

# The Council on Middle East Relations



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September 24, 2021

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The Secretary  
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee  
Department of the Senate  
PO Box 6100  
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Secretary,

Please find attached a submission from The Council on Middle East Relations to the work of your Committee on Afghanistan.

Our submission focuses on a.ii, c. and d. of the terms of reference.

Yours truly

Arthur Tane  
Executive Director

## Submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence & Trade Committee on Afghanistan by The Council on Middle East Relations

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The fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban is a debacle not only for the United States but also NATO and Australia; the consequences of which will take shape fast. The Biden administration and President Joe Biden himself have an overwhelming responsibility for what is taking place and what will follow; they have shown a degree of incompetence unseen in the United States since the calamitous Carter years.

On July 8, President Biden said, "the Afghan troops have 300,000 well equipped — as well equipped as any army in the world — and an air force against something like 75,000 Taliban". A Taliban takeover of the country, he added, was "not inevitable". He was wrong. Most of the Afghan army, probably after they saw the American military pulling out of the Bagram air base, understandably decided not even to try to fight.

The "trillion dollars spent training and equipping hundreds of thousands of Afghan National Security and Defence Forces" with "advanced weaponry" has led to that US-provided "advanced weaponry" falling into the hands of terrorists it was meant to fight - a donation to what is now the world's best-armed terrorist state. The Taliban now has access to US\$85 billion advanced weapons including 75,000 vehicles, 200 airplanes and helicopters, and 600,000 small arms and light weapons, courtesy of US taxpayers.

Contrary to the latest fabrication endlessly repeated in an apparent effort to make it true - that "after 20 years, everyone wanted the US out of Afghanistan" - the US has had troops in Germany and South Korea for about 70 years - a relatively modest "insurance policy" that never seemed "forever." Ironically, by handing over Afghanistan to the same Taliban that hosted Al Qaeda, which murdered nearly 3,000 people on 9/11, including ten Australians, Biden is not only making a mockery of these victims; it will soon find itself having to fight at an even greater cost in life and treasure as countries trying to eliminate the West can now do it without American or NATO troops nearby, and with America's military equipment.

On August 15, on CNN's "State of the Union," host Jake Tapper asked Secretary of State Antony Blinken if the Biden administration was in a "Saigon moment" - the hasty 1975 evacuation by helicopter of the American Embassy in Saigon, when the city fell to communist North Vietnamese troops. "This is not Saigon", Blinken replied. It was worse. The only difference was that the embassy was in Kabul, not Saigon, and those who took the city were Islamists, not communists. At Kabul airport, for days, thousands of Afghans have been trying to board planes leaving the country. Some who clung to them while taking off fell to their death. "We've succeeded in achieving our objectives", Blinken said.

Available intelligence indicates that al-Qaeda has, in fact, never left Afghan territory; now that the country is held by their jihadist allies, its members are already reorganizing.

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President Biden and Secretary Blinken claimed that the US Intelligence community did not inform them that the Taliban could gain power in a few weeks and that the Afghan government would quickly collapse. Almost Nine months ago, however, on February 3, a report from a US Congressionally-commissioned report stated that the Biden administration would have to change its plans: "withdrawing U.S. troops irresponsibly would likely lead to a new civil war in Afghanistan, inviting the reconstitution of anti-U.S. terrorist groups that could threaten our homeland, and providing them with a narrative of victory". More warnings followed. The Biden administration went ahead anyhow.

Even though Kabul's downfall was foreseeable long before August 15, the US Embassy in Kabul seemed caught off guard. After the Taliban arrived at the gates of the city, embassy personnel began destroying documents and were transported to the airport at the last minute.

