

FBI PUBLIC AFFAIRS – DIRECTOR’S AM NEWS BRIEFING

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Media Analyses: “Defiant” President Defends Withdrawal, Blames Others For Chaos. President Biden returned to Washington on Monday, and addressed the nation on the situation in Afghanistan in a speech that was commonly described as “defiant.” In addition, a focus of much of the coverage was the President’s moves to shift blame for the situation to others, such as the Afghan government and former President Donald Trump.

The [CBS Evening News](#) (8/16, 6:35 p.m. EST, story 2, 3:00, O’Donnell, 3.55M) reported President Biden “said today that staying in Afghanistan is not in America’s national security interests. The mission is to prevent another attack on the American homeland and it has been a decade since the death of Osama Bin Laden.” CBS (Jiang) added, in coverage interspersing video of the President speaking with scenes from Afghanistan, “President Biden took little responsibility for his administration’s miscalculation of how the war would end, only briefly mentioning today’s chaotic scenes at the Kabul airport.”

[NBC Nightly News](#) (8/16, 6:35 p.m. EST, story 2, 2:20, Holt, 5.72M) reported, “President Biden addressed the nation for the first time since the Taliban takeover, expressing surprise it happened so quickly, but defending his decision to end American involvement after two decades. Peter Alexander is at the White House.” NBC (Alexander) said the President was “defiant and without regret.” However, “While the President did not explain the US’s responsibility for the current chaos, he put blame on Afghan soldiers for giving up.”

[ABC World News Tonight](#) (8/16, 6:32 p.m. EST, lead story, 7:45, Muir, 6.15M) reported, “late today, for the first time, President Biden addressing the American people, saying, ‘I stand squarely behind my decision,’ but saying the truth is, this did unfold more quickly than we anticipated, saying Afghan leaders gave up, that the military there collapsed.” Later in the broadcast, [ABC World News Tonight](#) (8/16, 6:40 p.m. EST, story 2, 3:20, Muir, 6.15M) reported that Biden, “before the American people, saying the US spent more than a trillion dollars in Afghanistan, trained hundreds of thousands of Afghan forces. Saying Americans should not have to fight a war that the Afghans won’t fight themselves.” ABC (Ramos) added, “President Biden pointing fingers at his predecessor, former President Trump, who had already negotiated a deal with the Taliban, reducing the number of American troops from 15,000 to 2,500 by May 1st.” The President was shown saying, “It was only a cold reality of either following through on the agreement to withdraw our forces or escalating the conflict and sending thousands more American troops back into combat in Afghanistan. Lurching into the third decade of conflict.”

The [Washington Post](#) (8/16, 10.52M) reports the President “defended” his decision, “blaming the Taliban’s takeover on the unwillingness of the Afghan army to fight the militant group and arguing that remaining in the country was not in the U.S. national interest.” Similarly, the [Wall Street Journal](#) (8/16, Hughes, Lucey, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports that Biden acknowledged that the withdrawal has been “far from perfect,” but “took little responsibility for that.” Instead, the Journal says that he primarily blamed the Afghan forces for failing to take on the Taliban. Biden said, “If anything, the developments in the past week reinforced that ending U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan now was the right decision.”

The [AP](#) (8/16, Miller, Lemire, Boak) reports that “striking a defiant tone,” the President said he “stands ‘squarely behind’ his decision to withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan and that the Afghan government’s collapse was quicker than anticipated.” The [New York Times](#) (8/16, Shear, Weisman, 20.6M) says Biden “offered a defiant defense,” and “rejected criticism from allies and adversaries about the events of the weekend.” He “directed his ire at Afghanistan’s political leaders, saying he urged them to engage in real diplomacy,” but they “flatly refused.” [Roll Call](#) (8/16, Bennett, 130K) says that the President’s message, “delivered in an often stern tone, was one part strategic and one part defiant, as he stood by his decision to end America’s longest armed conflict while also taking jabs at political foes and trying to pin blame on Afghan troops and leaders after many top government officials fled Kabul once a Taliban takeover became a certainty.”

[Bloomberg](#) (8/16, Sink, 3.57M) says that President “offered a defiant defense,” while [Politico](#) (8/16, Niedzwiedek, 6.73M) also calls the speech “defiant,” and says the President “cast blame on his predecessor, former President Donald Trump, arguing that his administration’s hands were tied by the plan Trump set in motion last year.”

The [Los Angeles Times](#) (8/16, Stokols, 3.37M) says that President, “facing the biggest political crisis of his term, defended the chaotic withdrawal of U.S. forces.” Biden was “far more forceful in explaining his rationale for bringing U.S. troops home than the poorly executed departure, blaming Afghanistan’s political leaders who ‘gave up and fled the country.’”

