

Episode 150: TBWS Team on Afghanistan 8/31/21

Announcer ([00:04](#)):

Welcome to the Bill Walton Show, featuring conversations with leaders, entrepreneurs, artists and thinkers. Fresh perspectives on money, culture, politics, and human flourishing. Interesting people, interesting things.

Bill Walton ([00:23](#)):

Welcome to the Bill Walton Show, I'm Bill Walton. Afghanistan, what a catastrophe? I think it's all in everybody's mind right now. What we were doing there? Where we're going to go from here? What this means for the country, and the rest of the world really, going forward? But it's interesting. I was looking at some of the data facts on what happened, and we ought to remember that the United States was actually smart when we went in there in 2001. We had to go in and root out some of the people attacking us.

We went in and we quickly aligned ourselves with the Northern Alliance, which was a group of tribal chieftains and we successfully created a coalition and beat the Taliban. We did it by recognizing that the Afghans were different from us. They had a different culture, military system and set of beliefs, and we recognized that.

Well, we defeated the Taliban and then we immediately started engaging in country building, which we've had, as we all know, no success with anywhere in the world. And we ended up installing the most recent president was Ashraf Ghani, who as I think we've all read and or heard, fled Afghanistan with \$169 million dollars in cash. I guess his suitcases were so stuffed that they couldn't get them all onto the plane. So here we are, we've seen the spectacle of the planes flying out of Kabul airport.

And with me to talk about this is my brain trust here, the really smart guys involved with The Walton Show. We've got Rich McFadden, Greg Corombos and Brian McNicoll. We want to get into what we're all seeing and feeling, what we think's going to happen next. Greg, let's let you kick it off.

Greg Corombos ([02:21](#)):

Well, it's been a remarkable month and a half, almost two months now, since that July 8th press conference when Joe Biden insisted that it was not inevitable that the Taliban would take over Afghanistan in short order. He was highly confident due to the numerical advantage that the Afghan army and other forces, especially with all that US weaponry, would be able to hold off the Taliban, of course, within just a few weeks, that proved to not be true. And since then, of course, we've had the frantic evacuation efforts and the very difficult prospect of trying to get people to the airport, since the US wasn't allowed outside of that airport perimeter. That's been harrowing and we've gotten a bunch of different narratives.

First of all, you had Biden in July, like I just said, saying it was not inevitable. And then lately he said it was going to happen this way, no matter when we pulled out. And then at the same time, you've got the Pentagon saying that no one foresaw this, so how could you possibly be prepared for this? Yet, they were ready for every contingency. It's a very confusing narrative. I think they've been flying by the seat of their pants because they didn't expect it to unravel quite that quickly, but the way that this has happened, the constantly changing evaluation with Biden telling George Stephanopoulos, "We'll stay until everybody's out. Now, of course, because the Taliban wanted us out, we're out." The Taliban said, "There were no more Afghans."

And so, Joe Biden has seemingly negotiated this from a position of weakness for quite a long time. The question now is what comes next? Will there be massive bloodshed? Will we be able to extract more people, even though our military presence is gone? And then what do other bad actors do with this image of US weakness? What will it mean for China and Taiwan, Russia, and Ukraine and a lot of other places around the world? There's many, many questions there.

Bill Walton ([04:12](#)):

Rich? Brian?

Rich McFadden ([04:17](#)):

How are you supposed to feel when you see a terrorist organization take one of your \$50 million helicopters, learn how to fly it and fly it over the city that they've just taken with somebody hanging from the bottom of the helicopter? How does that make you feel as an American to watch your equipment taken and using to kill other people that your military has spent 20 years protecting? How can you feel?

I don't care who you voted for, I don't care what side of the aisle you're from, you see that image, you see people falling off of the C-17 trying to get out of that country and it gives you a perspective that you might have never had in your life. If you've never left the United States of America, never been to another country and you see images like that, how does that make you feel? It's powerful and I think this is a powerful moment for everybody in our country. And I'll tell you what, I think it's a powerful moment for Joe Biden showing how ineffective he is as a leader.

