

Former Afghan president Karzai says U.S. failed in his country

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Former Afghan President Hamid Karzai had harsh words and uncompromising criticism of US war tactics over the past twenty years in Afghanistan [File: Reuters]

Kabul, June 22 (RHC)-- Afghanistan's former president has said the United States has failed in its two-decade mission of bringing stability to "fight extremism" and bring stability to his war-tortured nation.

In an interview with The Associated Press just weeks before the last U.S. and NATO troops leave Afghanistan after nearly 20 years, Hamid Karzai said departing troops are leaving behind a disaster.

“The international community came here 20 years ago with this clear objective of fighting extremism and bringing stability ... but extremism is at the highest point today. So they have failed,” he said.

The former Afghan president said their legacy is a war-ravaged nation in “total disgrace and disaster.” He said: “We recognise as Afghans all our failures, but what about the bigger forces and powers who came here for exactly that purpose? Where are they leaving us now?” he asked and answered: “In total disgrace and disaster.”

Still, Karzai, who had a conflicted relationship with the US during his 13-year rule, wanted the troops to leave, saying Afghans were united behind an overwhelming desire for peace and needed now to take responsibility for their future. “We will be better off without their military presence,” he said.

“I think we should defend our own country and look after our own lives. ... Their presence (has given us) what we have now. ... We don’t want to continue with this misery and indignity that we are facing. It is better for Afghanistan that they leave.”

Karzai’s rule followed the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001 by a U.S.-led coalition that launched its invasion to hunt down and destroy the al-Qaeda network and its leader, Osama bin Laden, blamed for the 9/11 attacks on the US.

During Karzai’s rule, women gained more rights, girls again attended school, a vibrant, young civil society emerged, new high-rises went up in the capital Kabul and roads and infrastructure were built. But his rule was also characterised by allegations of widespread corruption, flourishing drug trade and in the final years relentless quarrels with Washington that continue even until today.

In April, when U.S. President Joe Biden announced the final withdrawal of the remaining 2,500-3,500 troops, he said the U.S. was leaving having achieved its goals. He said that the U.S. no longer needed “boots on the ground” to fight the security threats that might emanate from Afghanistan.

Still, the US’s attempts to bring about a political end to the decades of war have been elusive. It signed a deal with the Taliban in February 2020 to withdraw its troops in exchange for a Taliban promise to denounce armed groups such as al-Qaeda and keep Afghanistan from again being a staging arena for attacks on the United States.

There is little evidence the Taliban are fulfilling their part of the bargain. The United Nations claims the Taliban and al-Qaeda are still linked.

The architect of the U.S. deal and current U.S. peace envoy Zalmay Khalilzad says some progress has been made but without offering any details.

Karzai has had harsh words and uncompromising criticism of US war tactics over the past twenty years in Afghanistan. Yet he has become a linchpin of sorts in a joint effort being launched by the US and the United Kingdom to get a quarrelsome Afghan leadership in Kabul united enough to talk peace with the Taliban. The armed group has shown little interest in negotiating and instead has stepped up its assaults on government positions.

On Friday, U.S. President Joe Biden will meet at the White House with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and chairman of Afghanistan’s High Council for National Reconciliation Abdullah Abdullah to discuss U.S. troop withdrawal amid a surge in fighting between Afghan forces and the Taliban across the country.

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