Airport runway on Aug. 30, 2021, approximately 800,000 American military men and women served in Afghanistan. It is estimated that the U.S. had spent more than \$2 trillion during the course of the war. The U.S. and its NATO partners helped the Afghan people set up a new government, establish its own security forces, hold elections, open schools, build roads, and allow for commerce and communication to flow. So when it was announced that the U.S. would withdraw by the end of August 2021, it seemed like the Afghan government would be able to maintain the momentum built since they were freed from Taliban rule almost 20 years before. What happened in August last year was probably only imagined on a military planner's PowerPoint slide, saved as a backup in case a commander wanted to see what the worse-case scenario would be.

The Taliban took over huge swaths of the country as Afghan security forces collapsed without the help of U.S. support. The American bases and scores of equipment were left abandoned as U.S. troops pulled out in what seemed like a matter of days. The sheer panic of thousands of Afghans rushing to the Kabul International Airport to flee the country. People clinging to sides of U.S. military aircraft during taxi and take off, only to lose their grip and fall to their death. The Taliban terrorizing men, women, and children in the streets of the capital, and Taliban leadership posing for a photo op as they took over the presidential palace. American citizens unable to evacuate from the country. Then the unthinkable happened - a suicide bomb explodes at the airport's Abbey Gate killing 13 U.S. service members and more than 100 Afghan men, women and children. For what was supposed to be the inevitable withdrawal and noncombatant evacuation that had at least a

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year to prepare for, it was pure and utter chaos. Yet, despite all the confusion, it was because of the bravery and tenacity of American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines that close to 6,000 American citizens and more than 124,00 Afghan and other civilians were successfully airlifted out in what would become the largest air evacuation in U.S. history.

The 1.5 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and its Auxiliary would like all Americans to join us in saying “thank you” for the dedication, bravery and sacrifice of all veterans of the war in Afghanistan. For 20 years they kept Al-Qaeda from planning and executing another 9/11 style attack on American soil. They planted a seed of hope with a generation of Afghans who may have never experienced freedom without U.S. service members being there. And in the final days of the war, they saved the lives of more than 130,000 people, evacuating them to safety. We will never forget the 2,448 who laid down their lives during those 20 years for the sake of freedom. Nor will we forget the promise our country made to our Afghan partners who fought and served alongside our troops and only want a chance for a better life. America needs to do all it can to uphold its word to them in honor of every U.S. service member who sacrificed so much on behalf of the safety and security of both countries.

To our new Afghan neighbors who made it over to American soil, we say “welcome,” and to our veterans of our nation’s longest war, we say “welcome home.”

To learn more about the VFW-supported, bipartisan Afghan Adjustment Act, follow the link [here](#).