

Stenographic Transcript  
Before the

COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES

## **UNITED STATES SENATE**

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON  
THE CONCLUSION OF MILITARY OPERATIONS  
IN AFGHANISTAN AND PLANS FOR FUTURE  
COUNTERTERRORISM OPERATIONS

Tuesday, September 28, 2021

Washington, D.C.

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4

5 Tuesday, September 28, 2021  
6

7 U.S. Senate

8 Committee on Armed Services

9 Washington, D.C.  
10

11 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m. in  
12 Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jack Reed,  
13 chairman of the committee, presiding.

14 Committee Members Present: Senators Reed [presiding],  
15 Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King,  
16 Warren, Peters, Manchin, Duckworth, Rosen, Kelly, Inhofe,  
17 Wicker, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan,  
18 Cramer, 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: Let me call the hearing to order.

4           First, an administrative action. Since a quorum is now  
5 present, I ask the committee to consider a list of 2,993  
6 pending military nominations. Included in this list is the  
7 nomination of General Jacqueline D. Van Ovost, U.S. Air  
8 Force, for a reappointment to the grade of general, and to  
9 be Commander of U.S. Transportation Command. All of these  
10 nominations have been before the committee for the required  
11 length of time.

12           Is there a motion to favorably report this list of  
13 2,993 pending military nominations to the Senate?

14           Is there a second?

15           Female Voice: Second.

16           Chairman Reed: All in favor, please say aye.

17           [Chorus of ayes.]

18           Chairman Reed: The motion carries. Thank you.

19           Good morning. The committee meets today to discuss the  
20 end of American military operations in Afghanistan. After  
21 nearly 20 years of war, enormous sacrifice by American and  
22 coalition military, diplomatic and intelligence personnel  
23 and vast U.S. investment, the Afghan state has failed and  
24 the Taliban has taken control. We need to understand why  
25 and how.

1           As part of this hearing, we will seek to understand the  
2 factors that contributed to the Taliban's rapid takeover of  
3 the country and the collapse of the Afghan National Defense  
4 and Security Forces. While there is a temptation to close  
5 the book on Afghanistan and simply move on to long-term,  
6 strategic competition with China and Russia, we must capture  
7 the lessons of the last two decades to ensure that our  
8 future counterterrorism efforts in Afghanistan and elsewhere  
9 continue to hold violent extremists at bay.

10           I know that much of this hearing will focus on our  
11 final months in Afghanistan. I think it is equally  
12 important, however, that this committee takes a step back  
13 and examines the broader two-decade mission that shaped the  
14 outcome we face today. Our withdrawal this summer and the  
15 events surrounding it did not happen in a vacuum. The path  
16 that led to this moment was paved with years of mistakes,  
17 from our catastrophic pivot to Iraq, to our failure to  
18 handle Pakistan's support for the Taliban, to the flawed  
19 Doha agreement signed by President Trump. The members of  
20 this committee and the witnesses before us have overseen  
21 chapters of war that spanned four presidential  
22 administrations, both Democratic and Republican, and we owe  
23 the American people an honest accounting. I hope that this  
24 hearing will be frank and searching, so that future  
25 generations of Americans will not repeat our mistakes.

1           Our witnesses today are Secretary Lloyd Austin,  
2 Secretary of Defense; General Mark Milley, Chairman of the  
3 Joint Chief of Staff; and General Frank McKenzie, Commander  
4 of U.S. Central Command. I welcome each of you and thank  
5 you for your many years of service.

6           I also want to commend and thank our military men and  
7 women for their heroic efforts to evacuate more than 124,000  
8 American citizens, Afghan Special Immigrant Visa applicants,  
9 and other at-risk Afghans over 17 days in chaotic and  
10 perilous conditions -- a remarkable accomplishment. We  
11 especially honor the brave American service men and women  
12 were killed and wounded while selflessly protecting those  
13 seeking safety.

14           So how did we get here? There are countless decisions  
15 and factors that could be pointed to, but I would highlight  
16 a few that clearly paved the way.

17           Early in the war, we did achieve our original  
18 counterterrorism objective of significantly degrading Al  
19 Qaeda in Afghanistan. Over time, however, that mission  
20 morphed into convoluted counterinsurgency and nation  
21 building. While the U.S. presence in Afghanistan drew down  
22 significantly over the last few years, the lack of a defined  
23 strategy continued to erode the mission.

24           One of the clearest inflection points was the ill-fated  
25 decision to go to war in Iraq. Just as we began to achieve

1 momentum in Afghanistan, the Bush administration's invasion  
2 of Iraq drew critical resources, troops and focus away from  
3 the Afghan theater. Our best opportunity in Afghanistan was  
4 squandered and we were never able to get back on track.

5 Throughout the war, we were also unsuccessful in  
6 dealing with Pakistan's support to the Taliban. Even as  
7 American diplomats sat down with Pakistani leaders and our  
8 forces cooperated on counterterrorism missions, the Taliban  
9 enjoyed sanctuary inside Pakistan with time and space to  
10 regroup.

11 More recently the Taliban's resurgence can be tied to  
12 the flawed Doha agreement, which then-President Trump signed  
13 in 2020. This deal, negotiated between the Trump  
14 administration and the Taliban without our coalition allies  
15 or even the Afghan government present, promised the end of  
16 the entire international presence in Afghanistan, including  
17 contractors critical to keeping the Afghan Air Force in the  
18 fight, with virtually no stipulations. The Taliban, with  
19 momentum on the battlefield and no incentives to honor the  
20 Doha agreement, used the final year of the Trump  
21 administration to boldly escalate violence and begin its  
22 faithful March toward Kabul.

23 Despite colossal efforts over multiple administrations,  
24 both Democratic and Republican, we were unable to help build  
25 an Afghan government capable of leading its people nor an

1 Afghan security force capable of defeating the Taliban.  
2 Afghan soldiers fought bravely in the face of massive  
3 casualties, but faced with the loss of American military  
4 support and hamstrung by corruption within, they were unable  
5 to stand on their own against Taliban forces.

6 Secretary Austin, General Milley, General McKenzie, you  
7 have each led troops in combat in Afghanistan, commanded at  
8 the theater level, and advised our nation's top leaders on  
9 our Afghanistan strategy. You have played significant roles  
10 throughout this war, and I hope that you are forthcoming in  
11 your answers today.

12 To begin, I would ask that you provide an accounting of  
13 the intelligence and other key assessments that factored  
14 into your judgments about the viability of the Afghan  
15 government and Afghan forces and how those trends changed  
16 over time. I would like to know any lessons you have  
17 identified for how we can more effectively work by, with,  
18 and through partner nation forces in the future.

19 Additionally, I would like to understand what factors  
20 you attribute to the Taliban's success and whether we missed  
21 indicators and warnings of their imminent takeover.

22 Finally, while we have transitioned our military from  
23 Afghanistan after largely achieving our counterterrorism  
24 objectives, we must continue to ensure that Afghanistan can  
25 never again be used as a base for terrorist groups to

1 conduct operations against the United States and our allies.  
2 We must remain vigilant about these threats and ensure that  
3 we establish an effective counterterrorism architecture  
4 moving forward. To that end, I would ask that you update  
5 the committee on your plans for over-the-horizon  
6 counterterrorism operations.

7 The United States faces new and evolving threats around  
8 the world. To overcome them we must first understand what  
9 went wrong to our mission in Afghanistan and learn from  
10 those missteps. We owe it to the American people.

11 I want to thank you again for being here this morning.  
12 And I look forward to your testimony.

13 Now, before I turn to the Ranking Member Inhofe, for  
14 the benefit of my colleagues, because we have two rounds of  
15 open testimony and a closed session following, I will  
16 strictly enforce the 5-minute limit allowed for each member.  
17 I intend to recess at 1:00 p.m. for lunch and promptly  
18 resume at 1:30 p.m. I would again remind my colleagues that  
19 there will be a classified briefing immediately following  
20 the open session in SVC-217, the office of Senate Security.

21 Again, before I turn to Ranking Member Inhofe, I want  
22 to note that the rules of the committee state that witness  
23 testimony should be sent to the committee 48 hours in  
24 advance, and it is customary that, at the very latest,  
25 testimony arrives the afternoon before the hearing. I am



1 disappointed that the statements of our witnesses were not  
2 sent to the committee until late last evening, giving  
3 Senators and the staff very little time to review. I hope  
4 that when these witnesses appear again before this  
5 committee, they will follow the committee rules and customs.

6 Now, let me turn to Ranking Member Inhofe.

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

3           Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let us make  
4 sure that everyone understands that the 5-minute limit does  
5 not affect opening statements.

6           Let me say it a little bit stronger, the statement  
7 that was made by our chairman, that there is no reason in  
8 the world that they waited until late last night to send  
9 this information to us. All these members, they want to be  
10 well informed, and they did not have that opportunity.

11          I want to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to  
12 our servicemembers and our veterans. Our men and women in  
13 uniform bravely volunteer to go into harm's way for one  
14 reason: to keep their fellow Americans safe. They  
15 represent our very best.

16          I especially want to recognize those who made the  
17 ultimate sacrifice, and their families. On August 26th, we  
18 were reminded so painfully of what we ask our troops and  
19 their families to do. They laid it all on the line for this  
20 country. Those 13 men and women died trying to evacuate  
21 their fellow Americans and at-risk Afghans from Kabul under  
22 extremely difficult and dangerous circumstances.

23          So I want to be perfectly clear. The frustration on  
24 this committee about the chaotic and deadly withdrawal from  
25 Afghanistan is not, and should never be, directed towards

1 our troops. It was President Biden and his advisers who put  
2 them in that situation. Even worse, this was avoidable.  
3 Everything that happened was foreseeable. My colleagues on  
4 this committee and the commanders in charge, we saw it  
5 coming. So we are here today to understand what happened  
6 and why that advice was ignored.

7 General McKenzie, you said in February, before the  
8 President decided to fully withdraw from Afghanistan, quote,  
9 "You have to take a conditions-based approach." You  
10 expressed your concern, quote, "about the actions that the  
11 Taliban have taken up until this point," meaning that the  
12 Taliban was not constraining Al Qaeda, as it had agreed to  
13 do so under the conditions-based agreement that it signed  
14 with the Trump administration, that it was a conditions-  
15 based statement, in position.

