

Some former Trump allies say his Taliban deal laid the groundwork for chaos.



By Michael Crowley

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In February 2020, eager to remove American troops from Afghanistan by the end of his term, President Donald J. Trump struck a deal with the Taliban: U.S. forces would leave in return for Taliban promises not to harbor terrorists and to engage in direct negotiations with the Afghan government.

Mr. Trump's secretary of state, Mike Pompeo, attended the signing ceremony in Doha and posed for a photo alongside the Taliban leader, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar

Some former senior Trump officials now call that agreement fatally flawed, saying it did little more than provide cover for a pullout that Mr. Trump was impatient to begin before his re-election bid. They also say it laid the groundwork for the chaos unfolding now in Kabul.

"Our secretary of state signed a surrender agreement with the Taliban," Mr. Trump's second national security adviser, H.R. McMaster, said of Mr. Pompeo in a podcast interview on Wednesday. "This collapse goes back to the capitulation agreement of 2020. The Taliban didn't defeat us. We defeated ourselves."

The photo of Mr. Pompeo resurfaced this week on social media as the Taliban asserted control of Afghanistan. Mr. Baradar is widely expected to become the head of a new Taliban government based in Kabul.

In an interview with CNN on Wednesday, former Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper said that while President Biden "owns" the ultimate outcome in Afghanistan, Mr. Trump had earlier "undermined" the agreement through his barely disguised impatience to exit the country with little apparent regard for the consequences.

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