

Stenographic Transcript  
Before the

COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES

## **UNITED STATES SENATE**

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON  
SECURITY IN AFGHANISTAN AND IN THE REGIONS  
OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

Tuesday, October 26, 2021

Washington, D.C.

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1 HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON SECURITY IN AFGHANISTAN AND  
2 IN THE REGIONS OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA

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4 Tuesday, October 26, 2021

5  
6 U.S. Senate

7 Committee on Armed Services

8 Washington, D.C.  
9

10 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:32 a.m. in  
11 Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jack Reed,  
12 chairman of the committee, presiding.

13 Committee members present: Senators Reed [presiding],  
14 Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King,  
15 Warren, Peters, Manchin, Duckworth, Rosen, Kelly, Inhofe,  
16 Wicker, Fischer, Cotton, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Cramer,  
17 Scott, Blackburn, Hawley, and Tuberville.  
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1           OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM  
2 RHODE ISLAND

3           Chairman Reed: I will now call the hearing to order.

4           Good morning. The Committee meets today to examine the  
5 security situation in South and Central Asia in light of the  
6 transition of U.S. military forces from Afghanistan.

7           This is the sixth event in a series of Committee  
8 engagements that seek to assess the United States'  
9 military's 20-year mission in Afghanistan; understand  
10 factors that led to the Taliban's rapid takeover of the  
11 country and the collapse of the Afghan Forces; oversee DOD  
12 operations in support of Afghan evacuees; and recalibrate  
13 ongoing counterterrorism operations in light of emerging  
14 threats and broader national security priorities.

15          Joining us today are Dr. Colin Kahl, Under Secretary of  
16 Defense for Policy, and Lieutenant General James Mings,  
17 Director for Operations, J3, Joint Staff. I thank you both  
18 for being here.

19          I know there may be a tendency during this hearing to  
20 focus on our final months in Afghanistan. I would stress  
21 again that our withdrawal this summer and the events  
22 surrounding it did not happen in a vacuum. The path that  
23 led to this outcome was paved with years of mistakes, from  
24 our catastrophic pivot to Iraq, to our failure to  
25 effectively grapple with Pakistan's support for the Taliban,

1 to the flawed Doha Agreement. This is not a Democratic or a  
2 Republican problem; these failures have manifested over four  
3 presidential administrations of both parties and an  
4 unwillingness to recognize and correct past mistakes will  
5 impact the operations of today and the future.

6 One fundamental question that requires close  
7 examination is how did the decades-long strategy for  
8 building the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces  
9 result in a force that was incapable of defeating the  
10 Taliban and seemingly collapsed in a matter of days?

11 We need to better understand what led to the  
12 development of Afghan Security Forces that suffered from low  
13 morale, widespread corruption, and which were incapable of  
14 operating without U.S. and coalition support. In addition,  
15 we need to assess the extent to which the failure of the  
16 Afghan Government to earn the loyalty of the Afghan Security  
17 Forces contributed to their being unwilling to defend the  
18 Kabul Government against the Taliban.

19 Further, our inability across multiple administrations  
20 to effectively deal with Pakistan is another example of past  
21 being prologue. Managing the security relationship with  
22 Pakistan will remain important as we seek to successfully  
23 implement a regional counterterrorism strategy with other  
24 partners and allies. That is why it is vitally important  
25 for us to reflect upon and study the entirety of the 20-year

1 mission in Afghanistan.

2 I agreed with Secretary Austin and General Milley's  
3 testimony to this Committee last month that there should be  
4 a comprehensive review spanning the war in Afghanistan. I  
5 would support a formal independent study of the Afghan war,  
6 as Senator Duckworth and a number of other colleagues have  
7 taken the lead in preparing. I look forward to working  
8 towards authorizing such a review as part of this year's  
9 National Defense Authorization Act.

10 At the same time, we cannot allow our examination of  
11 the past mission to come at the expense of our national  
12 security for today and the future. While the United States  
13 has ended its military mission in Afghanistan, we must  
14 continue to ensure that Al Qaeda, ISIS-K, and other  
15 terrorist groups cannot use Afghanistan to attack the United  
16 States and our allies. We must remain vigilant about these  
17 threats and ensure that we establish an effective and robust  
18 counterterrorism architecture moving forward.

19 Last week the Members of this committee received a  
20 classified update on regional security issues and threats.  
21 The American people deserve to be reassured that the  
22 Department remains actively engaged in defending the  
23 homeland against terrorist threats emanating from this  
24 region. Under Secretary Kahl and General Mingus, I would  
25 ask that, to the extent you can because of the sensitive

1 nature of this material, during today's open session,  
2 provide an update on efforts to address the threat from  
3 terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan and across South  
4 and Central Asia. I would also appreciate an update on  
5 progress toward building a new regional counterterrorism  
6 architecture.

7 Finally, I would like to understand the status of  
8 negotiations with regional allies and partners to facilitate  
9 this new posture, whether and how our adversaries may  
10 attempt to constrain or stymie such efforts, and strategies  
11 for mitigation.

12 Before I turn to Ranking Member Inhofe for his opening  
13 remarks, I would like to remind my colleagues that there  
14 will be a classified session immediately following this open  
15 session in SV-217, the Office of Senate Security, and also  
16 remind my colleagues that there are scheduled, three votes  
17 this morning. So, this will be somewhat complicated.

18 With that, let me recognize the ranking member, Senator  
19 Inhofe. Senator?

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1 STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES INHOFE, U.S. SENATOR FROM  
2 OKLAHOMA

3 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you  
4 to our witnesses for appearing here today.

5 Welcome back, Secretary Kahl. As the most senior of  
6 policy advisors at DoD, it is appropriate that you agreed to  
7 testify in open session on these critical issues.

8 Let's be clear why we are here today: As a result of  
9 the chaotic withdrawal of U.S. troops in Afghanistan, 13  
10 servicemen and women were killed, at least hundreds of  
11 American citizens were left behind, and many thousands of  
12 Afghan partners have been abandoned.

13 Although some of our questions on this drawdown have  
14 been answered, we still have a long way to go until all of  
15 our questions are answered, and I want to thank Chairman  
16 Reed for working with us on continuing this oversight  
17 process.

18 Now, too often, the current administration tells us  
19 that President Biden was forced to withdraw from Afghanistan  
20 because of President Trump's agreement with the Taliban and  
21 that is just not true; I think everyone knows that is just  
22 not true. First, President Biden hasn't felt bound by  
23 President Trump's policies on anything else; on Iran, or the  
24 Southwest Border, or on funding our military.

25 Second, the Doha Agreement was a conditioned-based

1 approach under President Trump's plan, the U.S. agreed to  
2 withdraw troops only if the Taliban met seven conditions.  
3 These conditions included: Preventing the Al Qaeda from  
4 threatening the United States from Afghanistan and denying  
5 residence to those threatening the United States.

6 These conditions weren't met; in fact, as General  
7 Milley told us, only one of the seven conditions was met.  
8 As we have heard in recent hearings, Al Qaeda remains active  
9 in Afghanistan, and will likely threaten the U.S. homeland  
10 very, very soon. And that is why all of President Biden's  
11 military advisers told him to keep at least 2,500 troops to  
12 continue fighting the terrorists and to protect Americans,  
13 here, and in the homeland.

14 But President Biden withdrew anyway. He did not feel  
15 bound by President Trump's conditions-based approach and did  
16 not follow it. I wish he had. We would all be safer today  
17 if that were the case.

18 Now, Secretary Kahl, you were confirmed on April 27.  
19 So you did not make a recommendation on President Biden's  
20 decision to pull all the troops from Afghanistan by a set  
21 date, rather than based on the conditions on the ground.  
22 But you were the most senior policy advisor at DOD for the  
23 next four months as this tragedy played out from May through  
24 the end of August.

25 What I want to know, and what the American people want

1 to know, and what our troops who served and sacrificed in  
2 Afghanistan absolutely deserve to know, is what did  
3 President Biden's most senior advisors do during those four  
4 months?

5 We want to understand what this national security team  
6 did on a day-to-day basis as a warning light after a warning  
7 light began to blink red. We need to understand, and then  
8 fix, what went wrong so that we can keep American families  
9 safe and protect our interests in the future.

10 The consequences of the President's disastrous decision  
11 are impossible to ignore: An Afghan interpreter for our  
12 Australian allies was executed last week. China is going  
13 after rare-earth metals there. Girls are being prevented  
14 from going to school. That's just the beginning. The  
15 danger is likely to grow across the world and in our own  
16 backyard.

17 We have heard from our military officials and our  
18 intelligence officials how little we really know about the  
19 rising threat of terrorism now that Afghanistan is a safe  
20 haven for these organizations.

21 But instead of an honest look at what went wrong, the  
22 Biden administration has hunkered down and said this  
23 withdrawal was an extraordinary success, and instead of  
24 putting together a real counterterrorism plan for the  
25 future, all we get is buzzwords.

1           So, I look forward to our witnesses' testimony and  
2 thank you to Chairman Reed.

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Inhofe.  
2 Dr. Kahl and Mr. Secretary, please again.

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1           STATEMENT OF HON. COLIN KAHL, UNDER SECRETARY OF  
2 DEFENSE FOR POLICY

3           Dr. Kahl: Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and  
4 distinguished members of the Senate Armed Services  
5 Committee, thank you for the opportunity to join you today  
6 to discuss the military withdrawal from Afghanistan and the  
7 Department's role in Operation Allies Welcome.

8           Today, I am joined by Lieutenant General Jim Mingus,  
9 Director, J3, Joint Staff, who will also provide opening  
10 remarks following mine.

11           Let me start by echoing Secretary Austin and expressing  
12 my pride in our servicemembers. Over the last 20 years in  
13 Afghanistan, our men and women in uniform have performed  
14 countless acts of bravery; 2,461 of them paid the ultimate  
15 sacrifice while doing so. I know members of this Committee  
16 share my gratitude to our troops, who have faithfully served  
17 and sacrificed, spent months and years away from family and  
18 loved ones, and endured repeated combat tours, all to  
19 protect the homeland.

20           For 2 decades, our men and women serving in Afghanistan  
21 acted with courage and compassion, yet, the performance of  
22 our soldiers, airmen, sailors, and Marines during the  
23 historic evacuation was unparalleled. In the 48-hour span  
24 following the Taliban takeover of Kabul, our troops on the  
25 ground secured an airport in contested territory. In just

1 17 days, they evacuated the largest airlift of people in  
2 history, unprecedented both, in scope and scale, enabling  
3 the evacuation of 120,000 U.S. citizens; lawful permanent  
4 residents; third-country nationals; Afghan partners,  
5 including those eligible for Special Immigrant Visas and the  
6 State Department's locally employed staff; and other  
7 vulnerable Afghans at risk. As I testified previously, no  
8 other military on Earth could have accomplished that feat,  
9 and we, as Americans, should be immensely proud.

10 The success of the U.S. evacuation operation was  
11 enabled by our military planners and their diligent  
12 development of contingency plans. Immediately following the  
13 President's April announcement of our military withdrawal  
14 from Afghanistan, the Department of Defense went to work  
15 ensuring that the drawdown could be accomplished  
16 responsibly. Though we did not imagine a situation in which  
17 the Afghan Government and Security Forces would collapse in  
18 a matter of days prior to the conclusion of our retrograde,  
19 the Department began iterating on evacuation scenarios,  
20 including the possibility of a contested evacuation, in the  
21 spring of 2021. Not only did we plan, we proactively took  
22 steps in case of emergency.

23 In June, the Secretary pre-positioned forces in the  
24 region and sent the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group to  
25 the Gulf to cover the withdrawal. In August, as conditions

1 worsened, additional forces were placed on alert.

2 Forethought, as much as skill and bravery, allowed our  
3 servicemembers to execute this extraordinary mission.

4 To be sure, there were complications and tragedy.  
5 While airlifting up to 9,000 people per day from Kabul, we  
6 experienced overcrowding at the airport and at our interim  
7 staging bases for evacuees on their way to the United  
8 States. In a highly dynamic environment, we constantly had  
9 to adapt to access and evacuate U.S. citizens, lawful  
10 permanent residents, and Afghan evacuees, and in the end, we  
11 were unable to reach some of those we sought to evacuate by  
12 August 31.

13 There were also heartbreaking costs. In the final days  
14 of the withdrawal, we lost 13 American servicemembers to a  
15 horrific ISIS-K suicide attack on the airport. These 13  
16 heroes sacrificed their lives to save tens of thousands of  
17 innocent people. We will forever mourn the tragedy of their  
18 deaths and honor the humanity that they demonstrated in  
19 their final mission.

20 I am also acutely aware of the costs borne by Afghans.  
21 Last week, I met with the President of Nutrition & Education  
22 International (NEI), Dr. Steven Kwon. He told me of the  
23 extraordinary life lived by Mr. Zemari Ahmadi, an aid worker  
24 employed by NEI and one of the 10 civilians mistakenly  
25 killed during the August 29 U.S. airstrike in Kabul. It was

1 clear from our conversation that among the 10 innocent lives  
2 lost, including children, Afghanistan lost a tremendous  
3 humanitarian in the erroneous strike, and for that, we at  
4 the Department, are deeply sorry.

5 Just as I committed to Dr. Kwon, I commit to each of  
6 you that the Department will ensure a thorough investigation  
7 and accounting for the August 29 airstrike; how we can more  
8 stringently prevent civilian harm in the future; and how we  
9 can support the family of those lost via a condolence  
10 payment.

11 Our military mission in Afghanistan may have ended on  
12 August 31, but our servicemembers, diplomats, and government  
13 employees remain hard at work. The U.S. Government  
14 continues to facilitate the departure of U.S. citizens and  
15 lawful permanent residents, as well as Afghans who worked  
16 for and with us, from Afghanistan.

17 From September 21 through October 25, the U.S.  
18 Government has directly facilitated the departure of 240  
19 U.S. citizens and 157 lawful permanent residents, as well as  
20 others who have come out on private charters. Physically  
21 evacuating U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents,  
22 third-country nationals, Afghan partners, and other Afghans  
23 at risk from Kabul Airport was only step one of the  
24 extraordinary accomplishment of our military.

25 Across the globe and throughout this country, over

1 10,000 of our men and women in uniform continue to support  
2 the Afghan people alongside our interagency partners via,  
3 Operation Allies Welcome. We built out our military  
4 installations across Europe and the Middle East to serve as  
5 temporary locations for evacuees as they underwent the  
6 necessary vetting and health screenings for them to come to  
7 the United States. This portion of the mission was enabled  
8 by America's network of allies and partners, a network that  
9 no other nation can rival. It demonstrates that our  
10 bilateral relationships across the globe continue to be a  
11 source of great national strength.

12 At home, we have drawn upon another wellspring of  
13 national power: the generosity and hospitality of the  
14 American people. We have welcomed over 65,000 Afghan  
15 evacuees to eight safe haven sites, located on domestic  
16 military installations, as they complete the necessary steps  
17 to be resettled into the United States. American  
18 communities are opening their arms and embracing the  
19 evacuees, and with their support, the resilient spirit of  
20 the Afghan people is coming to life.

21 For example, at Fort Bliss, Texas, an Afghan  
22 interpreter organized and started an informal education  
23 program for Afghan children, and at Fort Dix, New Jersey,  
24 volunteers organized weddings for Afghan couples who delayed  
25 their ceremonies during the fall of Kabul. American

1 servicemembers continue to work around the clock to ensure  
2 evacuees are safe and welcome on our installations. Every  
3 day, we see our men and women in uniform trading high-fives,  
4 giving fist bumps, and playing ball with Afghan children.  
5 This mission has not been without its challenges, but we are  
6 truly proud of all those supporting this historic operation.

7       Despite the end of our military presence in  
8 Afghanistan, the work of the Department is far from over.  
9 We are examining and learning from the past, reckoning with  
10 the uncomfortable truth that despite decades and billions of  
11 dollars of U.S. investment, the Afghan military evaporated  
12 in the face of the Taliban assault. Additionally, we are  
13 turning to the future, bolstering our capacity to engage in  
14 over-the-horizon counterterrorism operations to ensure that  
15 no threat emanating from Afghanistan can harm our homeland  
16 or our interests, even as we refocus the Department on the  
17 challenges posed by China, Russia, and other competitors and  
18 adversaries.

19       I know this Committee has many questions about the war,  
20 the evacuation, and our path forward. I look forward to  
21 taking them, but before I do, I would like to thank the  
22 members of this Committee for your enduring support and  
23 partnership, and with that, I would like to turn it over to  
24 General Mingus.

25       [The statement of Dr. Kahl follows:]

1           STATEMENT OF JAMES MINGUS, LIEUTENANT GENERAL,  
2           DIRECTOR FOR OPERATIONS, J3, JOINT STAFF

3           General Mingus: Good afternoon. I would like to start  
4           by thanking Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and all  
5           Members here today for your enduring support of our entire  
6           Joint Force. I would like to extend my appreciation to the  
7           SASC for providing me with the opportunity to speak with you  
8           today about the military's deliberate withdrawal from  
9           Afghanistan and the Department's contribution to the  
10          interagency effort to initially evacuate fully-vetted Afghan  
11          Special Immigrant Visa holders and execute a Non-Combatant  
12          Evacuation Operation for U.S. Citizens and other Afghans.