[The Hill](#) (8/16, Chalfant, Kheel, 5.69M) reports the President “stood by” his decision, but the speech “is unlikely to quell Biden’s harshest critics.” Rep. Mike Rogers (R-AL), the ranking member on the House Armed Services Committee, said, “Biden did a lot of finger-pointing but it was his indefensible decisions and failure to prepare that have created the security and humanitarian crisis currently unfolding.”

[Reuters](#) (8/16, Holland, Bose) says Biden “rejected broad criticism of the chaotic withdrawal that is posing a crisis for him.” Biden “also coupled his defense with a warning to Taliban leaders: let the U.S. withdrawal proceed unimpeded or face devastating force.”

[The Hill](#) (8/16, Samuels, 5.69M) reports Biden “addressed criticism that the U.S. waited too long to begin evacuating allied civilians by shifting blame to the Afghan government and those on the ground.” The President said, “I know there are concerns about why we did not begin evacuating Afghan civilians sooner. Part of the answer is that Afghans did not want to leave earlier, still hopeful for their country. And partly because the Afghan government and its supporters discouraged us from organizing a mass exodus to avoid triggering, as they said, a mass crisis of confidence.”

[USA Today](#) (8/16, Groppe, Jackson, 12.7M) reports the President “interrupted a working vacation at Camp David to make his first public comments about the Taliban’s takeover of the country, a foreign policy debacle – particularly for a president who came to the office with decades of foreign policy experience. He took no questions and quickly went back to the presidential retreat.”

The [New York Times](#) (8/16, Edmondson, 20.6M) says the President’s “unapologetic defense” of his handling of the situation “rallied some Democrats to his side, but the president still faces angry and increasingly public criticism from lawmakers in both parties over the chaos descending on Kabul.” While some Democratic leaders, such as Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL), defended the President, other lawmakers “were unmollified. Many moderate Democrats remained furious at the Biden administration for what they saw as terrible planning for the evacuation of Americans and their allies. Liberal Democrats who have long sought to end military engagements around the world still grumbled that the images out of Kabul were damaging their cause.”

[The Hill](#) (8/16, Wong, 5.69M) reports House Speaker Pelosi on Monday “circulated White House talking points to rank-and-file House Democrats on Afghanistan as President Biden and his party came under withering criticism.” The talking points “underscore how politically perilous Pelosi and other party leaders view the Afghanistan issue as Democrats try to defend their narrow majority in the 2022 midterms.”

[CNN](#) (8/16, Liptak, Zeleny, Collins, 89.21M) reports on the genesis of the President’s address. As “advisers worked feverishly on Monday to calibrate the President’s speech, there was far less worry about the predictable criticism from Republicans than about how Biden’s own words and calculations over the last several months had been so wrong. The episode puts into sharp relief two of Biden’s most marked political traits: A stubborn defensive streak and a fierce certainty in his decision-making that allows little room for second-guessing.” Those traits “led to an air of defiance hanging over the White House on Monday, but remarkable images of the chaos in Kabul....stood as irrefutable evidence of failure. The task of what to do next will be left to Biden.”

Some Pundits Rally To President’s Defense. A number of commentators came to the President’s defense following the speech, praising it as appropriate to the moment. Brian Williams said on [MSNBC](#) (8/16, 1.02M), “That was a consequential speech by an American president at a consequential time. To, quote, toward the end, ‘I am the President of the United States. The buck stops with me.’ Earlier Joe Biden saying, ‘I stand squarely behind my decision.’ Consequential because of the pictures, imagery and stories the American people are seeing come out of Afghanistan after a two-decade-long engagement, \$2 trillion in expenditures.”

Former Deputy National Security Adviser under President Obama Ben Rhodes said on [MSNBC](#) (8/16, 1.02M), “I think that was a very powerful statement of complete confidence in the course of action that he set. And people should be reminded and Joe Biden reminded us himself, this is a position he’s long held. In 2009 when there was a surge of forces into Afghanistan, he opposed that. He had concluded at that point that there were diminishing returns in what we could accomplish militarily in Afghanistan.”

Fareed Zakaria said on [CNN](#) (8/16, 559K), “At the end of the day, the problem is we lost this war several years ago. We have not been able to defeat the Taliban. Biden did pull the band-aid off. And I think he took a very tough decision, a brave decision, and maybe at the end of the day there is no elegant way to lose a war.”

In her column for the [Washington Post](#) (8/17, 10.52M), Jennifer Rubin writes that in his address, Biden “made a strong point — one likely to find receptive ears among voters — that he refuses to maintain the lie to Americans that victory is around the corner.” Overall, Rubin writes, Biden “gave the best speech under the circumstances.”

