

Lawmakers from both parties express fury over the withdrawal from Afghanistan.



By Catie Edmondson

Aug. 17, 2021

President Biden's unapologetic defense on Monday of his decisions in Afghanistan rallied some Democrats to his side, but the president still faces angry and increasingly public criticism from lawmakers in both parties over the chaos descending on Kabul.

After leaving the White House largely undefended, some Democratic leaders voiced tentative support after the speech.

"President Biden understands history when it comes to Afghanistan," said Senator Richard J. Durbin of Illinois, a member of Democratic leadership. "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."

But other lawmakers were unmollified. Many moderate Democrats remained furious at the Biden administration for what they saw as terrible planning for the evacuation of Americans and their allies. Liberal Democrats who have long sought to end military engagements around the world still grumbled that the images out of Kabul were damaging their cause.

And Republicans who months ago cheered for former President Donald J. Trump's even faster timetable to end U.S. military involvement in the nation's longest war have shoved their previous encouragements aside to accuse Mr. Biden of humiliating the nation.

"America's two-decade involvement in Afghanistan has had many authors," the leader of the Senate Republicans, Mitch McConnell, said. "So have the strategic missteps made along the way. But as the monumental collapse our own experts predicted unfolds in Kabul today, responsibility rests squarely on the shoulders of our current commander in chief."

If Mr. Biden expected the bipartisan consensus on withdrawal from Afghanistan to protect him from criticism, he will most likely remain disappointed — at least for now.

"We didn't need to be in this position; we didn't need to be seeing these scenes at Kabul airport with our Afghan friends climbing a C-17," said Representative Jason Crow, Democrat of Colorado and a former Army Ranger who served in Afghanistan. "We should have started this evacuation months ago."

Representative Seth Moulton, Democrat of Massachusetts and a former captain in the Marine Corps, said that for months, he had been asking the administration to provide a refugee plan. "I was very explicit: 'We need a plan. We need someone in charge,'" he said. "Honestly, we still haven't really seen the plan."

"They had weeks of opportunity. They had an amazing coalition of liberal and conservative lawmakers who were willing to support the administration in this effort," Mr. Moulton, who serves on the Armed Services Committee, continued. "In my mind this was not just a national security mistake, but a political mistake, too."

Jonathan Weisman contributed reporting.

Catie Edmondson is a reporter in the Washington bureau, covering Congress. @CatieEdmondson