13          Our interagency coordination and partnership were, and  
14          continue to be, critical to the ongoing evacuation,  
15          processing, and resettlement of evacuees. I could not be  
16          more proud of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and  
17          civilians whose service and sacrifice throughout the  
18          Afghanistan Campaign is humbling. It has been the honor of  
19          a lifetime to serve alongside them.

20          As Dr. Kahl just explained, the breadth and depth of  
21          the simultaneous evacuation operations was unparalleled.  
22          NEO operations are among the most challenging missions a  
23          military can undertake. By their very nature they occur  
24          with little notice and are often within tenuous security  
25          environments. The Department recognized that a NEO could be

1 the most dangerous course of action and with the  
2 interagency, we planned for this contingency.

3 This pre-planning allowed the Department to respond  
4 quickly to the Department of State's NEO Declaration  
5 deploying a force package of nearly 6,000 personnel to HKIA  
6 within days. This NEO element executed the largest  
7 humanitarian airlift operation ever undertaken. I am not  
8 sure that there is another event that better demonstrates  
9 what it means to be an American servicemember, the  
10 willingness to sacrifice self, while demonstrating  
11 compassion under fire, so that others may enjoy the freedom  
12 and opportunities we would die to defend.

13 Unfortunately, 13 servicemembers did pay the ultimate  
14 price and they will be regarded as heroes forever.  
15 Americans were not the only heroes lost over the course of  
16 the 20-year campaign. NATO allies and partners, and  
17 especially Afghan civilians, were a part of our efforts  
18 beginning with the initial invasion. Countless Afghan lost  
19 their lives trying to help the United States navigate  
20 Afghanistan's difficult human and physical terrain, and  
21 countless more Afghan National Defense and Security Forces  
22 were lost serving alongside U.S. servicemembers.  
23 Unfortunately, we lost 10 more Afghan civilians leading up  
24 to our departure during a precision strike we employed to  
25 target ISIS-K.

1           As Dr. Kahl explained, we are committed to the ongoing  
2 investigation and to supporting the family members of those  
3 lost. We also understand how this strike may cause the  
4 Committee to question Over-the Horizon Counterterrorism  
5 operation now that we no longer have a physical footprint in  
6 Afghanistan. I look forward to discussing these issues with  
7 you today.

8           Furthermore, the ANDSF will be a case study the  
9 Department will pour over in the ensuing years. We will  
10 analyze their development and their ultimate dissolution to  
11 determine how to chart better paths for our partners in the  
12 future. While we cannot, and we will never be able to  
13 instill the will to fight, we can, and will take the  
14 opportunity to better understand those intangible factors  
15 that so significantly affect our mission and our nation's  
16 interests.

17           Our work did not end on 31 August. The interagency  
18 effort to quickly house, transport, vaccinate, and resettle  
19 the resultant evacuee population continues to be a herculean  
20 effort; one that would have been extraordinarily more  
21 difficult without our allies, partners, and NGOs. We are  
22 also continuing to support the interagency as they work to  
23 relocate U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, and  
24 Afghans to whom we hold special commitments, including SIV  
25 holders, who remain in Afghanistan and have expressed a

1 desire to leave.

2           Despite the Afghan withdrawal and evacuation, the  
3 Department remains focused on counterterrorism threats to  
4 the homeland. While we reprioritize following the  
5 withdrawal in the short term, we are actively setting the  
6 conditions to ensure we remain situationally aware and are  
7 postured to mitigate and neutralize developing terrorist  
8 threats and streams.

9           Dr. Kahl and I look forward to answering your questions  
10 today as we work together for the benefit of our country.  
11 Thank you again for your time and your support.

12           [The statement of General Mingus follows:]

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General, and thank  
2 you, Mr. Secretary.

3 For both the Secretary and General Mingus, when General  
4 Milley was here, he testified that although Al Qaeda and  
5 other terrorist groups had been significantly degraded in  
6 the past 20 years, that there may be a resurgence of  
7 international terrorism emanating from the region within 12  
8 to 36 months, do you concur with that assessment, Dr. Kahl?

9 Dr. Kahl: I think the assessment depends on which  
10 group we are talking about. I think the intelligence  
11 community assesses that both, ISIS-K and Al Qaeda have the  
12 intent to conduct external operations, including against the  
13 United States, but neither, currently has the capability to  
14 do so. We could see ISIS-K generate that capability in  
15 somewhere between 6 or 12 months. I think the current  
16 assessments by the intelligence community is Al Qaeda would  
17 take a year or two to reconstitute that capability. And as  
18 you said in your opening, Senator, we have to remain  
19 vigilant against that possibility.

20 Chairman Reed: Thank you.

21 Do you concur, General Mingus?

22 General Mingus: I do, sir. And I know that it was  
23 further refined last week when the intel folks were here to  
24 refine that assessment. So, the Chairman's assessment, I  
25 concur with that.

1 Chairman Reed: Thank you.

2 And, General Mingus, when General McKenzie was here, he  
3 indicated, given the departure, the physical departure of  
4 American personnel from Afghanistan that our "over the  
5 horizon" situation will not give us the same picture that we  
6 have now. The ranges will be greater. The resources will  
7 be greater. The risks will all be greater.

8 Do you all assess at this time that despite these  
9 increased risks that we are appropriately postured to  
10 disrupt terrorist activities emanating from the region?

11 General Mingus: I'm sorry, sir. The last half of the  
12 question?

13 Chairman Reed: Despite these increased risks, which we  
14 all recognize, do you believe we are appropriately postured  
15 at this time to disrupt terrorist threats emanating from the  
16 region and are adapting so we can consistently disrupt these  
17 activities?

18 General Mingus: Sir, as you know, and the Chairman and  
19 the Secretary both briefed, and so did General McKenzie, the  
20 "over the horizon" counterterrorism capability that we have  
21 in place right now. And we will go, Dr. Kahl and I will go  
22 into much more detail during the closed session, but as you  
23 know, we have a command and control architecture set up in  
24 the Gulf. We are able to project sets from the Gulf. We  
25 are able to collect across all the sources of intelligence,

1 fuse that, and continue and analyze, and if necessary, take  
2 action in Afghanistan.

3 As General McKenzie and the Chairman both indicated, it  
4 is harder, but we believe we have the assets in place right  
5 now, if necessary, to disrupt and/or degrade the terrorist  
6 networks in Afghanistan.

7 Chairman Reed: Thank you.

8 Secretary Kahl, some have suggested that the  
9 administration should have started evacuating people from  
10 Afghanistan sooner. Was it is the administration's  
11 assessment that doing so would have hastened the fall of  
12 Kabul but suggesting that the United States did not have  
13 confidence in the Ghani Government and did we, in fact, give  
14 assurances to President Ghani that we would maintain a  
15 presence and not signal our lack of confidence?

16 Dr. Kahl: So, Senator, the goal during the retrograde  
17 was to assist the Afghan Government and not undermine them.  
18 And there was concern that if you accelerated evacuations to  
19 include of large numbers of Afghans, that it would create a  
20 self-fulfilling prophesy of accelerating the collapse of the  
21 Afghan Government. It is also something that President  
22 Ghani raised as a chief concern.

23 We did bring out more than a thousand SIVs prior to the  
24 NEO, but there was a concern that a mass exodus could  
25 undermine the Government.

1 Chairman Reed: Thank you.

2 Finally, Dr. Kahl, can you give us updates with respect  
3 to our arrangement with Pakistan regarding their cooperation  
4 with us on counterterrorism. There have been press reports  
5 recently that they are working with the Taliban to attack  
6 ISIS-K, which is an enemy of both, but can you give us any  
7 further assessment?

8 Dr. Kahl: So, Pakistan is a challenging actor, but  
9 they don't want Pakistan to be a safe haven for terrorist  
10 attacks, external attacks; not just against Pakistan, but  
11 against others. They continue to give us access to  
12 Pakistani airspace and we are in conversations about keeping  
13 that airspace open and I am happy to talk about that more in  
14 the closed session.

15 Chairman Reed: Uh-huh.

16 Dr. Kahl: But for right now, the counterterrorism  
17 cooperation with Pakistan is pretty good.

18 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much.

19 Senator Inhofe, please?

20 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 One of the many confusing things about this whole thing  
22 is that we really don't know how many Americans were left in  
23 Afghanistan. The administration's number of U.S. citizens  
24 left in Afghanistan keeps changing. We understand that and  
25 it is very confusing.

1           The administration always said a hundred to 200 U.S.  
2 citizens were left in Afghanistan, but it has already  
3 withdrawn 234 and is in contact with 363 others; 176 of whom  
4 want to leave. I am speaking slowly, because I am trying to  
5 put this together at the same time.

6           The administration, by its own count, left 600  
7 Americans behind; over 400 of whom want to leave, not the  
8 100 to 200 that has been referred to several times.

9           There are still thousands of Americans unaccounted for,  
10 based on Secretary Blinken's earlier claim that there were  
11 10 to 15,000. Mid-August, Secretary of State Blinken told  
12 senators, we were all there that 10,000 to 15,000 Americans  
13 were in Afghanistan. On the 31 of August, the  
14 administration claims it withdrew 6,000.

15           Now, if you do the math as we are saying this, it  
16 withdrew 6,000 Americans from Afghanistan. Now, this would  
17 mean that somewhere between 4,000 and 9,000 Americans were  
18 left behind, but the administration says 100 to 200 are  
19 remaining.

20           In October, the administration stated that 234  
21 Americans have been evacuated since January, since the 31 of  
22 August. The State Department says in contact, says it is in  
23 contact with 363 more Americans in Afghanistan; 176 of whom  
24 want to leave.

25           Now, if we can figure this out, you are doing a lot

1 better than I have done. And I have made a real effort to  
2 go down and document everything that is in there. So, at  
3 the very least, it is confusing.

4 During the August 18 interview on ABC, George  
5 Stephanopoulos asked President Biden whether U.S. troops  
6 would stay beyond August 31 if there were still Americans to  
7 evacuate. President Biden responded quote, and this is a  
8 quote, if there are American citizens left, we are going to  
9 stay to get them out. Of course, this didn't happen.

10 So, Secretary Kahl, I would ask you the question: When  
11 did you realize that the United States would not be able to  
12 get all of the U.S. citizens out of Afghanistan by August 31  
13 and did you present your leadership any options for  
14 extending that self-imposed deadline to ensure that our  
15 people were out of harm's way at that time?

16 Dr. Kahl: Well, as a first matter, nobody was  
17 abandoned. We continue to get people out of Afghanistan,  
18 including American citizens.

19 And, Senator, if you would like, I am happy to go  
20 through the latest numbers on that, but --

21 Senator Inhofe: Well, now, I would ask you to pause  
22 there. The latest numbers, I have already done the latest  
23 numbers. And maybe there are later numbers than I just read  
24 earlier.

25 Are there some later numbers?

1 Dr. Kahl: So I can give you some fidelity on the  
2 numbers.

3 Senator Inhofe: I agree with that.

4 Dr. Kahl: Okay. So, the validated numbers from the  
5 State Department during the NEO were 6,000 Americans. We  
6 estimate we evacuated about 5,500.

7 Since the end of the NEO, so since September 1, the  
8 State Department documented 240 American citizens who have  
9 departed Afghanistan since September 1 and 157 Green Card  
10 holders. When you account for additional individuals who  
11 did not, were not arranged for travel outside of Afghanistan  
12 by the U.S. Government, but came out through other private  
13 charters, DOD's numbers total out to 314 AMCITS total and  
14 266 LPR, total, since the end of the NEO.

15 In terms of how many American citizens we estimate are  
16 currently in Afghanistan, the Department of State is in  
17 contact with 196 American citizens who are ready to depart  
18 and arrangements are being made for them to do so, either  
19 via area or over ground, and another 243 American citizens  
20 have been contacted and are not ready to depart, either  
21 because they want to stay in Afghanistan or aren't ready, is  
22 the current numbers.

23 Senator Inhofe: Now, the question that I asked: Did  
24 you present your leadership any options for extending that  
25 self-imposed deadline to ensure that our people were out of

1 harm's way --

2 Dr. Kahl: It was --

3 Senator Inhofe: -- and if it wasn't you, who would it  
4 be?

5 Dr. Kahl: It was the consensus of civilian and  
6 military leadership at the Department of Defense that we  
7 should stick to the August 31 deadline. If it extends  
8 beyond that would cause a risk to mission in force and would  
9 make it harder to get American citizens out beyond that  
10 date.

11 Senator Inhofe: The same military leadership that  
12 insisted that we leave troops down there at the time that we  
13 evacuated?

14 Dr. Kahl: That is correct.

15 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Inhofe.

17 Senator Shaheen, please?

18 Senator Shaheen: Thank you both for being here this  
19 morning and for your efforts to support the evacuation in  
20 Afghanistan.

21 I want to start by recognizing, as both of you did, the  
22 tremendous service of our men and women in the military who  
23 made possible, that evacuation and continue to support  
24 Afghan refugees. I was proud that 11 members of the New  
25 Hampshire National Guard volunteered to go to Joint Base

1 McGuire as part of Operation Allies Refuge and believe that  
2 they represent what we have seen across our Armed Forces.

3 We have also heard in our office from a number of those  
4 men and women who served in Afghanistan to continue to be  
5 concerned about people they served with, Afghans they served  
6 with during their time there, who are still in Afghanistan,  
7 whose lives are being threatened by the Taliban because of  
8 their service with the United States.

9 And so, General Mingus, you referenced those SIV  
10 applicants. I wonder if you can tell me what we continue to  
11 do to try and ensure that those SIV applicants and those who  
12 have received Special Immigrant Visas are ready, are going  
13 to be evacuated out of Afghanistan, either to the United  
14 States or somewhere else, where they will be safe.

15 General Mingus: Thank you, Senator.

16 As you know, the State Department has a group that they  
17 have established under Ambassador Jones and underneath that  
18 there is a group that solely focuses on the additional folks  
19 coming out of Afghanistan. They are also working with about  
20 52 special interest groups that Dr. Kahl's office and the  
21 Joint Staff are a part of. We meet with those groups twice  
22 a week because they have knowledge and understanding and  
23 contact with other Afghans who are at risk, that continue to  
24 try and come out.

25 And as the State Department works the documentation,

1 there is generally a flight or two a week that does bring  
2 out not just American citizens and legal permanent  
3 residents, but also Afghans at risk.

4 Senator Shaheen: I am sorry to interrupt, but do you  
5 have a sense of how many SIV applicants remain in  
6 Afghanistan or Secretary Kahl, do you know that number?

7 Dr. Kahl: So, the total number of SIVs in the pipeline  
8 is 28,000, according to our records, of which 8,555 have  
9 come out with their family members. So, that would suggest  
10 there is a significant number of SIVs still in Afghanistan.

11 And, Senator, I share your concern and we will work to  
12 try to get them out and hold the Taliban to their pledge for  
13 safe passage with people with documents, which should  
14 include SIVs.

15 Senator Shaheen: As I am sure you are both aware, one  
16 of the challenges for those SIV applicants has been getting  
17 the documents that can confirm that they actually worked  
18 alongside our military. And one of the challenges has been  
19 that DOD has not provided documents in many cases, and so  
20 what are we doing to reform that issue for, not just for the  
21 current SIV applicants, but for future?

22 Dr. Kahl: So, as this Committee is aware, the SIV  
23 process was not designed for an emergency. It is very slow.  
24 Typically, it took a year or 2.

25 Nothing was done in the previous administration to

1 speed that up. Nothing was done to bring anybody out from  
2 Afghanistan after the Doha Agreement in 2020.

3 At the beginning of the Biden administration, the State  
4 Department took some steps that shrunk the time to about 8  
5 months; that is still way too long.

6 The Department of Defense created an enormous database  
7 and has refined that data over time to try to speed up the  
8 confirmation of employment. The DOD, itself, doesn't  
9 provide the documents, the visas; that obviously comes  
10 through the State Department.

11 In some cases, they have provided physical visas to  
12 people who are in Afghanistan and other cases, there are  
13 electronic documents that have been transmitted because,  
14 obviously, our embassy is not in Afghanistan anymore.

15 Senator Shaheen: Well, Senator Ernst and I worked on  
16 legislation that has passed the Congress to try and speed up  
17 that process, but if there are other changes that need to be  
18 made, I hope that you will share that with the Committee so  
19 that we can continue to try and ensure that we don't have  
20 bureaucratic impediments to getting people out of the  
21 country.

22 My other question, because my time is short, has to do  
23 with the status of ISIS-K and Afghanistan. And we have seen  
24 an increase in the number of attacks in Afghanistan.

25 Is it our assessment that the Afghan or that the

1 Taliban has the capacity to defeat ISIS-K in the country?

2 Dr. Kahl: I think it is our assessment that the  
3 Taliban and ISIS-K are mortal enemies. So, the Taliban is  
4 highly motivated to go after ISIS-K. Their ability to do  
5 so, I think, is to be determined.

6 Senator Shaheen: Do you share that, General Mingus?

7 General Mingus: I do, ma'am.

8 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

9 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

11 Senator Wicker, please?

12 Senator Wicker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 I, first of all, have a statement. The Under Secretary  
14 in his prepared remarks on page 3 talks about, "the work of  
15 the Department is far from over. We are examining and  
16 learning from the past, reckoning with the uncomfortable  
17 truth that despite decades and billions of dollars of U.S.  
18 investment, the Afghan military evaporated in the face of  
19 the Taliban assault."