Afghans trying to flee the Taliban overran the runway, Kabul airport was plunged into chaos, and American soldiers took control of the airport. 7,000 US troops were sent back into Afghanistan in an environment more dangerous than the one the US had abandoned, one entirely controlled by the Taliban. Meanwhile, the Taliban, despite claims by President Biden, have been blocking access to Kabul airport. Those trying to reach it have been beaten by the Taliban and their passports taken. There are reports of the Taliban "with lists" going door-to-door, killing people who had worked with the US and our NATO partners.

Those Europeans and Americans left to their fate in Kabul run the risk of being taken hostage by the Taliban or other Islamist groups; they have every reason to feel abandoned by their government and terrified for their lives.

Women in Afghanistan are being raped, beaten to death, murdered for not wearing a burka, and had their eyes gouged out. "Hit lists" are being drawn up for women and children to be hunted as sex slaves or for forced marriages to "fighters".

President Biden and Secretary Blinken, as usual, blamed what is happening on former President Donald J. Trump, who had wanted the United States to leave Afghanistan, but not this way. Trump reportedly expected to leave a residual troop force in place, and apparently had a plan for an orderly military withdrawal - based strictly on conditions on the ground. These presumably included not departing in the middle of the Taliban's summer fighting season, but in winter, when they shelter in Pakistan; not neglecting to consult with America's European allies, and not surrendering the main US air base, Bagram, before evacuating Americans and their allies, whom they had promised to rescue should plans not work out.

Former President Trump seems to have understood what the Biden administration has ignored: that terrorists may not be all that susceptible to diplomacy, but to strength - as Osama bin Laden put it, "When people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by

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nature they will like the strong horse." Trump recently recounted what he had said on the phone - in front of witnesses - to Hibatullah Akhundzada, Supreme Commander of the Taliban, to help him understand what would happen if the Taliban did not honor their agreements:

"We're going to come back and hit you harder than any country has ever been hit. And your village, where I know you are and where you have everybody, that's going to be the point at which the first bomb is dropped".

Shortly after Trump hung up, the Taliban attacked Afghan forces; US jets immediately responded with an air strike, and Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen posted a Twitter message saying that the group "plans to implement all parts of the agreement one after another to prevent conflict escalation".

After Biden's inauguration, everything was different. Lieutenant General Gregory Guillot, commander of the Ninth Air Force (Air Forces Central), Southwest Asia, said that from the moment the Biden administration took control, there had been a steep decline in airstrikes. Trump maintained fighter jets and armed drones at Bagram airbase; Biden, on July 5, and without notifying the Afghan military, ordered the base evacuated. Immediately after the Americans departed, the Taliban not only looted the base and recovered US military equipment that had been abandoned, they also freed five (5) thousand Taliban and al-Qaeda members that the US military had imprisoned there.

When members of the Biden administration saw that the president's disappearance was drawing horrified reactions even from the previously slavish mainstream press, they announced on the morning of August 16 that Biden would hold a press conference in the afternoon. So, on August 16, after days of silence, Biden read a 19-minute speech saying that he stood behind his decision to leave Afghanistan, and even accused he Afghan security forces, which had sacrificed an estimated 66,000 men. Biden left the press conference without answering questions and returned to Camp David where he resumed his vacation". Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi praised his "strong leadership".

On August 11, when it became clear that the Taliban would take power, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said, "The Taliban also has to make an assessment about what they want their role to be in the international community".

The reply arrived on August 15, the day of the capture of Kabul. Taliban commander, Muhammed Arif Mustafa told a journalist:

"One day mujahedeen will have victory and Islamic law will come not just to Afghanistan, but all over the world. We are not in a hurry. We believe it will come one day. Jihad will not end until the last day."

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What caused the administration of George W. Bush to destroy the rear bases of al-Qaeda and overthrow the Taliban regime was the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US. They had been organized on Afghan soil by the leaders of al-Qaeda when the Taliban were in power. Twenty years later, there seems no reason why the Taliban would drive out the members of al-Qaeda and ISIS present in the country. Rather, Afghanistan seems poised to become a safe haven for Islamist terrorist groups, already rejoicing to see the weakness of the United States and the West doubtless perceiving it as encouragement to escalate. The risk of Islamic terrorist attacks across the globe has increased sharply.