Brian McNicoll ([05:35](#)):

What scares me about this is, the just incredibly long list of things they were really completely wrong about. Greg mentioned the speech by Biden in July where he predicted there would be no quick overrun of the country. There'd be no Saigon taking off or helicopters hanging from the rooftop, no routing of our remaining people. They're out of the country. Then on the Thursday before the government changed hands, they said that the army might not hold for 90 days. It didn't hold for 90 hours. Everything they've said about this, they don't know what they're talking about. They've been completely wrong about all of it.

And this is a multi... They talk about a whole of government response to stuff, this is a whole of government failure. State Department, Defense Department, Office of the President. The vice president is amscray to the other side of the world to not be associated with it in any way. We have to look at the incompetence that went into this, and this is ... You can blame it on Biden, he happened to be sitting on the top and set all this into motion and everything, but you have to think about our whole government failed here, you're talking about hundreds of bureaucrats who've bought one thing, and the truth was actually far different.

Bill Walton ([07:06](#)):

Yeah. It seems utterly devoid from strategic reality. I'm not an Afghan, I'm not a foreign policy expert, but you look at a map and Afghanistan sits right in the middle of Iran, Pakistan, India, through Pakistan, the Russian stans, part of the Soviet State. By the way, it's got a border of 57 miles with China and you've got four nuclear powers, and one wannabe nuclear power surrounding this landlocked country, and we mismanaged almost everything. But the thing I think we did right, is we had Bagram air base, which was loaded to the gills with weapons and defensive capabilities and the ability to get any kind of our aircraft in and out.

And the situation in Afghanistan, as I understand it, has been relatively stable for the last couple of years. We haven't had any American people killed. And it just seems to the naive person, which I don't know exactly name, but to somebody who doesn't know all the details, why do we need to do anything? Why not just leave Bagram there, pull things back to there, reduce our footprint, give up the idea of trying to install nations, but keep our presence in that region. And right now we have none.

Brian McNicoll ([08:26](#)):

There was no pressure to do this. They said, "Do we want by Bagram or the Kabul airport?" We said, "The Kabul airport," for some reason. They said, "Would you like all of Kabul to get this done?" "No. We only need the airport." Who made those decisions and based on what? Those seem like directly counterproductive decisions.

Bill Walton ([08:50](#)):

Well, the guy who they fired, there's a Lieutenant Colonel who they removed from command and then I guess he quit the Marines, or I think it was the Marines. That was his specific criticism. He said, "What are we doing pulling out of Bagram when we could have stayed there and secured our presence and let it go with that?"

Greg Corombos ([09:10](#)):

This moves to the straw man argument that Biden's trying to throw out there because he said every time the execution of the withdrawal has been criticized, he says, "Well, it was either we leave or we have to massively escalate our presence in Afghanistan." That's not the option that he had. He could have stayed with the 2,500, he could have added a few more depending on what he needed, but he wanted to be the president that ended the war, and he wanted to do it near the 20th anniversary of 9/11. That's why he moved the withdrawal deadline from May 1st to September 11th itself before moving it back to August 31st, he wanted a talking point and it turned out to be a very costly one.

Brian McNicoll ([09:10](#)):

He got one.

Bill Walton ([09:50](#)):

So in our judgment, there's 99% domestic political considerations that lead to this catastrophe?

Brian McNicoll ([09:58](#)):

Yeah. There's no strategic impetus for any of this. The pot was right, as they say in poker, right? Everybody was at peace, doing their thing, could have happened next year or the year after. Could have waited till it wasn't fighting season, because what happened, at least, they could stay with their families. [crosstalk 00:10:18].

Rich McFadden ([10:18](#)):

He's going to have to go back in there now and take Bigram and it's going to be a disaster. You cannot leave this, you just can not. Its totally evacuate and let the pot boil over.

Bill Walton ([10:30](#)):

Well, who in this chain of command, Lloyd Austin, Mark Milley, Tony Blinken? I mean who-

Greg Corombos ([10:38](#)):

One thing I saw Bill that's I thought [crosstalk 00:10:40].

Bill Walton ([10:39](#)):

Who's going to do that? I don't see them [crosstalk 00:10:41]?

Rich McFadden ([10:41](#)):

The private sector. The private sector has been amazing this past couple of weeks. I mean, just private, or you've got the private sector, you've got ex military going in there and rescuing people, you've got millionaires and billionaires contractors having their special ops, private forces go in there and rescue people. You've got journalists using their contacts on the ground to go in and rescue people. And so, a lot of the people that were rescued, especially in the first week or so, was all done by private ops and it was bootstrapping to get these people out of there.