However, some had a more nuanced reaction. David Axelrod said on [CNN](#) (8/16, 559K), “I thought that his case for why we had to get out was strong, it was compelling, and I think he did to do that as well. But I do think that he needed to take responsibility. My thoughts go back to President Kennedy in the Bay of Pigs crisis. When that was a failure, he stood before the American people and he said victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan. I am the responsible officer of government, and I think a little more of that would’ve been useful for the President here.”

Others were outright critical. For example, Jonathan Karl said on [ABC News](#) (8/16, 225K), "Listening to Biden, you get a sense that he is portraying the options here as a simple choice between withdrawing all American forces or having a war that never ends. ... I think that what you will hear from many people that have worked on the issue, many in the military, is that it is not as simple as that. We don't suddenly achieve peace by withdrawing US troops, all troops out of Afghanistan, and that's what we are seeing."

Stephen Collinson, in an analysis piece for [CNN](#) (8/17, 89.21M), says that while the President said "The buck stops with me," Biden "didn't really follow Harry Truman's maxim. Biden instead tried to reframe a weekend of mayhem and humiliation in Kabul."

Brit Hume said on [Fox News' Special Report](#) (8/16, 1.53M), "The President's speech was about the one thing that he knows is still popular and that is the idea of getting out of Afghanistan. But, for much of the speech I didn't figure out what so-called war he was talking about. We have been getting out of Afghanistan gradually, slowly for years and years. We were down now in that country to about 2,500 American soldiers on the ground. No American soldier had been killed there in a year and a half. But that little modest force with the air power, the intelligence and the logistical support and advice that came with it, was enough to maintain a kind of an uneasy stalemate in that country. The President comes along and blows the whole thing up because he wants to get out."

Trey Gowdy said on [Fox News' Special Report](#) (8/16, 1.53M), "I keep thinking of the words of [former Defense Secretary] Robert Gates...who said Joe Biden for four decades was wrong on nearly every major foreign policy and national security decision. ... I'm happy he kept a campaign promise because he seems really, really interested in doing that. I'm just sorry for all the carnage left behind because he did."

Aaron Blake writes for the [Washington Post](#) (8/16, 10.52M) that while the President said "the buck stops with me" near the end of his address, the "vast majority of what Biden said before then, though, pointed anything but inward." The "story of how all of this played out will be written in the months and years to come. Biden clearly wants the headline to be the buck stopping with him, while seeding all kinds of arguments for why it actually doesn't."

William McGurn, in a column for the [Wall Street Journal](#) (8/16, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) entitled, "Afghanistan Reveals All the President's Weaknesses," writes that the President became Jimmy Carter on Sunday, and then confirmed it by "doubling down" on the decision in his speech on Monday.

Broader Commentary Turning More Mixed Than In Previous Media Cycle. Opinion commentary on the broader situation was more mixed than it had been in previous days. Still, some commentators remained sharply critical of the President. Michael Gerson writes in the [Washington Post](#) (8/16, 10.52M) it was former President Trump's "fondest hope...in his final days in office to withdraw the last U.S. troops from Afghanistan, as the fulfillment of his 'America First' ideals." Gerson says, "The military and foreign policy establishment was strong enough to resist Trump's mania for global abdication because the 45th president was a buffoon." Biden "got his way because he is not." Gerson argues the "abandonment" of Afghanistan "to some of the worst, most dangerous people on Earth" was "a symbolic rejection of America's post-9/11 global role, obscenely timed to coincide with the 20th anniversary of 9/11. This is Biden's voluntary defeat – and the spiritual victory of Trump's 'America First.'"

In an analysis piece for [CNN](#) (8/16, 89.21M), Chris Cillizza writes that Biden is "faced with nothing short of a crisis of that competence, beset on a number of fronts with developments that it appears all of his experience and know-how didn't prevent." The "glaring example" is Afghanistan, but Cillizza also with the pandemic situation and the challenges on the border.

Walter Russell Mead, in a column for the [Wall Street Journal](#) (8/16, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) entitled "Biden's Chamberlain Moment in Afghanistan," strongly criticizes both the long-term US conduct of the war, along with the precipitous withdrawal. He argues that it will strengthen the US' rivals, and raise questions about our reliability and competence among our allies, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

Afghanistan veteran Jason Amerine, in an op-ed for [CNN](#) (8/16, 89.21M), writes that Afghanistan's collapse "collapse was not pre-ordained. It was willful abandonment. The arguments we're hearing from officials about the inevitability of this collapse seem self-serving. The notion of inevitability removes blame or accountability."