### **Other consequences are taking shape.**

Iran, two decades ago, had bad relations with the Taliban, who were hostile to Shiites and Shiism. In 1998, when the Taliban murdered nine Iranians at its consulate in Mazar-e Sharif, Iran nearly declared war on the Taliban. That has changed. In November 2019, Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, a senior leader of the Taliban, met with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in Tehran to "help Afghan peace and security" and again met in January 2021. Now that the Taliban have regained power in Kabul, Iran is likely ready to cooperate with them. Iran, which supports Sunni Islamist organizations if they serve its aims, has been a home to al-Qaeda leaders for years, and has apparently understood for at least ten years that funding and arming the Taliban might not only allow closer relations, but also drive the United States out of Afghanistan. "We always wanted to establish relations with Iran," Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said on July 31, "because Iran has an Islamic system, and we want an Islamic system. We asked them to recognize us officially". Afghans might seek refuge in Iran; many are already present there. Iran may try to limit the amount.

Russia, for its part, probably intends to make sure that the Taliban will not try to destabilize Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan (Russia recently completed joint military exercises with troops from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan), but seems satisfied to see an American defeat (adviser to Vladimir Putin Fyodor Lukyanov said: "You can't blame Russia for feeling a little smug about what is happening in Kabul") and may well want to forge economic and strategic links with an enemy of the United States. "I have long since decided that the Taliban is much more able to reach agreements than the puppet government in Kabul", Russia's presidential envoy to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, said.

Russia happens to be an ally of both Iran and China, which signed a 25-year economic and military agreement with Iran in March 2021. China's communist regime has already announced that it is looking forward to "friendship and cooperation with the Taliban". "Afghanistan's Taliban," China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying added, "has expressed many times a desire for good relations with China... with an expectation that China will take part in Afghanistan's rebuilding and development process." Afghanistan has abundant natural resources, including a rare

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earth metals estimated to be worth more than \$3 trillion, but has no mining infrastructure.

China doubtless stands ready to make Afghanistan into a Chinese economic colony, so long as the Taliban do not attack China and its allies, or create issues with the Muslim Uyghur people whom China has been brutally suppressing in Xinjiang province. The Taliban already seem to have shown their "goodwill" towards China by giving it the means to identify Uyghurs present in Afghanistan and by helping to deport them back to China.

The Taliban victory is also a victory for China, which in the near future will most likely be the dominant country in Afghanistan as it continues to move towards the global hegemony it wants. Currently, China is reportedly in talks, which they strenuously deny, to take over the Bagram airbase, conveniently situated near Russia's former "Stans", Iran, Pakistan and China's Xinjiang province, home to its persecuted Turkic Uyghurs. Bagram's central location enabled intelligence gathering and proximity to these countries. If China succeeds in occupying the airbase, Biden - despite purported efforts to withdraw from Afghanistan to focus more on Beijing - will instead have provided CCP Chairman Xi Jinping with the run of the region.

The Taliban victory is also a victory for Pakistan, Russia and Iran, which no doubt intend to take advantage of the recent turn of events.

According to the *Washington Post*, Pakistan is more deeply linked to the Taliban's victory than the United States might care to admit. Pakistan's border with Afghanistan is "notoriously porous;" also, according to Human Rights Watch:

"Of all the foreign powers involved in efforts to sustain and manipulate the ongoing fighting, Pakistan is distinguished both by the sweep of its objectives and the scale of its efforts, which include soliciting funding for the Taliban, bankrolling Taliban operations, providing diplomatic support as the Taliban's virtual emissaries abroad, arranging training for Taliban fighters, recruiting skilled and unskilled manpower to serve in Taliban armies, planning and directing offensives, providing and facilitating shipments of ammunition and fuel, and on several occasions apparently directly providing combat support."