So it would be interesting to see how that continues, because I don't think that people trust the Biden administration or the Pentagon at this moment to be able to secure our country in this region to look out for our best interests. I just don't think anybody trust them.

Bill Walton ([11:39](#)):

Greg.

Greg Corombos ([11:40](#)):

Well, Tony Blinken is now saying that we're going to keep trying to get people out who want to leave, that phrase, I think has been their excuse for not getting everybody out. I'm not sure how many would really want to stay at this point, but he says, "We've got all this leverage all these diplomatic tools." And I would argue that they probably had more leverage and tools about 48 hours ago as we record this, as they had a military presence on the ground there.

So, we'll see. I mean, they keep arguing that they are okay, now we'll see if the Taliban serious about becoming a member of the international community and interested in getting the international aid. Taliban's been around a long time. The Taliban doesn't care. I mean, if they can get the money, they'll take it, but it's not like they're about to change who they are just to make the UN happy.

Bill Walton ([12:27](#)):

I also think the Taliban's toast, because now that we've withdrawn, they're now facing those people, those gentle people, I mentioned before who surround them, and I think China, in particular, would see Afghanistan as part of its belt and road initiative and they'll do it economically. They'll come and say, "We'll let us help you rebuild Bigram, let us help you do this." And then next thing you know, the Taliban are up to their eyeballs in debt and China calls the loan and China owns the airbase. Something like that. That's one scenario.

Brian McNicoll ([13:00](#)):

There's a trillion dollars worth of lithium in Afghanistan. Chinese will be extremely interested in that.

Bill Walton ([13:07](#)):

What about the Pakistanis? The Pakistanis has been supporting the Taliban.

Brian McNicoll ([13:13](#)):

Well, they're going to play the winning side, right? They're talking about people on board for many moral pretense at all, the ISI, the Pakistanis Intelligence service. so, what's left is, if you're correct and things start going bad for the Taliban, ISI will melt away again. As it always does.

Rich McFadden ([13:39](#)):

I mean, the other thing you got to worry about there is it's not just the Taliban, it's ISIS, ISIS-K, and it's Al Qaeda, and so, I mean, there's a lot of people fighting to be king of the hill there, but I think you're right, it's China or Russia will end up being king of the hill. That's [crosstalk 00:13:58].

Bill Walton ([13:57](#)):

Well, and they're going to play real politic, which we seem to be incapable of playing. They're going to say, "Look. We're going to not rebuild this country, we don't care what kind of government they have, we just want to get those strategic assets in control of them. And we'll pay off anybody we have to. If they want cash to get this, we'll give them some cash." That would be how I see them playing the game, particularly the Chinese.

Greg Corombos ([14:21](#)):

That's the language of the tribes in Afghanistan. It's whoever can pay him the most, and we've seen that from day one. I remember Tommy Franks, who is head of Central Command in the early days of the war, trying to get one of the warlords to work with them and the guy said no. And finally, he just brought him a huge duffel bag of cash. And ultimately he got what he wanted. And so, that's what-

Rich McFadden ([14:42](#)):

What do they use the money for? What are they doing with the money?

Greg Corombos ([14:46](#)):

I don't know.

Bill Walton ([14:47](#)):

You haven't seen their villas in Switzerland? But the funny... I was looking at the guy who fled with all that money, we installed him. And he was a favorite of the global elite. And he wrote a book on restoring failed states. And he also gave a Ted talk a few years ago. And in the Ted talk, I mean, think about it-

Rich McFadden ([15:11](#)):

That's hysterical.

Bill Walton ([15:12](#)):

He gave a Ted talk, and in the Ted talk one of his anecdotes was, "Look. You got to understand Afghanis, don't understand capital. They don't think about investing in productivity, improving things, they understand cash." And he said that in a Ted talk, what? I think it was 10 years ago, something like that. But it seems, let me probe a little bit on where this is going with this administration. It seems like this is part of a global withdrawal. We've taken our aircraft carrier out of the Pacific, we're no longer

protecting Japan, they've run some more games, I understand, and the Pentagon and they no longer think they can protect Taiwan. They've reduced [crosstalk 00:15:57].