16 Around the same time, General Miller, who was then the  
17 commander of U.S. Forces Afghanistan, advised his chain of  
18 command to keep approximately 2,500 troops in the country.  
19 He warned that the Taliban might otherwise take over.

20 General McKenzie, you offered a similar warning when  
21 you last testified before this committee in April, right  
22 after the President made his decision to withdraw. You  
23 said, quote, "My concern is the ability of the Afghan  
24 military to hold the ground that they are on now without the  
25 support that they have been used to for many years."

1           Throughout the spring, we saw many districts quickly  
2 fall to the Taliban, many without firing a shot. This is  
3 why I urged President Biden in June to rethink his approach  
4 and maintain a small force in Afghanistan in order to  
5 prevent the collapse we ultimately saw. It was also why the  
6 members of this committee, on both sides of the aisle, spent  
7 months urging the administration to evacuate Americans and  
8 our Afghan partners sooner.

9           But President Biden and his advisers did not listen to  
10 his combat commander, he did not listen to Congress, and he  
11 failed to anticipate what all of us knew would happen.

12           So in August, we all witnessed a horror of the  
13 President's own making. Afghans died as they desperately  
14 gripped onto departing flights. The Taliban is in a  
15 stronger position than it has been since 9/11. The  
16 terrorist Haqqani members are now in senior government  
17 positions. We went from "we will never negotiate with  
18 terrorists" to "we must negotiate with terrorists." You  
19 know, in the years that I have been here, we have heard over  
20 and over again, "you do not negotiate with terrorists," and  
21 now it is required.

22           Worst of all, 13 brave Americans were killed in the  
23 evacuation effort. Three days later, the Biden  
24 administration said that it struck an ISIS operative, but,  
25 in fact, it killed 10 Afghan civilians, including 7

1 children. And then, President Biden concluded the drawdown  
2 by doing the unthinkable -- he left Americans behind.

3 The men and women who served in uniform, their heroic  
4 families, and the American people deserve answers. How did  
5 this avoidable disaster happen? Why were Americans left  
6 behind?

7 President Biden's decision to withdraw has expanded the  
8 threat of terrorism and increased the likelihood of an  
9 attack on the homeland. The administration is telling the  
10 American people that the plan to deal with these threats is  
11 something called over-the-horizon counterterrorism, and that  
12 we do these types of operations elsewhere in the world. That  
13 is misleading, at best, and dishonest, at worst.

14 There is no plan. We have no reliable partners on the  
15 ground. We have no bases nearby.

16 The Afghan government is now led by terrorists with  
17 long ties to Al Qaeda, and we are at the mercy of the  
18 Pakistan government to get into Afghanistan airspace. Even  
19 if we can get there, we cannot strike Al Qaeda in  
20 Afghanistan because we are worried about what the Taliban  
21 will do to the Americans who are still there, and Americans  
22 are still there.

23 The administration needs to be honest. Because of  
24 President Biden's disastrous decision, the terrorist threat  
25 to American families is rising significantly, while our

1 ability to deal with these threats has been declined  
2 decidedly.

3 We will have another hearing with expert witnesses on  
4 Thursday -- that is just 2 days from now. We understand  
5 Undersecretary of Defense, Colin Kahl, has agreed to testify  
6 in that hearing. So today is really just a start.

7 In conclusion, I would just like to say this.  
8 President Biden made a strategic decision to leave  
9 Afghanistan which resulted in the death of 13 U.S.  
10 servicemembers, the deaths of hundreds of Afghan civilians,  
11 including women and children -- that is what terrorists do  
12 -- and left American citizens surrounded by the very  
13 terrorists who attacked us on 9/11, and they are still  
14 there.

15 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 Chairman Reed: Well, thank you very much, Senator  
17 Inhofe.

18 Secretary Austin and Chairman Milley, the Doha  
19 agreement -- excuse me. We want to give you an opportunity  
20 to have opening statements, as I have been reminded. So,  
21 General Austin, you are recognized.

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1           STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE LLOYD J. AUSTIN III,  
2 SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

3           Secretary Austin: Chairman Reed, Ranking Member  
4 Inhofe, members of this committee, thank you for the  
5 opportunity to appear before you today to discuss our recent  
6 draw down in evacuation operations in Afghanistan. I am  
7 pleased to be joined by Generals Milley and McKenzie, who I  
8 know will be able to provide you with additional context.

9           I would like to make a few points before turning it  
10 over to you and to them, and first I want to say how  
11 incredibly proud I am of the men and women of the U.S. Armed  
12 Forces, who conducted themselves with tremendous skill and  
13 professionalism throughout the war, the draw-down and the  
14 evacuation.

15           Over the course of our nation's longest war, 2,461 of  
16 our fellow Americans made the ultimate sacrifice, along with  
17 more than 20,000 who still bear the wounds of war, some of  
18 which cannot be seen on the outside. And we can discuss and  
19 debate the decisions, the policies, and the turning points  
20 since April of this year, when the President made clear his  
21 intent to end American involvement in this war. And we can  
22 debate the decisions, over 20 years that led us to this  
23 point. But I know that you agree with me that one thing not  
24 open to debate is the courage and the compassion of our  
25 servicemembers, who, along with their families, served and

1 sacrificed to ensure that our homeland would never again be  
2 attacked the way it was on 9/11.

3 I had the chance to speak with many of them during my  
4 trip to the Gulf region a few weeks ago, including the  
5 Marines who lost 11 of their teammates at the Abbey Gate in  
6 Kabul on the 26th of August, and I have never been more  
7 humbled and inspired. They are rightfully proud of what  
8 they accomplished and the lives they saved in such a short  
9 span of time.

10 In fact, I would like to talk to you a little bit about  
11 that issue of time. The reason that our troops were able to  
12 get there so quickly is because we planned for just such a  
13 contingency. We began thinking about the possibilities of a  
14 non-combatant evacuation as far back as this spring.

15 Indeed, by late April, 2 weeks after the President's  
16 decision, military planners had crafted a number of  
17 evacuation scenarios. In mid-May, I ordered Central Command  
18 to make preparations for potential NEO. And 2 weeks later I  
19 began pre-positioning forces in the region to include three  
20 infantry battalions. And on the 10th of August, we ran  
21 another tabletop exercise around a non-combatant evacuation  
22 scenario. We wanted to be ready and we were. In fact, by  
23 the time that the State Department called for a NEO, leading  
24 elements of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit were already  
25 on the ground in Kabul. And before that weekend was out



1 another 3,000 or so ground troops had arrived, including  
2 elements of the 82nd Airborne.

3 But Let us be clear. Those first 2 days were  
4 difficult. We all watched with alarm the images of Afghans  
5 rushing the runway and our aircraft. We all remember the  
6 scenes of confusion outside the airport. But within 48  
7 hours, our troops restored order, and process began to take  
8 hold. Our soldiers, airmen and Marines, in partnership with  
9 our allies and partners and our State Department colleagues,  
10 secured the gates, took control of airport operations, and  
11 set up a processing system for the tens of thousands of  
12 people they would be manifesting onto airplanes.

13 They and our commanders exceeded all expectations. We  
14 planned to evacuate between 70,000 and 80,000 people. They  
15 evacuated more than 124,000. We planned to move between  
16 5,000 and 9,000 people per day. On average, they moved  
17 slightly between more than 7,000 per day. On military  
18 aircraft alone, we flew more than 387 sorties, averaging  
19 nearly 23 per day. At the height of this operation an  
20 aircraft was taking off every 45 minutes. And not a single  
21 sortie was missed for maintenance, fuel, or logistical  
22 problems. It was the largest airlift conducted in U.S.  
23 history, and it was executed in 17 days.

24 Was it perfect? Of course not. We moved so many  
25 people so quickly out of Kabul that we ran into capacity and

1 screening problems at intermediate staging bases outside  
2 Afghanistan. And we are still working to get Americans out  
3 who wish to leave. And we did not get out all of our Afghan  
4 allies enrolled in a Special Immigrant Visa program. We  
5 take that seriously, and that is why we are working across  
6 the interagency to continue facilitating their departure.  
7 Even with no military presence on the ground, that part of  
8 our mission is not over.

9 And tragically, lives were lost: several Afghans  
10 killed climbing aboard an aircraft on that first day; 13  
11 brave U.S. servicemembers and dozens of Afghan civilians  
12 killed in a terrorist attack on the 26th; and we took as  
13 many as 10 innocent lives in a drone strike on the 29th.

14 Non-combatant evacuations remain among the most  
15 challenging military operations, even in the best of  
16 circumstances, and the circumstances in August were anything  
17 but ideal. Extreme heat, a landlocked country, no  
18 government, a highly dynamic situation on the ground, and an  
19 active, credible, and lethal terrorist threat.

20 In a span of just 2 days, from the 13th to the 15th of  
21 August, we went from working alongside a democratically  
22 elected longtime partner government to coordinating warily  
23 with a longtime enemy. We operated in a deeply dangerous  
24 environment, and it proved a lesson in pragmatism and  
25 professionalism.

1           We learned a lot of other lessons too, about how to  
2           turn an Air Force base in Qatar to an international airport  
3           overnight and about how to rapidly screen, process, and  
4           manifest large numbers of people. Nothing like this has  
5           ever been done before and no other military in the world  
6           could have pulled it off, and I think that is crucial.

7           Now I know that members of this committee will have  
8           questions on many things, such as why we turned over Bagram  
9           Airfield and how real is our over-the-horizon capability,  
10          and why did we not start evacuations sooner, and why did we  
11          not stay longer to get more people out? So let me take each  
12          in turn.

13          Retaining Bagram would have required putting as many as  
14          5,000 U.S. troops in harm's way just to operate and defend  
15          it, and it would have contributed little to the mission that  
16          we had been assigned, and that was to protect and defend the  
17          embassy, which was some 30 miles away. That distance from  
18          Kabul also rendered Bagram of little value in the  
19          evacuation. Staying at Bagram even for counterterrorism  
20          purposes meant staying at war in Afghanistan, something that  
21          the President made clear that he would not do.