20 Let me just remind everyone that for the past 6 or 7  
21 years before the debacle in Kabul, the Afghan military took  
22 almost all of the casualties and fatalities and fought  
23 bravely on behalf of their country.

24 And, General Mingus, I appreciate the fact that you  
25 have been deployed a number of times and have served in

1 dangerous situations, but on the final page of your written  
2 statement, you talk about the ANDSF, Afghan National Defense  
3 Security Forces, you say there will be a case study for the  
4 Department in ensuing years; indeed, there will be a case  
5 study for historians in the coming years. And you make the  
6 statement, "While we cannot, and will never be able to  
7 instill the will to fight, we can and will take the  
8 opportunity to better understand," and so forth.

9         May I suggest that both of those statements are  
10 unworthy of the Secretary of Defense for Policy of this  
11 administration or of the Director of Operations for the  
12 Joint Staff and, in fact, it was a decision by this  
13 administration to pull support for the Afghan National  
14 Defense Forces that led to the debacle? And to suggest that  
15 this group of armed forces, supported by the United States,  
16 but populated almost entirely by Afghan soldiers was  
17 unwilling to fight or evaporated in the face of combat, is a  
18 shameful and unworthy statement.

19         Now, Mr. Secretary, on August 10, the White House said  
20 that President Biden believed that it is not inevitable that  
21 the Taliban takes over Kabul or the country, and I am  
22 quoting directly, 5 days later, we abandoned the embassy in  
23 Kabul.

24         Do you think this sent a signal to the Afghan National  
25 Defense Forces that we were out of there and that they could

1 not depend on us anymore?

2 And was that part of the, was the abandonment of the  
3 embassy part of the troop-withdrawal plans?

4 Dr. Kahl: It was not part of the plan. The embassy  
5 was evacuated once the ANDSF has essentially already  
6 collapsed. So, starting on or about August 11, you saw a  
7 cascade of provincial capitals that culminated in the  
8 Taliban entering Kabul. The ANDSF evaporated. President  
9 Ghani left the country on the 15 and we moved our diplomats  
10 to the airport.

11 Senator Wicker: General Mingus, who took the vast  
12 majority of the casualties in combat from, say, 2014 to the  
13 abandonment of Kabul?

14 General Mingus: It was the Afghan National Security  
15 Forces.

16 Senator Wicker: And do you think it is fair to suggest  
17 that they did not have the will to fight?

18 We cannot and never will be able to instill the will to  
19 fight; is that a fair statement, General?

20 General Mingus: Sir, agree how the Chairman and the  
21 Secretary qualified it when we talked about this very topic  
22 during their testimony. The leadership and the will to  
23 fight, when we pulled off, at the tactical level, from an  
24 advisory perspective several years ago, our visibility in  
25 terms of the condition of the Afghan National Security

1 Forces became less and less.

2 What I would offer, based on my experience, is that I  
3 have fought alongside the Afghans and there is no issue with  
4 their will to fight. I think the follow-on thing that we  
5 will need to study as part of history is, the will to fight  
6 for what, and that, I think, is the fundamental question;  
7 i.e., did they have the will to fight in Afghanistan against  
8 other Afghans, and that is the part, I think, that we will  
9 have to determine going forward.

10 Senator Wicker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11 Chairman Reed: Thank you, very much, Senator Wicker.

12 Now, Senator Gillibrand, excuse me, Senator Hirono?

13 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 Secretary Kahl, did I hear you say that Al Qaeda and  
15 ISIS-K are developing the capability to attack the U.S.  
16 within 2 years?

17 Dr. Kahl: What I said was that the current  
18 intelligence community's assessment is that ISIS-K could  
19 potentially develop the capability within 6 to 12 months and  
20 that Al Qaeda could potentially develop that capability  
21 within 1 to 2 years, but it is precisely that threat that we  
22 need to remain vigilant to disrupt.

23 Senator Hirono: Yeah. So, how do we determine whether  
24 they have the intention or the will to attack once they have  
25 the capability to do so?

1           Dr. Kahl: Well, I think we are fairly certain that  
2 they have the intention to do so. And I think the Committee  
3 had the opportunity to hear from the intelligence community  
4 in a classified setting not too long ago, and we can follow-  
5 up in the closed session, but we have considerable evidence  
6 that they have the intent. The question at the moment is  
7 the capability.

8           Senator Hirono: Well, you just said they will have the  
9 capability within 2 years.

10          Dr. Kahl: They could have the capability within 2  
11 years.

12          Senator Hirono: So, since they have the intent and  
13 then they will develop the capability, and so I don't know  
14 whether it is in the closed session that you will tell us  
15 what we are doing to defend against the culmination of both,  
16 the capability and the will to attack.

17          I have an ongoing concern shared by others on this  
18 committee about how the Taliban are treating women and girls  
19 in Afghanistan, given their brutal history. It is not  
20 likely that this will improve.

21          This is for you, Secretary Kahl: What is your  
22 understanding of the conditions on the ground for women and  
23 girls in Afghanistan under Taliban rule, following our  
24 withdrawal, and what is your assessment of our ability,  
25 along with the international community, to effectively

1 provide and direct aid directly to these vulnerable groups  
2 under Taliban control?

3 I have a series of questions, so I will just put them  
4 to you. Are there any ongoing operations to assist  
5 prominent female Afghan leaders who are at risk from  
6 retribution from the Taliban?

7 And back in May, I joined my colleagues, Senators  
8 Shaheen and Collins, in asking President Biden to appoint an  
9 ambassador-at-large for global women's issues to coordinate  
10 the protection of women and girls' rights in Afghanistan. I  
11 think that position is needed now more than ever. To your  
12 knowledge, has anyone been nominated to fill this spot?

13 Could you respond to my series of questions?

14 Dr. Kahl: I am happy to. So, as it relates to the  
15 situation on the ground in Afghanistan, I think we all have  
16 to be a little humbled that the reports are largely  
17 anecdotal, not systematic. But the conditions are not good.  
18 The Taliban are a ruthless authoritarian band. They promise  
19 to put forward an inclusive government. They did not do  
20 that.

21 Our reports suggest that women and girls are having a  
22 hard time going to school. We have not seen evidence yet of  
23 widespread reprisals, but that doesn't mean it is not  
24 happening; it just means we haven't seen that evidence yet.  
25 But there clearly are violence levels of human rights abuses

1 to include against women and girls.

2 I think that the international community has some  
3 leverage points with the new Taliban government. The  
4 Taliban government wants recognition. They should not get  
5 that recognition unless they are a very different government  
6 than the one that they are now. They have profound economic  
7 needs; that provides some leverage. And we should continue  
8 to provide humanitarian assistance, not to the government,  
9 but around the government, to at-risk populations.

10 As it relates to the State Department's position on  
11 women and girls, I don't have any information on that and I  
12 would ask that, I would defer that to the State Department.

13 Senator Hirono: I know that the international  
14 community has come forward with, literally, billions of  
15 dollars and aid that is supposed to go directly to  
16 non-governmental entities, but my understanding is that they  
17 have to work with the Taliban in order to make sure that the  
18 aid gets to the people that they are providing the aid to.

19 So, how much of the aid that the international  
20 community, including the United States, is providing will  
21 actually get to these organizations and out of Taliban's  
22 hands, do you have some sense of that?

23 Dr. Kahl: So, obviously, that falls more in the writ  
24 of the USAID and I would defer that, on specifics, to them.  
25 But my understanding from my USAID colleagues is that, and

1 from our U.S. U.N. colleagues is that NGOs and international  
2 organizations are able to operate around the Taliban  
3 government to provide aid directly, but it is harder.

4 Senator Hirono: We know that there are still a number  
5 of people who are seeking SIV status. So what agency is  
6 leading that effort to enable that the documentation, et  
7 cetera necessary for these applicants to get that status and  
8 then to leave Afghanistan?

9 Dr. Kahl: So, the State Department is in the lead for  
10 the SIV issue, but to degree that they need assistance from  
11 the Department of Defense to verify employment, we set up a  
12 project called Project Rabbit to streamline the data and  
13 make sure that we can make that process as efficient as  
14 possible.

15 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hirono.

17 Senator Fischer, please?

18 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 Last month, Generals Milley and McKenzie both testified  
20 on the challenges of conducting "over the horizon"  
21 counterterrorism strikes against targets in Afghanistan.  
22 Unlike other places in the world where we conduct "over the  
23 horizon" CT operations, Afghanistan is landlocked. We have  
24 no reliable partners on the ground and we don't have any  
25 basing agreements with neighboring countries.

1 Secretary Kahl, in the months since Secretary Austin,  
2 General Milley, and General McKenzie testified, have we  
3 secured any basing agreements or arrangements with any  
4 country bordering Afghanistan?

5 Dr. Kahl: We have not secured firm basing  
6 arrangements. We have had extensive conversations, which --

7 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

8 Dr. Kahl: -- I would be happy to discuss in closed  
9 session.

10 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

11 Also, Secretary Kahl, since President Biden made the  
12 decision to withdraw in April is touted "over the horizon"  
13 CT operations as our strategy going forward, can you share  
14 with the Committee any tangible steps the administration has  
15 made in trying to secure basing agreements with those  
16 countries, and keep it short, please; I have a number of  
17 questions.

18 Dr. Kahl: Sure. We have arrangements already in the  
19 Gulf, as you know. We are in conversations with Pakistan to  
20 keep the air line of communication open.

21 We have also had conversations with Uzbekistan and  
22 Tajikistan, which we can talk about in the closed session.

23 Senator Fischer: Okay. Thank you.

24 I look forward to learning about the status of all of  
25 those negotiations with those countries.

1           General Mingus, with the Taliban in control of the  
2 Afghan Government and absence of reliable on-the-ground  
3 partners, is it more challenging or less challenging to  
4 collect intelligence on ISIS-K and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan,  
5 and that is particularly looking at the intelligence that is  
6 needed to identify and also to locate targets for  
7 counterterrorism operations.

8           General Mingus: Yes, ma'am, that is a fair  
9 characterization. It is more challenging to collect and in  
10 the closed session, we will lay out some of the percentages  
11 for you across all the different intel specialties, in terms  
12 of what that degradation looks like.

13          Senator Fischer: Thank you.

14          Secretary Kahl, prior to August, were you aware of  
15 reports of extremely low morale among Afghan forces or of  
16 reports that they had not been paid in months?

17          Dr. Kahl: Broadly aware, but I think our visibility  
18 onto the exact conditions was highly degraded.

19          Senator Fischer: Were you concerned in June when the  
20 Taliban took control of 21 districts across nine provinces  
21 over the course of 4 days, most of them without a single  
22 shot being fired?

23          Dr. Kahl: Yes.

24          Senator Fischer: At this point or any other point  
25 prior to August 14, did you ever question the intelligence

1 community's assessment that the Afghan Government and Afghan  
2 Security Forces would remain viable for weeks to months,  
3 even years, following our departure; that is a quote.

4 Dr. Kahl: I repeatedly engage any intelligence  
5 colleagues, and as you know, Senator, the estimate shifted  
6 from 1 to 2 years, to months to year, and then weeks to  
7 months, and then days to weeks.

8 Senator Fischer: I think this disconnect between the  
9 reality on the ground and what the Biden administration  
10 assessed would happen with respect to the collapse of the  
11 Afghan Security Forces is deeply troubling. It was not just  
12 that our predictions were overtaken by events, some of the  
13 underlying assumptions, upon which the analysis were based,  
14 were very flawed.

15 Mr. Secretary, how can you possibly assure us that such  
16 a disconnect is not happening between the reality on the  
17 ground and the Biden administration's analysis of how long  
18 it is going to take Al Qaeda or ISIS-K to gain ability to  
19 attack the United States, and when you speak of 6 months as  
20 a possibility when our homeland would be in extreme danger,  
21 those were numbers that were given to us several months ago.  
22 Will we here an update on that in the classified?

23 Dr. Kahl: So, on the latter, we will give you the  
24 update. I think there was also a number of our intel  
25 colleagues that were here a few days ago that provided you

1 with the latest.

2 I think we should all be humbled that we have all known  
3 less about Afghanistan than we thought we did. I think that  
4 especially after the Doha Agreement in 2020, our forces  
5 declined substantially and we pulled off the Afghan Security  
6 Forces, so we had less feel for what was going on --

7 Senator Fischer: So, Secretary --

8 Dr. Kahl: -- and that got worse in 2021.

9 Senator Fischer: Mr. Secretary, would you agree with  
10 General McKenzie's testimony, then, that, quote, "The war on  
11 terror is not over, and the war in Afghanistan is not over,  
12 either"?

13 Dr. Kahl: There are terrorist threats all over the  
14 globe; in fact, the biggest ones, as you are aware --

15 Senator Fischer: Specifically to Afghanistan --

16 Dr. Kahl: -- are currently emanating from the Somalia  
17 and Yemen area.

18 Senator Fischer: Mr. Secretary, specifically to my  
19 question, it is on Afghanistan. That war is not over  
20 either?

21 Dr. Kahl: I think the war, as we know it, isn't  
22 continuing, but the terrorist threat continues.

23 Senator Fischer: And do you agree with General  
24 Milley's testimony that the outcome of this war was a  
25 strategic failure?

1 Dr. Kahl: I think the strategic objective of  
2 decimating Al Qaeda and getting Bin Laden was achieved. I  
3 think the broader, nation-building mission that several  
4 administrations had, was not successful.

5 Senator Fischer: Do you believe that the Biden  
6 administration bears any responsibility for the outcome of  
7 this war or for the Taliban now being in charge of  
8 Afghanistan?

9 Dr. Kahl: I think what we saw unfold in the past few  
10 months would have happened whenever we left Afghanistan.

11 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Fischer.

13 Senator King, please?

14 Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 I feel like we are in a time warp where history started  
16 on January 20 of 2021, when, in fact, history in this case  
17 started on February 29 of 2020 when the Doha Agreement was  
18 signed. I have read it, I don't know, probably 10 times.

19 I am a country lawyer, but it is not conditions-based.  
20 It guarantees that we will withdraw from Afghanistan in a  
21 certain number of months and a certain number of days. It  
22 even sets the day. It does talk about that the Taliban  
23 guarantees that Al Qaeda won't have safe haven. As far as  
24 we know, that is still the case. It does talk about  
25 negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan Government,

1 but that does not appear to be a condition of our  
2 withdrawal.

3 The decision to leave Afghanistan was made by the  
4 former administration in February of 2020. The question  
5 before President Biden was, do you abide by that agreement  
6 or do you abrogate it?

7 And we are talking now about the consequences of  
8 abiding by it. But let's talk for a minute about the  
9 consequences of abrogating it.

10 General Mingus, what would have happened, had the  
11 President said in April of 2021, we have decided not to  
12 withdraw our troops from Afghanistan, but to maintain our  
13 presence there, what would have been the result of that  
14 decision?

15 General Mingus: It is my belief that attacks from the  
16 Taliban, the one condition in the Doha Agreement that they  
17 did generally adhere to, would have resumed.

18 Senator King: And in order to respond to those  
19 attacks, it would have been necessary to augment our  
20 presence, would it not?

21 General Mingus: Potentially, although, the assessment  
22 by General McKenzie and General Miller, at the time, was  
23 that 2,500 was sufficient to be able to deal with that. But  
24 time would have only been able to tell, based on the  
25 voracity and the type of attacks, that would have started to

1 occur.

2 Senator King: And then to get to August 31, I remember  
3 the discussions. I remember the phone calls, the conference  
4 calls around that time.

5 Was it not the unanimous recommendation of the military  
6 that staying beyond August 31, which would have violated the  
7 agreement with the Taliban, would have subjected our troops  
8 and the citizens who remained, to greater danger than  
9 leaving and working with the Taliban to extract the  
10 remaining citizens, which, in fact, has happened. Wasn't  
11 that the consensus that the danger to the troops both, from  
12 the Taliban, who would have been free to attack us at that  
13 point under the, because of the abrogation of the August 31  
14 agreement, but also the terrorist threat, which we saw play  
15 itself out at the airport?

16 General Mingus: That is correct, Senator.

17 The consensus amongst the Joint Chiefs, the commanders  
18 on the ground, that staying past 31 August, the attacks  
19 would have resumed and the ability to get additional  
20 American citizens and legal permanent residents out, would  
21 have actually, the risk to that would have gone up higher  
22 than had we departed as we did.

23 Senator King: And, in fact, since August 31, the  
24 Taliban has honored, I don't know if it is an agreement or  
25 it is an understanding or an implicit understanding, that

1 they let these Americans out, and, in fact, they have been  
2 letting SIVs out; is that correct?

3 General Mingus: That is correct, Senator.

4 It has not been without challenge, but they continue,  
5 those that are properly documented, they have continued to  
6 let them depart in the numbers as Dr. Kahl briefed earlier.

7 Senator King: Mr. Kahl, what is your assessment of if  
8 the President had made the opposite decision, which the  
9 military, admittedly, we have established through testimony,  
10 recommended an additional 2,500? Would 2,500 been enough  
11 had the Taliban resumed attacks on Americans in the country  
12 over the course of 2021?