Rich McFadden ([15:57](#)):

And China pretty much told the world that.

Bill Walton ([16:00](#)):

Yeah. And...

Brian McNicoll ([16:01](#)):

And why would China share that little piece of information with us? [Crosstalk 00:16:06] for our knowledge and understanding.

Bill Walton ([16:10](#)):

Well, one last data point, then I'm going to throw it open for chaos. But we also withdrawn a lot of our missile support from Saudi Arabia, because the left never got over the murder of this guy, Baghdadi, and so, it's payback time, and now we're making nice with Iran again. And so, this whole area has been thrown into chaos.

Brian McNicoll ([16:32](#)):

Trump had this figured out. Isolate the Palestinians and the Iranians away from everybody else, everyone else was on the same page. Israel and all the Arab States and Iran was on the other side with [malevolent 00:16:46] anti. And they came in and it's one of the many things they have really screwed up in this country because they refuse to do things trump's way, "If Trump was doing it, it must have been the wrong way."

So they renounced it, it's the same as border policy, energy policy, economic policy, all that stuff, they changed things for the sake of eradicating Trump from the American policy, and we are suffering for it. And people in Afghanistan and all over the world are suffering for it.

Bill Walton ([17:15](#)):

I So agree that we had Russell Vought on OMB director for Trump, and they had \$6 billion in the defense budget to relaunch our Navy capabilities, which we desperately need to do, 6 billion out of a \$700 billion budget. And one of the very first things that Biden did was cut that out. And it was almost like, "If Trump wanted it, we're getting rid of it."

Brian McNicoll ([17:41](#)):

That's right.

Rich McFadden ([17:46](#)):

[crosstalk 00:17:46] Go ahead, Greg.

Greg Corombos ([17:46](#)):

I was just going to joke that clearly we can't spend six billion dollars, because we've spent three and a half trillion dollars already on infrastructure and COVID relief, and we got another three and a half trillion coming.

Rich McFadden ([17:57](#)):

What I want to know Bill, and I want to hear what you guys think is, does Biden survive this? Greg and I were talking about this the other day and he thinks just because Kamala Harris is such a horrible vice presidential candidate, or vice president does Biden survives, and sticks out the four years? But there's already been calls for him to be impeached or to resign.

Bill Walton ([18:26](#)):

Well, that's the theory about Richard Nixon that the biggest blunder he made was maybe naming Gerald Ford vice president, because they now thought they could get rid of him because Gerald Ford would be, okay. And Kamala is not okay. I don't know. I mean, I don't know how you... But I don't know who the grownups are that make these changes. I mean, is this really still Obama? Is this really still Valerie Jarrett from their headquarters in Kalorama right across from the mosque? Is this still, I mean, are they still engaged in this puppet show?

Brian McNicoll ([19:05](#)):

I don't know. I don't see what the forces are that forced him out right now.

Bill Walton ([19:10](#)):

I don't either.

Brian McNicoll ([19:11](#)):

They control both houses of Congress. Can't do it through impeachment, can't even get our vote on impeachment articles. And there's really not another-

Rich McFadden ([19:19](#)):

I mean, 2022 is right around the corner and it's not looking good for them.

Brian McNicoll ([19:22](#)):

After joining 2022, all bets are off. But I think that right now, there's no mechanism by which to remove him, and the Democrats, they've reached the point in this where they're making excuses and trying to act like it's a big positive, "Oh yeah. We went through the hard part, but now we're out of Afghanistan. Peace in the valley."

Greg Corombos ([19:43](#)):

Yeah. I think Brian's got a good point there because one thing we've seen over the past couple of weeks is how the media has been pretty tough on Biden, certainly compared to where they were before this and throughout the campaign. And then as soon as that last plane took off on Monday, all the headlines were, "Wars over. Americans are out." And there was still some discussion, of course, of the Americans and the Afghan allies and the green card holders left behind.

But over whelming it was, "This 20 year war is over, obviously salute to all the troops that served during that time, and we're still going to be there to help the people in Afghanistan and we're going to

do it diplomatically." And it's going to be very interesting now, if the media just gives them that one day of, "Okay. All the troops are out, now we'll go back to the crisis that's still on the ground there, and not to mention the bloodshed that's likely to follow." Or now, whether they're just going to pivot to the economic agenda or whatever else they prefer to talk about.