22          As for over-the-horizon operations, when we use that  
23          term we refer to assets and target analysis that come from  
24          outside the country in which the operation occurs. These  
25          are effective and fairly common operations. Indeed, just

1 days ago, we conducted one such strike in Syria, eliminating  
2 a senior Al Qaeda figure. Over-the-horizon operations are  
3 difficult, but absolutely possible, and the intelligence  
4 that supports them comes from a variety of sources and not  
5 just U.S. boots on the ground.

6 As for when we started evacuations, we offered input to  
7 the State Department's decision, mindful of their concerns  
8 that moving too soon might actually cause a very collapse of  
9 the Afghan government that we all wanted to avoid, and that  
10 moving too late would put our people and our operations at  
11 greater risk. And as I said, the fact that our troops were  
12 on the ground so quickly is due in large part to our  
13 planning and our pre-positioning of forces.

14 And as for the mission's end, my judgment remains that  
15 extending beyond the end of August would have greatly  
16 imperiled our people and our mission. The Taliban made  
17 clear that their cooperation would end on the first of  
18 September, and as you know, we faced grave and growing  
19 threats from ISIS-K. Staying longer than we did would have  
20 made it even more dangerous for our people and would not  
21 have significantly changed the number of evacuees we could  
22 get out.

23 Now as we consider these tactical issues today, we must  
24 also ask ourselves some equally tough questions about the  
25 wider war itself and pause to think about the lessons that

1 we have learned over the past 20 years: Did we have the  
2 right strategy? Did we have too many strategies? Did we  
3 put too much faith in our ability to build effective Afghan  
4 institutions, an army, an air force, a police force and  
5 government ministries?

6 We helped build the state, Mr. Chairman, but we could  
7 not forge a nation. The fact that the Afghan army that we  
8 and our partners trained simply melted away, in many cases  
9 without firing a shot, took us all by surprise, and it would  
10 be dishonest to claim otherwise.

11 We need to consider some uncomfortable truths, that we  
12 did not fully comprehend the depth of corruption and poor  
13 leadership in the senior ranks. That we did not grasp the  
14 damaging effect of frequent and unexplained rotations by  
15 President Ghani of his commanders. That we did not  
16 anticipate the snowball effect caused by the deals that the  
17 Taliban commanders struck with local leaders in the wake of  
18 the Doha agreement. And that the Doha agreement itself had  
19 a demoralizing effect on Afghan soldiers.

20 And finally, that we failed to grasp that there was  
21 only so much for which, and for whom, many of the Afghan  
22 forces would fight. We provided the Afghan military with  
23 equipment and aircraft and the skills to use them. Over the  
24 years, they often fought bravely. Tens of thousands of  
25 Afghan soldiers and police died. But in the end, we could

1 not provide them with the will to win, at least not all of  
2 them. And as a veteran of that war, I am personally  
3 reckoning with all of that.

4 But I hope, as I said at the outset, that we do not  
5 allow a debate about how this war ended to cloud our pride  
6 in the way that our people fought it. They prevented  
7 another 9/11, they showed extraordinary courage and  
8 compassion in the war's last days, and they made lasting  
9 progress in Afghanistan that the Taliban will find difficult  
10 to reverse and that the international community should work  
11 hard to preserve.

12 Now our servicemembers and civilians face a new  
13 mission, helping these Afghan evacuees move on to new lives  
14 and new places, and they are performing that one  
15 magnificently as well. I spent time with some of them up at  
16 Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst just yesterday. I know  
17 that you share my profound gratitude and respect for their  
18 service, their courage, and professionalism, and I  
19 appreciate the support that this committee continues to  
20 provide them and their families. Thank you.

21 [The prepared statement of Secretary Austin follows:]

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1           Senator Reed: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. General  
2 Milley, I believe you have a statement.

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1           STATEMENT OF GENERAL MARK A. MILLEY, USA, CHAIRMAN OF  
2 THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

3           General Milley: Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe,  
4 thank you for the opportunity to be here with Secretary  
5 Austin and General McKenzie to discuss Afghanistan. As you  
6 mentioned up front, we submitted matters for the record, a  
7 lengthy statement of this cut-down oral version, and I know  
8 it got to you late.

9           During the past 20 years, the men and women of the  
10 United States military along with our allies and partners  
11 fought the Taliban, brought Osama bin Laden to justice,  
12 denied Al Qaeda sanctuary, and protected our homeland for  
13 two consecutive decades. Over 800,000 of us in uniform  
14 served in Afghanistan. Most importantly, 2,461 of us gave  
15 the ultimate sacrifice, while 20,698 of us were wounded in  
16 action, and countless others of us suffer the invisible  
17 wounds of war. There is no doubt in my mind that our  
18 efforts prevented an attack on the homeland from  
19 Afghanistan, which was our core, original mission. And  
20 everyone that has served in that war should be proud. Your  
21 service mattered.

22           Beginning in 2011, we steadily drew down our troop  
23 numbers, consolidated and closed bases, and retrograded  
24 equipment from Afghanistan. At the peak, in 2011, we had  
25 97,000 U.S. troops, alongside 41,000 NATO troops in



1 Afghanistan. Ten years later, when Ambassador Khalilzad  
2 signed the Doha agreement with Mullah Baradar on 29 February  
3 2020, the United States at 12,600 U.S. troops, with 8,000  
4 NATO and 10,500 contractors. This has been a 10-year multi-  
5 administration draw down, not a 19-month or 19-day NEO.

6 Under the Doha agreement, the U.S. would begin to  
7 withdraw its forces contingent upon Taliban meeting certain  
8 conditions, which would lead to a political agreement  
9 between the Taliban and the government of Afghanistan.  
10 There were seven conditions applicable to the Taliban and  
11 eight conditions applicable to the United States. While the  
12 Taliban did not attack U.S. forces, which was one of the  
13 conditions, it failed to fully honor any -- any other  
14 condition under the Doha agreement.

15 And perhaps most importantly, for U.S. national  
16 security, the Taliban has never renounced Al Qaeda or broke  
17 its affiliation with them. We, the United States, adhered  
18 to every condition.

19 In the fall of 2020, my analysis was that an  
20 accelerated withdrawal, without meeting specific and  
21 necessary conditions, risks losing the substantial gains  
22 made in Afghanistan, damaging U.S. worldwide credibility,  
23 and could precipitate a general collapse of the ANSF and the  
24 Afghan government, resulting in a complete Taliban takeover  
25 or general civil war. That was a year ago. My assessment

1 remained consistent throughout.

2       Based on my advice and the advice of the commanders,  
3 then-Secretary of Defense Esper submitted a memorandum on 9  
4 November, recommending to maintain U.S. forces at a level  
5 between about 2,500 and 4,500 in Afghanistan until  
6 conditions were met for further reduction. Two days later  
7 on 11 November 2020, I received an unclassified, signed  
8 order directing the United States military to withdraw all  
9 forces from Afghanistan no later than 15 January 2021.

10       After further discussions regarding the risks  
11 associated with such a withdrawal, the order was rescinded.

12       On 17 November, we received a new order, to reduce levels  
13 to 2,500 plus enabling forces no later than 15 January.

14       When President Biden was inaugurated, there were  
15 approximately 3,500 U.S. troops, 5,400 NATO troops, and  
16 6,300 contractors in Afghanistan, with a specified task of  
17 train, advise, and assist, along with a small contingent of  
18 counterterrorism forces. The strategic situation at  
19 inauguration was stalemate.

20       The Biden administration, through the National Security  
21 Council process, conducted a rigorous interagency review of  
22 the situation in Afghanistan in February, March, and April.

23       During this process, the views of the Joint Chiefs of  
24 Staff, all of us, the CENTCOM commander, General McKenzie,  
25 the U.S. 4A General Miller, and myself were all given

1 serious consideration by the administration. We provided a  
2 broad range of options and our assessment of their potential  
3 outcomes. The cost, benefit, risk to force, and risk to  
4 mission were evaluated against the national security  
5 objectives of the United States.

6 On 14 April, the President announced his decision, and  
7 the U.S. military received a change of mission to retrograde  
8 all U.S. military forces, maintain a small contingency force  
9 of 600 to 700 to protect the embassy in Kabul until the  
10 Department of State could coordinate contractor security  
11 support, and also to assist Turkey to maintain the Karzai  
12 International Airport, and transition the U.S. military to  
13 an over-the-horizon counterterrorism support and security  
14 force assistance.

15 It is clear, it is obvious, the war in Afghanistan did  
16 not end on the terms we wanted with the Taliban now in power  
17 in Kabul. Although the NEO was unprecedented, and is the  
18 largest air evacuation history, evacuating 124,000 people,  
19 it came at an incredible cost of 11 Marines, one soldier,  
20 and a Navy corpsman. Those 13 gave their lives so that  
21 people they never met will have an opportunity to live in  
22 freedom. And we must remember that the Taliban was and  
23 remains a terrorist organization, and they still have not  
24 broken ties with Al Qaeda.

25 I have no illusions who we are dealing with. It

1 remains to be seen whether or not the Taliban can  
2 consolidate power, or if the country will further fracture  
3 into civil war, but we must continue to protect the United  
4 States of America and its people from terror attacks coming  
5 from Afghanistan. A reconstituted Al Qaeda or ISIS with  
6 aspirations to attack the United States is a very real  
7 possibility, and those conditions to include activity in  
8 ungoverned spaces could present themselves in the next 12 to  
9 36 months. That mission will be much harder now, but not  
10 impossible, and we will continue to protect at the American  
11 people.

12 Strategic decisions have strategic consequences. Over  
13 the course of 4 Presidents, 12 Secretaries of Defense, 7  
14 chairmen, 10 CENTCOM commanders, 20 commanders in  
15 Afghanistan, hundreds of congressional delegation visits,  
16 and 20 years of congressional oversight, there are many  
17 lessons to be learned. Two specific to the military that we  
18 need to take a look at, and we will, is did we mirror image  
19 the development of the Afghan National Army, and the second  
20 is the rapid collapse, unprecedented rapid collapse, of the  
21 Afghan military in only 11 days in August.

