

Biden Meets With President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan &gt;

## Biden meets President Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan at the White House.



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President Biden pledged on Friday to Ashraf Ghani, the Afghan president, that the United States would support a safe future for Afghanistan, a country increasingly threatened by a violent insurgency as American and international troops withdraw.

The Biden administration has assured Afghanistan's leaders that it will continue to provide security, diplomatic and humanitarian assistance, even as the Taliban advances on Afghan government forces.

"Our troops may be leaving, but support for Afghanistan is not ending," Mr. Biden said.

He also pressed Mr. Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, the chairman of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation, to unify the country's power brokers to stave off the Taliban.

"They're doing important work trying to bring about unity among Afghan leaders across the board," Mr. Biden said. "Afghans are going to have to decide their future, what they want."

He added that the "senseless violence has to stop."

Mr. Biden's decision to withdraw American troops by Sept. 11 is one of the most consequential of his presidency so far. And despite the worsening security situation, gloomy intelligence reports and the likelihood of terrible images of human suffering, his message remains clear, officials say: The U.S. military is leaving.

"It won't be a happy conversation," said Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the Wilson Center, a think tank in Washington. "While Kabul has accepted the fact that U.S. forces are leaving, it's tough to swallow given that the withdrawal is playing out against an unprecedented Taliban offensive."

At the White House, Mr. Biden sought to reassure Mr. Ghani with \$266 million in humanitarian assistance and \$3.3 billion in security aid. The administration will also send oxygen supplies and three million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to Afghanistan, where fighting has hampered efforts to combat the coronavirus.

A small embassy security force will also stay behind.

"He was very clear that if we did not pull our troops, withdraw our troops from Afghanistan — something that he has long talked about having an interest and desire to do — the Taliban would have been shooting at U.S. troops again," the White House press secretary, Jen Psaki, said on Friday.

The financial commitment buys Mr. Ghani's administration "a little bit of space and authority with everybody now who is jockeying and saying, 'Can the central government protect me or do I need to completely break?'" said Jason Dempsey, an adjunct senior fellow at the Center for New American Security.

### Understand the Taliban Takeover in Afghanistan

**Who are the Taliban?** The Taliban arose in 1994 amid the turmoil that came after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan in 1989. They used brutal public punishments, including floggings, amputations and mass executions, to enforce their rules. Here's more on their origin story and their record as rulers.

In the Oval Office, Mr. Ghani expressed gratitude.

“We’re entering into a new chapter of our relationships where the partnership of the United States will not be military, but comprehensive regarding our mutual interest,” he said, adding that Afghan security forces had retaken six districts on Friday.

A day earlier, Mr. Biden said his administration would begin relocating tens of thousands of Afghan interpreters, drivers and others who are at risk of retaliation for working with American forces, and who have faced bureaucratic delays in obtaining special visas to provide them sanctuary in the United States. Ms. Psaki confirmed on Friday that people in the pipeline for visas would be eligible even if they had fled Afghanistan.

Military planners and intelligence analysts have come to agree that the Taliban’s growing strength and the planned withdrawal mean the Afghan government will probably fall in six months to two years.

Asked about that intelligence, Mr. Ghani smiled and said, “There have been many such predictions, and they have all proven — turned out false.”

But he also said Afghanistan was entering an “1861 moment,” a reference to when President Abraham Lincoln entered a besieged Washington and ultimately saved the United States.