13 Dr. Kahl: I think there are two points that weighed  
14 heavily on the President. One was the issue that, in the  
15 exchange that you just had with General Mingus, which was if  
16 we had stayed beyond, would we have come under attack and,  
17 therefore, would the President have faced pressure to send  
18 in reinforcements for force protection. But the other  
19 issue, which gets less attention, but I know the President  
20 considered was that the assessment by the intelligence  
21 community was that us staying at 2,500 was not producing a  
22 stalemate. It was an eroding stalemate; in other words, the  
23 Afghans were losing.

24 And so, at some point, even if we weren't taking  
25 casualties, the President would have faced pressure to

1 escalate, just like Barack Obama did at the beginning of his  
2 administration when the Afghans were losing and just like  
3 President Trump did at the beginning of his administration  
4 when the Afghans were losing.

5 So, the President did not believe that 2,500 troops was  
6 a stable equilibrium. If we had kept at that level, he  
7 would have been under pressure to put in more.

8 Senator King: Thank you.

9 And I appreciate this. I think it is, like Senator  
10 Duckworth's proposal, that we have a nonpartisan commission  
11 to examine this to really get to the bottom of it. I would  
12 point out that I think this is our sixth hearing on  
13 Afghanistan in the last several months. I have had three or  
14 four in the Intelligence Committee. We had zero hearings  
15 that I can recall on the Doha Agreement, which was really  
16 the heart of the departure from Afghanistan.

17 So, the umbrage and outrage about what has happened  
18 since this summer rings a little hollow for me because there  
19 was no umbrage or outrage when the former administration  
20 essentially made an agreement with the Taliban,  
21 unconditional, essentially, really, unconditional to get our  
22 troops out by a certain date, which, by the way, was May 1  
23 of 2021, not August 31.

24 So, with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator King.

1 Senator Ernst, please?

2 Senator Ernst: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair.

3 And, gentlemen, thank you for being here today as we  
4 continue to examine the repercussions of President Biden's  
5 disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan and the abandonment  
6 of Americans to the hands of the Taliban.

7 Dr. Kahl, is it true that President Biden said we  
8 wouldn't leave when there were Americans left behind?

9 Dr. Kahl: We have not left Americans behind; they  
10 continue to get out.

11 Senator Ernst: We left Americans behind.

12 Dr. Kahl: We did not leave Americans behind; they  
13 continue to get out.

14 Senator Ernst: You represent the DOD, Dr. Kahl. Did  
15 the DOD leave before all Americans were out?

16 Dr. Kahl: It was the consensus judgment that leaving  
17 on the August 31 was the best way to continue getting  
18 Americans out.

19 Senator Ernst: General Mingus, did the DOD, did our  
20 soldiers leave before all Americans were out?

21 General Mingus: Yes, ma'am. The last airplane left  
22 the evening of the 30, the morning of the 31 of August.

23 Senator Ernst: Thank you for your straightforward  
24 answer, General Mingus.

25 Dr. Kahl, is there more or less risk of terror attacks

1 against Americans and American interests because of the  
2 precipitous withdrawal of American military capability from  
3 the region?

4 Dr. Kahl: I think the intelligence community assesses  
5 that the overall risk to the homeland across the world is at  
6 its lowest point since 9/11. We have already discussed the  
7 possibility that ISIS-K and the Al Qaeda could reconstitute  
8 and we have to be vigilant against that in Afghanistan.

9 Senator Ernst: That does not sound like a low risk  
10 when you have just told us that the possibility of attack  
11 from ISIS-K to our homeland could be 6 to 12 months from  
12 now.

13 Dr. Kahl: The intelligence community assesses they  
14 could build that capability. We need to be vigilant in  
15 disrupting that.

16 Senator Ernst: So, it doesn't sound like low risk.

17 So, Dr. Kahl, what threat assessments did you use for  
18 planning the security environment that would occur after the  
19 U.S. withdrawal, what assessments?

20 Dr. Kahl: Well, when I came into office, the decision  
21 had already been made and I was overseeing, from a civilian  
22 perspective, the retrograde operations.

23 Senator Ernst: Yes, I understand. You informed me  
24 last time in a closed session that you were busy sitting on  
25 the couch, so you weren't paying attention to those

1 assessments, which I disagreed with, because I do believe  
2 that in a position such as yours, you should absolutely be  
3 keeping up with various assessments, especially as we are  
4 pulling out our military troops, leaving Americans, and SIV  
5 holders behind.

6 So, since you came into office, those assessments that  
7 were used by others, did they provide to be accurate?

8 Dr. Kahl: I think the consensus, as we discussed a  
9 couple of minutes ago, the assessments constantly change.  
10 So, originally, the intelligence community assessed 1 to 2  
11 years after a withdrawal of U.S. forces, would be the point  
12 where the ANDSF might collapse. It then became closer to a  
13 year, and then months to years, and then weeks to months,  
14 and then days to weeks in August, and I was paying attention  
15 to all those assessments once I was in the position.

16 Senator Ernst: Thank you.

17 And that would mean that any policy recommendations and  
18 planning recommendations that were made at that time are now  
19 ill-fit for the security environment that we are now facing.

20 Dr. Kahl: We were posturing to an "over the horizon"  
21 posture even before the ANDSF collapsed. Obviously, the  
22 ANDSF collapse makes that mission harder, but harder is not  
23 impossible.

24 Senator Ernst: What regional force postures, and this  
25 is going back to a number of questions you are already had,

1 what regional force postures, capabilities, ISR, are we now  
2 recommending be readied to deal with the security  
3 environment that is now true on the ground?

4 Dr. Kahl: So, we have a robust presence in the Gulf;  
5 beyond that, we should really talk about this in the closed  
6 session.

7 Senator Ernst: And just in the time remaining, as  
8 well, what measures have you recommended to address the  
9 reconstitution that we are now learning about with ISIS-K  
10 and Al Qaeda?

11 Dr. Kahl: Well, I think we need to remain vigilant  
12 against that threat in collecting intelligence and we can  
13 talk about exactly how we are doing that in the closed  
14 session. But we also need to build out more capabilities,  
15 so it is not just reliant on the facilities we have in the  
16 Arabian Gulf.

17 Senator Ernst: And just in the remaining time I have,  
18 thank you, gentlemen, again, for being here today. We are  
19 going to continue looking into this. I do hope we are able  
20 to form an outside committee that can take a look at the  
21 past 20 years of the war on terror.

22 But I also want to express my heartfelt gratitude to  
23 the men and women that have served our great United States  
24 Armed Forces and all that they have given and their families  
25 have given over the course of the past 20 years. They have

1 faced significant and sometimes insurmountable challenges,  
2 and yet they have overcome and they have served us well.

3 And we can never diminish their service, especially in  
4 the face of an administration that would not listen to our  
5 military leaders. So, God bless them and their service to  
6 our great United States.

7 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

8 Chairman Reed: Thank you.

9 Senator Gillibrand, please?

10 Thank you, Senator Ernst.

11 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 I, too, want to commend the service of all of our  
13 servicemembers who have served in Afghanistan and the  
14 intelligence officers and Afghan personnel who supported  
15 them.

16 I want to focus on the last point that Senator Ernst  
17 made about a review. Dr. Kahl and General Mingus, Members  
18 of the Committee, myself included, have proposed a  
19 comprehensive, rigorous, and objective audit on the war in  
20 its entirety.

21 At last month's hearing, General Milley acknowledged  
22 that there have been many lessons to be learned from  
23 America's longest war. Secretary Austin further stated any  
24 commission or review of the war should be an interagency  
25 effort.

1 Do you have any recommendations for an external,  
2 independent review of the war in Afghanistan; for example,  
3 what do you think Congress' role should be? What U.S.  
4 agencies, countries, and organizations do you recommend be  
5 included?

6 Chairman Reed: So, we are supportive of Senator  
7 Duckworth's proposal for an independent commission on this,  
8 strongly supportive of that. We also have efforts underway.  
9 At the Department of Defense, we are about to be underway.  
10 The Joint Staff has an effort. My organization is working  
11 to identify an independent institution that can do an  
12 independent review, especially of the time period from  
13 February 2020 through the end of the NEO. And we are in  
14 conversation with the NSC and the State Department and  
15 intelligence community to make sure whatever we do is  
16 aligned with their ongoing lessons-learned activities.

17 Senator Gillibrand: General?

18 General Mingus: Ma'am, I would echo Dr. Kahl's  
19 comments. I fully support, after 20 years, and all the  
20 treasure and resources, we owe our nation some better  
21 answers in terms of what we have learned.

22 Senator Gillibrand: With the testimony that has been  
23 given earlier in this hearing of an estimate that ISIS-K  
24 could launch an attack within 6 to 12 months, that Al Qaeda  
25 could launch an attack within 1 to 2 years, acknowledging

1 that we are in an unclassified setting, what are some of the  
2 broad objectives our adversaries may have within Afghanistan  
3 and planning is DOD doing in response to those  
4 recommendations and objectives?

5 Dr. Kahl: Yes, so I think the intelligence community  
6 would say that ISIS-K and Al Qaeda could have the capability  
7 to do attacks within that time frame. Whether they do or  
8 not is, of course, not something that can be predicted with  
9 any degree of certainty.

10 We are deploying ISR over Afghanistan every single day.  
11 We also have national technical means, which we can talk  
12 more about in the classified setting. We are sharing  
13 intelligence with regional partners and with our other  
14 partners, the U.K. and others, who are very focused on this  
15 problem set. So, we will get after this challenge and we  
16 will try to grow our capability to get after it.

17 I will say, I do think the Taliban is highly motivated  
18 to go after ISIS-K for the reasons we discussed earlier;  
19 they are a mortal enemy. I think Al Qaeda is much more  
20 complicated because the Taliban, especially the Haqqanis  
21 have a relationship with Al Qaeda. But we have seen signs,  
22 and we can talk, again, more in the classified setting, that  
23 the Taliban is wary about Afghanistan being a springboard  
24 for Al Qaeda external attacks; not because the Taliban are  
25 good guys, but because they fear international retribution

1 if that were to occur.

2 General Mingus: Ma'am, if I could?

3 Senator Gillibrand: Please.

4 General Mingus: This has come up several times in  
5 terms of the time frames for Al Qaeda and ISIS-K. Those  
6 estimates from the intel community, that is based on no U.S.  
7 or coalition intervention.

8 When applied, and we will talk about in the classified  
9 session in terms of our strategy and what we are doing, the  
10 goal would be to keep those times around where they are at  
11 now; if not, even further.

12 Senator Gillibrand: Can you give an assessment in the  
13 setting of what your view is with regard to regional  
14 instability and how that may impact with Russia and China.

15 Dr. Kahl: So, I think both, Russia and China, are  
16 nervous, frankly, despite what their propaganda outlets  
17 would suggest. Afghanistan is now a problem that is much  
18 more on their doorstep than on ours.

19 I think both of them have counterterrorism concerns  
20 inside of Afghanistan. I think both, Moscow and Beijing,  
21 are more willing to work with the Taliban than we are. But  
22 I think they are concerned.

23 I think Afghanistan's other neighbors, we have already  
24 talked about Pakistan, but the Central Asian States, they  
25 worry about the counterterrorism challenge. They also worry

1 about the implosion of Afghanistan leading to refugee flows  
2 that would spill across their borders.

3 Senator Gillibrand: What resources, trade agreements,  
4 military operations, or bilateral relation improvements do  
5 you think will be necessary to gain support from regional  
6 partners, such as Uzbekistan, to enable "over the horizon"  
7 operations or any other collaborations?

8 Dr. Kahl: We have some very specific ideas, but on  
9 that score, I would recommend that we talk about that in the  
10 closed session. It is very sensitive.

11 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Gillibrand.

13 Senator Tillis, please?

14 Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And,  
15 Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you. I think you have done an  
16 extraordinary job with the oversight on this matter and I  
17 appreciate your willingness to do that. You know, we have  
18 gathered a lot of very important information through these  
19 hearings.

20 And Secretary Kahl, I would like to, I think it would  
21 be helpful, I like the fact that you support an independent  
22 commission, but I think it would also be helpful as that  
23 ramps up for our Committee to compile a bipartisan,  
24 comprehensive report on what we have all learned through  
25 these oversight hearings.

1           So, can I get your commitment to work with the minority  
2 and majority staff to put such a report together?

3           Dr. Kahl: You have my commitment to provide you the  
4 information you need for that effort.

5           Senator Tillis: General Mingus, when we talk about the  
6 2,500 troops, and Secretary Kahl, I may come back to you if  
7 I have time, but I think we need to understand more broadly  
8 what I believe. I just want to confirm that I have my facts  
9 correct.

10           Generals Miller, Milley, McKenzie have all said that  
11 there was a consensus with 2,500 troops that we could  
12 maintain a relatively stable situation. Nothing is  
13 guaranteed.

14           But weren't we, in fact, talking about 2,500 fighters,  
15 the intelligence community largely remaining in place in  
16 Afghanistan, and another almost 6,000 troops from our NATO  
17 partners and allies, so we are talking somewhere on the  
18 order of about maybe 8,000, 8,500 being present in  
19 Afghanistan. Is that roughly the numbers?

20           General Mingus: If the NATO coalition contractors,  
21 civilians would have stayed consistent, sir, yes, that  
22 number is accurate.

23           Senator Tillis: And that would have been our ISRS  
24 assets, our strike capabilities, all the other things that  
25 would be inherent with that sort of troop presentation?

1           General Mingus: Those ISRS, that actually was inside,  
2 largely inside the 2,500, but then there was, from a strike  
3 perspective, you had both, assets in Afghanistan and from  
4 the Gulf.

5           Senator Tillis: And, by the way, Senator King, I have  
6 been against the Doha Agreement since September or since  
7 February 29. I thought it was a bad idea; it was  
8 fundamentally flawed, and I am not surprised where we are  
9 today.

10           But I do have to question, it seems to me, based on  
11 briefings that we have received, that there were a number of  
12 examples since the signing of the agreement where the  
13 Taliban has either, did not live up to the letter or the  
14 spirit of the agreement. I think one thing we heard  
15 consistently is that they were doing targeted attacks of  
16 Afghan national leadership, which was one of the  
17 destabilizing influences with respect to the eroding  
18 confidence in the Afghan National Forces.

19           General Mingus, you said that they have generally  
20 honored the agreement, or it may have been Secretary Kahl,  
21 but I can tell you in two real-life examples where they  
22 haven't, in terms of allowing people to leave. They slit  
23 the throat of a pregnant woman that we were working on to  
24 get out who had, she was in, I think, the P-1 category.  
25 They also slit the throat, we have pictures that family

1 members ultimately sent to us, 2 of the 900 people that we  
2 have on a list that we are still trying to get people out of  
3 the country. So, the Taliban may be doing a better job in  
4 the marketing department, but we know every single day,  
5 people are dying there that have a legitimate reason to be  
6 out of the country.

7 So, with respect to the broader agreement, though, can  
8 you give me other examples? You said they generally adhered  
9 to the terms of the Doha Agreement. Can you give me a  
10 couple examples where that is not the case.

11 General Mingus: I apologize if I misspoke. I meant  
12 they had only complied with one of the many, and that was  
13 largely not attacking U.S. forces since the Doha Agreement.

14 Senator Tillis: Okay.

15 General Mingus: So, on the others, they were in clear  
16 violation.

17 Senator Tillis: I am glad to hear that, because that  
18 is consistent with what General Milley testified to a couple  
19 of weeks ago.

20 And so, we can't say that the agreement did not have  
21 terms or did not have conditions, and they broke that.

22 So, now, Secretary Kahl, I want to go back to you. You  
23 testified before that some of the decisions or the  
24 recommendations of the remaining 2,500 troops predated your  
25 confirmation. But after you were confirmed, were you

1 briefed on that and to what extent did these discussions or  
2 to what extent did these proposals even get considered when  
3 we saw the eroding process occurring in Afghanistan or was  
4 it pretty much covered ground at that point, not considered  
5 by the time you got in at the end of April?

6 Dr. Kahl: So, by the time I got in, the decision had  
7 been made by the President and the Department was executing  
8 on that decision. There was not a major re-litigation of  
9 kind of reversing course. I think as you heard from General  
10 Miller in closed briefing to you, in his view, once we did  
11 the retrograde, because we were already so small, so  
12 compact, speed was safety. So, we really had the bulk of  
13 the retrograde done by, I think, the beginning of July.

14 The remaining mission was to protect the embassy, which  
15 is why we concentrated at the embassy compound and then a  
16 few hundred troops at HKIA. We did put in a couple hundred  
17 additional troops to assist with close air support in the  
18 July-August time frame as the Taliban was making gains, but  
19 that was, essentially, a short-term measure. We were still,  
20 the plan was still to stick to the August 31 date and that  
21 was not relitigated to the best of my knowledge.

22 Senator Tillis: Thank you.

23 And, Secretary Kahl, I will look forward to our  
24 Committee being able to compile a report based on what we  
25 have learned through these oversight hearings.

1 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

2 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Tillis.

3 Senator Warren, please?

4 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 The U.S. went into Afghanistan almost exactly 20 years  
6 ago now. It took us only about 2 months to dislodge the  
7 Taliban from power and another 3 months to root out Al Qaeda  
8 from the mountains east of Kabul. But then we just stayed.  
9 We started nation-building and attempted to create an Afghan  
10 National Army. We were used by warlords and other  
11 government officials to target their enemies, not our  
12 enemies. We had little understanding of the underlying  
13 political dynamics.