22 However, one lesson must never be forgotten. Every  
23 soldier, sailor, airman, and Marine who served there in  
24 Afghanistan for 20 consecutive years protected our country  
25 from attack by terrorists, and for that, they should be

1 forever proud, and we should be forever grateful.

2 Thank you, Chairman, and if I could, I know that there  
3 are some issues in the media that are of deep concern to  
4 many members on the committee, and with your permission, I  
5 would like to address those for a minute or two. Again, I  
6 have submitted memorandum for the committee to take a look  
7 at.

8 Chairman Reed: You may proceed.

9 General Milley: Mr. Chairman, I have served this  
10 nation for 42 years. I have spent years in combat, and I  
11 have buried a lot of my troops who died while defending this  
12 country. My loyalty to this nation, its people, and the  
13 Constitution has not changed and will never change as long  
14 as I have a breath to give. My loyalty is absolute, and I  
15 will not turn my back on the fallen.

16 With respect to the Chinese calls, I routinely  
17 communicated with my counterpart, General Li, with the  
18 knowledge and coordination of civilian oversight. I am  
19 specifically directed to communicate with the Chinese by  
20 Department of Defense guidance, the policy dialogue system.  
21 These military-to-military communications at the highest  
22 level are critical to the security of the United States in  
23 order to deconflict military actions, manage crisis, and  
24 prevent war between great powers that are armed with the  
25 world's most deadliest weapons.

1           The calls on 30 October and 8 January were coordinated  
2 before and after with Secretary Esper and Acting Secretary  
3 Miller's staffs and the interagency. The specific purpose  
4 of the October and January calls were generated by  
5 concerning intelligence which caused us to believe the  
6 Chinese were worried about an attack on them by the United  
7 States. I know, I am certain, that President Trump did not  
8 intend to attack the Chinese, and it is my directed  
9 responsibility, and it was my directed responsibility by the  
10 Secretary, to convey that intent to the Chinese.

11           My task at that time was to de-escalate. My message,  
12 again, was consistent -- stay calm, steady, and de-escalate.  
13 We are not going to attack you.

14           At Secretary of Defense Esper's direction, I made a  
15 call to General Li on 30 October. Eight people sat in that  
16 call with me, and I read out the call within 30 minutes of  
17 the call ending. On 31 December, the Chinese requested  
18 another call with me. The Deputy Assistant Secretary of  
19 Defense for Asia Pacific Policy helped coordinate my call,  
20 which was then scheduled for 8 January, and he made a  
21 preliminary call on 6 January. Eleven people attended that  
22 call with me, and readouts of this call were distributed to  
23 the interagency that same day.

24           Shortly after my call ended with General Li, I  
25 personally informed both Secretary of State Pompeo and White

1 House Chief of Staff Meadows about the call, among other  
2 topics. Soon after that, I attended a meeting with Acting  
3 Secretary Miller, where I briefed him on the call.

4 Later that same day on 8 January, Speaker of the House  
5 Pelosi called me to inquire about the President's ability to  
6 launch nuclear weapons. I sought to assure her that nuclear  
7 launch is governed by a very specific and deliberate  
8 process. She was concerned and made various personal  
9 references characterizing the President. I explained to her  
10 that the President is the sole nuclear launch authority, and  
11 he does not launch them alone, and that I am not qualified  
12 to determine the mental health of the President of the  
13 United States. There are processes, protocols, and  
14 procedures in place, and I repeatedly assured her that there  
15 is no chance of an illegal, unauthorized, or accidental  
16 launch.

17 By presidential directive and Secretary of Defense  
18 directives, the chairman is part of the process to ensure  
19 the President is fully informed when determining the use of  
20 the world's deadliest weapons. By law, I am not in the  
21 chain of command, and I know that. However, by presidential  
22 directive and DoD instruction, I am in the chain of  
23 communication to fulfill my legal statutory role as the  
24 President's primary military advisor.

25 After the Speaker Pelosi call I convened a short

1 meeting in my office with key members of my staff to refresh  
2 all of us on the procedures which we practiced daily at the  
3 action officer level. Additionally, I immediately informed  
4 Acting Secretary of Defense Miller of Speaker Pelosi's phone  
5 call. At no time was I attempting to change or influence  
6 the process, usurp authority, or insert myself in the chain  
7 of command. But I am expected, I am required, to give my  
8 advice and ensure that the President is fully informed on  
9 military matters.

10 I am submitting for the record a more detailed and  
11 unclassified memoranda, that I believe you all now have,  
12 although late, and I welcome a thorough walkthrough on every  
13 single one of these events. And I would be happy, in a  
14 classified session, to talk in detail about the intelligence  
15 that drove these calls. I am also happy to make available  
16 any email, phone logs, memoranda, witnesses, or anything  
17 else you need to understand these events.

18 My oath is to support the Constitution of the United  
19 States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic,  
20 and I will never turn my back on that oath. I firmly  
21 believe in civilian control of the military as a bedrock  
22 principle, essential to the health of this republic, and I  
23 am committed to ensuring that the military stays clear of  
24 domestic politics.

25 I look forward to your questions, and thank you,



1 Chairman, for the extra time.

2 [The prepared statement of General Milley follows:]

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you, General.

2 General McKenzie, I understand you do not have a  
3 statement. Is that correct?

4 General McKenzie: Sir, I will waive my statement in  
5 order to get us back on schedule.

6 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General.

7 Secretary Austin, the Doha agreement represents direct  
8 negotiations with terrorists, and not just negotiations but  
9 an agreement with them that excluded the Afghan government  
10 and the allies we have been fighting with us now since 9/11.  
11 It set a fixed departure date with conditions, as has been  
12 indicated, were not really followed consistently by the  
13 Taliban. As you considered, in April, what to do, did the  
14 intelligence suggest to you that reneging on the departure  
15 of the troops would lead to significant attacks against  
16 American and allied military forces?

17 Secretary Austin: Chairman, to my recollection, the  
18 intelligence was clear that if we did not leave in  
19 accordance with that agreement, the Taliban would recommence  
20 attacks on our forces.

21 Chairman Reed: And they would include the blue-on-  
22 green attacks and any other means they could use to attack  
23 American forces.

24 Secretary Austin: That is correct, Chairman.

25 Chairman Reed: So the choice was, in many respects,

1 was, were we going to incur additional casualties  
2 indefinitely in Afghanistan? That is one way to look at it.  
3 Is that fair?

4 Secretary Austin: That is correct, Chairman. You  
5 certainly would have to take additional measures to be able  
6 to defend yourself if the Taliban recommenced their  
7 offensive operations against us.

8 Chairman Reed: Now, General Milley and General  
9 McKenzie, did the Doha agreement affect the morale of the  
10 Afghan forces, i.e., was there a sense now that even though  
11 it was months away, that the United States was leaving since  
12 we had agreed to leave?

13 General Milley: I will let Frank talk the details, but  
14 my assessment is yes, Senator, it did affect the morale of  
15 the Afghan security forces.

16 Chairman Reed: General McKenzie?

17 General McKenzie: Sir, it is my judgment that the Doha  
18 agreement did negatively affect the performance of the  
19 Afghan forces, in particular by some of the actions that the  
20 government of Afghanistan was required to undertake as part  
21 of that agreement.

22 Chairman Reed: And one of the critical issues was the  
23 agreement to withdraw contractors, which are basically the  
24 engine that maintains the air force of Afghanistan and many  
25 other logistical operations. And that was just as critical

1 as the troop departure, I would assume.

2 General McKenzie: Chairman, it was. We had plans in  
3 place to try to conduct those operations from over the  
4 horizon. They were not as effective as having contractors  
5 on the ground, on site with the aircraft.

6 Chairman Reed: The momentum appeared to be shifting to  
7 the Taliban. Indications were their penetration or parts of  
8 the country in the northern sectors, particularly which  
9 traditionally opposed the Taliban, the Northern Alliance,  
10 but that started -- to be fair, that started long before  
11 Doha. There are some commentators who have suggested since  
12 2014, the Taliban have been surrounding provincial capitals,  
13 insinuating themselves into the politics of the local  
14 communities, striking bargains. Is that your impression  
15 too, General McKenzie?

16 General McKenzie: Sir, I think it is a good assessment  
17 that from 2014 on, the Taliban did pursue that strategy, and  
18 they had some success. Now, the government of Afghanistan  
19 also had success holding onto centralized urban areas and  
20 population centers, but the Taliban pursued a distinct  
21 strategy and had some success with it.

22 Chairman Reed: Now, General -- excuse me, Secretary  
23 Austin, you did provide your best military advice to the  
24 President regarding the situation in Afghanistan, and has  
25 been recounted several times through multiple meetings, and

1 he received advice from many different quarters. Do you  
2 feel that you had the opportunity to make your advice very  
3 clear?

4 Secretary Austin: I do, Chairman. As I have said  
5 before, I always keep my advice to the President  
6 confidential, but I am very much satisfied that we had a  
7 thorough policy review, and I believe that all of the  
8 parties had an opportunity to provide input. And that input  
9 was received.

10 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much.

11 Senator Inhofe.

12 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 It was 2 weeks ago that we had a closed, classified  
14 hearing. We had General Miller's recommendation at that  
15 time. Well, let me first of all just mention that during  
16 your confirmation process, you committed, and I am speaking  
17 now to General McKenzie and General Milley, to give me your  
18 honest and personal views of this committee, even if those  
19 views differed from those of the administration, and I am  
20 confident that you will be doing that.

21 During this hearing that we had, it was emphasized to  
22 us, from General Miller, that he was recommending the 2,500  
23 troops in Afghanistan. Now, we did not receive the  
24 documentation from your offices, I say to the witnesses  
25 today, until, well actually, 10:35 last night. So there

1 really was not time to get into a lot of the details, but I  
2 would ask General McKenzie, did you agree to the  
3 recommendation that General Miller had two weeks ago?

4 General McKenzie: Senator, again, I will not share my  
5 personal recommendation to the President, but I will give  
6 you my honest opinion, and my honest opinion and view shaped  
7 my recommendation. I recommended that we maintain 2,500  
8 troops in Afghanistan, and I also recommended earlier in the  
9 fall of 2020 that we maintain 4,500 at that time. Those are  
10 my personal views. I also have a view that the withdrawal  
11 of those forces would lead inevitably to the collapse of the  
12 Afghan military forces, and eventually the Afghan  
13 government.

