

On an iconic bridge, U.S. allies flee Afghanistan as the Soviets did.



By Andrew E. Kramer

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In a chaotic retreat from the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif in recent days, pro-government soldiers streamed onto the Friendship Bridge, seeking safety on the other bank in neighboring Uzbekistan.

The scene echoed an iconic moment from 32 years ago in the failed Soviet war in Afghanistan, when it was the final exit route out of the country for the defeated Soviet Army.

Then, red flags fixed to the armored vehicles flapped in a winter wind as the departing Soviet troops drove and marched across the bridge on Feb. 15, 1989. That movement was meant to signal an organized, dignified exit after a decade of occupation and defeats.

The Biden administration had made a point of avoiding a similar ceremonial scene for the U.S. Army in Afghanistan, a notion hardly imaginable now given the rapid collapse of the U.S.-backed government on Sunday.

And the retreat on Thursday over the Friendship Bridge of soldiers loyal to the American-backed Afghan government, which collapsed just three days later, was chaotic.

Andrew E. Kramer is a reporter based in the Moscow bureau. He was part of a team that won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize in International Reporting for a series on Russia's covert projection of power. @AndrewKramerNYT