Pakistan has not only historically helped the Taliban militarily and strategically, it also has increasing economic, military and strategic ties with China. China, which has done nothing to curb Pakistan's support for the Taliban, can only benefit from this support.

China, Pakistan, Russia, Iran, and the Taliban have different worldviews, but do possess three things in common: they are enemies of the Western world and the United States, they want to see the West and the United States humiliated and defeated, and they want to eliminate the United States from the region.

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For months, woke Western European leaders did not criticize the Biden administration: they appeared to enjoy seeing a weak, incompetent and destructive administration at the head of the United States. Now, though, they are worried about an additional influx of migrants sweeping into Europe, renewed Russian activity against Europe, and the consequent heightened terrorist risks environment.

The people of Taiwan have every reason to be anxious. An article on August 16 in the Communist Chinese *Global Times*, an organ of the Chinese Communist Party (CPP), said:

"The DPP authorities [the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) on the island of Taiwan] need to keep a sober head, and the secessionist forces should reserve the ability to wake up from their dreams. From what happened in Afghanistan, they should perceive that once a war breaks out in the Straits, the island's defence will collapse in hours and the US military won't come to help."

Israelis also have every reason to be concerned. Commenting on Afghanistan, journalist Yoav Limor wrote:

"The implications for Israel's security will be immediate. The terrorist organizations on its borders - especially those operating under an Iranian umbrella - can be expected to become more daring."

President Trump appears to have seen that trying to transform a tribal country - ruled for centuries by warlords and mired in strict Islam - into Western democracy was most likely a doomed undertaking, and that hundreds of billions of dollars had been spent to the great benefit of freedom and opportunity for women, but that much of the of the US investment might have been in vain.

The enemies of the United States and the West doubtless see the defeat of the United States as an entirely self-inflicted one, resulting from inept decisions by American leaders unable to lead and who seem deliberately to choose incompetence.

Seeing what the Biden administration has done in just seven months to weaken America and strengthen its enemies has been nothing short of shattering. One can only hope for a change of course, a return to real leadership, before much more damage is done.

### **Taliban Recognition & Geostrategic Factors**

Any official recognition, which the Taliban may now be demanding in exchange for releasing hostages, will only embolden other Islamic and terrorist groups worldwide - including the Muslim Brotherhood and its supporter, the Qatari government - to destabilize their countries, as well as place a bounty on the head of any Westerner including Australians travelling abroad.

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A few key questions remain unanswered: Will the Biden administration cap the horror by officially recognizing a state run by known terrorists, armed to the teeth with finest military equipment, and who seem to have every intention of establishing a terrorist state?

Another question is the geostrategic factor. What now is the West's position in the future of Afghanistan and Central Asia?

With the prospect of an intensifying Sino-US rivalry in the coming decades, the shadow of the geopolitical conflict over Afghanistan between these superpowers, despite the US withdrawal, might well remain. Although the Taliban has pledged that it would not allow other groups to form and organize terrorist attacks, this promise will probably last only as long as the US and the West keeps complying with the Taliban's blackmail demands regarding the hostages and co-workers Biden abandoned.

By contrast the US pullout provides China with the opportunity to develop its excavation of rare earth minerals, such as lithium, as well as to expand its Belt and Road Initiative – both huge loss for India and the West.

Considering the proxy influence of Pakistan, Russia, Qatar and Iran among the Islamist sects of Afghanistan and Central Asia, we should expect that if these countries' interests require, they will move towards activating these satellite groups in Afghanistan against each other, as Washington has lost all access and intelligence and influence.

The Taliban and other terror groups might be used as Trojan horses to force out rivals, as Pakistan and its Inter-Services Intelligence agency (ISI), are currently doing with India. New Delhi had sought influence in Afghanistan by investing millions of dollars in the country's reconstruction plans. Strengthening India's political influence in Afghanistan would pave the way for its economic, social and cultural influence as well as helping anti-Pakistan movements in Afghanistan.