14 Senator Inhofe: Yes, so I understand that. And  
15 General Milley, I assume you agree with that in terms of the  
16 recommendation of 2,500?

17 General Milley: What I said in my opening statement  
18 and the memoranda that I wrote back in the fall of 2020  
19 remained consistent, and I do agree with that.

20 Senator Inhofe: This committee is unsure as to whether  
21 or not General Miller's recommendation ever got to the  
22 President. You know, obviously, there are conversations  
23 with the President, but I would like to ask, even though  
24 General McKenzie, I think you have all made this statement.  
25 Did you talk to the President about General Miller's

1 recommendation?

2 General McKenzie: Sir, I was present when that  
3 discussion occurred, and I am confident that the President  
4 heard all the recommendations and listened to them very  
5 thoughtfully.

6 Senator Inhofe: So one of the recommendations that was  
7 made by the three of you would be the recommendation that  
8 originally was made by General Miller two weeks ago.

9 During the August 18th interview on ABC, George  
10 Stephanopoulos asked President Biden whether U.S. troops  
11 would stay beyond August 31st if there were still Americans  
12 to evacuate. President Biden responded, and this is a  
13 quote, "If there are American citizens left, we are going to  
14 stay to get them all out." This did not happen. President  
15 Biden's decision resulted in all of the troops leaving, but  
16 the American citizens are still trying to get out.

17 How many American citizens, is your opinion, are still  
18 there? Just go down the line, each one of you. Anyone?

19 Secretary Austin: Senator, I would defer to the State  
20 Department for that assessment. That is a dynamic process.  
21 They have been contacting the civilians that are in  
22 Afghanistan, and again, I would defer to them for definitive  
23 numbers.

24 Senator Inhofe: Go ahead. Others?

25 General Milley: Same as the Secretary just said.

1 There were numbers at the beginning of this whole process  
2 with the F-77 report out of the embassy, and we know that we  
3 took out almost 6,000, I guess it is, American citizens.  
4 But how many remain --

5 Senator Inhofe: Okay. Do all of you agree that  
6 Secretary of State Blinken, when he made his analysis as to  
7 how many people would be here, would still be there, he  
8 talked about the 10,000 to 15,000 citizens left behind, and  
9 then evacuated some 6,000. That would mean a minimum of  
10 4,000 would still be there now. Would anyone disagree with  
11 that? By your silence, I assume you agree.

12 Secretary Austin: I have no -- I personally do not  
13 believe that there are 4,000 American citizens still left in  
14 Afghanistan, but I cannot confirm or deny that, Senator.

15 Senator Inhofe: So you think Secretary of State was  
16 probably wrong in his analysis?

17 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 Chairman Reed: Thank you. And just for the record,  
19 the Chair and the Vice Chair/Ranking Member have each abided  
20 by the 5-minute rule, so fair is fair.

21 Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank  
22 you, Secretary Austin, General Milley, and General McKenzie  
23 for being here this morning. And Secretary Austin and  
24 General Milley, thank you for your effort to put into some  
25 historical perspective what happened in Afghanistan, and for



1 recognizing the incredible service and sacrifice of the  
2 troops who served there.

3           General Milley, in a hearing before the Senate  
4 Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense in June, I explicitly  
5 raised concerns about the plight of at-risk Afghans due to  
6 our withdrawal, and I asked about the Department's plans to  
7 evacuate them. Now you indicated today that you thought we  
8 might be facing the kind of desperate situation that we saw  
9 in Kabul, but your response at that time was that, quote,  
10 "Lots of planning was ongoing," and this is in-quote, "and  
11 the State Department was leading efforts pertaining to  
12 evacuating our Afghan partners." And you explicitly told  
13 the committee that in your professional opinion, you did not  
14 see Saigon 1975 in Afghanistan. So I am just trying to  
15 figure out why we missed, or from a public perception, it  
16 appears that we did not anticipate the rapid fall of  
17 Afghanistan and Kabul, and the rise of the Taliban, and the  
18 way we saw it play out on television. And what did we miss?

19           General Milley: I think, Senator, we absolutely missed  
20 the rapid 11-day collapse of the Afghan military and the  
21 collapse of their government. I think there was a lot of  
22 intelligence that clearly indicated that after we withdrew,  
23 that it was a likely outcome of a collapse of the military  
24 and collapse of the government. Most of those intelligence  
25 assessments indicated that that would occur late fall,

1 perhaps early winter, Kabul might hold till next spring. It  
2 depends on when the intel assessment was written. So after  
3 we leave, the assessments were pretty consistent that you  
4 would see a general collapse of the government and the  
5 military.

6 While we were there, though, up through 31 August,  
7 there is no intel assessment that says the government's  
8 going to collapse and the military's going to collapse in 11  
9 days, that I am aware of, and I have read, I think, pretty  
10 much all of them. And even as late as the 3rd of August,  
11 and there is another one on the 8th of August, et cetera,  
12 they are still talking weeks, perhaps months, et cetera.

13 General McKenzie can illuminate on his own views on the  
14 same topic. He gave his assessments at the same time. And  
15 although General Miller did, in many, many assessments, say  
16 rapid, fast, hard for collapse, he also centered into the  
17 October-November time frame as opposed to August.

18 Senator Shaheen: So how do we avoid that happening  
19 again?

20 General Milley: I think the key, Senator that we  
21 missed, frankly, we had some indicators, but we did not have  
22 the full wholesome assessment of leadership, morale, and  
23 will. There were some units, and I do not want to say  
24 negative things about these guys, the 60,000, 70,000 of the  
25 Afghan service that were killed in action over the last 20

1 years, and many units did fight at the very end. But the  
2 vast majority put their weapons down and melted away in a  
3 very, very short period of time. I think that has to do  
4 with will, leadership, and I think we still need to try to  
5 figure out exactly why that was. And I have some  
6 suggestions, but I am not settled on them yet.

7 But we clearly missed that. I think one of the key  
8 factors we missed it for was we pulled our advisors off  
9 three years ago, and when you pull the advisors out of the  
10 units, you no longer can assess things like leadership and  
11 will. We can count all the planes, trucks, and automobiles,  
12 and cars, and machine guns, and everything else, we can  
13 count those from space and all the other kind of intel  
14 assets, but you cannot measure the human heart with a  
15 machine. You have got to be there.

16 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. Secretary Austin, I am  
17 about to run out of time, so you may want to respond to this  
18 on the next round, but one of the challenges with getting  
19 Special Immigrant Visa applicants out of Afghanistan has --  
20 and this was not just a problem in the evacuation. This has  
21 been a historic problem that has gone over years -- has been  
22 having the documents that show they actually served with our  
23 military, and DoD has been cited as the major problem in  
24 getting those documents.

25 So again, how do we make sure that does not happen

1 again in some future conflict, where we need our partners on  
2 the ground to serve alongside of our military members? And  
3 I am out of time, so hopefully you will answer that. Thank  
4 you.

5 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Shaheen.

6 Senator Wicker, please.

7 Senator Wicker: Chairman Reed, before I ask my  
8 questions I have an objection. We have been having hearings  
9 in a classified setting on this, our first public hearing.  
10 And I am sorry Senator Kaine has had to step away, but in a  
11 previous hearing he expressed frustration in various  
12 hearings he had been to, and a frustration that I shared,  
13 that when the State Department is here and we ask them a  
14 question, they say, "Well, you have to ask the Defense  
15 Department that." And now today, again, Defense Department  
16 people are before us, and a question was asked, and the  
17 answer to Senator Inhofe as well, "You will have to ask the  
18 State Department that."

19 Senator Kaine gently but fatherly sent a message to the  
20 administration at our last classified hearing that we need  
21 to cut that out, that members of the Defense Department need  
22 to be ready for the questions that we have asked and that we  
23 are going to ask. And so I object to the continuation of  
24 that in this hearing today.

25 While I am at it, I would also point out, General

1 Milley, I appreciate your statement and I have read it, and  
2 I understand what you are trying to say. But further than  
3 what you mentioned, the allegation is that you told  
4 combatant commanders to report back to you. Our clear  
5 understanding is that you are not in their chain of command  
6 that they report directly to the commander in chief through  
7 the Secretary. And so to the extent that you told them to  
8 report to you, they were not in your chain of command.

9 Now, let me see if I can get one question in here,  
10 having taken two minutes to mention a very important  
11 objection. General Milley, in the fall of 2020, you said an  
12 accelerated withdrawal would risk substantial gains and  
13 damage U.S. credibility, and I want to ask our witnesses  
14 about U.S. credibility.

15 On July 8, President Biden said, "The likelihood there  
16 is going to be Taliban overrunning everything and owning the  
17 whole country is highly unlikely." We now know he was  
18 advised actually this might happen. It turns out, it was  
19 completely untrue, that statement on July 8th.

20 Later in July, the President of the United States,  
21 President Biden, says, "I trust the capacity of the Afghan  
22 military, better trained, better equipped, and more  
23 competent in terms of conducting the war." President Biden  
24 was wrong on that. We told our interpreters, our drivers,  
25 our friends, the people who had had our backs during this

1 entire period of time that we would not abandon them, and  
2 that is exactly what we did.

3 And in an interview, that has already been referred to,  
4 on network news, President Biden says, and I quote, "If  
5 there are American citizens left, we are going to stay and  
6 get them all out." Two days later, the President of the  
7 United States unequivocally said, "Any American that wants  
8 to come home, we will get you home. We are going to stay  
9 and get them out." The President of the United States, our  
10 commander in chief, did exactly the opposite.

11 Now, I think you were right, General Milley, when you  
12 advised that our credibility would be damaged. Our  
13 credibility has been gravely damaged, has it not, General  
14 Milley?

15 General Milley: I think that our credibility with  
16 allies and partners around the world and with adversaries is  
17 being intensely reviewed by them to see which way this is  
18 going to go, and I think that "damage" is one word that  
19 could be used, yes.