14 We went into places like Pesh and the Korangal Valley  
15 in search of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda and created new  
16 enemies, instead. Wesley Morgan's, *The Hardest Place*,  
17 details how those areas were actually not fertile ground for  
18 the Taliban before our arrival, but that with each civilian  
19 we accidentally killed, and we killed many, we drove their  
20 friends and their families into the arms of the Taliban.

21 The opium fields created another dilemma. We would  
22 bomb or otherwise destroy the opium crops and drive those  
23 farmers into the arms of the Taliban or we would allow the  
24 opium to grow and watch the Taliban shake down the farmers  
25 and use the proceeds to finance their operations or we would

1 give the farmers fertilizer to grow something else and then  
2 watch the farmers sell the fertilizer to the makers of IEDs.

3 On top of all of that, we flooded the country with  
4 billions of dollars, fueling the epidemic corruption that  
5 was undermining the very legitimacy of the Afghan Government  
6 that we were trying to prop up.

7 So, Dr. Kahl, what do you believe has been the impact  
8 of U.S. actions in Afghanistan on the conditions that  
9 allowed the Taliban and Al Qaeda to regroup and gain  
10 strength?

11 Dr. Kahl: So, I think, Senator, the stories and  
12 examples that you just used, I think, strongly suggests that  
13 we have never known as much about Afghanistan as we thought  
14 we did. I think the Secretary testified that we didn't have  
15 a 20-year strategy in Afghanistan and we had 21-year plans.  
16 All the zigzagging, the examples on the counternarcotics  
17 front that you provided are illustrative of that.

18 I think that we made some progress in Afghanistan. I  
19 think living conditions for many were improved. I think  
20 access to schooling for women and girls was improved. I  
21 think things got better, but a lot of the deep, structural  
22 challenges that Afghanistan had, its tribal structure, its  
23 endemic corruption, the fact that it has never had a long  
24 history of a strong, central government that could impose  
25 its will on the hinterlands of the country, we were not able

1 to overcome any of that. And the Taliban were fearsome  
2 fighters who were going to fight forever. And so, I think  
3 those were realities that we were not able to overcome.

4 Senator Warren: And I only want to push back on one  
5 point. I understand that we can point to women made  
6 progress in the country and they may be losing a part of  
7 that, but I think it is hard to describe, overall, that  
8 things got better in Afghanistan.

9 Who was caught in the middle of all of this violence?  
10 Who watched various government officials enrich themselves  
11 through corruption? Who suffered the most?

12 Innocent Afghan civilians.

13 The Costs of War Project at Brown University estimates  
14 that approximately 47,000 Afghan civilians were killed,  
15 along with another 66,000 Afghan military and police. And  
16 while all of this was happening, while we were creating the  
17 very conditions that were used to justify our continued  
18 presence, military officials came before this Committee, one  
19 after another, time after time, and said, we are making  
20 progress. We are turning the corner.

21 General Milley told this Committee last month that our  
22 presence would have been needed indefinitely.

23 Dr. Kahl, do you agree with that assessment?

24 Dr. Kahl: Yes.

25 Senator Warren: And what would that have meant for the

1 Taliban and Al Qaeda?

2 Dr. Kahl: It would have meant that we would have had  
3 thousands of people, probably more than 2,500 over time, as  
4 the ANDSF continued to lose, or we took casualties. That  
5 was, at least, the President's assessment. We would have  
6 been spending tens of billions of dollars every year and  
7 also sacrificing our servicemembers and our participation in  
8 the war and the costs that you described would have  
9 continued.

10 Senator Warren: And I would argue that if our presence  
11 would have been required indefinitely, that casts grave  
12 doubt on the years of military assessments that we were ever  
13 making progress here. This whole enterprise was a catch-22  
14 and it should humble everyone in this room. It should cause  
15 all of us to reflect on how badly everyone got it wrong.  
16 And above all, it should be a call for Congress, and this  
17 Committee, in particular, to start exercising more oversight  
18 of the Pentagon during ongoing military operations, instead  
19 of waiting until it is over and then politically  
20 advantageous to do so.

21 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Warren.

23 Senator Cotton, please?

24 Senator Cotton: Mr. Kahl, you testified to Senator  
25 Tillis that you were not yet sworn in when President Biden

1 announced his decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. A few  
2 weeks ago in our closed session, you had dismissedly told  
3 Senator Ernst that you were on your couch during that  
4 period.

5 While you were on your couch, were you preparing for  
6 your confirmation hearing and then to take the office that  
7 you now hold?

8 Dr. Kahl: It was after my confirmation hearing and I  
9 was preparing as best I could by reading the newspaper and  
10 open source materials. I was not in the Pentagon.

11 Senator Cotton: From the time you were nominated until  
12 the time you were confirmed, did you speak with National  
13 Security Advisor Jake Sullivan?

14 Dr. Kahl: I don't believe so.

15 Senator Cotton: Never once?

16 Dr. Kahl: No. I was under instruction not to do  
17 anything that would presume confirmation.

18 Senator Cotton: Okay. But you were following the news  
19 through open sources.

20 At what point did you become aware of President Biden's  
21 decision to withdraw all of our troops in Afghanistan by  
22 September 11?

23 Dr. Kahl: On April 14.

24 Senator Cotton: When he announced it to the nation?

25 Dr. Kahl: Yes, sir.

1           Senator Cotton: From your couch, what was your opinion  
2 on whether we should withdraw all those troops or whether we  
3 should remain some residual troop presence in Afghanistan?

4           Dr. Kahl: Well, I think as I said in my testimony  
5 during my confirmation hearing, I think it was in exchange  
6 with Senator Holly, I was supportive of a conditions-based  
7 drawdown, conditioned most prominently on a peace agreement  
8 between the Afghan Government and the Taliban.

9           Senator Cotton: And did President Biden's decision to  
10 withdraw all troops by September 11 comport with that  
11 conditions-based drawdown?

12          Dr. Kahl: It did not.

13          Senator Cotton: Once you were confirmed, did you  
14 express a personal opinion similar to what this Committee  
15 has heard from Secretary Austin and Generals Miller,  
16 McKenzie, and Milley, that we should maintain a small  
17 residual troop presence in Afghanistan?

18          Dr. Kahl: Well, by the time I came in office, the  
19 debate had moved on. The President had made his decision  
20 and we were executing on that decision.

21          I was involved in what our presence should look like at  
22 the U.S. embassy and at the airport, to make sure that we  
23 could safeguard the embassy, and I was involved in the, you  
24 know, oversight of the retrograde and NEO planning.

25          Senator Cotton: So, you did or did not have a personal

1 opinion on that matter?

2 Dr. Kahl: My personal opinion never changed, but by  
3 the time I came into office, the President had made his  
4 decision and we were moving out on that decision.

5 Senator Cotton: Did you agree that September 11 was an  
6 appropriate date by which to withdraw?

7 Dr. Kahl: I have no insight into why that date was  
8 picked.

9 Senator Cotton: Since you have been confirmed, you  
10 have never once spoken to Secretary Austin or Jake Sullivan  
11 or anyone else in the administration about why September 11  
12 was chosen?

13 Dr. Kahl: I have not.

14 Senator Cotton: In retrospect, do you believe  
15 September 11 was a wise date, by which to withdraw from  
16 Afghanistan?

17 Dr. Kahl: I don't know.

18 Senator Cotton: The Biden administration has also said  
19 there was no intelligence indicating the Afghan National  
20 Army would collapse so quickly.

21 Were you also surprised by the speed in which the  
22 Afghan Security Forces collapsed?

23 Dr. Kahl: I think we were all surprised by the speed.

24 Senator Cotton: Are you aware that the intelligence  
25 from the intelligence community consistently shortened the

1 timeline of their assessment of how long the Afghan  
2 Government could survive, from a matter of years at the end  
3 of last year to a matter of weeks at the end of July?

4 Dr. Kahl: Yeah, and, in fact, by August, I think on  
5 the eve of the fall of Kabul, they were down to days to  
6 weeks. But, yes, it went from years, to months to years, to  
7 weeks to months, and then to days to weeks.

8 Senator Cotton: General Miller has testified that in  
9 June there was a brief pause at the drawdown and ultimate  
10 closure at the Bagram Air Base to decide whether or not they  
11 should proceed; obviously, it did proceed.

12 Was it your opinion in late June, given the conditions  
13 you saw in Afghanistan, that the closure of Bagram Air Base  
14 should proceed?

15 Dr. Kahl: It was General Miller's recommendation. My  
16 recollection is, you know, the President, of course, had  
17 instructed the Department to leave Afghanistan, so there was  
18 no scenario in which we were going to leave Afghanistan and  
19 not close Bagram Airfield and the residual mission was that  
20 the embassy at HKIA, which is where the concentration of a  
21 few hundred forces we would have left beyond August, that is  
22 where they would have been concentrated.

23 Senator Cotton: Okay. In 2011, Mr. Kahl, in your role  
24 as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle  
25 East, you stated the following, despite the often

1 exaggerated media narrative that depicts Iraq on the verge  
2 of unraveling, the underlying security situation remains  
3 strong. Unfortunately, not long after that statement, Iraq  
4 was very much on the verge of unraveling. The Islamic State  
5 rose and rampaged across Syria and Iraq, and a third of Iraq  
6 collapsed, which necessitated a new counterterrorist  
7 operation.

8       You couldn't foresee the unraveling of Iraq. You  
9 didn't foresee the unraveling of Afghanistan.

10       Are there any other countries that may be about to  
11 cause national security debacles for America that you think  
12 you are not foreseeing now?

13       Dr. Kahl: I don't know. I have paid pretty close  
14 attention. I think we are focused on the counterterrorism  
15 front on Somalia, the growth of violent extremists in places  
16 like the Sahel. We continue to have to be vigilant in Iraq  
17 and in Syria and in Yemen, and as we have talked about  
18 earlier in this hearing, in Afghanistan, and, of course,  
19 there are even greater challenges when it comes to China,  
20 Russia, Iran, North Korea. So, there is a lot that we have  
21 to focus on.

22       Senator Cotton: There are many challenges out there.  
23 Let's hope that we foresee them a little bit better than we  
24 have in the past.

25       Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Cotton.

1 Senator Peters, please?

2 Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 Dr. Kahl, I would like to start with Bangladesh and the  
4 ongoing wave of violence against minority Hindu temples and  
5 homes, which is just, yet another reminder that  
6 disinformation spread on social media all too often results  
7 in real-world violence. Acts of terrorism like these not  
8 only threaten innocent civilians, but also the political  
9 stability of an ally, with whom we have a long history of  
10 cooperation on security, development, and humanitarian  
11 assistance, as well as disaster relief.

12 So, my question for you is, as you consider our  
13 strategic interests in a regional security context, how do  
14 you prioritize the information domain and can U.S. Security  
15 Assistance in South and Central Asia enhance our allies'  
16 resilience to information warfare?

17 It is an issue that I have raised in this room many  
18 times with General Nakasone and Admiral Aquilino, as well,  
19 but I would love to hear your thoughts.

20 Dr. Kahl: So, Senator, I agree with you that  
21 information and information operations envelope everything.  
22 They can enable our adversaries or they can enable violent  
23 extremists, whether they be of one sect or religion or  
24 ethnicity. I think social media platforms don't do nearly  
25 enough to crack down on misinformation and disinformation

1 along the lines that you suggested.

2 I think that there are things that the Department of  
3 Defense can do to help our partners, especially in the cyber  
4 realm, and also to coordinate with them, like we have in  
5 instances in the past in the counter-ISIS campaign, for  
6 example, of coordinating to push back on propaganda and  
7 disinformation. But a lot of this will also fall outside of  
8 DOD's writ.

9 Senator Peters: So, the Department of Defense does  
10 play a pretty vital role. You know, obviously, if you can  
11 counter these activities, that ally becomes less vulnerable  
12 to external influence. We see the external influence from  
13 both, the Chinese, as well as the Russians, so you would  
14 acknowledge that piece of it needs to be something that the  
15 Department of Defense is thinking about, in particular?

16 Dr. Kahl: Absolutely.

17 Senator Peters: All right. Thank you.

18 Dr. Kahl, India's policies towards Afghanistan have  
19 been conceived largely through the lens of competition and  
20 proxy conflict with Pakistan. So, it stands to reason that  
21 New Delhi should be no less concerned about the possibility  
22 that a Taliban government could benefit anti-Indian  
23 terrorist groups, especially those oriented towards Kashmir.

24 In view of our commitment to joint cooperation and  
25 interoperability with this critical partner and the fact

1 that India is the only designated major defense partner of  
2 the United States, I believe it is important for us to  
3 understand how its view towards Afghanistan has, and will,  
4 evolve. So, if you could please discuss this, but before  
5 you answer that question, I am not asking you to speak for  
6 an ally, just for your thoughts or any insights that you  
7 have gained from co-chairing the U.S.-India Defense Policy  
8 Group earlier this month.

9 Dr. Kahl: Yes, thank you.

10 I have had a number of encounters to include the one  
11 you just mentioned with my Indian colleagues. I would say a  
12 couple of things. One is, as I am sure you are aware, they  
13 are concerned about the situation in Afghanistan. They are  
14 concerned about the intersection between instability there  
15 and their counterterrorism concerns. They want to work with  
16 us on those issues; sharing intelligence, cooperating where  
17 we can.

18 But I would actually, Senator, I think in line with  
19 your question, I would zoom out. I think that there is a  
20 tremendous convergence between U.S. and Indian national  
21 interests right now that provides a lot of opportunity for  
22 us to cooperate with Indian, not just on Afghanistan and  
23 counterterrorism, but on broader, regional security  
24 questions in the Indian Ocean, and as it relates to the  
25 broader Indo-Pacific.

1 Senator Peters: Thank you.

2 General Mingus, prior to the Taliban's takeover, Russia  
3 bolstered its military and security posture in Central Asia.  
4 Regional military bases and the leadership of the Collective  
5 Security Treaty Organization make Russia the primary  
6 security guarantor against spillover from Afghanistan into  
7 Central Asia.

8 So, my question for you is, could this necessitate some  
9 kind of deconfliction mechanism for our "over the horizon"  
10 operations, similar to what we used in Syria?

11 General Mingus: Senator, I think we can probably go  
12 into a little bit more detail in the closed session, but the  
13 relationship with Russia, the Central Asia States, the next  
14 census of our counterterrorist goals and objectives there  
15 are all intertwined, and we can go into more detail.

16 Senator Peters: I will look forward to that.

17 Thank you, gentlemen, for your answers.

18 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Peters.

20 Let me recognize Senator Cramer.

21 And I am going to depart for the vote, which is  
22 ongoing, and ask Senator King to recognize appropriately in  
23 my absence. Thank you.

24 Senator Cramer?

25 Senator Cramer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Senator

1 Inhofe.

2 And, thank you, gentlemen, for being here.

3 As I have been listening to all of this, I am struck by  
4 the fact that several people have referenced the  
5 miscalculation of things; whether it is the intelligence  
6 community, you know, through the intelligence itself or  
7 analysis of the intelligence or the communication of  
8 intelligence, it does seem like for the last 20 years or so,  
9 we have been miscalculating on the wrong side, the  
10 capabilities for whether it is for Afghanistan and Iraq to  
11 reconstitute or ISIS or ISIS-K in Afghanistan.

12 And I don't know what the answer is going forward, but,  
13 you know, management of expectations sometimes becomes part  
14 of the formula, I am afraid, and I worry a little bit about  
15 that, you guys. And that is to say, maybe I will put it in  
16 the form of a question for you, Secretary Kahl, and this is  
17 just an honest, raw, almost spontaneous question.

18 Do you feel whether it is just a feeling or whether it  
19 is deliberate, do you get a sense of political pressure in  
20 your job to communicate something other than the worst news,  
21 you know, possible at any given moment? I know there is not  
22 a strategic advantage to that from a military standpoint,  
23 but, politically, do you feel that as a political nominee?

24 Dr. Kahl: I have never felt that, personally, and I  
25 try to call it as I see it. But I do think it is true what

1 you said at the outset, which is on a number of issues there  
2 has been, as it relates to Afghanistan, there have been  
3 serial miscalculation, probably over 2 decades.

4 Senator Cramer: Yeah. And there is obviously a lot of  
5 consequence to that. And like I said, we can have a longer  
6 time, sometime about how to do better, obviously.

7 I am just going to get to one point related to the  
8 miscalculation of ISIS-K and maybe talk about what we do  
9 know or what you might know, if we can talk about it here,  
10 and if not, later in the closed session. I mean, how  
11 financially healed is ISIS-K, and as part of that  
12 calculation, obviously, that is a big part of it. How well  
13 off are they, financially, do you think?

14 Dr. Kahl: You know, I don't have a precise number of  
15 what is in the bank. I don't think they are nearly as well-  
16 resourced as ISIS in Iraq and Syria were back in the heyday,  
17 you know, think the kind of 2014-2015 time frame when ISIS  
18 controlled all those oil wells and had, you know, a billion  
19 dollars of annual revenue. It is nothing like that.