Now that the Taliban are in charge there, India does not have many levers to secure its interests there. The Taliban have close ties to anti-Hindu groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba. One of its leaders, Suhail Shaheen, recently said that the group raises voice for Muslims in "Kashmir, India or any other country." Pakistan and India had evidently transferred their conflicts in Kashmir to Afghanistan and were pursuing their threats against each other in Afghanistan at a lower cost.

Whether the situation is reversible or not depends upon the policy of the Biden Administration regarding Central Asia. At present, all policies appear in disarray.



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### Monitoring Islamic Terrorist Groups

The ability of Western security officials to monitor and disrupt the activities of Islamist terror groups will be severely diminished as a consequence of the Biden administration's catastrophic decision to end America's military involvement in Afghanistan.

One of the most notable achievements of the US-led coalition's presence in Afghanistan during the past two decades has been its relentless campaign to destroy the terrorist infrastructure of Islamist terror groups such as Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda organisation.

In the years immediately following the September 11th attacks in 2001, American and other intelligence agencies estimated that around 80 percent of Islamist-inspired terror plots against the West originated from Afghanistan or the lawless tribal territories on the Pakistani border.

Today that figure has been reduced to almost zero, as the highly successful counter-terrorism campaign mounted by the U.S. and key allies like Britain against Afghan-based Islamist terror cells has seen their infrastructure destroyed, and their ability to wreak havoc against the West curtailed.

The success of the American-led campaign has resulted in groups like al-Qaeda, as well as more recent Islamist organisations like ISIS, being forced to locate their operations to other failed states, such as Syria and Libya.

Following the dramatic collapse of the Western-backed Afghan government of President Ashraf Ghani and its replacement by the Taliban, senior Western intelligence officials are becoming increasingly concerned about their ability to continue monitoring the activities of Islamist terror cells in Afghanistan, as well as neighbouring countries.

Reports have already surfaced in recent days of al-Qaeda supporters flocking to join the Taliban as it intensified its campaign to seize control of the country through force of arms.

ISIS terror cells are also known to be actively involved in Afghanistan and have been accused of carrying out some of the most deadly attacks against civilian targets, including the 2020 joint attack on a hospital maternity ward and funeral procession in Kabul that left 56 dead and more than 100 wounded.

The fear now is that, as Western intelligence agencies are no longer able to monitor the activities of Islamist extremists both in Afghanistan and in neighbouring countries like Pakistan and Iran, the West will find itself increasingly vulnerable to high profile terror attacks as a direct consequence of Biden's disastrous withdrawal plan.

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Of particular concern for Western intelligence and security officials is the fate of Afghanistan's highly respected intelligence service, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), whose officers have played a central role in the U.S.-led coalition's long-running campaign against the Taliban and its terrorist affiliates.

Unlike Pakistan's ISI intelligence service, which has actively supported the Taliban and famously provided al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden with a safe house, the NDS has won many plaudits from American and other Western intelligence agencies for the bravery and courage they have displayed in taking the fight to the Taliban during the past two decades.

But now that the Islamist militants control the entire machinery of the Afghan government, NDS officers and their families have been abandoned to an uncertain fate by the Biden administration, one where their lives are at risk of reprisals by the Taliban.

The Taliban's dramatic seizure of power has certainly been a cause for celebration among jihadi extremists if their reaction to the power grab on social media is anything to go by.

Social media accounts sympathetic to al-Qaeda, for example, published an unsigned message shortly after the Taliban takeover congratulating "the brothers" in the movement on their victory. "Afghanistan is Conquered and Islam has won", read the message which was translated by the SITE intelligence group, which monitors extremist media.