20 Senator Wicker: Yes. And Secretary Austin, no question  
21 that this sends a disastrous message to China and Russia.  
22 What message does it send to our NATO allies and our other  
23 allies around the world about not only our credibility, but  
24 our national resolve?

25 Secretary Austin: Thanks, Senator. What the world

1 witnessed is United States military evacuating 124,000  
2 people out of a contested environment in 17 days.

3 Senator Wicker: Well, you testified that that was a  
4 great accomplishment, our withdrawal and our evacuation.  
5 What about our credibility?

6 Secretary Austin: As I engage my counterparts, I think  
7 our credibility remains solid. Clearly, Senator, there will  
8 be people who question things going forward, but I would say  
9 that the United States military is one that -- and the  
10 United States of America, people place great trust and  
11 confidence in. And relationships are things that we have to  
12 work on continuously, and we understand that and will  
13 continue to do that.

14 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Wicker.

15 Senator Gillibrand, please.

16 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am  
17 also very grateful to our servicemembers who committed so  
18 much over the last 20 years, and I do want to thank  
19 President Biden for taking the tough yet necessary step to  
20 stop and end an endless war, something that many of us have  
21 pushed for over the last decade.

22 There is obviously still a lot to do both overseas and  
23 here at home, such as ensuring that Afghan refugees are  
24 treated respectfully and responsibly, both on the DoD bases,  
25 such as ensuring that they can be transitioned into their

1 new lives in the United States. We also have the  
2 responsibility to our troops and to all Americans to make  
3 sure that we have a complete picture of what we did,  
4 accomplished, and happened over the last 20 years across all  
5 the administrations. We have to look back so that we can do  
6 better when we look forward.

7 One way to do better is to make sure Congress maintains  
8 and fulfills its constitutional responsibility. We have to  
9 put back into the hands of Congress the right and  
10 responsibility to declare war. What started as a mission to  
11 defeat Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and the perceived threat in  
12 Iraq expanded to 20 years of war in more multiple countries,  
13 with hundreds of thousands of lives lost, and trillions of  
14 dollars spent? This is why I introduced the War Powers  
15 Reform Resolution, so that Congress can take back this  
16 responsibility for the benefit of our servicemembers.  
17 Congress must set clear and defined goals for the use of  
18 military force abroad, and place a limit to how long, where,  
19 and against whom we can continue military action without a  
20 new authorization, in order to finally put a stop to endless  
21 wars and prevent them in the future.

22 Second, there should be a comprehensive, rigorous, and  
23 objective audit on the war in its entirety. Over the last  
24 20 years, the United States spent more than \$2 trillion on  
25 the war in Afghanistan, and we lost thousands of American



1 lives and tens of thousands of Afghan civilians. I commend  
2 the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction  
3 for its independent and objective oversight of the  
4 Afghanistan reconstruction, but I do have questions beyond  
5 that.

6 First, General Milley, in your testimony, you said and  
7 you mentioned that there are many lessons to be learned.  
8 What did you mean by that statement?

9 General Milley: Senator, thank you. I think there is  
10 a series of strategic lessons to be learned, and I would  
11 echo some of the ones that Senator Reed mentioned early on,  
12 specific military lessons we have to take a hard look at.  
13 The United States military was tasked, under the 2002 Bonn  
14 Agreement, to train, man, and equip the Afghan army. The  
15 Germans were required to train, man, and equip the Afghan  
16 police. As we built that army and all of its components, I  
17 think that one error we may have made over time is we made  
18 them too dependent on technology, too dependent on our  
19 capabilities, we did not take in the cultural aspects  
20 perhaps as much as we should have, and we mirror-imaged, to  
21 put it simply.

22 I think that is a big lesson. We are going to have to  
23 take a hard look at it. And the result is when you pull  
24 contractors, you pull troops. That, I think, is one of many  
25 contributing factors to the rapid collapse. So that is a

1 big lesson. Another one is the intel lesson that we talked  
2 about. I think that is in the military realm as well as the  
3 intelligence community realm.

4 There are a lot of other lessons, legitimacy of the  
5 government, corruption of the government. Those sorts of  
6 things are all out there as to why that government collapsed  
7 as rapidly as it could, but those are for others to sort  
8 out. There is a specific set of military lessons we need to  
9 pull out within the military.

10 Senator Gillibrand: I have read various opinion  
11 pieces. I know everyone here is deeply disturbed that the  
12 trained Afghan military did not perform as expected. I  
13 would like your thoughts on if they had performed as  
14 expected, would we have seen a prolonged civil war? What is  
15 your estimate of what the impact of them actually fighting  
16 would have been?

17 General Milley: My estimate is if they had, you know,  
18 performed as we expected them to perform that the government  
19 would still be there. They would have probably lost  
20 significant chunks of territory, but Kabul would be there,  
21 and some of the major provincial capitals. But I would  
22 defer that, probably you would get a more granular view from  
23 that from General McKenzie.

24 Senator Gillibrand: General McKenzie?

25 General McKenzie: I think had the Afghan military

1 fought, we would have probably seen the approaches to Kabul  
2 get into the winter, still under the control of the  
3 government of Afghanistan. A lot of the outlying provinces  
4 would not have been.

5 But I would just note that it was not so much the  
6 collapse of the Afghan military as the collapse of the  
7 Afghan government writ large. Those two things happen  
8 together, and they were completely linked together. So when  
9 you consider one, I think you have to think about the other.

10 Senator Gillibrand: Additionally, in retrospect, one  
11 of the areas of debate has been whether we should have  
12 started our evacuation earlier. And I recognize that the  
13 Kabul government asked us not to start our evacuation early.  
14 Can you speak to what you now know and whether it would have  
15 been smarter or more effective if we had started evacuate  
16 personnel a year in advance or six months in advance or any  
17 time in advance?

18 Chairman Reed: Could I ask the Senator?

19 Senator Gillibrand: I apologize. I did not realize my  
20 time was expired.

21 Chairman Reed: Thank you.

22 Senator Gillibrand: I will submit that for the record.

23 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much Senator Gillibrand.

24 Senator Fischer, please.

25 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I too would

1 like to thank our military men and women for their  
2 dedication to this country, for the sacrifices that they and  
3 their families make in any theater of war, and make every  
4 day for us.

5 But our exit from Afghanistan was a disaster and the  
6 missteps that are already outlined had consequences that  
7 struck close to home -- as a Nebraskan, Corporal Daegan  
8 Page, who was one of the 13 servicemembers killed in action.  
9 And we should not forget we have the policy discussions here  
10 today, but let us remember the human sacrifice.

11 We also left American citizens behind. General Milley,  
12 in your written testimony, you stated withdraw would  
13 increase risks of regional instability, the security of  
14 Pakistan and its nuclear arsenals, a global rise in violent  
15 extremist organizations, our global credibility with allies  
16 and partners would suffer, and a narrative of abandoning the  
17 Afghans would become widespread. Would you agree that all  
18 of these things that happened over the last eight weeks are  
19 currently happening?

20 General Milley: I think in the main, yes, Senator,  
21 most of those are probably happening right now.

22 Senator Fischer: And I hope that we see in the future,  
23 military advice having more consideration by the  
24 administration on what will happen from what you and General  
25 McKenzie have said today.

1           General Milley:  If I may, Senator, I can tell you with  
2  100 percent certainty that the military voice was heard and  
3  it was considered.

4           Senator Fischer:  It was considered, but not followed.  
5  Correct?

6           General Milley:  Presidents are elected for reasons.  
7  They make strategic decisions, and --

8           Senator Fischer:  I would say this committee, General,  
9  has always stressed that commanders on the ground should be  
10 listened to.  Would you agree with that?

11          General Milley:  I would, and I would tell you they  
12 were listened to.  I think there is a difference between us  
13 having an opportunity to have a voice, and I think it is  
14 very important that the military has a voice, but I firmly  
15 believe in civilian control of the military, and I am  
16 required and the military commanders are required to give  
17 our best military advice, but the decision-makers are not  
18 required in any manner, shape, or form to follow that  
19 advice.

20          Senator Fischer:  No, they are not, I agree with you  
21 about civilian control of this country, but I think it is  
22 also important to realize when we continue to see missteps  
23 by an administration that is costing lives.

24          Secretary Austin, it is being reported right now that  
25 the Biden administration reached out to Russia about using

1 Russian bases in the central Asian nations bordering  
2 Afghanistan to the north for our strike assets to fly out of  
3 over-the-horizon counterterrorism missions. Is that true?

4 Secretary Austin: Senator, this is an issue that I  
5 believe came up during a conversation that the President had  
6 with President Putin, where President Putin offered to  
7 provide assistance.

8 Senator Fischer: But have you reached out to the  
9 Russians asking specifically to use bases?

10 Secretary Austin: General Milley just recently had a  
11 conversation with his Russian counterpart.

12 Senator Fischer: So the reports are true that have  
13 been coming out today?

14 Secretary Austin: I can assure you that, you know, we  
15 are not seeking Russia's permission to do anything. But I  
16 believe and General Milley can speak for himself, but I  
17 believe that he asked for clarification on what that offer  
18 was.

19 Senator Fischer: I have a number of questions which I  
20 will need to get to with General McKenzie about over-the-  
21 horizon and the capabilities as we look to the future, and  
22 what is available there. But I think what we are seeing in  
23 the reports today about asking to use Russian bases, that is  
24 just another example that we see of the Biden  
25 administration, they have really left us in a terrible

1 position that we have to ask the Russians to be able to  
2 protect the United States from terrorists, and we have to  
3 ask them to use their installations.

4 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 Secretary Austin: And I would just reemphasize,  
6 Senator that we are not asking the Russians for anything.

7 Senator Fischer: But you are negotiating and trying to  
8 get these bases to be able to use their installations,  
9 because Afghanistan is a landlocked country, and when we  
10 have explanations from the military and they give examples  
11 for over-the-horizon, and use countries like Yemen and Libya  
12 and Somalia, that does not take into consideration that  
13 Afghanistan is landlocked. And we have to depend on  
14 Pakistan to give us airspace to get there.

15 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Fischer.