Bill Walton ([20:43](#)):

Well, if this was a domestic policy move in order to claim a victory, which of course blew up in their face, it was anything but a victory, but they thought they'd get a victory and they could use that as some winning their back to get the John Lewis Voting Rights back through the Senate, and maybe you get the \$6 trillion, or nobody knows how many trillions of dollars Pelosi he has gotten in these bills. I do think they're moving towards the '22 election, if they don't get all this done by '22, they think they're going to get obliterated. And so, Afghanistan was a sideshow they wanted to get rid of so they could focus on the domestic agenda.

Rich McFadden ([21:23](#)):

Yeah. But Taliban does not-

Brian McNicoll ([21:26](#)):

[crosstalk 00:21:26] one quick thing, about a month ago, there was a poll of Hill staffers and 78% of the Hill staffers, both parties, said they expect Congress to change hands after 2022, they know what's coming. They're looking at the polls. I'm sorry Rich, go ahead.

Rich McFadden ([21:42](#)):

No. I'm going to say if the Taliban does not shut off the internet service, if pictures keep coming out of Afghanistan, CNN can say all they want about the war is over, these images that we've seen over the past couple of weeks, and the ones we're about to see for the next six months, are going to totally crush Biden's chances of getting anything done ever again.

Brian McNicoll ([22:09](#)):

Yeah. And I think that the thing about hanging the people from the helicopters, that shows that they're, I mean, this is going to be performative. They're going to make a point of giving us some TV to watch [crosstalk 00:22:22] .

Bill Walton ([22:23](#)):

I missed that image. There weren't people hanging from it like this, they were hanging people as in...

Brian McNicoll ([22:30](#)):

Yeah. Pretty like this.

Rich McFadden ([22:31](#)):

From their neck.

Bill Walton ([22:32](#)):

It was execution?

Rich McFadden ([22:34](#)):

They executed somebody by tying them by their neck to a helicopter and flying over the city of Kabul.

Bill Walton ([22:41](#)):

Oh man.

Rich McFadden ([22:42](#)):

And it's all over the news, or all over the internet [crosstalk 00:22:46] .

Brian McNicoll ([22:45](#)):

And there's more than one too. It appears to be like they're going to do this a little bit.

Greg Corombos ([22:49](#)):

And Richard said something that's very interesting, but he had the word if in there, which is also critical if they leave the internet on, I think Brian's right, that they will want some imagery of them taking control and punishing their enemies, but at the same time, at some point, they're probably going to try to cut it off. That's just, their tendency is to not let the world see what they're doing. When they further clamped down on women and girls and that sort of thing, and really have the bloodletting here. I'd be surprised if they kept it as open as they are right now.

Bill Walton ([23:24](#)):

Well, the thing I'm troubled by is I fear the press is going to forget this in a week, or two, or three, and focused on the domestic agenda. And this'll be just another block, but it's not going to be as catastrophic as it really should be. I mean, this-

Rich McFadden ([23:43](#)):

Facebook won't let the press forget about this. If you get images like that on social media, they're not going to be able to ignore it.

Bill Walton ([23:51](#)):

Well, what about the role of social media here? I mean, we've seen social media companies shut people down over different theories about the lockdowns, and the virus, and the vaccines, and the mask. I mean, has there been any social media censorship of this?

Rich McFadden ([24:04](#)):

Well, this video we're talking about right now, you have to accept permission to see it, because it is graphic. And so, whatever it is posted all you see as a great outbox and then you have... So they are already aware of this video. And so, I'm sure anything like that will likely be censored to some extent.

Brian McNicoll ([24:29](#)):

Pretty soon we'll be told that the guy swinging from the helicopter is misleading information. Lacks context, or something like that. He's got the context.

Bill Walton ([24:40](#)):

He had context.

Rich McFadden ([24:42](#)):

Yeah.

Bill Walton ([24:44](#)):

It's a great caption. Let's talk about context. Well, Greg, you're the political person here. I mean, where do you come out on 2022? As far as the effect of this.