Western counter-terrorism officials are also concerned that militant groups like al-Qaeda will be boosted after the Taliban released thousands of prisoners held at Kabul's Bagram Air Base, once the nerve centre of the coalition war effort, as well as Pul-e-Charkhi, another Afghan prison on the outskirts of Kabul.

The alarming implications, in terms of Western security, of a Taliban takeover of Afghanistan are clearly an issue the Biden administration failed to take into consideration when deciding to abandon Afghanistan to its fate. It is an oversight that adds to the scale of the disaster that Mr Biden has just inflicted on the security of the Western alliance.

### **Indian Fallout**

President Biden's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan has ruined, perhaps for decades, America's most important bilateral relationship of this era, India.

If Washington is going to deter a militant China, it needs the support of democratic India. Unfortunately, India looks like the country most immediately — and perhaps most adversely — affected by the Biden-created debacle. As a result, New Delhi could decide to side not with America but with a Chinese ally, Moscow.

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New Delhi was one of the staunchest supporters of the American-backed Afghan government and was working alongside Washington in the war against the Taliban and other insurgents. For instance, Indian intelligence was instrumental in breaking up an Afghan ring of Chinese spies working with the Haqqani Network. The Trump administration believed that the Chinese members of that ring, taken into custody last December, were, among other things, offering cash to kill American soldiers.

India saw the Afghan government as a friend in blunting extremism in neighboring Pakistan, which has always defined itself as India's enemy. Islamabad continually foments trouble in India-controlled Kashmir and has continually backed insurgents targeting India. The Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists who attacked targets in Mumbai in November 2008, for instance, came from Pakistan and relied heavily on Pakistani government resources.

The fall of the Afghan government was, therefore, a blow to New Delhi. Worse, the inability of the Biden administration to orchestrate an orderly withdrawal resulted in compounding the damage to Indian interests.

To obtain security, New Delhi had been looking toward the U.S. Consequently, Russia's and China's friends in Indian policy circles were losing influence, a trend especially evident after the Chinese incursions in Ladakh beginning in May of last year. Russia's friends were delegitimized by that event because Moscow had assured New Delhi that the movement of Chinese forces in Tibet, which occurred immediately before the invasion, was only a drill.

As a result of Ladakh and other incidents, the government of Narendra Modi had been working fast to build military ties with the U.S. In the wake of the fall of Kabul, however, relationships with Washington have been put on ice. Indian strategists who have been saying that the way forward is working more closely with the U.S. are being openly taunted by those who have a more pro-Moscow bent.

There is a reassessment going on. One possible outcome is that New Delhi works more closely with Tokyo, and possibly Canberra and Taipei. Japan, Australia, India, and the U.S. form what is known as the Quad, which up until the fall of Kabul was coming together as an effective grouping. Now, all bets are off.

Another scenario is that New Delhi decides to work more closely with Russia, reviving decades-old ties. Russia, of course, is increasingly aligned with China.

America more than ever needs India's help in ensuring peace in the ring of countries surrounding China and its surrounding waters. Now, however, India could desert America as America has just deserted India. To say there is a crisis in trust throughout Asia in current U.S. policymaking would be an understatement.

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### Taiwan

In the wake of the fall of Afghanistan, Taiwan has become the critical test of American resolve, especially as President Biden has justified the withdrawal as a strategic move to counter Russia and China. "The world is changing," he said to the American people on August 31. "We're engaged in a serious competition with China. We're dealing with the challenges on multiple fronts with Russia."

It is significant, therefore, that on August 27 USS Kidd, an American guided-missile destroyer, and USCG Munro, a Coast Guard cutter, transited the Taiwan Strait. The transits come on the heels of Vice President Kamala Harris's welcome comments in both Singapore and Hanoi on China's "bullying" in the South China Sea.

The Biden administration may in fact be willing to defend Taiwan, but that is not all that counts at this crucial time. What also counts are perceptions, and the perceptions that especially count are those in Beijing. Chinese propagandists promoted two narratives as Kabul fell: The United States will not defend Taiwan and an America unable to deal with the Taliban cannot hope to stand up to China.