17 Senator Blumenthal, please.

18 Senator Blumenthal: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. And I want  
19 to express my hope that this hearing is just the beginning,  
20 a first step in an in-depth analysis, going not just to the  
21 last 10 weeks or even 10 months, but 10 years and longer  
22 back, so that we can match the courage of the men and women  
23 of America who have sacrificed during this 20-year war, all  
24 of them and all of their families, not just in Afghanistan,  
25 but around the world. And we owe them, veterans of America,

1 much more than we are giving them right now because they  
2 have earned it.

3 That in-depth analysis looking backward is essential,  
4 but I want to look forward right now to what is happening in  
5 Afghanistan with respect to Americans and our Afghan allies.

6 After our withdrawal, it was left to an unofficial  
7 network or coalition of veterans, NGOs, some government  
8 officials. I was involved in an effort through chartered  
9 planes and airports outside of Kabul to try to airlift on a  
10 makeshift, ad hoc basis, Americans and Afghan allies still  
11 there. They have targets on their back, their situation is  
12 increasingly urgent and desperate, and I have been  
13 frustrated by the lack of someone in charge, in lines of  
14 authority, a point person.

15 We need an evacuation czar, somebody who will provide a  
16 plan and supervise actions so that we can get out of  
17 Afghanistan the Americans that remain there. And I will  
18 tell you, we do not have an estimate on the number because  
19 nobody is in charge right now.

20 So let me ask you, Secretary Austin, who at the  
21 Department of Defense as overall responsibility with  
22 overseeing the effort to evacuate?

23 Secretary Austin: As you know -- well, first of all,  
24 Senator, thank you to you and your colleagues for all that  
25 you have done to continue to help get American citizens out



1 of Afghanistan.

2 The State Department, following the departure of the  
3 military, the State Department remained engaged and  
4 continued to work to get American citizens out. And as we  
5 have seen, some 85 American citizens and 79 legal permanent  
6 residents have departed via the Kabul airport. And so that  
7 work continues on.

8 The State Department set up a cell to continue this  
9 work and develop a mechanism. That cell is headed up by  
10 Ambassador Bass. As you may recall, Ambassador Bass was one  
11 of the senior counselors on the ground at HKIA as we were  
12 conducting the investigation.

13 I have a general officer that is a part of that cell  
14 and we have reached out to, or Ambassador Bass has reached  
15 out to veterans groups and others who may have information  
16 that can help us continue to contact and eventually,  
17 evacuate American citizens and LPRs.

18 So this work continues and we remain committed to  
19 continuing that work until we get out as many American  
20 citizens that are willing to come out.

21 Senator Blumenthal: Well, there was a point and you  
22 can call it the eye of the storm, when the Taliban had taken  
23 over the country, but really was not in charge, when we  
24 could have evacuated a great many more Americans and our  
25 Afghan allies, the translators and others, guards, security

1 officers. And I feel that the administration was on notice.  
2 In fact, a group of us went to the White House in the spring  
3 and urge that there be a plan for evacuation. And  
4 unfortunately, the withdrawal prevented there from being  
5 anybody on the ground.

6 And in the wake of that withdrawal, there was a vacuum  
7 of leadership, and I would hope that there would be more  
8 effective action now to put somebody in charge and develop a  
9 plan, because we know that there are many Americans, whether  
10 it is green card holders or citizens, or others still there.  
11 In Connecticut, we have a resettlement organization called  
12 IRIS. Chris George, who heads it, has told us of  
13 individuals who are still there, more than 40 in Kabul, and  
14 I am sure other organizations similarly know of such  
15 Americans who are still there. Thank you.

16 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Blumenthal.

17 Senator Cotton, please.

18 Senator Cotton: Thank you.

19 General Milley, it is your testimony that you  
20 recommended 2,500 troops, approximately, stay in  
21 Afghanistan?

22 General Milley: As I have said many times before this  
23 committee and other committees, I do not share my personal  
24 recommendations to the President, but I can tell you my  
25 personal opinion and my assessment, if that is what you

1 want.

2 Senator Cotton: Yes, please.

3 General Milley: Yes, my assessment was, back in the  
4 fall of '20 and it remained consistent throughout, that we  
5 should keep a steady state of 2,500, and it could bounce up  
6 to 3,500, maybe, something like that, in order to move  
7 toward a negotiated gated solution.

8 Senator Cotton: Did you ever present that assessment  
9 personally to President Biden?

10 General Milley: I do not discuss exactly what my  
11 conversations are with the sitting President in the Oval  
12 Office, but I can tell you what my personal opinion was, and  
13 I am always candid.

14 Senator Cotton: Okay. General McKenzie, do you share  
15 that assessment?

16 General McKenzie: Senator, I do share that assessment.

17 Senator Cotton: Did you ever present that opinion  
18 personally to President Biden?

19 General McKenzie: I am not going to be able to comment  
20 on those executive discussions.

21 Senator Cotton: Did General Miller ever present that  
22 opinion personally to President Biden?

23 General McKenzie: I think it would be best to ask him.  
24 I believe that his opinion was well heard.

25 Senator Cotton: Secretary Austin, President Biden last

1 month, in an interview with George Stephanopoulos, said that  
2 no military leader advised him to leave a small troop  
3 presence in Afghanistan. Is that true?

4 Secretary Austin: Senator Cotton, I believe that --  
5 well, first of all, I know the President to be an honest and  
6 forthright man, and secondly --

7 Senator Cotton: It is a simple question, Secretary  
8 Austin. He said no senior military leader advised him to  
9 leave a small troop presence behind. Is that true or not?  
10 Did officer and General Miller's recommendations get to the  
11 President personally?

12 Secretary Austin: Their input was received by the  
13 President and considered by the President, for sure. In  
14 terms of what they specifically recommended, Senator, as  
15 they just said, they are not going to provide what they  
16 recommended in confidence.

17 Senator Cotton: I mean, it is shocking to me. It  
18 sounds to me like maybe their best military advice was never  
19 presented personally to the President of the United States  
20 about such a highly consequential matter.

21 Let me move on to another recommendation they are  
22 reported to have made. General Milley, Joe Biden has said  
23 that it was the unanimous -- the unanimous recommendation of  
24 the Joint Chiefs that we not maintain a military presence  
25 beyond August 31st. We have heard testimony to that effect

1 today as well. When was that unanimous recommendation  
2 sought and presented to the President?

3 General Milley: You are talking about the 31 August?

4 Senator Cotton: Yes, the 31 August deadline for  
5 getting --

6 General Milley: So on 25 August, I was asked to make  
7 an assessment and provide best military advice on --

8 Senator Cotton: I am sorry. My time is limited here.  
9 You gave me the answer to that I needed to hear. August  
10 25th?

11 General Milley: Correct.

12 Senator Cotton: Kabul fell on August 15th.

13 General Milley: That is correct.

14 Senator Cotton: You were not asked before August 25th?

15 General Milley: On August 25th, I was asked to provide  
16 best military assessment as to whether we should keep  
17 military forces past the 31st.

18 Senator Cotton: Secretary Austin, was anybody asked  
19 before August 25th if we should keep troops at the Kabul  
20 airport?

21 Secretary Austin: The President tasked us to provide  
22 an assessment on whether or not we should extend our  
23 presence beyond August 31st. And as General Milley just  
24 said, we tasked them to make that assessment on the 25th,  
25 and he came back and provided his best military advice.

1           Senator Cotton: Secretary, Kabul fell on August 15th.  
2   It was clear that we had thousands of Americans -- it was  
3   clear to members of this committee, we were getting phone  
4   calls that we have thousands of Americans in Afghanistan  
5   behind Taliban lines on August 15th and it took 10 days to  
6   ask these general officers if we should extend our presence.  
7   I suspect the answer might be a little different if you were  
8   asking them 16 days out, not 5 days out.

9           Again, my time is limited. I want to move on to  
10 another matter. President Biden's botched evacuation  
11 screwed things up coming and going as it relates to Afghan  
12 evacuees. We left behind thousands of Afghans who serviced  
13 alongside of us who were vetted and approved to come here.

14          We brought out thousands who really have no particular  
15 connection, about whom we know nothing and cannot be  
16 effectively vetted. You now have female troops who have  
17 been assaulted. You have Afghan evacuees committing sex  
18 crimes at Fort McCoy. What are we to make of this? What  
19 steps are we taking to ensure that thousands of Afghans  
20 about who we know nothing are not going to be a menace to  
21 our troops and our military bases and into the communities  
22 into which they are about to be released?

23          Secretary Austin: Well, Senator, I am certainly aware  
24 of the allegations and I take the allegations very  
25 seriously. And I can assure you that our commanders at our

1 bases have what they need to be able to protect our troops  
2 and our families that work and live at those bases. And I  
3 am in contact with General VanHerck, the NORTHCOM commander,  
4 who has overall responsibility for the operation on a  
5 routine basis. And this is an area that he remains sighted  
6 on.

7 Senator Cotton: All right, I have just got one final  
8 question. General Milley, I can only conclude that your  
9 advice about staying in Afghanistan was rejected. I am  
10 shocked to learn that your advice was not sought until  
11 August 25th on staying past the August 31 deadline. I  
12 understand that you are the principal military advisor, that  
13 you advise, you do not decide. The President decides. But  
14 if all of this is true General Milley, why have you not  
15 resigned?

16 General Milley: Senator, as a senior military officer  
17 resigning is a really serious thing, and it is a political  
18 act if I am resigning in protest. My job is to provide  
19 advice. My statutory responsibility is to provide legal  
20 advice or best military advice to the President, and that is  
21 my legal requirement. That is what the law is. The  
22 President does not have to agree with that advice. He does  
23 not have to make those decisions just because we are  
24 generals. And it would be an incredible act of political  
25 defiance for a commissioned officer to just resign because

1 my advice is not taken.

2 This country does not want generals figuring out what  
3 orders we are going to accept and do or not. That is not  
4 our job. The principal civilian control of the military is  
5 absolute. It is critical to this Republic. In addition to  
6 that, just from a personal standpoint, you know, my dad did  
7 not get a choice to resign at Iwo Jima, and those kids that  
8 are at Abbey Gate, they do not get a choice to resign and I  
9 am not going to turn my back on them. They cannot resign,  
10 so I am not going to resign. There is no way.

