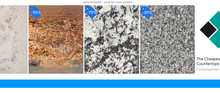

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'We lied to ourselves': UT experts assess chaos in Afghanistan after Taliban retake control

Nirvan Mullick Austin American-Statesman
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Taliban's return in Afghanistan and what it means for US involvement
The Taliban has been control of Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan. Here's what a Taliban regime means for the country and rest of the world, and the FAQs. GUY TISDIN*

Global affairs experts from the University of Texas said the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan was highly probable, if not inevitable, as President Joe Biden followed through on former President Donald Trump's peace deal.

However, they said the U.S. could have done more before the Taliban seized the country, such as better preparing the Afghanistan military and helping more translators and others who aided the U.S. leave the country.

"The main terrorists of the U.S. are not in Afghanistan right now. So leaving Afghanistan made sense," said Jeremi Suri, a professor of history and public affairs at UT. "But this humanitarian crisis and this collapse of power creates new problems, crises and environments that are conducive to terrorists and other actors moving in."

'I stand squarely behind my decision': Biden defends handling of Afghanistan as Taliban forces seize Kabul

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The Afghanistan security forces melted away as American troops withdrew despite U.S. efforts to train and fund the foreign military, which allowed the Taliban to quickly gain control of the government. U.S. officials said they did not anticipate that the military would fall so quickly, prompting Biden to send thousands of troops back to Afghanistan temporarily to help with evacuations of American diplomats and Afghans who worked with the U.S. government and military.

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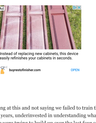

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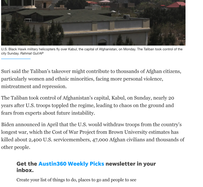
"There's no way of looking at this and not saying we failed to train the military. ... We've, over the last five years, underinvested in understanding what that means," Suri said. "The group we were trying to build up over the last four or five years was not capable of defending themselves. We lied to ourselves. If we had been more honest, we could have done other things to prepare."

'Nobody should be surprised': Why Afghan security forces crumbled so quickly to the Taliban



U.S. Black Hawk military helicopters fly over Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan, on Monday. The Taliban took control of the city Sunday. Rahmat Gul/AP

Suri said the Taliban's takeover might contribute to thousands of Afghan citizens, particularly women and ethnic minorities, facing more personal violence, mistreatment and repression.

The Taliban took control of Afghanistan's capital, Kabul, on Sunday, nearly 20 years after U.S. troops toppled the regime, leading to chaos on the ground and fears from experts about future instability.

Biden announced in April that the U.S. would withdraw troops from the country's longest war, which the Cost of War Project from Brown University estimates has killed about 3,400 U.S. servicemembers, 47,000 Afghan civilians and thousands of other people.

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Michael Mosser, an assistant professor of instruction in international relations and global studies at UT, said the Biden administration was completely taken by surprise at how the Afghan forces crumbled, but neither Biden nor Trump is exclusively to blame for the current situation in Afghanistan.

More: Chaos and deaths at Kabul airport as Afghans flee Taliban and Biden defends decision to withdraw

"Every president since 2001 bears some responsibility for what we're seeing in Afghanistan in 2021 ... but it's also not just the presidents. It's the foreign policy establishment underneath them," Mosser said. "No one president owns the whole thing. No president is blameless either."

Mosser said he doesn't expect a lot of involvement from the U.S. in the future in Afghanistan, as long as there is not a Taliban-linked terrorist attack anywhere in the world and the Taliban are contained to Afghanistan.

However, as the situation in Afghanistan continues to develop, Suri said neighboring countries, such as Pakistan and Iran, are going to see a major refugee crisis when people flee Afghanistan, which could contribute to instability in the region.

"The most important thing for American citizens to be looking at right now and paying attention to is what we are doing for all the refugees? There are going to be large numbers that are likely being brought to the U.S. and housed temporarily in U.S. military bases," Suri said. "And how do we treat them? How do we take care of them?"

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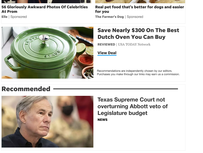

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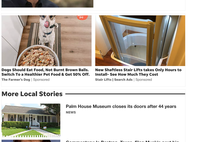

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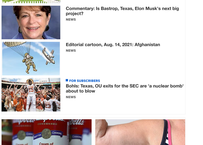

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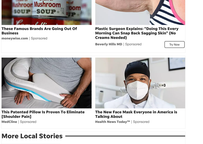

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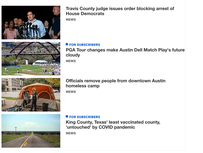

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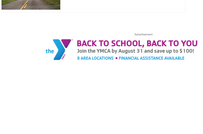

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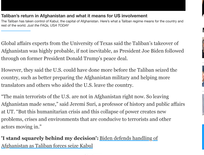

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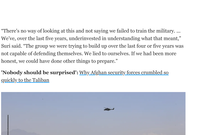

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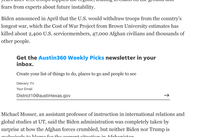

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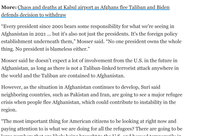

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