

**OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR JACK REED
CHAIRMAN, SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**ROOM SD-G50
Thursday, September 30, 2021**

To receive testimony on Afghanistan
(As prepared for delivery)

REED: Good morning. The Committee meets today for the fourth in a series of Committee engagements that seek to assess the United States military's 20-year mission in Afghanistan; understand factors that led to the Taliban's rapid takeover of the country and the collapse of the Afghan Government and Afghan National Defense and Security Forces; oversee DOD operations in support of Afghan Special Immigrant Visa holders—or SIVs—and other high-risk Afghans; and explore lessons learned for counterterrorism operations going forward while framing these operations within broader national security priorities and emerging threats.

Today's hearing will explore perspectives from two expert witnesses. Joining us today are Dr. Vali Nasr, Professor of Middle East Studies and International Affairs at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies and former Senior Adviser to the United States Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan; and Mr. Thomas Joscelyn, Senior Fellow at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies and Senior Editor of the Long War Journal. I would like to thank you both for being here.

Recent attention has been focused on the final months in Afghanistan. I think it is equally important, however, that this Committee examines the broader two-decade mission that shaped the outcome we face today. The path that led to this moment was paved with years of mistakes spanning four presidencies. There is plenty of blame to go around.

This hearing is not just review for history's sake. There is a temptation to close the book on Afghanistan and move on to long-term strategic competition with China and Russia. However, while the threat from violent extremists has changed, we must ensure we remain postured to carry out counterterrorism operations in an effective manner. In order to move forward, we must capture the lessons of the last two decades.

On Tuesday we heard from Secretary of Defense Austin, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Milley, and Commander of U.S. Central Command General McKenzie regarding their views on what contributed to the outcome we now face in Afghanistan. Notably, we heard from Generals Milley and McKenzie that while their military advice was to keep 2,500 troops in Afghanistan, they acknowledged that this plan created the real possibility of more U.S. casualties and a likely return to war with the Taliban. President Biden concluded that more troops might buy more time and casualties—but more time would not create a more effective Afghan government.

General Milley pointed out several strategic decisions that contributed to the outcome in Afghanistan which included the invasion of Iraq, Pakistan’s support to the Taliban, the corruption of the Afghan government, and U.S. mission creep into counterinsurgency and nation building. I agree with General Milley that these are important factors to grapple with. I also think the implications of the Trump Administration’s flawed Doha Agreement—which required the withdrawal of all U.S. and coalition forces and international contractors—warrants further analysis.

General Milley also testified that he was committed to understanding, quote, “how we developed, trained, and equipped the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and why they collapsed in 11 days.” It is paramount to understand and learn from this failure as we continue overseas operations where we must work by, with, and through partner nations to achieve shared national security goals.

Despite colossal efforts over multiple administrations, both Democratic and Republican, we were unable to help build an Afghan government capable of leading its people, nor an Afghan security force capable of defeating the Taliban. Afghan soldiers fought bravely in the face of massive casualties but, faced with the loss of American military support and hamstrung by corruption within, they were unable to stand on their own against Taliban forces.

As the committee continues its review and oversight of the war in Afghanistan, I would ask that during today’s hearing you provide your assessments of the mission. We would like to understand what events and decisions throughout the war you believe have shaped the ultimate outcome, and what lessons we can apply to future operations. We would also like to hear your thoughts on how to effectively transition to an “over the horizon” counterterrorism architecture.

In addition, we would like your impressions on the regional dynamics following the withdrawal of our forces, including the implications for relations with Pakistan, China, Russia, Iran and others, and your recommendations for optimizing regional security arrangements going forward.

With that, let me recognize Ranking Member Inhofe for any opening comments he may have.