

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

**ROOM SD-G50
Tuesday, October 26, 2021**

*To receive testimony on security in Afghanistan and in the regions of South and
Central Asia*

(As prepared for delivery)

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

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

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

I know there may be a tendency during this hearing to focus on our final months in Afghanistan. I would stress again that our withdrawal this summer and the events surrounding it did not happen in a vacuum. The path that led to this outcome was paved with years of mistakes, from our catastrophic pivot to Iraq, to our failure to effectively grapple with Pakistan's support for the Taliban, to the flawed Doha Agreement signed by President Trump. This is not a Democratic or a Republican problem. These failures have manifested over four presidential administrations of both political parties. An unwillingness to recognize and correct past mistakes will impact the operations of today and the future.

One fundamental question that requires close examination is how the decades-long strategy for building the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces resulted in a force that was incapable of defeating the Taliban and seemingly collapsed in a matter of days. We need to better understand what led to the development of Afghan security forces that suffered from low morale, widespread corruption, and

which were incapable of operating without U.S. and coalition support. In addition, we need to assess the extent to which the failure of the Afghan government to earn the loyalty of the Afghan security forces contributed to their being unwilling to defend the Kabul government against the Taliban.

Further, our inability across multiple administrations to effectively deal with Pakistan is another example of past being prologue. Managing the security relationship with Pakistan will remain important as we seek to successfully implement a regional counterterrorism strategy with other partners and allies.

That is why it is vitally important for us to reflect upon and study the entirety of the 20-year mission in Afghanistan. I agreed with Secretary Austin and General Milley's testimony to this Committee last month that there should be a comprehensive review spanning the war in Afghanistan. I would support a formal independent study of the Afghan war, as Senator Duckworth and a number of other colleagues have taken the lead in preparing. I look forward to working toward authorizing such a review as part of this year's National Defense Authorization Act.

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

Last week the Members of this committee received a classified update on regional security threats. The American people deserve to be reassured that the Department remains actively engaged in defending the homeland against terrorist threats emanating from this region. Under Secretary Kahl, General Mingus, I would ask that to the extent you can during today's open session, you provide an update on efforts to address the threat from terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan and across South and Central Asia. I would also appreciate an update on progress toward building a new regional counterterrorism architecture.

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

Before I turn to Ranking Member Inhofe for his opening remarks, I would like to remind my colleagues that there will be a classified session immediately following this open session in SVC-217, the Office of Senate Security. Senator Inhofe.