Greg Corombos ([24:58](#)):

It's a long way away, and I think we were talking about this in a previous meeting, the guy, Robert Kelly is a professor in South Korea. You might remember him as the guy who was on the BBC when his kids came into his office while he was on a live interview, but he had a tweet out a week or two ago and was saying, "Look. 2022 is so far away, nobody's going to remember Afghanistan. It's all going to be domestic issues." And I think if we don't get a flood of graphic, horrible images, the media might be able to push towards things that are more favorable to Democrats, but that's assuming Afghanistan is the only issue of instability.

And so, when I look at what happened following the fall of Saigon, when you have relatively weak leadership in the White House, you have other people taking advantage of that. After the fall of Saigon, you had at least a million, maybe millions of Vietnamese refugees, the boat people who we had to rescue out of the Pacific. You have the Khmer Rouge executing two million people in the span of a year or two in Cambodia. You had the communist infiltrating Angola and Nicaragua. You have the Islamic revolution in Iran and then Soviet is going into Afghanistan.

And so, the idea that our rivals will not smell the opportunity here over the next, whatever it is, 14 months, it's hard to believe that they're just going to sit on their hands while that happens, if they think they've got a good opportunity to finally do what they want to do. Whether it's China and Taiwan, Russia and Ukraine, or somewhere else.

Brian McNicoll ([26:29](#)):

I also think that waiting on good news out of domestic policy may not be a good bet either, because you've had two straight months now at record inflation, joblessness creeping back up, a big homeless problem, gasoline, a dollar and a half a gallon more than it was when Trump left office. I'm not sure that, in a lot of domestic unrest, I'm not sure that that shifting the focus back to domestic will be a positive for Biden by then.

Bill Walton ([27:00](#)):

Well, I think one of the big factors here is China. Xi's cracking down on Chinese companies, tech companies, consumer products companies, education companies, he's getting control, he really doesn't... You can see he wants to make his move, and I think he thinks the time to make his move on Taiwan, it may be now. Because if you're Xi and you're looking at our fearless [Fosdick 00:27:28] defense leaders, you're thinking, "Joy, I can play these guys and they're not going to do a thing to stop me."

And that may be the 2022 issue. But they put the world at risk, asset risk in the world, and consequently, a lot of other countries. The fecklessness is just unbelievable.

Rich McFadden ([27:52](#)):

It's just the word I was thinking of. That mother of the killed Marine used that word, and it's just what was in my mind.

Bill Walton ([27:59](#)):

Yeah.

Brian McNicoll ([28:00](#)):

That was another thing that blew up in his face. He went to Dover and all the people are saying he looked at his watch and all he wanted to talk about was his [crosstalk 00:28:09]. The bombs were highly critical.

Greg Corombos ([28:15](#)):

Yeah. I just want to add one point on China. I've been reading that instead of the typical hardcore military invasion, they might try to economically strangle Taiwan. So, it's not as overt on the world stage, and eventually they're just going to force Taiwan's hand because of the greater and greater restrictions, which is going to have a huge impact on our economy, particularly the semiconductors, which I think Bill you've talked about on previous shows too.

Bill Walton ([28:37](#)):

Yeah. I think the acronyms TCM, Taiwan's, I can't remember the guy, but anyway, there are three big ones and it's the biggest of the three and strategically critical. Well, we're out of time, which always happens, but I don't think we've quite resolved where this is going. I think we've raised the issues. Greg, Rich, Brian, anything you want to add?

Brian McNicoll ([29:06](#)):

Well, I don't think China wants a hot war with regard to Taiwan. So, I think Greg is probably right that it'll happen some way other than just going and shooting them up, but they may, I mean, and they certainly don't fear us right now.

Rich McFadden ([29:21](#)):

Yeah. And you said, Billy, you're not exactly sure where this is going? Think about where we were a month and a half ago. It's almost impossible to predict where we could be and hopefully it doesn't head the same direction.

Bill Walton ([29:31](#)):

Well, that's about the time the four of us are going to need to get together again. All right. Well, you've been watching the Bill Walton Show and you can catch this on YouTube and the other major podcast channels, as well as streaming on CPAC Now on Monday nights at seven o'clock, and we've been here with the brain trust, Rich McFadden, Greg Corombos and Brian McNicoll. And guys, let's watch and take detailed notes so next time we come back we'll see where this is going from here. So anyway, thanks everyone, and thanks for joining.

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