Several commentators, however, took a longer view of the situation. Thomas L. Friedman writes in the [New York Times](#) (8/16, 20.6M) that the Biden Administration's "failure to create a proper security perimeter and transition process, in which Afghans who risked their lives to work with us these past two decades could be assured of a safe removal to America – not to mention an orderly exit for foreign diplomats, human rights activists and aid workers – is appalling and inexplicable." But, Biden's team will ultimately "be judged by how it handles the morning after the morning after. Biden made a claim...that America would be more secure and better able to deal with any terrorist threats if we were out of Afghanistan than if we stayed embedded there, with all the costs of people, energy and focus." Biden "determined that we needed to stop this effort, leave Afghanistan and readjust our defense strategy. I pray that he is right. But he will be judged by what happens the morning after the morning after."

In the [Washington Post](#) (8/16, 10.52M), Henry Olsen describes the evacuation of American from the US Embassy in Afghanistan as “an ominous echo from the fall of Saigon.” The “loss in Vietnam was followed by years of U.S. retreats and defeats, culminating in the Iran hostage crisis.” Olsen argues President Biden and congressional Democrats “must not allow that to happen again.” Biden “should show our adversaries and our allies that he intends to maintain and restore U.S. global leadership with deeds as well as words. That could involve a series of concrete steps that may be controversial.” Olsen suggests a number of such steps and argues, “Our allies fear that Biden’s precipitous and ill-planned withdrawal indicates he has chosen denial, decline and defeat. He must show the world that’s wrong.”

In his column for [USA Today](#) (8/16, 12.7M), Paul Brandus writes that Biden “is in charge now, this catastrophe is appearing on his watch, and he will have to take his lumps. That’s the way it goes. Life, and politics, are often unfair. Yet as bad as things look for Biden today, I wonder just how much long-term damage this will actually do to him.”

In her column for [USA Today](#) (8/16, 12.7M), Kathy Kiely says that for “the first 24 hours after the fall of Kabul, the silence from the White House was deafening. Finally, against the backdrop of horrific scenes of desperation at the airport playing out on our screens, big and small, President Biden announced plans to address the nation.” She asserts Biden “has recognized this: From the very outset of his administration, he announced that we are in a fight between democracy and autocracy. He must seize this moment to begin laying out plans for how we are going to win.”

Others outright approved of the President’s decision to withdraw. In his [Washington Post](#) (8/16, 10.52M) column, Fareed Zakaria calls the idea that the US “was maintaining the peace [in Afghanistan] with just a few thousand troops and that this situation could have been managed with this small commitment” a “fantasy.” It “looked that way to Americans because Washington had made a deal with the Taliban and, as a result, the Taliban was deliberately not attacking U.S. and coalition forces.” The US “had been watching the Taliban gain ground in Afghanistan for years now. It is rich and powerful enough to have been able to mask that reality through a steady stream of counter-attacks and air, missile and drone strikes. But none of that changed the fact that, despite all its efforts, it had not been able to achieve victory – it could not defeat the Taliban.”

Charles A. Kupchan, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, writes in an op-ed for the [Los Angeles Times](#) (8/16, 3.37M) that the Taliban’s “virtually uncontested takeover raises obvious questions about the wisdom of President Biden’s decision to withdraw U.S. and coalition forces from the country. However, the rapidity and ease of the Taliban’s advance provides a clear answer: that Biden made the right decision — and that he should not reverse course.”

Ethan Brown, a senior fellow at the Center for the Study of the Presidency & Congress who served in Afghanistan, writes in an op-ed for [The Hill](#) (8/16, 5.69M) that the Afghans “must assert self-determination or remain subjected to brutal rule. Either way, the onus is not on the United States to hold together the thousands of tribes who are naturally inclined to disaggregate by ethos unless existential threat unites them.”

Editorials published after the President’s were also mixed. In an editorial, the [Washington Post](#) (8/16, 10.52M) says the situation in Afghanistan was “avoidable,” highlighting a variety of alternative paths the President might have taken. The “point of leaving Kabul is to save resources that may now be devoted to geopolitical struggles with Russia and China, Mr. Biden argued. Supposedly these rivals would have been delighted to see U.S. forces tied down indefinitely in Afghanistan. Maybe so; but then it is hard to imagine that they are not delighted today, as U.S. allies in Europe and Asia are dismayed, at the incompetent handling of the withdrawal.” In an editorial, the [Wall Street Journal](#) (8/16, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) says that the President was “defiant in surrender,” and that he failed to take responsibility for the outcome.

However, the LA Times came to the President’s defense. In an editorial, the [Los Angeles Times](#) (8/16, 3.37M) says that as “criticism of the Biden administration’s handling of the withdrawal grows, it is also worth taking a step back to consider how we got to this point.” The Times says the war “has been ruinously costly in money and in lives. Biden made the difficult, but correct, decision not to prolong this quagmire any further. The return of the Taliban to power is a tragedy, but it is a tragedy that was decades in the making.”

