

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

**ROOM SD-G50  
DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING**

**Thursday, May 20, 2021**

**To receive testimony on the transition of all United States and Coalition forces  
from Afghanistan and its implications**  
*(As prepared for delivery)*

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling today's hearing, and welcome to our witnesses.

I strongly oppose President Biden's decision to fully withdraw all U.S. troops by September 11 of this year.

The fact that the President chose that date — the twentieth anniversary of the most horrific terrorist attacks in our nation's history — indicates this was a calendar-based political decision.

It was not based on the conditions on the ground, which is the strong bipartisan recommendation Congress has given to both Republican and Democratic presidents over the last decade.

This isn't just my own interpretation. An unnamed senior administration official told the *Washington Post*: "The president has judged that a conditions-based approach...is a recipe for staying in Afghanistan forever."

I am troubled by the Biden administration's misleading framing of the issue, which pretends that there are only two options: unconditional U.S. withdrawal, or a so-called "forever war."

Nobody wants to see U.S. troops in Afghanistan forever. That's why I supported a third option: maintaining a relatively small troop presence until the conditions outlined in the February 2020 U.S.-Taliban Agreement are fully implemented.

Under that agreement, U.S. troops were supposed to be withdrawn as the Taliban met its counterterrorism commitments, and when progress was made in the intra-Afghan dialogue.

But rather than patiently implementing that agreement and ensuring a safe U.S. drawdown, the Biden administration is pulling the plug.

A bipartisan majority of the Senate warned President Trump against doing this two years ago. President Trump listened. President Biden did not.

The precipitous drawdown from Afghanistan carries many risks.

First, there is the risk of severe chaos, violence, and instability in Afghanistan, as the Taliban uses our withdrawal to escalate its attacks around the country and in Kabul.

As we saw after President Obama's withdrawal from Iraq in 2011, terrorists will exploit this instability — two and a half years after U.S. troops left Iraq, ISIS captured Mosul.

In a similar way, after President Biden's calendar-based withdrawal from Afghanistan in September, the threat of a terror attack from Afghanistan will be back to pre-9/11-levels.

Second, the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops will make it much harder and more expensive to effectively support our Afghan security partners.

Over-the-horizon counterterrorism does not work. General McKenzie, the CENTCOM commander, testified: "The ranges will be greater. The resources will be greater. The risks will all be greater..."

Third, the U.S. drawdown puts at risk thousands of Afghan citizens who have worked alongside and helped protect our troops.

An Afghan interpreter who worked for a U.S. Army brigade was clear about the threat when he said, "You will see dead bodies in every street. They will slaughter us."

They and their families face death threats from the Taliban. They require security, and many desire to immigrate to the United States.

While the Department of Defense does not control the special immigrant visa program, it should provide security and assistance for our Afghan partners while they await visa processing, which often takes years.

Thank you both for your testimony today, and your service. Mr. Chairman.

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