

**OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR JIM INHOFE  
RANKING MEMBER, SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
ROOM SD-G50**

**Tuesday, September 28, 2021**

**To receive testimony the conclusion of military operations in Afghanistan and  
plans for future counterterrorism operations**

*(As prepared for delivery)*

*Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to our witnesses for appearing today.*

*I would like to echo Chairman Reed's comments about the committee receiving your written statements late last night. This committee and the American people have waited over 30 days to hear from you in an open session and I am disappointed we did not receive your written statements at least 24 hours prior to this hearing.*

*I want to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to our service members and our veterans.*

*Our men and women in uniform bravely volunteer to go into harm's way for one reason: to keep their fellow Americans safe. They represent our very best.*

*I especially want to recognize those who made the ultimate sacrifice, and their families. On August 26th, we were reminded so painfully of what we ask our troops and their families to do. They lay it all on the line for this country.*

*Those 13 men and women died trying to evacuate their fellow Americans and at-risk Afghans from Kabul under extremely difficult and dangerous circumstances.*

*So I want to be perfectly clear: the frustration on this committee about the chaotic and deadly withdrawal from Afghanistan is not—and should never be—directed towards our troops.*

*It was President Biden and his advisers who put them in that situation.*

*Even worse: this was avoidable. Everything that happened was foreseeable. My colleagues on this committee and the commanders in charge—we saw it coming. So we're here today to understand what happened and why that advice was ignored.*

*Gen. McKenzie, you said in February—before the President decided to fully withdraw from Afghanistan—[quote] “you have to take a conditions-based approach.”*

*You expressed your concern “about the actions that the Taliban have taken up until this point”—meaning that the Taliban was not constraining al-Qaeda, as it had agreed to do under the conditions-based agreement that it signed with the Trump administration.*

*Around the same time, Gen. Miller, who was then the commander of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, advised his chain of command to keep approximately 2,500 troops in the country. He warned that the Taliban might otherwise take over.*

*Gen. McKenzie, you offered a similar warning when you last testified before this committee in April, right after the President made his decision to withdraw:*

*You said, “My concern is the ability of the Afghan military to hold the ground that they are on now without the support that they have been used to for many years.”*

*Throughout the spring, we saw many districts quickly fall to the Taliban—many without a shot fired. This is why I urged President Biden in June to rethink his approach and maintain a small force in Afghanistan in order to prevent the collapse we ultimately saw.*

*It was also why the members of this committee, on both sides of the aisle, spent months urging the administration to evacuate Americans and our Afghan partners sooner.*

*But President Biden and his advisers didn’t listen to his combat commander. He didn’t listen to Congress. And he failed to anticipate what all of us knew would happen.*

*So in August we all witnessed a horror of the President’s own making. Afghans died as they desperately gripped onto departing flights. The Taliban is in a stronger position than it’s been since 9/11. Terrorist Haqqani members are in senior government positions. We went from “we will never negotiate with terrorists” to “we must negotiate with terrorists.”*

*Worst of all: 13 brave Americans were killed in the evacuation effort. Three days later, the Biden administration said that it struck an ISIS operative—but, in fact, it killed ten Afghan civilians, including seven children.*

*And then, President Biden concluded the drawdown by doing the unthinkable: he left Americans behind.*

*The men and women who served in uniform, their heroic families, and the American people deserve answers: how did this avoidable disaster happen? Why were Americans left behind?*

*President Biden’s decision to withdraw has expanded the threat of terrorism—and increased the likelihood of an attack on the homeland.*

*The administration is telling the American people that the plan to deal with these threats is something called “over the horizon” counterterrorism, and that we do these types of operations elsewhere in the world. That’s misleading at best and dishonest, at worst.*

*There is no plan. We have no reliable partners on the ground. We have no bases nearby.*

*The Afghan government is now led by terrorists with long ties to al-Qaeda. And we're at the mercy of the Pakistan government to get into Afghanistan airspace.*

*Even if we can get there, we can't strike al-Qaeda in Afghanistan because we're worried about what the Taliban will do to the Americans still there.*

*The administration needs to be honest: Because of President Biden's disastrous decision, the terrorist threat to American families is rising significantly, while our ability to deal with these threats has been decimated.*

*This hearing marks the continuation of an oversight process that the Committee began two weeks ago. I thank Chairman Reed for working with me on it.*

*We will have another hearing with expert witnesses on Thursday, and Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Colin Kahl has agreed to testify in open session thereafter. I hope we hold as many hearings as it takes to get all the answers we need. Today is just the start.*

*In closing, I would just like to say this: President Biden made a strategic decision to leave Afghanistan which resulted in the death of 13 U.S. service members, the deaths of hundreds of Afghan civilians, including women and children, and left American citizens surrounded by the very terrorists who attacked us on 9/11—and they're still there.*

*Thank you again for agreeing to testify today. Chairman Reed.*

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