The Hill, Politico: Plenty Of Blame To Go Around For Afghan Situation. In a piece looking at the attempts by the Biden Administration and former Trump officials to blame the other for the situation in Afghanistan, [The Hill](#) (8/16, Samuels, 5.69M) reports “current and former government officials believe both Trump and Biden bear some responsibility for the mess unfolding in Kabul and elsewhere.” In its National Security Daily, [Politico](#) (8/16, Ward, Forgey, 6.73M) reports that after surveying a variety of people over who is at fault for the situation, “What we’ve found is there’s no single individual, organization or government drawing Washington’s ire. Instead, anyone who contributed to the U.S.-led debacle in Afghanistan and America’s botched withdrawal bears some responsibility.”

Media’s Turn Against President On This Issue Draws Commentary. James Freeman, in his column for the [Wall Street Journal](#) (8/16, Subscription Publication, 8.41M), highlights the extent to which previously “amicable” media outlets have turned on the President following the weekend’s events. Along those lines, in her media column for the [Washington Post](#) (8/16, 10.52M), Margaret Sullivan writes that “if ever a big, breaking story demanded that the news media provide historical context and carefully

avoid partisan blame, it's the story of the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban. Instead, what we largely got over the past few days was the all-too-familiar genre of 'winners and losers' coverage." She says the blame "has to be spread much more evenly" over previous administrations. She concludes, "Maybe the pullout from Afghanistan really will go down as Biden's Waterloo. But maybe deciding that should take more than a few hours."

Chaos At Kabul's Airport Hinders Evacuation Efforts. The chaotic scenes from Kabul's international airport on Monday dominated all forms of media, which ran numerous stories, images and videos of Afghans storming the facility and desperately attempting to board, or even cling to, departing aircraft.

Ian Pannell reported for [ABC World News Tonight](#) (8/16, 6:32 p.m. EST, lead story, 7:45, Muir, 6.15M) from Kabul, "Tonight, the panic, chaos and desperation at the Kabul airport, then forced to shut down. Thousands of Afghans crowding onto the runway, surrounding this massive C-17 military jet, some clinging to the sides of the fuselage. Horrifying local reports saying people could be seen falling from the plane as it took off. The despair at the airport, overwhelming."

[NBC Nightly News](#) (8/16, 6:31 p.m. EST, lead story, 4:20, Holt, 5.72M) reported, "For two decades, we wondered how our longest war would end. Now we know. A total collapse that will be remembered by its swiftness and by its own Saigon moment. Afghan civilians desperate to leave their country trying to climb aboard a US transport plane as it taxied for takeoff." NBC (Engel) reports, "One US military official told me it was 100 times worse than the humiliating American pullout from Saigon."

[Reuters](#) (8/16) reports "thousands of civilians desperate to flee Afghanistan thronged Kabul airport's single runway on Monday after the Taliban seized the capital, prompting the United States to suspend evacuations as it came under mounting criticism at home over its pullout." US troops "fired in the air to deter people trying to force their way on to a military flight evacuating U.S diplomats and embassy staff, a U.S. official said." A US official told the news agency that a pair of gunmen had been killed by US forces over the last 24 hours, while a Pentagon spokesman "said there were indications that one U.S. soldier was wounded." The [AP](#) (8/16) reports that US authorities "said that all told, at least seven people died during the chaotic evacuation at the airport, including several who fell from a military jet."

The [Wall Street Journal](#) (8/16, Shah, Trofimov, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports on widespread disorder at the airport, including Taliban gunmen in the terminals and at least eight Afghans dead. [Bloomberg](#) (8/16, Blum, 3.57M) says that "desperate scenes played out" at the airport.

The [New York Times](#) (8/16, Ramzy, Gall, Santora, 20.6M) reports US Marines "worked to secure the civilian side of the airport, with the help of Turkish troops, after security was breached there on Monday, John F. Kirby, the chief Pentagon spokesman, said. Flights into and out of the airport were suspended for several hours, before resuming in the evening." [Politico](#) (8/16, Forgey, Ward, 6.73M) reports that in a Pentagon news briefing on Monday afternoon, Garry Reid, "the Defense Department's lead for Afghan nationals' relocation effort, said the military anticipated speeding up evacuations in the coming days."

Earlier in the day, [Axios](#) (8/16, Knutson, 1.26M) reported that the US is deploying another 1,000 paratroopers to help secure the airport. The [New York Times](#) (8/16, Cooper, 20.6M) reports that Pentagon spokesman John Kirby "said that by Tuesday morning the military expected around 3,000 Marines would be on the ground at the airport to aid the evacuation effort."

