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LTG Mingus –Afghanistan, Open and Closed Briefing to SASC
Members

26 OCT 21

Good afternoon. I'd like to start by thanking Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and all Members here today for your enduring support of our entire Joint Force. I would like to extend my appreciation to the SASC for providing me with the opportunity to speak with you today about the military's deliberate withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the Department's contribution to the interagency effort to initially evacuate fully-vetted Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders and execute a Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) for U.S. Citizens and other Afghans. Our interagency coordination and partnership were, and continue to be, critical to the on-going evacuation, processing, and resettlement of evacuees. I could not be more proud of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Civilians whose service and sacrifice throughout the Afghanistan Campaign is humbling. It has been the honor of a lifetime to serve alongside them.

As Dr. Kahl just explained, the breadth and depth of the simultaneous evacuation operations was unparalleled. NEO operations are among the most challenging missions a military can undertake. By their very nature they occur with little notice and are often within tenuous security environments. The department recognized that a NEO could be the most dangerous course of action and, with the interagency, planned for this contingency.

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This pre-planning allowed the department to respond quickly to the Department of State's NEO Declaration deploying a force package of nearly 6,000 personnel to HKIA within days. This NEO element executed the largest humanitarian airlift operation ever undertaken. I'm not sure that there is another event that better demonstrates what it means to be an American Service Member- the willingness to sacrifice self, while demonstrating compassion under fire, so that others may enjoy the freedom and opportunities we would die to defend. Unfortunately, 13-Service Members did pay the ultimate price and they will forever be regarded as heroes.

Americans were not the only heroes lost over the course of the 20-year Campaign. NATO allies and partners, and especially Afghan civilians, were a part of our efforts beginning with the initial invasion. Countless Afghan civilians lost their lives trying to help the United States navigate Afghanistan's difficult human and physical terrain, and countless more Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) were lost serving alongside U.S. Service Members. Unfortunately, we lost 10-more Afghan civilians leading up to our departure during a precision strike we employed to target the ISIS-K. As Dr. Kahl explained, we are committed to the on-going investigation and to supporting the family members of those lost. We also understand how this strike may cause the SASC to question Over-the-Horizon Counterterrorism (OTH-CT) operations now that we no longer have a physical footprint in Afghanistan. I look forward to discussing these issues with you today.

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

Our work did not end on 31 AUG. The interagency effort to quickly house, transport, vaccinate, and resettle the resultant evacuee population continues to be a herculean effort; one that would have been extraordinarily more difficult without our allies, partners, and NGOs. We are also continuing to support the interagency as they work to relocate U.S. Citizens, Lawful Permanent Residents, and Afghans to whom we hold special commitments, including SIV holders, who remain in Afghanistan and have expressed a desire to leave.

Despite the Afghan withdrawal and evacuation, the Department remains focused on counterterrorism threats to the homeland. While we reprioritize following the withdrawal in the short-term, we are actively setting the conditions to ensure we remain situationally aware and are postured to mitigate and neutralize developing terrorist threat streams. Dr. Kahl and I look forward to answering your questions today as we work together for the benefit of our country. Thank you again for your support and partnership.

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