

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

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**To receive testimony on the transition of all United States and Coalition forces
from Afghanistan and its implications**

(As prepared for delivery)

REED: The Committee meets this morning to examine the process and implications of transitioning all United States and Coalition forces from Afghanistan by mid-September. Helping us better understand this challenge are two witnesses: Mr. David Helvey, Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs, and Brigadier General Matthew G. Trollinger, Deputy Director, Politico-Military Affairs for the Middle East from the J-5. And General Trollinger, let me congratulate you on your recent selection for promotion to Major General.

I would like to thank the witnesses for appearing today to give us a snapshot of what is happening at this time. However, I want to note that I have repeatedly asked for General Scotty Miller, Commander of NATO's Resolute Support Mission, to testify. This Committee has not had an open hearing on Afghanistan with DOD officials since 2017, and the last closed briefing was in December 2019. That is far too long to hear about a mission that involves so many Americans. I understand that General Miller is now very busy with the transition that is underway, but I will continue to press for him to appear at the appropriate time.

Last month, President Biden announced the withdrawal of all forces from Afghanistan by September 2021. It must be noted that none of the options available to the President were particularly palatable. He could have left May 1st, as agreed to by the previous Administration—in what I would characterize as an extremely flawed deal—or continue to press on with the United States' longest war. It appears that the President concluded that more troops might buy more time and casualties—but more time would not create a more effective Afghan government.

The President's decision, however, should be seen as a transition, not closure, and should not mean an end to our counterterrorism efforts. We must ensure that

Afghanistan will not be a source of planning, plotting, or projection of terrorist attacks around the globe, including against our homeland. Despite great progress over the last 20 years, the threats from al Qaeda, ISIS, and other terrorist groups still remain. The Director of National Intelligence stated in the 2021 annual threat assessment that ISIS and al Qaeda remain among “the greatest... terrorist threats to U.S. interests overseas,” and that they “seek to conduct attacks inside the United States; although sustained U.S. and allied [counterterrorism] pressure has broadly degraded their capability to do so.” We must look to transition to a new counterterrorism architecture in the region to continue to degrade al Qaeda, ISIS, and other terrorist groups and prevent their ability to attack the homeland.

CENTCOM Commander General McKenzie recently provided the Committee some assurances that such a counterterrorism posture in the region was possible, but cautioned that it will be a reduced capability with longer ranges and heightened risks, and will require greater resources. I would be interested in hearing from the witnesses what progress has been made in constructing a follow-on or over-the-horizon posture.

Additionally, while the United States and Coalition forces will physically transition from the country, international support to the Afghan government—including through support to the Afghan security forces—will remain vital to security and stability there. Ultimately, the Afghan government must find a way to govern in a way that earns the confidence of its people—especially beyond the limits of its cities—by providing basic services to include security, education, health care, and justice. It is broadly understood that the Afghan government will struggle to hold the Taliban at bay if international support is withdrawn, and it will be increasingly difficult for the international community to justify continuing to provide such assistance without a functioning Afghan government partner. The difficulty of providing such support to the Afghan security forces is further compounded by the fact that the deal the previous administration negotiated with the Taliban includes the departure of all security personnel, logisticians and contractors. When the United States transitions from the country, the international presence that is the foundation for security assistance is removed. I would like to understand what plans are in place to continue training and assistance to the Afghan forces in light of these factors and how we will balance that against the need to conduct robust oversight of funding provided.

Lastly, we must do our part to aid those Afghans who have aided us. There are already troubling examples of Taliban plans to target those who helped the United States, and we must ensure that we have the capacity to bring them to safety. That is why I joined 20 of my colleagues in signing a letter to President Biden this week

emphasizing our support for the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program for Afghans. I am grateful to Senator Shaheen for leading this important effort. I would ask the witnesses to share what the Department sees as its role in such operations and if any additional authorities might be required in order for DOD to assist the State Department or other agencies leading these efforts.

I want to thank you both again for being here this morning and I look forward to your testimony. Before I turn to Ranking Member Inhofe, I would like to remind my colleagues that there will be an informal classified briefing which will include an appropriate DIA representative immediately following this session in SVC-217, the Office of Senate Security.

Ranking Member Inhofe.