Those two narratives appear to in fact reflect Chinese thinking, especially because the withdrawal from Afghanistan signalled to Beijing a complete failure of the U.S. intelligence community, the Pentagon, and the White House national security apparatus. Chinese exercises in areas adjacent to Taiwan in August and an August 13 simulated attack on Taiwan with a short-range missile are, in this context, ominous.

The other perceptions that count are those in New Delhi, which had been inching toward closer cooperation with Taiwan. Indian thinkers realized that they needed to challenge China in its peripheral seas as China was challenging India in its nearby waters. India's close ties with Vietnam are an indication that India perceives its security as dependent on an open South China Sea and even East China Sea. Taiwan, which sits at the intersection of those bodies of water, is essential in keeping sea lanes there open.

### Recommendations on Australia's response to the fall of Afghanistan

Up to the very end, the 36 nations alliance that fought in Afghanistan ignored Pakistan's role in the destabilization of that country and turned a blind eye to Qatar's openly acknowledged funding of the Taliban and Islamic terrorist organizations worldwide.

The following eight lessons point to a need for dramatic change if we in Australia want a safer better world.

First, we can never again rely on a strategy backed by intelligence assessments that leave out the actual belligerents. What Pakistan, Russia, China, Iran and Qatar were doing to us was totally ignored. Meanwhile as long as Joe Biden remains US

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President, we can no longer rely on the United States to anchor the fight against international Islamic terrorism.

Second, those nations who plan and undertake attacks as part of proxy wars need to be held to account. The best solution would be to expand national and international judicial capacity to prosecute and try members of recognized terrorist groups and key protagonists in today's proxy wars.

Third, the international sanctions regime needs root-and-branch reform. The current UN Security Council Consolidated List, which includes Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders, has become a standing joke, with Pakistan in flagrant violation of virtually every provision. Iran-backed groups remain ignored, as do extremist proxies backed by China, Russia and Qatar.

Fourth, Pakistan deserves withering sanctions. The scale of its proxy war and invasion in Afghanistan dwarfs anything Russia has undertaken in Ukraine since 2014. Every day that Pakistan escapes accountability for reimposing the Taliban on Afghanistan, the authority of the UN Charter, NATO credibility and US influence and prestige fade. As former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen has now said, it is time to "cut Pakistan loose."

Fifth, we need to increase our shared capacity to defend human rights; support independent media to engage in professional journalism; and give voice to groups, peoples and movements facing repression, proxy war or genocide. This should involve attempts to rescue the UN Human Rights Council and other existing bodies from their current torpor, while deploying additional multilateral capacity backed by democracies to counter propaganda, disinformation, dictatorship and armed conflict supported by regimes enjoying impunity.

Sixth, the international community should unanimously and vocally condemn the illegal Taliban regime, which has already engaged in war crimes, and support the Afghan resistance.

Seventh, Australia should deliver the most effective response possible to the massive and unprecedented humanitarian crisis facing educated Afghan women and religious minorities like the Christians.

Eight, radical Islam is the greatest threat to Australia since Soviet Communism. But we still have not been inclined to question any of the political or ideological pillars that have led to the current disaster. Hard counter-terrorism measures, the only ones that could break the terrorists' plans and morale, have never been taken. These would include shutting down radicalized mosques, deporting radical imams, banning foreign funding of mosques, closing toxic non-governmental organizations, draining the welfare financing jihadists, refraining from flirting with jihadists, and stopping all foreign fighters from returning home from the battlefield.

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We dismiss radical Islam as the "mental illness" of a few disturbed people. It seems that for Australia, Islamic terrorism is not real, but only a momentary disruption of its routine. We fight against global warming, malaria and hunger, and for a global world of equality. But are we not ready to go all out to fight for our culture, way of life and our values? Or have we already given up?