20 I think for the moment, ISIS-K is mostly focused on  
21 creating havoc within Afghanistan, but they do have a cadre  
22 of a few thousand folks, some of which would love to conduct  
23 external attacks. ISIS-K is obviously the link to the  
24 broader ISIS network globally, and so I think we have to be  
25 vigilant that a subset of ISIS-K could develop the resources

1 and the capability to strike outward toward the U.S.  
2 homeland, and as General Mingus said, we have to be poised  
3 to disrupt that so that, that never comes to pass.

4 Senator Cramer: So, regarding your statement about  
5 raise havoc within, obviously, that can be part of the  
6 strategy to, I don't know, access generosity and acquire  
7 both, financial resources and recruitment resources. I  
8 mean, how do you sense that is going for them?

9 Dr. Kahl: I have not seen a lot of evidence that they,  
10 you know, going back to the Iraq example, you know, ISIS was  
11 able to knock off a bank in Mosul and seize hundreds of  
12 millions of dollars of Iraqi money. There has been no  
13 version of that that I am aware of.

14 I also think that the Taliban is pretty committed to  
15 going after ISIS-K. I don't think there is a willpower  
16 question there. You know, I Taliban capability to be  
17 determined, but they are pretty intent on doing it.

18 So, I have not seen huge gains by ISIS-K. We have seen  
19 them carry out some horrific bombings against minority  
20 populations inside Afghanistan. I think we should expect  
21 that some of that will continue.

22 But from a U.S. national interest perspective, we have  
23 to be particularly focused on the subset of the threat  
24 streams that could emanate outward towards us.

25 Senator Cramer: Do you worry about all of this, again,

1 raising havoc, as you put it in what you just described, as  
2 inspiring to others, you know, whether it is, it could be Al  
3 Qaeda for that matter, as well, but whether it is financial  
4 resources or recruitment?

5 Dr. Kahl: I do think that that is something that we  
6 have to watch. I think the Taliban is not keen for a lot of  
7 Arab foreign fighters and others to flow into Afghanistan,  
8 frankly, for either Al Qaeda or ISIS-K. I do think we have  
9 to look about how events in Afghanistan or anywhere else in  
10 the world, it could be Nigeria, it could be Somalia, it  
11 could be Yemen, it could be Syria, could have a galvanizing  
12 effect on the internet and elsewhere that inspires recruits.  
13 And I know that the Department of Homeland Security and our  
14 intelligence community is pretty focused on that.

15 Senator Cramer: General, anything you would add to any  
16 of that?

17 General Mingus: If you look at kind of how we parse a  
18 violent extremist organization out and how you analyze our  
19 ensuing level efforts, the threat itself, whether it is  
20 internally or externally focused, does it have host-nation  
21 capacity that can interdict that, the will and the intent  
22 and the capacity and the capability.

23 Right now, as Dr. Kahl pointed out, they are internally  
24 focused and the capacity and capability to be externally  
25 focused is still limited. Our efforts in the months going

1 ahead and as we continue to improve our "over the horizon"  
2 architecture is to ensure that that external capability  
3 never comes to fruition.

4 Senator Cramer: Thank you both. Thank you.

5 Senator King: [Presiding.] On behalf of the Chair,  
6 Senator Rosen, via Webex.

7 Senator Rosen: Well, thank you, Senator King. I  
8 appreciate that; of course, Ranking Member Inhofe, as well,  
9 for convening this critically important hearing on security  
10 in Afghanistan.

11 I also want to, once again, thank our troops who served  
12 our nation there no nearly 20 years and, of course, their  
13 families who love them and serve alongside with them.

14 As we look ahead to the future of security in South and  
15 Central Asia, we must also take stock of how we got to this  
16 point. We have 20 years of decisions in Afghanistan to  
17 evaluate. Plenty of responsibility to go around,  
18 particularly, to the prior administration, which sets us on  
19 the path to capitulation to the Taliban; nonetheless, it  
20 remains frustrating and shameful that over the past few  
21 months, despite our efforts to save lives and bring  
22 vulnerable individuals to freedom, we have failed so many.  
23 For this, the American people deserve accountability and  
24 they demand answers.

25 Like others on this committee, I am also concerned

1 about the regional implications of our withdrawal on  
2 security, counterterrorism, and American interests.

3 So, I would like to follow-up on some of the questions  
4 that I asked Secretary Austin last month, but which he  
5 didn't have time to answer at that moment, so about our  
6 ability to combat terrorism in the region now that we no  
7 longer have a "boots on the ground" presence in Afghanistan.

8 So, to both of you, Secretary Kahl and General Mingus,  
9 what is our plan for executing an enduring counterterrorism  
10 strategy that will be able to fully address and counter the  
11 influence of the violent extremist organizations that  
12 everyone is talking about in Afghanistan and how has this  
13 changed now that our Afghan partners are no longer in  
14 control of the country?

15 I guess we could start, General, we could start with  
16 you.

17 General Mingus: Yes, ma'am.

18 First, I would start with no two of these organizations  
19 are the same. Each one of them has to be looked at  
20 independently. In those variables that I talked about, what  
21 is the ensuing level of U.S. effort to ensure that you  
22 continue to disrupt and degrade so they don't pose a threat,  
23 either to our partners or our U.S., our homeland?

24 We look at, from my perspective on the military side,  
25 the resources necessary to be able to prosecute and continue

1 to disrupt and degrade, and we move those based on  
2 recommendations that come up from the combatant commanders,  
3 through the Chairman, to the Secretary of Defense, to ensure  
4 that from an authorities and a resources standpoint, we are  
5 postured to be able to do that.

6 In this session, before we go to closed, I can say that  
7 we continue to routinely conduct operations in Syria and  
8 Iraq and other places where, like, these threats are  
9 emanating to make sure that they are not there.

10 In terms of Afghanistan, we continue to mature that,  
11 but we are going to talk in a few minutes in terms of what  
12 the specifics assets that are applied to that.

13 And Dr. Kahl, I will defer to him in terms of his  
14 thoughts on the broader strategy for violent extremist  
15 organizations.

16 Senator Rosen: Thank you.

17 Dr. Kahl: I think in Afghanistan, as it relates to the  
18 problem set there, you need to think of it in terms of  
19 layers. So, ideally, you would have partners on the ground.  
20 That doesn't happen. That is not the case in Afghanistan.

21 This isn't the first time where that has been the case.  
22 Libya is a good example of where we were able to knock ISIS  
23 back pretty hard in Libya in the kind of 2019 time frame  
24 without boots on the ground, and we can talk about that more  
25 in the closed session.

1 But as it relates to Afghanistan, we have these assets  
2 in the Gulf that we are projecting ISR into. We have  
3 national technical means, SIGINT imagery, et cetera, that  
4 gives us insight into these organizations.

5 We are sharing intelligence with regional actors and  
6 international partners who share our counterterrorism  
7 objectives. We are seeking to build out a more robust  
8 ecosystem for "over the horizon" CT, which would include  
9 regional players. We are in conversations with Uzbekistan,  
10 Tajikistan, and others and, again, we can talk about more in  
11 the closed session.

12 I also think we, to Senator Peters' point, we also need  
13 to think that this isn't just what we are doing on the  
14 ground in these places, but what we are doing in the cyber  
15 realm to disrupt their activities, their finances, what we  
16 are doing through sanctions, what we are doing through  
17 information operations. There is a lot that isn't kinetic.

18 Senator Rosen: Well, I want to kind of build on that,  
19 Secretary. How do you assess the collapse of the Afghan  
20 Government, the effect on ISIS and Al Qaeda in Iraq and  
21 Syria, do you think Afghanistan is going to see a surge of  
22 foreign fighters coming in?

23 Dr. Kahl: I think it is possible and we need to be  
24 vigilant against that possibility. My read, at least, based  
25 on the intelligence community's assessment, is the Taliban

1 is not keen to see a large number of Arab foreign fighters,  
2 in particular, come in to Afghanistan to kind of repopulate  
3 either ISIS-K or Al Qaeda; in particular, ISIS-K, because as  
4 I mentioned earlier, the Taliban and ISIS-K are mortal  
5 enemies.

6 Senator Rosen: Thank you. I see that my time is just  
7 about expired, so I will yield back. Thank you.

8 Chairman Reed: [Presiding.] Thank you, Senator Rosen.  
9 Now, let me recognize Senator Sullivan, please.

10 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11 Thank you, gentlemen.

12 I want to talk the issue of Taiwan and our policy  
13 there. Mr. Secretary, 20 years ago, President Bush had said  
14 in an interview that the full force of the U.S. military  
15 would come and defend Taiwan.

16 A prominent U.S. Senator in an op-ed was very critical.  
17 He said, in this case, President Bush's inattention to  
18 detail has damaged the U.S. credibility with our allies,  
19 sown confusion throughout the Pacific Rim. Words matter,  
20 this prominent senator said; of course, that was Senator  
21 Biden.

22 Last week or two weeks ago, his words have dramatically  
23 sown confusion on this very sensitive issue. I was just out  
24 in the INDOPACOM region. The men and women in the military  
25 are doing a great job preparing for contingencies, military

1 contingencies.

2 But the President said, we are going to defend Taiwan,  
3 publicly. Is that our new policy?

4 Dr. Kahl: The White House clarified that the President  
5 wasn't trying to establish new policy. I think the policy  
6 remains that it was established under the Taiwan Relations  
7 Act.

8 Senator Sullivan: So, the President's statement was  
9 incorrect?

10 Dr. Kahl: I will defer to the White House. The White  
11 House --

12 Senator Sullivan: Well, you are the Secretary of  
13 Defense for Policy, so?

14 Dr. Kahl: From the White House, the view is that our  
15 policy remains that under the Taiwan Relations Act, which is  
16 that we are prepared to ensure that Taiwan can defend itself  
17 and that we also have the capabilities to deter and prevent  
18 coercion across the strait.

19 Senator Sullivan: So, do you agree with President  
20 Biden 20 years ago when he criticized President Bush, saying  
21 that his statement and his inattention to detail, words  
22 matter, has damaged U.S. credibility with our allies and  
23 sown confusion throughout the Pacific Rim?

24 Dr. Kahl: I see no evidence that our allies are  
25 confused about our resolve on Taiwan or China or anything

1 else. I have engaged with our Indo-Pacific allies and  
2 partners repeatedly. They know that the Department and the  
3 U.S. Government treats China as the pacing challenge. That  
4 Taiwan is the pacing scenario.

5 Senator Sullivan: Let me talk about that.

6 Dr. Kahl: We are doing everything to get after that.

7 Senator Sullivan: Let me talk about that. This is our  
8 budget, relative to China's budget.

9 [Chart.]

10 Senator Sullivan: When national Democrats get into  
11 office, unfortunately, they cut Defense spending. You see  
12 the blue is our cuts during the Obama years. The blue up  
13 there is the increase that Republicans and the Trump  
14 administration put to our budget.

15 But one thing is certain: China keeps spending 10, 14  
16 percent increases in GDP growth.

17 Can I see the next slide?

18 [Chart.]

19 Senator Sullivan: So, the one issue I keep hearing  
20 about with our allies is this, the prioritization of our  
21 military. If you look at the Biden budget, a six-trillion-  
22 dollar budget, the two agencies that they actually cut, they  
23 are proposing to cut is DOD and Homeland Security. Those  
24 are cuts. That is your budget. That is what matters to the  
25 Chinese and our allies, more than anything. That is

1 President Biden's budget. That is Bernie Sanders' budget.  
2 That is Senator Schumer's budget.

3 But something happened recently, Mr. Secretary. This  
4 Committee and the House Committee rebuke that pretty  
5 dramatically, the budgets that we have put forward in  
6 the NDAA, and the House version of the NDAA increases  
7 Defense spending by a real increase of 3 percent. That  
8 would be moving from about \$715 billion to \$740 billion.

9 Does the Department now agree with what, in a very  
10 bipartisan way, this Committee and the House Armed Services  
11 Committee said, we shouldn't do that; that is a bad message  
12 to the Chinese?

13 Do you agree with what we did here on this Committee?  
14 Are you going to change your budget submission?

15 Dr. Kahl: It is obviously within Congress' prerogative  
16 to do exactly what you did.

17 We can just say from the Department's perspective,  
18 China is the number one pacing challenge. The Secretary of  
19 Defense has been laser-focused on it. Our budget --

20 Senator Sullivan: But do you --

21 Dr. Kahl: -- is oriented around it.

22 Senator Sullivan: Do you agree with it? Do you agree  
23 with this? Do you agree with what we did in the Committee?

24 I know it is our prerogative, of course. I am asking  
25 you --

1 Dr. Kahl: I agree that we should be spending  
2 significant resources to get after China as the pacing  
3 challenge.

4 Senator Sullivan: General, what about you? I know it  
5 is a difficult issue because you have to support the  
6 President's budget.

7 I know that the members of the uniformed military don't  
8 support it, but they have to constitutionally. I get that.

9 But in your personal opinion, would you rather have the  
10 House and the Senate's seven-hundred-and-forty-billion top  
11 line or the Biden administration's seven-hundred-and-  
12 fifteen-billion top line?

13 General Mingus: My personal opinion is, yes, given the  
14 modernization bills and the force design and force structure  
15 challenges that we are going to have in the future, I agree.

16 Senator Sullivan: With the 740?

17 General Mingus: Predictable, sustainable is the most  
18 important to the Department of Defense. But when you look  
19 at the modernization bills that are coming forward in the  
20 coming years, the 740 is a better number than what was  
21 proposed in my personal opinion.

22 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, General, for your honesty  
23 on that.

24 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Sullivan.

1 Now, let me recognize, via Webex, Senator Duckworth.

2 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank  
3 you for your support of the Afghan Study Commission proposal  
4 I drafted with a backing of a number of my colleagues who  
5 are sitting here today. I am also looking forward to  
6 authorizing my Afghan Study Commission as part of the  
7 National Defense Authorization Act.

8 I am further pleased to hear our witnesses confirm  
9 their support for an independent commission, because this is  
10 just too important to get wrong. If we set too narrow a  
11 scope, we will fail to understand the true causes of our  
12 barriers or worse, we will learn the wrong lessons. If we  
13 don't look at the role of all government agencies involved  
14 and only look at DOD, we will similarly miss important  
15 conclusions.

16 If we simply settle for, yet, another report without  
17 incurring a truly non-partisan, independent body to make  
18 forward-looking recommendations, then we won't have done our  
19 duty to prevent future generations from repeating past  
20 mistakes. And if we don't resource a commission  
21 appropriately or if we rush the commission's work because we  
22 want to look like we are taking action, but we don't really  
23 want to commit to doing the work thoroughly, then we will  
24 have wasted everyone's time. After listening to today's  
25 hearing, I am even more convinced we need a non-partisan,

1 independent commission to examine the entire scope of the  
2 war in Afghanistan.

3 General Mingus, thank you for expressing your support  
4 for an independent commission to study the entire span of  
5 the war in Afghanistan. Can you please elaborate on why  
6 existing lessons-learned exercises are not sufficient and  
7 what further lessons could be examined by an independent  
8 commission looking across government agencies? How would  
9 this benefit future strategic planners and policymakers?

10 General Mingus: Thank you, ma'am.

11 I think, and you alluded too much of this, when you  
12 look at, and General Milley shared some of these a couple of  
13 weeks ago, but just from the mission sets, we started off  
14 with a counterterrorism mission, which moved into a  
15 stability mission, which moved into a nation-building  
16 mission. We invaded Iraq 2 years into the operations in  
17 Afghanistan. We never dealt with the sanctuary in Pakistan  
18 adequately. Corruption has been discussed several times.  
19 The legitimacy, how we mirror-imaged both, the Government  
20 and the Afghan National Security Forces. We didn't  
21 understand the culture as well as we should have. The will,  
22 that component of it, as well.

23 But when you take all of those, and there are several  
24 that I am omitting, that is much larger than just a DOD or  
25 interagency thing. It has got to be a whole-of-government

1 approach and so as many elements that we can look at this,  
2 have look at this independently will always be good for the  
3 nation going forward.

4 Senator Duckworth: Thank you.

5 Dr. Kahl, thank you, as well, for your statement of  
6 support. Before you were confirmed, much of your recent  
7 work focused on analysis of American grand strategy, post  
8 9/11. So, I know you have been thinking about many  
9 different agencies that shape our national security.

10 Did the failures from Afghanistan result from the  
11 actions of the DOD alone or did the actions of the  
12 Department of State, the intelligence community, and  
13 multiple Congresses and administrations also impact the  
14 event for outcome in Afghanistan?

15 Dr. Kahl: Well, I think it is important to have a  
16 scope and scale that matches the actual war. So, it needs  
17 to look holistically at 20 years. It shouldn't just look at  
18 the DOD involvement, but the interagency involvement, what  
19 we were doing diplomatically from an economic and  
20 development perspective, from an intelligence and  
21 counterterrorism perspective, to include those pieces that  
22 are outside of DOD's lane. But, frankly, I think it also is  
23 an opportunity, Senator, to explore the mentality, the  
24 overall approach to foreign policy that we had after 9/11  
25 and how that really manifested in 20 years in Afghanistan.

1 Senator Duckworth: Thank you.

2 So, I am going to ask you the same question that I just  
3 asked General Mingus: How could this work of such a broad  
4 committee of an independent commission benefit future  
5 strategic planners and policymakers?

6 You just mentioned that we understand the mentality of  
7 what happened post-9/11 and as we were making these  
8 decisions. How could the lessons learned from this type of  
9 independent commission benefit future strategic CRT planners  
10 and policymakers?