The [AP](#) (8/16, Seir, Faiez, Gannon, Krauss) reports that "late Monday night, hundreds of people remained trapped between American forces trying to push them out of the airport and Taliban forces trying to keep them in, witnesses said. An Associated Press journalist also saw what appeared to be an airstrike target two vehicles near the airport."

Numerous other outlets also ran reports on the scenes at the airport, such as [USA Today](#) (8/16, 12.7M), [The Hill](#) (8/16, Oshin, 5.69M), and the [Daily Mail \(UK\)](#) (8/16, Smith, Ibbetson, 4.11M), which covered the situation extensively.

Media: Chaotic Airport Scenes My Be Iconic Images Of Fall Of Afghanistan. A number of media outlets suggested that the images of the desperate Afghans could become the defining memory of the fall of Afghanistan. For example, the [New York Times](#) (8/16, Ramzy, Gall, Santora, 20.6M) says images of Afghans "clinging to a hulking U.S. military transport, even as it left the ground, quickly circulated around the world. It seemed to capture the moment more vividly than words: a symbol of America's military might, flying out of the country even as Afghans hung on against all hope." The [AP](#) (8/16) says that in "video footage that could become some of the defining images of the fall of Kabul, Afghans desperate to escape the Taliban takeover clung to the side of a departing U.S. military jet as it rolled down the tarmac Monday. Some of them apparently fell to their death as the aircraft gained altitude."

There were also some comparisons to the images of the US evacuation of the embassy in Saigon. In its lead story, The [CBS Evening News](#) (8/16, 6:32 p.m. EST, lead story, 3:40, O'Donnell, 3.55M) reported that the "swift fall of Kabul led to chaotic and disturbing scenes at the airport, as Afghans tried to climb on to a US military plane. ... The evacuation of the capital brought back the memories of the fall of Saigon in 1975. And the images, side by side, are eerily similar."

The [New York Times](#) (8/16, Gall, Khapalwak, 20.6M) says that images “evoked America’s frantic departure from Vietnam, encapsulating Afghanistan’s breathtaking collapse in the wake of American abandonment.” Noting the President’s speech, the Times added, “the ugly scenes at the airport, which quickly circulated around the world, seemed to speak louder than words.”

The [Washington Post](#) (8/16, Jaffe, Miller, 10.52M) reports that two “indelible, humiliating images are certain to endure from the final days of the Afghan war. The first came in the White House on July 8 when President Biden was asked if the U.S. departure from Afghanistan carried echoes of Vietnam. ‘None whatsoever. Zero,’ he replied, testily. ‘There’s going to be no circumstance where you see people being lifted off the roof of an embassy.’” The “other is an image just as searing as those from the fall of Saigon: Desperate Afghans clinging to the wheel wells of a C-17 U.S. Air Force cargo jet as it taxis for takeoff at Kabul’s international airport.”

Proud Boys Supporter Pleads Guilty In Capitol Siege Probe. [Reuters](#) (8/16, Stempel) reports from New York, “A Proud Boys supporter pleaded guilty on Monday to making social media threats tied to the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol, including a threat to kill an incoming U.S. senator.” Reuters adds, “The defendant, Eduard Florea, also admitted to storing a large collection of ammunition at his home in the New York City borough of Queens.” Florea, 41, “a software engineer and father of two, entered his plea at a remote hearing before Chief U.S. Magistrate Judge Cheryl Pollak in federal court in Brooklyn. Prosecutors said Florea used the moniker ‘LoneWolfWar’ on Parler. Florea, who did not attend the riot, allegedly referred to current Democratic Senator Raphael Warnock of Georgia as a ‘dead’ man.”

[NBC News](#) (8/16, Williams, 4.91M) reports that Florea “admitted posting statements online threatening to kill Warnock, who had just won a run-off election for the U.S. Senate in Georgia. ‘Dead man can’t pass s--- laws ... I will fight so help me god,’ he said in one message, according to prosecutors. When the FBI searched Florea’s house in January, agents found more than a thousand rifle and shotgun rounds. He also pleaded guilty to illegally possessing that ammunition because he had previously been convicted of a felony.”

FBI Cites Instagram Evidence Against Actor Arrested In Capitol Siege Probe. [NBC News](#) (8/16, Planas, 4.91M) reports, “An actor who was arrested last week and charged with breaching the U.S. Capitol during the Jan. 6 riot was recorded on video singing ‘The Star Spangled Banner,’ court records showed.” Michael Aaron Carico, 33, “is charged with several counts related to allegations that he participated in the riot, according to a federal criminal complaint. Evidence against Carico included photos and videos of him on the Capitol grounds that were obtained from a confidential source, GPS data and additional photos and videos secured through a search warrant of Carico’s Gmail account, according to the complaint written by an FBI special agent. An alleged still of Michael Aaron Carico from a video submitted to the FBI that was taken by another person present in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda on Jan. 6.”

