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Biden's 'team of sycophants' enabled Afghanistan disaster

By **MARC A. THIESSEN**

In 2014, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., took to the Senate floor to deliver a blistering speech opposing Antony Blinken's nomination as deputy secretary of state. Noting his years working for then-Vice President Joe Biden, McCain declared that Blinken was "not only unqualified" but also would be "dangerous to America and to the young men and women who are fighting and serving our country."

As evidence, McCain cited a 2013 speech in which "Mr. Blinken discussed a number of the administration's achievements, including, one, ending the war in Iraq responsibly; two, setting a clear strategy and date for the withdrawal from Afghanistan." To call these achievements, McCain said, was "Orwellian." The senator then went on to cite a series of Blinken statements that McCain said were "so divorced from reality, one can only

draw one of two conclusions: either that Mr. Blinken is abysmally ignorant or he is simply not telling the truth." He quoted Blinken boasting how "many predicted that the violence would return and Iraq would slide backward toward sectarian war," but that "those predictions proved wrong." And he cited Blinken declaring that in Afghanistan "we have been very clear. We have been consistent. The war will be concluded by the end of 2014. We have a timetable, and that timetable will not change."

"This is why I am so worried about him being in the position he is in," McCain said. If we followed Blinken's advice, he warned, "we will see the same movie in Afghanistan that we saw in Iraq," adding that "we must leave a stabilizing force behind of a few thousand troops."

Flash forward seven years: Biden is president, Blinken is secretary of state, and McCain's warning has come true.

When President Donald Trump was in office, the media were always celebrating the "adults in the room"—the presidential advisers who restrained Trump from following through on his worst instincts. To his credit, Trump sometimes invited people who disagreed with him such as H.R. McMaster and John Bolton to join his inner circle. And when his generals warned him of disastrous consequences, he modified his plans. Trump wanted to pull all U.S. forces from Syria but was persuaded to leave 900 in place. He wanted to pull out all U.S. forces from Afghanistan before leaving



office but was persuaded to leave 2,500 troops on the ground, pending a conditions-based withdrawal in May.

And when he would not listen to reason, there were people willing to put their stars on the table. In 2018, after clashing with Trump over the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Syria and Afghanistan, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis submitted his resignation.

Where are the adults in the room today? Nowhere to be found. *ABC News's* George Stephanopoulos asked Biden whether any of his advisers had pushed back on a complete withdrawal and recommended leaving a residual force of 2,500 troops in Afghanistan?

Where are the adults in the room today? Nowhere to be found.

"No. No one said that to me that I can recall," Biden replied.

That he can recall? If someone did push back, and Biden

cannot recall it, then we have a 25th Amendment problem. But if Biden is correct, and not one single person in his circle of advisers—in or out of uniform—pushed back on his plan to withdraw no matter the conditions on the ground, or made the case for leaving a residual force, then that is a shocking indictment of his national security team.

Far from a team of rivals, Biden has surrounded himself with a team of sycophants and enablers who share his worst instincts. Blinken is an ideologue who has been working toward a full Afghanistan withdrawal since he joined the Obama administration in 2009. Ditto for national security adviser Jake Sullivan. But others such as Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mark A. Milley knew better. Why didn't one of them have the courage to do what Mattis did, and resign rather than carry out a policy they knew—or should have known—would lead to the disaster we see unfolding?

In his speech seven years ago, McCain noted that former defense secretary Robert Gates famously said Biden has been "wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security issue over the past four decades."

He did not make those blunders—or this one—alone.

(Washington Post)

Educate, don't mandate

Since early 2020, the people in Marion County, like others throughout the state, have been greatly impacted by COVID-19. While we have experienced the loss of loved ones and continue to help others who are ill to recover, the people of Marion County have also demonstrated resilience and commitment to the community.

We've seen community members volunteer to help others through wildfires, ice storms and historic heat waves, all while also facing the realities of the pandemic. Through these challenging times, I've watched as our local public health officials, county and city leaders, and many community partners have worked tirelessly to get PPE into the hands of our residents and visitors. Our local leaders have collaborated with state officials to ensure vaccines are available to every person in Marion County who choose to get one.

As the elected Sheriff of Marion County, I am sworn to protect its 345,000 residents who are spread across 1,182 square miles. I recognize the many diverse communities that make up Marion County have their own unique needs, values and beliefs, something I value greatly. With this diversity in mind, I find it necessary to express how important it is we have the ability at the local level to develop a response that fits the needs of our community members.

As a resident of Marion County, I am confident in the ability of Marion County Health and Human Services to lead local response efforts to COVID-19. This confidence is vested in the proven ability of our local leaders to listen to our community members, assess our local



capabilities, and ask for additional support when needed. This preserves our ability to continue to tailor our efforts to the specific needs of our residents and visitors.

My office committed to encouraging our community members to make educated decisions to protect the health and safety of our residents and visitors in Marion County. This is something we can accomplish, not through mandates, but with communication, compassion, and while respecting the different beliefs of our diverse community.

(Joe Kast is the Sheriff of Marion County.)

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