11 Dr. Kahl: Well, I think it is crucial because it is  
12 really a major opportunity to take a holistic view. The  
13 Department of Defense will do various reviews with different  
14 time frames, but inevitably, we will be looking through our  
15 soda straw. Now, it is a big soda straw, but it is a soda  
16 straw. The State Department will do the same. The  
17 intelligence community will do the same. The NSE might even  
18 pull all those threats together, but at the end of the day,  
19 there is a wider context and I really think the opportunity  
20 to make this bipartisan and to make it independent and to  
21 have the scope and scale be appropriate will have tremendous  
22 value.

23 Senator Duckworth: Thank you.

24 General Mingus: Ma'am, the other thing that I would  
25 add that needs to be a part of this, when you look at the

1 vast nature of the NATO and coalition component of it, there  
2 has to be a partner and coalition aspect to that Commission  
3 Report.

4 Senator Duckworth: Very good point, General. I agree  
5 with you, because we certainly expected our partners to do a  
6 little bit more and they were not as able to help maintain  
7 Afghanistan as we had hoped.

8 So, thank you. Gentlemen, I thank you for your  
9 testimony today. Bottom line, for 20 years, we prosecuted  
10 this war without a viable strategy. We failed to consider  
11 long-term costs and consequences, and if we fail to learn  
12 from our history in Afghanistan, we will be doomed to repeat  
13 it.

14 I urge my colleagues to join me and pass my Afghanistan  
15 War Commission Act. We owe it to our constituents. We owe  
16 it to the veterans who served honorably and the families  
17 that lost loved ones, and we owe it to future generations of  
18 American servicemembers. Thank you.

19 Thank you, Chairman.

20 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Duckworth.

21 Let me recognize Senator Scott, please.

22 Senator Scott: Thank you, Chairman Reed.

23 General Mingus, given that the President committed to  
24 evacuate all the Americans before our military would leave,  
25 would you say a successful evacuation would have included

1 all Americans being evacuated before our troops left?

2 General Mingus: Defining success is hard and I know  
3 this has been talked about and debated, what the President  
4 said, with the decision, with the recommendation by the  
5 military to leave. But, historically, we have gone back and  
6 we looked and I am not even sure that there is an example of  
7 where we have done a NEO where we brought all the American  
8 citizens out of a given country.

9 And so given the remote nature of Afghanistan and the  
10 various locations of the American citizens, I am not even  
11 sure that it is a reasonable expectation that we could have  
12 gotten 100 percent out before the 31.

13 Senator Scott: But the President commit that we were  
14 going to get all the American citizens out before we would  
15 remove troops.

16 Do you think it should be the policy of the United  
17 States that we will remove the U.S. military and its assets  
18 from a hostile country with enemy forces bearing down on us  
19 before we evacuate American citizens and partners in the  
20 future?

21 General Mingus: I think it would be hard to quantify a  
22 hypothetical, because there were so many variables in this  
23 one and no future NEO scenario will be identical. So, the  
24 decision and the recommendation by the Joint Chiefs and the  
25 Chairman to depart on the 31, took into account the

1 situation on the ground for this particular situation and it  
2 was deemed that the calculus was actually, and the risk to  
3 American citizens was actually higher had we stayed beyond  
4 the 31, than we did when we left actually on the 31, to  
5 include the risk to our troopers that were on the ground at  
6 HKIA.

7 Senator Scott: If you were an American citizen and you  
8 listened to the President say that our troops would not  
9 leave before American citizens were, all American citizens  
10 were evacuated, would you feel like our President and our  
11 military let them down?

12 General Mingus: There may be some that have that view,  
13 but I think our commitment to continue to bring American  
14 citizens out has been important.

15 Senator Scott: So, I assume the military leadership  
16 understood the risk of removing the military and its assets  
17 before evacuating American civilians and our partners.

18 Did you see the analysis and did you warn the  
19 administration of the risk of bringing out troops and our  
20 equipment before all Americans were evacuated?

21 General Mingus: Did we provide that risk?

22 Senator Scott: Did you provide any, any you warn the  
23 administration that if we did it the way it ended up  
24 happening, where we brought the troops out first before  
25 everybody was evacuated and the fact that we could have

1 evacuated people earlier and we didn't, did you warn the  
2 administration that the path they were going down was  
3 putting American citizens at risk?

4 General Mingus: I know, and I was not present for  
5 those conversations, and I was not with the Chairman when he  
6 made those recommendations to the President, but I do know  
7 that he went prepared even before the NEO part, but the  
8 decision to come out in April, I know that he was prepared  
9 and armed to provide the risks associated with the  
10 withdrawal.

11 Senator Scott: Did the statements from the Department  
12 or the Pentagon choose to rely on the Taliban for security  
13 at the airport as we withdrew?

14 General Mingus: They were a part of that security  
15 ecosystem.

16 Senator Scott: Who made the decision, the State or the  
17 Pentagon?

18 General Mingus: If memory serves, it was a combination  
19 of the commanders on the ground up through the chain of  
20 command.

21 Senator Scott: So, the commanders on the ground made  
22 by the decision that the Taliban would do the security,  
23 knowing the Taliban's history?

24 General Mingus: It was deemed that it had to be a  
25 relationship that we had to work through and whether they

1 had stayed on the outside of Kabul or on the outskirts of  
2 HKIA, once the collapse occurred and the ANSF folded, that  
3 was the outer perimeter that was the outer security for  
4 forces that were outside where we were at.

5 Senator Scott: Was the President warned about the  
6 risks of relying on the Taliban for security around the  
7 airport?

8 General Mingus: I am not aware whether he was informed  
9 of that or not.

10 Senator Scott: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Scott.

12 Now let me recognize Senator Blumenthal, please.

13 Senator Blumenthal: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thank you  
14 for your continuing attention to these issues and having  
15 this hearing today.

16 Gentlemen, last week I had the opportunity to visit  
17 Quantico Camp Upshur. As of the date of my visit, Camp  
18 Upshur housed 4,410 Afghan men, women, children who were  
19 able to escape Afghanistan. The camp has a maximum capacity  
20 of about 5,000 people; a number that it will probably soon  
21 reach.

22 I want to, first of all, commend the extraordinary work  
23 done by the United States Marine Corps at Quantico and their  
24 partners from other military branches, as well as the  
25 civilians from the State Department, CDC, and others.

1           But during our briefings there, we had the opportunity  
2 to not only meet those Marines who were hosting these Afghan  
3 guests, they call them guests, quite correctly, but also  
4 representatives of the civilian agencies charged with their  
5 resettlement. And we were fortunate to speak with the  
6 people housed at Camp Upshur, the refugees who have escaped  
7 and who have managed to avoid the torture or death that is  
8 threatened to many who remain there.

9           I met with a family of five that were able to escape on  
10 charter flights from Mashori Sharif. They left after  
11 withdrawal had been completed, our withdrawal of our  
12 military. These were flights that my office was involved in  
13 facilitating. So, I was just incredibly moved to meet with  
14 this family. It happened by coincidence that this family  
15 was chosen to meet with me. They were the beneficiaries of  
16 the charter flights that my office worked day and night to  
17 facilitate. Sadly, more members of their very family are  
18 hiding and seeking assistance so they can leave Afghanistan;  
19 literally, brothers and other family members who are in  
20 grave danger. More needs to be done, in short, to help  
21 these people escape and keep faith with them.

22           After my visit to Camp Upshur, I have, still,  
23 significant concerns about the case of resettlement. We  
24 were tragically slow in planning the execution of the  
25 evacuation mission, the airlift of 120,000 people that was

1 accomplished, even though many, many remain. We cannot,  
2 again, rely on optimistic expectations. We must plan for  
3 reality and be ready to use, be ready for the worst-case  
4 situation.

5 We were told that the Afghans brought to Camp Upshur  
6 would be departing for resettlement in 3 to 4 weeks. I  
7 don't believe that number can possibly be accurate, 3 to 4  
8 weeks. When I had visited, there had already been 52  
9 births; a joyous occasion for sure, but one that prevents  
10 not only the mother and child from being able to travel and  
11 be resettled, but the entire family unit. That is just an  
12 example of the impediments to resettlement.

13 And I think we need to focus on the fact that the pace  
14 of resettlement, very simply, is not keeping up with the  
15 pace of new arrivals. As these locations reach maximum  
16 capacity, we face a looming crisis, the processing of our  
17 Afghan guests is completed quickly, 1 or 2 days, for intake.  
18 At that point, they await resettlement opportunities.

19 Currently, the weather is good. It is the fall, and a  
20 temperate one at that, but it will change and even with the  
21 heating in those tents, life will become more and more  
22 difficult. The tents and other expeditionary structures  
23 used for housing and feeding people do not currently afford  
24 the kind of heat that is necessary if the temperature drops.  
25 This inevitability may force closing of the tents at Pioneer

1 City, which currently houses approximately 1,000  
2 individuals.

3 So, before my time expires, I just want to close by  
4 saying, we face 75 to 80,000 seeking resettlement. Of those  
5 Afghan refugees, a total of 120,000 evacuated, we have  
6 failed to provide the resources so far that will enable  
7 effective resettlement. It is a looming crisis and I am  
8 going to ask for your response in writing since my time has  
9 expired as to how medical care, housing, and other services  
10 will be provided at the camps and what will be done to  
11 ensure more expeditious resettlement. Thank you.

12 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Blumenthal.

14 Senator Blackburn, please?

15 Senator Blackburn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 Under Secretary Kahl, you are going to recognize my  
17 questions, because I asked them at the hearing in  
18 September and you didn't want to answer them then, so let's  
19 take another round, another go at it.

20 So, as I view the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy  
21 or in the time between President Biden's inauguration and  
22 your confirmation, did you ever have a conversation with  
23 General Scott Miller about the future of Afghanistan?

24 Dr. Kahl: No.

25 Senator Blackburn: You did not, okay.

1           During your September testimony on the topic, you told  
2   Senator Ernst that you basically didn't have an opportunity  
3   to participate in the decision process on Afghanistan  
4   because you were at home sitting on your couch. We are all  
5   aware that you were pending confirmation prior to late-  
6   April, but were you actually at home sitting on the couch or  
7   were you involved in the President's decision calculus on  
8   when and how to withdraw from Afghanistan?

9           Dr. Kahl: I had no interactions with the  
10   administration because I was trying not to presume  
11   confirmation.

12          Senator Blackburn: Okay. Were you ever part of a ROC  
13   walk in which a General Miller was in the room?

14          Dr. Kahl: Yeah, the ROC drill happened on May 8, about  
15   a week after I took office.

16          Senator Blackburn: So, you were present for that  
17   May ROC walk?

18          Dr. Kahl: The ROC drill on the retrograde, I was.

19          Senator Blackburn: Okay. Thank you.

20          What we are concerned about, and I what I hear from  
21   Tennesseans about is that you all have a tendency to point  
22   the finger at the Trump administration and say they didn't  
23   know how to lead, but you have taken over and what you have  
24   done is to fail to lead.

25          And the DOD leadership is something that people in

1 Tennessee have a lot of concern about. They are seeing  
2 apathy. They are perceiving apathy. And they are  
3 perceiving a self-righteous indignation that the individuals  
4 or the military would question you all.

5 So, in this vein, I want to read for you, portions of a  
6 letter that I received in my office this week. And I am  
7 reading from the letter.

8 Thank you for your work in trying to find the answers  
9 about the horrible Afghanistan withdrawal. I saw a news  
10 report yesterday that the suicide bomber who took my son's  
11 life and 12 others was actually a prisoner at Bagram. So,  
12 then, not only did we leave all of our military equipment,  
13 but we also just left these terrorist prisoners in Bagram  
14 and now we find out that the Taliban just released them,  
15 which is not a surprise.

16 I am not expressed my anger or political thoughts  
17 through this grieving time, but now I hear that this coward  
18 had been locked up and someone on our side made the decision  
19 to just let these bad guys evaporate into the wind. It  
20 really frustrates me beyond belief.

21 Please, continue to try to find out who is responsible  
22 for the decision to run from Bagram. It sounds like that  
23 decision is directly related to the death of my son and the  
24 12 other U.S. servicemembers.

25 Now, I am duty-bound to my constituents, to

1 Tennesseeans, and to these military families from our state  
2 who have reached out to me about this horrific debacle in  
3 Afghanistan. So, I need to ask you a few questions, and  
4 please bear in mind that you are not speaking to me, that  
5 you are speaking to them. So, let's throttle any animosity  
6 that you have toward me and speak to the Tennesseeans, to  
7 our servicemembers that want these answers.

8 Who, specifically, is responsible for the decision to  
9 withdraw U.S. forces from Bagram Airfield?

10 Dr. Kahl: When the President decided that we would  
11 withdraw from Afghanistan, we were always going to leave  
12 Bagram as a consequence of leaving Afghanistan.

13 Senator Blackburn: So, it was the President's  
14 decision?

15 Dr. Kahl: The President directed that we leave  
16 Afghanistan, then General Miller executed a retrograde that  
17 included the leaving of Bagram Airfield.

18 Senator Blackburn: Okay. So, the President.

19 Who, specifically, is responsible for the decision to  
20 leave terrorist prisoners in Bagram, despite the impending  
21 advance of the Taliban forces?

22 Dr. Kahl: So, Parwan Prison, which is the prison you  
23 are speaking of, isn't actually at the airfield; it is off  
24 the airfield and it was transferred to the Afghans in 2013.  
25 So, it wasn't part of the retrograde to transfer that

1 prison; it had been transferred 8 years prior.

2 Senator Blackburn: Okay. So, you are saying that  
3 leaving Bagram had absolutely no impact at all on the  
4 prisoners being freed. Is that the position of this  
5 administration, that you had nothing to do with this?

6 Dr. Kahl: I mean, I think people of good character and  
7 good judgment can disagree. I think that the Afghan  
8 National Security Forces had control of the prison and they  
9 were handed control of Bagram Airfield. So, when the  
10 Taliban overran those forces, they took over both, the  
11 airfield and the prison.

12 Senator Blackburn: Yes. So, that was a decision made  
13 by the President to give up Bagram Airfield and to execute a  
14 speedy withdrawal from Afghanistan?

15 Dr. Kahl: The decision was to leave Afghanistan, which  
16 means we were going to leave Bagram and General Miller's  
17 retrograde plan included leaving Bagram.

18 Senator Blackburn: Thank you.

19 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Blackburn.

20 Senator Kelly, please?

21 Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 Secretary Kahl, countries like China have long  
23 benefited from our presence in Afghanistan and the stability  
24 that we provided in the region. The conclusion of U.S.-led  
25 operations has forced countries in the region to reassess

1 their policies towards Afghanistan and nations, including  
2 China and Russia, are developing closer relationships with  
3 the Taliban. China, in particular, has sought to call  
4 attention to aid donations and pushed the U.N. to lift  
5 sanctions, without asking of much accountability from the  
6 Taliban.

7 So, Secretary Kahl, how would you assess China's  
8 intentions and priorities with respect to Afghanistan and  
9 what concerns do you have for how these could impact U.S.  
10 interests?

11 Dr. Kahl: There are important questions. I think  
12 China is actually quite worried at the moment. They did  
13 benefit from our presence in Afghanistan, despite the fact  
14 that they rail against our military interventions across the  
15 world. They are worried about growing instability on their  
16 border, because, remember, China does share a narrow border  
17 with Afghanistan. They are also, frankly, worried that our  
18 withdrawal from Afghanistan will allow us to refocus  
19 elsewhere in the Indo-Pacific, in checking back the  
20 challenge that they present. We know that.

21 You are absolutely right that China is trying to  
22 influence events in Afghanistan, largely through economic  
23 levers. They are not able to do that unilaterally because  
24 of U.N. sanctions. It is a policy of the Biden  
25 administration not to recognize the Taliban government or

1 lift those sanctions unless a bunch of conditions are met  
2 and that the Taliban aren't currently meeting.

3 Senator Kelly: And how should U.S. policy towards  
4 Afghanistan and China's activities there fit into the  
5 broader context of our strategic competition with China?

6 Dr. Kahl: Well, I think we do have to be mindful of  
7 competing with China in a lot of places. I would not put  
8 Afghanistan at the top of that list.

9 First and foremost, we have to focus on the Western  
10 Pacific and on places like the Indian Ocean. There are also  
11 places in Africa where the Chinese are seeking to turn dual-  
12 use facilities into military bases and other things.

13 So, I think we should have an eye on what China is  
14 doing on Afghanistan, but I would not make it the focal  
15 point of my strategy in checking back Beijing's aspirations.

16 Senator Kelly: All right. Well, thank you.

17 General Mingus, the U.S. military relationship with our  
18 allies in South and Central Asia is critical to regional  
19 stability and our national security and many of these  
20 relationships are strengthened through our continued  
21 commitment to joint exercises and training. And these  
22 activities can also serve as a deterrent to regional  
23 aggression.

24 We have continued to see Russia-led exercises with  
25 regional actors, including a joint-military exercise near

1 the northern Afghanistan border with Uzbekistan and  
2 Tajikistan this summer. Similarly, China and Tajikistan  
3 conducted a joint-military exercise in August.

4 From an operational standpoint, are we doing enough  
5 militarily to train, equip, and prepare our South and  
6 Central Asia partners?

