

Leaving Afghanistan–2021



Desiccating grit pelts our faces in the turbulence of smothering black back blast
Spewing from screeching engines on the tarmac powering up for retreat.

Deadened and disoriented, we heavily laden listless figures shuffle into the
metal leviathans, crowd ourselves methodically into regimented rows

and strap ourselves securely with red and yellow nylon belts to the bulkhead for take-off,
our equipment crammed into where it can fit,
underneath our seats or stacked underneath nets,
with weapons secured.

Breathing in the smell of sweat, and pee, and JP4, the urine-colored interior light
Blinks suddenly to phosphorescent green as the rear ramp elevates

From the ground up and locks shut with the metallic finality of perdition.
Outside, there is a dull roar and the muffled whine of engines powering up that
melds a midnight-like buzzing of locusts

With the rolling crash of waves thrashing some distant stony shore in the dark.

A drowsy silence prevails, some are already asleep, some laugh, and some weep.

—Maj. Paul Faust
February 2021