Former State Department Aide Charged With Assaulting Officers In Capitol Siege. [Insider](#) (8/16, Snodgrass, 2.74M) reports, “A former State Department aide appointed by former President Donald Trump, who was arrested earlier this year in connection with the January 6 Capitol riot, was hit with charges of six counts of assaulting police officers on Thursday as part of a nine-person, sprawling government indictment.” Federico Klein, 42, of Annandale, Virginia, “is the first known Trump appointee facing charges related to the Capitol insurrection. Prosecutors allege that Klein was ‘among the first wave of rioters’ to storm the Capitol building on January 6 and physically fought against the front line of officers. Klein, who previously worked on Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign, joined the State Department as a staff assistant shortly after Trump was inaugurated in 2017, according to USA Today. At the time of the January 6 siege, Klein held a ‘top secret’ security clearance. He resigned on January 19, one day before Joe Biden was inaugurated.”

Carlson To “Reveal Most Compelling UFO Evidence” From US Report. [Fox News](#) (8/15, Altus, 23.99M) reports that following this year’s release by an ODNI-compiled report on unexplained aerial objects, Fox News host Tucker Carlson now plans to reveal “the most compelling evidence in the upcoming episode of Fox Nation’s ‘Tucker Carlson Originals – The UFO Files: Chasing the Truth.’” The report did not “find any evidence to suggest the sightings were of an alien spacecraft or evidence of advanced technology possessed by a foreign power such as China or Russia. However, the report also did not rule out the possibility.” During the special, Fox writes that Tucker “sits down with air and space experts and witnesses of the strange sightings for the Fox Nation special to learn more about what UFOs are and if they should worry us.”

US Prosecutors See Prince Andrew As A “Person Of Interest” In Epstein Probe. [Reuters](#) (8/16, Hosenball) reports US prosecutors “probing the activities of British socialite Ghislaine Maxwell and others linked to U.S. financier Jeffrey Epstein consider Prince Andrew a person of interest in the investigation, a source familiar with the U.S. inquiry

said." According to Reuters, "Investigators want to interview Andrew, Queen Elizabeth's second son, about his friendship with Epstein as part of their inquiry into possible co-conspirators, the source said. As a person of interest he is viewed at least as a potential witness." Prosecutors in 2020 "said Andrew had 'sought to falsely portray himself to the public as eager and willing to cooperate' but had given no interview to federal authorities and had repeatedly declined requests to talk with investigators." The source told Reuters that federal prosecutors in the Southern District of New York "do not expect to be able to interview him in the foreseeable future, if ever."

Minnesota College Republicans Leader Charged In Alleged Sex-Trafficking Ring. [Fox News](#)

(8/16, Wallace, 23.99M) reports, "Minnesota College Republicans cut ties with a 19-year-old woman and university chapter leader for the group after she was recently apprehended in Florida and charged in connection to a sex trafficking operation allegedly spearheaded by a prominent Minneapolis-based GOP strategist and donor." Gisela Castro Medina, "the now former Minnesota College Republicans chair at the University of St. Thomas, was arrested at a hospital in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, by the Okaloosa County Sheriff's Office. She was wanted by the FBI Minneapolis Field Office as an out-of-state fugitive from justice. Medina is facing charges in connection to an underage sex trafficking operation allegedly led by 30-year-old Anton Joseph Lazzaro, also known by 'Tony Lazzaro.' He was arrested separately last week."

The [Toronto \(CAN\) Sun](#) (8/16, Hunter, 29K) reports, "Medina was arrested in Florida after she and Lazzaro, 30, were indicted on multiple federal offences on Aug. 12, according to the U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota. The duo are accused of trafficking underage girls. 'We as an organization are absolutely disgusted by the actions of Ms. Medina, and have cut all ties with her effective immediately.' state chair Nia Moore said. Lazzaro's lawyer has denied the allegations and blamed 'overreaching by the government.' Both Lazzaro and Medina have been hit with 10 charges."

Four Charged With Kidnapping Man Off New Jersey Street, Demanding \$100K Ransom. The [New Jersey Star-Ledger](#)

(8/4, Atmonavage, 1.47M) reports, "Four men have been arrested for allegedly abducting a man in New Jersey and holding him captive as they tried to extort the victim's family of more than \$100,000, the U.S. Attorney's office announced Monday." Melvin Severino, 25, of Scranton, Pennsylvania, Welber Antonio Jesus, 24, and Yoandry Rodriguez, 21, both of Camden, and Cesar Alexander Batista Alcantara, 23, of Yonkers, New York, "were each charged with kidnapping after they allegedly abducted a man off a Camden street last week. According to a criminal complaint, the victim was walking in Camden on Aug. 12 when at least two people approached him from behind, covered his head, bound him with plastic restraints and put him in a vehicle. On Aug. 14, the FBI located the residence where the victim was being held and apprehended the four defendants, while removing the victim from the home, who was treated at a local hospital for the injuries he suffered, the documents said." The [Cliffside Park \(NJ\) Daily Voice](#) (8/16) also reports.