7 General Mingus: Senator, thank you.

8 And that is one of the things that Dr. Kahl has kind of  
9 alluded to that we would like to talk about in the closed  
10 session in terms of the recent trips that was just made in  
11 terms of the outcomes of that. But we are looking at ways  
12 to expand our training opportunities and those kinds of  
13 things in Central Asian States.

14 Senator Kelly: All right. Well, I am looking forward  
15 to hearing more about that in the closed session.

16 Dr. Kahl, I want to come back to you for a second here  
17 and talk a little bit more about China and how, well,  
18 actually, let's switch here and talk about a Taliban for a  
19 second. In media interviews and in public discourse, the  
20 Taliban have attempted to downplay the threat posed by ISIS,  
21 including the recent attack on worshippers in Kunduz. At  
22 the same time, they have tried to play up their own efforts  
23 to counter ISIS, pointing to several arrests and suggesting  
24 that they have averted ISIS plans.

25 What can we learn from the fact that the Taliban is

1 more interested in putting a positive spin on its ability to  
2 govern than they are in working to address known threats to  
3 both, Afghan and international security?

4 Dr. Kahl: Yes, Senator. First of all, I don't think  
5 we should trust the Taliban, whatever they say. I think we  
6 have to watch what they do. I think the only thing we can  
7 have any confidence or faith in is that they will try to  
8 advance their own narrow interests.

9 I think as it relates to the ISIS-K problem set, they  
10 do not have an interest in ISIS-K establishing a beachhead  
11 in Afghanistan, either to destabilize Afghanistan or to  
12 conduct external operations. So, I actually believe that  
13 the Taliban is highly motivated to go after ISIS-K.

14 Their ability to do so, I think, is to be determined.

15 Senator Kelly: Have we seen any success? Is there any  
16 intel that you can talk about that shows any success with  
17 them going after ISIS-K?

18 Dr. Kahl: So, I think we have seen instances of them  
19 going after ISIS-K. During the war, of course, there were  
20 ferocious battles at times between the Taliban and ISIS-K,  
21 as well. But, you know, we, I do want to keep in mind for  
22 this committee that as it relates to the threat streams that  
23 we are most focused on from ISIS-K, it is the ones that  
24 might be externally projected out from Afghanistan, we have  
25 not yet seen those threat streams yet materialize and we

1 would not count on the Taliban to be the ones responsible  
2 for disrupting for that. We will have our own unilateral  
3 capabilities to do that.

4 Senator Kelly: And what can we do right now to contain  
5 that threat?

6 Dr. Kahl: Well, I think we should continue to engage  
7 the Taliban on these questions. We did have a delegation in  
8 Doha a couple of weeks ago, a high-level delegation to, you  
9 know, to hold the Taliban accountable for their commitments  
10 under the February 2020 Doha Agreement to not allow  
11 Afghanistan to be a safe haven for international terrorism.

12 The Taliban tell us that they remain committed to that,  
13 but like I said, it is not just their words that matter; it  
14 is going to be their actions.

15 Senator Kelly: Well, thank you, Dr. Kahl.

16 And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Kelly.

18 Senator Hawley, please?

19 Senator Hawley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

20 Dr. Kahl, I understand on August 18, the Consul General  
21 in Kabul sent the following email to his team. I am going  
22 to quote it for you, quoting now:

23 President Biden phoned Ambassador Wilson with the  
24 following directive about who to clear to board the  
25 evacuation flights: number one, anyone with a valid form of

1 ID should be given to go on a plane. If that person  
2 plausibly falls into the categories. We will evacuate U.S.  
3 citizens and LPRs, plus their immediate families, LES, plus  
4 their immediate families, those entitled to an SIV, and  
5 Afghans at risk. Number two, families, including women and  
6 children should be allowed through and held to fill out the  
7 planes. Number three, total inflow to the United States  
8 must exceed the number of seats available; err on the side  
9 of excess. I am still quoting. This guidance provides  
10 clear discretion and direction to fill seats and provide  
11 special consideration for women and children when we have  
12 seats. I expect that C-17 flight volume will increase. End  
13 quote.

14 Are you aware of any guidance from the White House to  
15 evacuate Afghans who might plausibly fill out these  
16 categories, to fill seats, regardless of whether the  
17 passengers actually were eligible or not, and to err on the  
18 side of excess. I mean, are you familiar with this  
19 directive?

20 Dr. Kahl: So, our priorities, so I can't speak to that  
21 specific engagement, but our priorities in that time frame  
22 were, as you mentioned, first and foremost, American  
23 citizens and legal permanent residents, Green Card holders,  
24 also, locally employed staff at the State Department, but  
25 also other agencies and departments, SIVs, and others with

1 documents.

2 But it was also the case that as we were bringing  
3 forces in, we had excess capacity to bring people out. And  
4 to what the President was signaling was, if there are other  
5 clearly Afghans at risk that we can safely bring into the  
6 airport and get off the airfield, we should do that.

7 Senator Hawley: But that is not what the email says.  
8 The email doesn't say clearly; it says plausibly. It says  
9 that the flights need to be filled out. It says that we  
10 need to err on the side of excess.

11 I mean, what I am driving at is we now know that we  
12 have major problems with vetting of the people who were  
13 brought to this country, who were evacuated and brought to  
14 this country. This email seems to indicate that the  
15 administration was saying, just fill up the planes. I mean,  
16 if they plausibly fall into a category, put them on a plane.

17 Is that wrong? Is that --

18 Dr. Kahl: So, vetting was always foremost in our mind,  
19 but just keep in mind, Senator, the vetting wasn't happening  
20 at HKIA.

21 Senator Hawley: Where did the vetting happen?

22 Dr. Kahl: So, all the vetting happened at what we  
23 called the lily pads. So, these were --

24 Senator Hawley: And the vetting consisted of what?

25 Dr. Kahl: Yeah, so in places like Qatar, Kuwait,

1 Bahrain, Ramstein, and elsewhere; essentially, teams of DHS,  
2 CBP, DOD would collect biometric information, fingerprints,  
3 et cetera, biographic information, and then that information  
4 would be fed through the NCTC, CBP, and FBI databases and  
5 only people who had cleared that vetting, so that they  
6 didn't have contacts with the Taliban or the Haqqanis or Al  
7 Qaeda or ISIS, were to be manifested to be brought to the  
8 United States, and people who required further processing  
9 were not brought to the United States.

10 Senator Hawley: Was there ever any in-person vetting  
11 done?

12 Dr. Kahl: Well, all of this was in-person, in the lily  
13 pads.

14 Senator Hawley: Well, those aren't interviews; that is  
15 just fingerprinting.

16 So, were there ever any in-person that is a screening,  
17 was there actually any vetting done, where you sit down and  
18 you ask a person questions?

19 Dr. Kahl: So, it is a good question.

20 For those where there was any either, there wasn't  
21 sufficient information or there was derogatory information,  
22 now, keep in mind, the derogatory information could be that  
23 you shared the same name with somebody or that your phone  
24 number touched a phone number of a phone number. For people  
25 where there was any derogatory information then, yes,

1 follow-up interviews and additional vetting was done.

2 Senator Hawley: At the lily pads?

3 Dr. Kahl: Yes.

4 Senator Hawley: And in the United States, too, or just  
5 at the lily pads?

6 Dr. Kahl: There may have been instances in which  
7 people came to the United States, who also received  
8 additional vetting, but I would direct you to the DHS to get  
9 the full accounting of that.

10 Senator Hawley: Oh, I am talking to DHS, believe me,  
11 and what is interesting is what DHS says is there was never  
12 any in-person vetting done anywhere; not at the lily pads,  
13 not in the United States.

14 Your testimony here today, under oath, is there was in-  
15 person vetting done. That you sat down and did interviews  
16 with them; is that right?

17 I just want to be clear on this.

18 Dr. Kahl: So, my understanding is that at the lily  
19 pads, so forward --

20 Senator Hawley: Right.

21 Dr. Kahl: -- Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, et cetera, that  
22 those who popped derogatory information, if they couldn't be  
23 cleared because it was some misunderstanding, so, for the  
24 example of someone with the same name --

25 Senator Hawley: Right.

1 Dr. Kahl: -- if it required further information, there  
2 were times where the FBI spoke to those individuals.

3 Senator Hawley: So, you testified in September that  
4 those evacuated, about 6,000 American citizens. You  
5 testified in September that the SIVs were about 1,200 or  
6 1,300. That leaves 116,700 people, based on the 124,000 NEO  
7 number that you have been offering, 116,700 people who were  
8 not citizens, who were not SIVs, and we just don't know much  
9 about, who were those people?

10 Dr. Kahl: Yeah, so, just so we are all working off the  
11 same set of numbers, so we evacuated around 2,000 U.S.  
12 embassy personnel. We evacuated 5,530 American citizens.  
13 We evacuated 3,335 third-country nationals. So, think of  
14 that as, you know, somebody who worked for another embassy,  
15 not an Afghan. We evacuated, during the NEO, 2,496 SIV  
16 holders. And then we evacuated 64,052 other Afghans at  
17 risk. Some of those were on our P-1 or P-2 refugee rolls  
18 and others were, you know, some of those were, I know every  
19 office on Capitol Hill was calling to try to get people out.  
20 Whether they had a formal relationship or not, it might have  
21 been because they had a relationship with an organization  
22 like NDI or, you know, some other NGO. We also got out  
23 2,004 NATO citizens. And we facilitated 44,874 people  
24 coming out on non-U.S. aircraft by other folks. So, it is a  
25 mix-match of a lot of different categories. About 84

1 percent of the people we brought out were Afghans at risk of  
2 various kinds: SIVs, P-1s, P-2s, or others.

3 Senator Hawley: My time is expired. The Chairman has  
4 been very indulgent. I will have a number of questions for  
5 you for the record.

6 Dr. Kahl: I will take those for the record.

7 Senator Hawley: Dr. Kahl, there is a lot to sort  
8 through here.

9 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hawley.

11 Senator Tuberville, please?

12 Senator Tuberville: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 Gentlemen, thank you for your service. Thanks for  
14 being here today. I know it has been a long day.

15 Dr. Kahl, I want to talk a little bit about the Doha  
16 Agreement and the timeline. I would think that you would  
17 say there was probably around four main parts of the Doha  
18 Agreement; one would have been a ceasefire permit and  
19 comprehensive. Another condition was withdrawal of American  
20 troops, April 12. President Biden said September 11. We  
21 have talked about that.

22 How long was it before the Taliban violated the terms  
23 of the Doha Agreement, in your mind?

24 Dr. Kahl: I think, as General Mingus has already  
25 testified, from the very beginning, the only part of the

1 agreement they stuck with was not attacking U.S. forces.

2 The rest of the agreement, they did not stick with.

3 Senator Tuberville: Right. May 1, you know, they did  
4 some damage, obviously, over in Afghanistan.

5 Now, you were in your seat April 27. Given that the  
6 Taliban broke their end of the deal so quickly, did you  
7 change your policy assessment on May 1?

8 Dr. Kahl: Well, by the time that I came into office,  
9 the decision had already been made, so --

10 Senator Tuberville: Yeah, but did you change, did you  
11 have a change?

12 Dr. Kahl: My position, which I testified to during my  
13 confirmation, was that we should have a conditions-based  
14 withdrawal. My personal position never changed, but by the  
15 time I came into office, the President had already made his  
16 decision and that wasn't going to be relitigated.

17 Senator Tuberville: But, you know, in the first full  
18 month, they kept breaking their promises. And I have a  
19 couple of slides here that I just want to show you.

20 Did things get better in the second month, you know, in  
21 June, the Taliban, you know, they captured 69 districts in  
22 June and it was starting to ramp-up. Not only did they  
23 capture 69 districts, but that month, the Taliban captured  
24 700 trucks, Humvees, dozens of vehicles, and all that kind  
25 of stuff.

1 Did you rethink your policy at that time, given how  
2 badly it was ramping up? Did you give your preference  
3 upstream, so to speak, to the people that needed to listen?

4 Dr. Kahl: So, you were right that security situation  
5 deteriorated in June. It got worse in July. And,  
6 obviously, it got catastrophically worse in August.

7 We were focused on executing the retrograde, because  
8 that was the direction from the President of the United  
9 States.

10 Senator Tuberville: Yeah. All right. Let's move on  
11 to July. How many districts did the Taliban capture in  
12 July, do you remember?

13 Dr. Kahl: I don't know off the top of my head, but I  
14 have no reason to disagree with the --

15 Senator Tuberville: I will get it for you. Sixty-  
16 four.

17 Dr. Kahl: -- map behind you.

18 Senator Tuberville: Okay. Sixty-four. Yeah.

19 The President said on July 8, quote, I am briefed daily  
20 on the battlefield updates, end quote.

21 So, President Biden knew how badly it was going, it was  
22 ramping up in Afghanistan and, yet, we gave up Bagram  
23 Airfield that month, correct?

24 Dr. Kahl: General Miller's plan for the retrograde  
25 called for us to give up Bagram in early July.

1           Senator Tuberville: Right. By the end of the third  
2 month on the job, the Taliban had entered the capitals of  
3 Helmand and Herat and they controlled 223 districts.

4           Dr. Kahl, do you know how many districts there are in  
5 Afghanistan?

6           Dr. Kahl: Well, by that time, it must have been more  
7 than half the districts.

8           Senator Tuberville: There are 407, total, and there  
9 are 223 districts that they had overtaken.

10          So, let's talk about the fourth month on the job,  
11 August. After three straight months of losses and  
12 bloodshed, did the OSD policy suggest changing course with  
13 how bad it was getting?

14          Dr. Kahl: The President had directed that we leave  
15 Afghanistan. There was no set of deliberations about --

16          Senator Tuberville: But there were Marines that talked  
17 back and forth?

18          Dr. Kahl: So, there were conversations about whether  
19 we should position forces to provide more close air support  
20 and we did that in the July-August time frame. We put a  
21 couple hundred of additional forces into HKIA to do  
22 personnel, recovery, and other things, so we could do more  
23 airstrikes. But the course of the policy was set in  
24 April and we carried out that policy.

25          Senator Tuberville: But in August it got worse and the

1 fighting was ramping up. To recap, in 3 and a half months  
2 that you were there, due to this administration's, I guess  
3 we can call it incompetence, we saw a complete collapse of  
4 Afghanistan in that short period of time; a waste of 20  
5 years' of blood and treasure.

6 Since President Biden took office, America, to me, is  
7 less safe. Our allies are less safe. And we, once again,  
8 have to confront radical Islamic terrorism somewhere down  
9 the road. I just don't understand those 4 months of how we  
10 can make a timeline and then we can get away from it.

11 General Mingus, just a couple quick for you. From the  
12 beginning in Afghanistan 20 years ago, can you tell me what  
13 time of the year the Taliban traditionally counterattacked  
14 our forces.

15 General Mingus: There is the summer fighting season,  
16 which typically starts in the spring. They plan throughout  
17 the winter. They build up supplies and those kinds of  
18 things. It typically starts in April and May and runs until  
19 the fall. But that is not to suggest that there isn't  
20 fighting during the winter. It does subside a little bit,  
21 but given the mountain passes and the snow and the  
22 challenges with, you know, moving about, that is typically  
23 why the fighting does subside a little bit in the  
24 wintertime.

25 Senator Tuberville: So, it wouldn't surprise you that

1 any of our guys would say, listen, we are going to have more  
2 fighting in the summer, right, because of the heavy snow.  
3 So, why didn't we reduce our presence in the fall and the  
4 winter when the weather was worse? I am going to ask both  
5 of you real quick.

6 I know my time is up.

7 Why wouldn't we have that in that time of year, other  
8 than the time of year when they were ready to fight? They  
9 were all away from home congregating, ready to do whatever  
10 they needed to do to fight and take over Afghanistan. Why  
11 wouldn't we not -- was there any talk, Dr. Kahl? Let's go  
12 with you, first.

13 Dr. Kahl: Well, the timeline for the departure was set  
14 --

15 Senator Tuberville: Well, I know that.

16 Dr. Kahl: -- so I can't, and I wasn't part of those  
17 deliberations, so it is not a satisfying answer for you,  
18 Senator, but I don't know the rationale beyond that the  
19 President calculated that the longer we stayed beyond the  
20 deadline established by the Doha Agreement, the higher at  
21 risk our forces would be.

22 Senator Tuberville: Yeah. General, was there any  
23 military talk on that, that you can remember?

24 General Mingus: Sir, there was, and as you know, as  
25 the Chairman, General Miller, and General McKenzie, I was

1 not present with their personal recommendations, but as they  
2 testified, their personal feelings is that the 2,500 should  
3 have stayed and should have become a conditions-based  
4 withdrawal.

5 But as Dr. Kahl pointed out, I think what the President  
6 was wrestling with was the 1 May, which was extended towards  
7 the "end of the summer" kind of deadline and the potential  
8 for the recommencing of hostilities with the Taliban, had we  
9 stayed any longer than that. I think that was the strategic  
10 dilemma.

11 Senator Tuberville: Thank you both for your service  
12 and time.

13 I apologize, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

14 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Tuberville.

15 The Committee will stand in recess and reconvene in  
16 SVC-217 at 2:15 for a closed session. 12:15. I have been  
17 corrected, appropriately.

18 So, the Committee will stand in recess.

19 [Whereupon, at 12:05 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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