Feds Seize Counterfeit COVID-19 Vaccination Cards Headed To The US. The [Washington Post](#)

(8/16, Shepherd, 10.52M) reports on Friday, the US CBP "said in a...statement that agents have seized thousands of fake vaccination cards passing through Memphis, a shipping hub." The agents took "121 packages filled with more than 3,000 fake vaccination cards." Purchasing or producing "a counterfeit card violates federal laws against the unauthorized use of an official government agency's seal, which can result in a fine and up to five years in prison, according to the FBI."

[USA Today](#) (8/16, 12.7M) reports the shipment was from Shenzhen, China and, "It was obvious the vaccine cards were fake since they weren't sent from the CDC or any medical entity, the agency's statement said."

T-Mobile Confirms Data Breach, Could Not Determine If Customer Data Was Affected. [USA Today](#)

(8/16, Molina, 12.7M) reports, "T-Mobile confirmed it was hit in a data breach that has reportedly affected 100 million of its wireless customers." Based on "a report from Vice, someone on an underground forum claimed to have obtained data of more than 100 million people from T-Mobile's servers." The stolen data allegedly "includes Social Security information, physical addresses and IMEI (International Mobile Equipment Identity) numbers that uniquely identify individual mobile devices." In a recent statement, "T-Mobile confirmed a data breach happened, but it could not determine whether customer data was affected." The company also "said it is confident the entry point used to gain access to its data has been closed." This breach "is the third time in recent years that a data breach has hit the wireless carrier."

The [Wall Street Journal](#) (8/16, FitzGerald, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) also reports.

COVID Continues To Spread In US As Pfizer, BioNTech Data Show Third Vaccine Dose Appears To Boost Immunity. On [ABC World News Tonight](#)

(8/16, 6:50 p.m. EST, story 6, 1:40, Muir, 6.15M), correspondent Marcus Moore reported that COVID is "continuing it's rapid spread across the nation. The rate of hospital admissions for people under

49, now at its highest point in the pandemic. In Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi and Texas, ICUs are at over 90% capacity." Meanwhile, the amount of pediatric COVID infections has reached a pandemic high, with "121,000 new cases reported in just the last week." Moore also reported that Pfizer and BioNTech "submitted early data to the FDA that shows a third dose of their vaccine appears to show immunity levels that are far greater, significantly greater than just two doses, but they have not yet sought authorization from the FDA."

The [Wall Street Journal](#) (8/16, Hopkins, Subscription Publication, 8.41M) reports Pfizer and BioNTech on Monday indicated that the results they submitted to the FDA were from an early-stage study, and the Journal adds that the firms are carrying out a late-stage study and said they anticipate those results soon.

On [NBC Nightly News](#) (8/16, 6:42 p.m. EST, story 5, 2:10, Holt, 5.72M), correspondent Catie Beck reported that the preliminary study results from Pfizer indicated that "a third dose of its vaccine produces significantly higher antibody levels than the initial two. The company ultimately hoping for authorization for a third dose booster for Americans 16 and older." Beck also reported, "This comes as a new vaccine mandate takes hold in New Orleans. Proof of a vaccination or negative COVID test no more than 72 hours old now required for indoor dining, bar, gyms, concerts, even Saints games."

Meanwhile, the [CBS Evening News](#) (8/16, 6:44 p.m. EST, story 6, 2:10, O'Donnell, 3.55M) reported the National Institute of Health has warned that the US could shortly be experiencing 200,000 new cases per day. Correspondent David Begnaud said Louisiana "is drowning in its fourth COVID wave. Overflowing ICUs at Oshner Hospitals in New Orleans have forced more than one hundred doctors to pivot from normal their jobs. ... In the last month, average daily cases in Louisiana have grown nearly eight fold. Since the start of the weekend, more than 13,200 COVID cases have been reported with nearly 3,000 people currently hospitalized. That is the highest since the pandemic started."

A [New York Times](#) (8/16, Bosman, 20.6M) analysis says, "Americans have entered a new, disheartening phase of the pandemic: when they realize that Covid-19 is not disappearing anytime soon. A country that had been waiting for the virus to be over has been forced to recalibrate." University of Michigan epidemiologist Emily Martin said, "We can't expect it to go away where we never have to think about it anymore," adding, "We've seen that it ebbs and flows. Sometimes we need to be more vigilant than others."

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