11 If the orders are illegal, we are in a different place,  
12 but if the orders are legal from civilian authority, I  
13 intend to carry them out.

14 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Cotton.

15 Senator Hirono, please.

16 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Do I understand you correctly, General McKenzie and  
18 General Milley that your personal recommendation was that  
19 the troops who remain in Afghanistan, a certain number of  
20 them beyond the August 31st deadline?

21 General Milley: No, Senator. Our recommendation, this  
22 was the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this is myself included,  
23 General McKenzie, Major General Donahue, the Ground Tactical  
24 Commander of the 82nd Airborne Division, and Admiral Vasely.  
25 Every single one of us were in a tank. I brought them up.



1 Secretary Austin did not show up. There was no political  
2 pressure. There was no expectation of consensus. Every one  
3 of us evaluated the military conditions at the time on the  
4 25th, and we made a unanimous recommendation that we end the  
5 military mission and transition to a diplomatic mission.

6 Senator Hirono: Thank you. So while you testify that  
7 you may have had the personal recommendation, and I think in  
8 your case, General McKenzie, in the fall of 2020, or it  
9 might have been General Milley, that by the time we are  
10 evacuating everyone, that was not a recommendation that you  
11 personally held --

12 General Milley: Absolutely not. At that point on the  
13 25th of August, no. On the 25th of August, we recommended  
14 that the mission end on the 31st.

15 Senator Hirono: Thank you for that clarification.

16 General Milley: Thank you.

17 Senator Hirono: So the evacuation was chaotic, and  
18 yes, we are really grateful that our military performed  
19 magnificently in evacuating over 120,000 people. But  
20 Secretary Austin, Secretary Blinken acknowledged to my  
21 colleagues on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that no  
22 one believed the Afghan government and military could  
23 collapse as rapidly as it did, especially in the first weeks  
24 of August. However, U.S. forces conducted at least a couple  
25 of airstrikes in the middle of July aimed at blunting the

1 Taliban's rapid advance.

2           So Secretary Austin, in July you were aware, or the DoD  
3 was aware that the situation was deteriorating rapidly by  
4 July. Why was action not taken to secure the Kabul airport  
5 or retake Bagram then?

6           Secretary Austin: Thank you, Senator. You are right,  
7 the tempo had picked up significantly and the Taliban  
8 continued to make advances. Our entire chain of command --  
9 myself, the Chairman, General McKenzie -- routinely engaged  
10 the Afghan leadership to encourage them to solidify their  
11 defensive plans, to make sure that they were providing the  
12 right logistics to their troops, and further, stiffen their  
13 defenses, to no avail. And to compound that, President  
14 Ghani continued to make changes in the leadership of the  
15 military, and this created further problems for the Afghan  
16 Security Forces.

17           Senator Hirono: Mr. Secretary, I do not mean to  
18 interrupt you, but my time is elapsing. So this gets to the  
19 overestimation, I think the overly optimistic assessment,  
20 because even as late as July, you are still encouraging the  
21 Afghan Special Forces, you are expecting the Ghani  
22 government to remain, but that was not the case.

23           In December 2019, the Washington Post reported that the  
24 U.S. military commanders privately expressed a lack of  
25 confidence that the Afghan army and police could ever fend

1 off, much less defeat the Taliban on their own.

2 So General Milley, you noted that there were some  
3 specific military lessons to be learned. This is not the  
4 first time that I think we have relied upon overly  
5 optimistic assessments of conditions on the ground or  
6 conflict conditions. It certainly happened in Vietnam. So  
7 my question to you is what specific steps can we take to  
8 make sure that our assessments are not overly optimistic, so  
9 we can avoid the reliance on assessments that are not  
10 accurate?

11 General Milley: I think in the case of working with  
12 other countries' armies, it is important to have advisors  
13 with those units, so that you can do a holistic assessment  
14 of things that are very difficult to measure, the morale  
15 factors, leadership will. I think that is one key aspect.

16 Another part, I think it is really important, and this  
17 is a lesson from Vietnam and I think today, is do not  
18 Americanize the war. We learned that in El Salvador, or in  
19 Columbia, for example, where we did assist and help other  
20 countries' armies fight insurgencies, and we were quite  
21 effective, but it was their country, their army that bore  
22 the burden of all the fighting. And we had very, very few  
23 advisers and it was quite effective. Now, every country is  
24 different, every war is different, and it has to be  
25 evaluated on its own merits, but I think those are some key

1 points that are worth thinking about.

2 Senator Hirono: I agree. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hirono.

4 Senator Rounds, please.

5 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 Gentlemen, first of all, thank you for your willingness  
7 to appear before this committee to answer questions on the  
8 withdrawal from Afghanistan. You have received and will  
9 continue to receive tough questions on what led to this  
10 decision. This is an important constitutional requirement  
11 of the jobs that you have agreed to serve in, and I thank  
12 you all for your many years of service to our nation.

13 I want to underline the fact that every single member  
14 of this committee, regardless of party, is grateful for the  
15 dedication and bravery exhibited by our service members,  
16 especially those who gave their last full measure of  
17 devotion at Abbey Gate.

18 General McKenzie, General Miller told this committee  
19 that he recommended keeping 2,500 troops in Afghanistan, and  
20 this is back in January 2021, because he felt that Afghan  
21 forces would not hold out long without our support. It  
22 seems to me that there would have been a process to convey  
23 General Miller's recommendation to the President. Can you  
24 share the process and who conveyed General Miller's  
25 recommendation, and was that recommendation delivered to

1 both President Trump at the time and also to President  
2 Biden?

3 General McKenzie: So there is a process for delivering  
4 recommendations to commanders in the field. I was part of  
5 that process. While I have been very clear that I will not  
6 give you my recommendation, I have given you my view, which  
7 I think you can draw your own conclusions from, and my view  
8 is that 2,500 was an appropriate number to remain, and that  
9 if we went below that number, in fact, we would probably  
10 witness a collapse of the Afghan government and the Afghan  
11 military. So --

12 Senator Rounds: General McKenzie, I guess my question  
13 is would it be fair for the committee to assume that both  
14 President Trump and President Biden received that specific  
15 information that had been assumed to be delivered by General  
16 Miller?

17 General McKenzie: I believe it would be reasonable for  
18 the committee to assume that.

19 Senator Rounds: And would General Miller have been  
20 able to deliver that directly to the President, or would  
21 someone else have had to have delivered that for him?

22 General McKenzie: I would leave it to General Miller  
23 to express an opinion on that, but he and I both had the  
24 opportunity to be in executive session with the President,  
25 and I cannot share anything beyond making that statement.

1           Senator Rounds: Thank you. Secretary Austin, this  
2 committee was briefed on the series of rock drills,  
3 rehearsal of concept drills that examined the many potential  
4 scenarios that could arise through the execution of  
5 different types of actions and counteractions. We have been  
6 briefed by multiple leaders that the worst-case scenario, an  
7 un-forecasted collapse of the Afghan government, was not  
8 something that these drills factored in as a possibility.

9           Is it true that we actually did tabletop exercises and  
10 we actually went through these drills, and we never assumed  
11 that there could be an immediate collapse of the Afghan  
12 government?

13           Secretary Austin: We planned for a range of  
14 possibilities. The entire collapse of the Afghan government  
15 was clearly one of the things that if you look at the intel  
16 estimates and some of the estimates that others had made  
17 that could happen. But in terms of specific planning,  
18 especially with respect to NEO, we planned for, you know, a  
19 contested environment or an un-consented environment, the  
20 requirement to evacuate a moderate amount of people versus a  
21 large amount of people. So there was a range of  
22 possibilities that we addressed.

23           Senator Rounds: But never with an immediate collapse  
24 of the government?

25           Secretary Austin: We certainly did not plan against

1 the collapse of a government in 11 days.

2       Senator Rounds: Thank you. General Milley, I think  
3 Senator Cotton made a very good point with regard to the  
4 timing, the collapse of Kabul and the time in which you were  
5 asked for your professional military opinion about the path  
6 forward. What seems to be the real challenge for many of us  
7 is that it appears that in your professional military  
8 opinion it would have been prudent to have used a different  
9 approach than a date certain with regard to a withdrawal  
10 from Afghanistan.

11       And if that is correct, and if there were other  
12 alternatives presented to the President, I am certain that  
13 the frustration that you felt in not having your  
14 professional military advice followed closely by an incoming  
15 President, that you were then tasked, in a very short period  
16 of time, with handling what was a position in time for the  
17 people that were on the ground there to respond in an  
18 emergency basis, would it be fair to say that you changed  
19 from a long-term plan of gradual withdrawal based on  
20 conditions to one in which you had to make immediate changes  
21 based upon a date certain?

22       General Milley: Senator, as a matter of professional  
23 advice, I would advise any leader, do not put dates certain  
24 on end dates. Make things conditions based. Two Presidents  
25 in a row, put dates on it. I do not think that is a -- my

1 advice is do not put specific dates. Make things conditions  
2 based. That is how I have been trained over many, many  
3 years.

4 With respect though, to the 31st and the decision on  
5 the 25th, the risk to mission and the risk to force, and  
6 most importantly, the risk to the American citizens that are  
7 remaining, that was going to go up, not down, on the 1st of  
8 September. And the American citizens, I know there are  
9 American citizens there, but they would have been at greater  
10 risk had we stayed past the 31st, in our professional  
11 opinion.

12 Senator Rounds: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 Chairman Reed: Senator Kaine, please.

14 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair. To the  
15 witnesses, I want to return to a point that Senator Wicker  
16 made. I informed a DoD witness about 10 days ago that we  
17 would expect an answer to the question of how many Americans  
18 are still in Afghanistan, and that we would not appreciate  
19 an answer that that was deferred to State. I am going to  
20 ask the question during my second round of questions after  
21 lunch and with the number of staff who are here in this room  
22 and in the ante room, we ought to be able to get an answer.  
23 And if we cannot, it will suggest to the committee, and I do  
24 not think you want to suggest this to the committee, that  
25 you do not want to be responsive to that question, or that



1 you do not talk to the State Department, or that the number  
2 of Americans in Afghanistan is something that you are  
3 indifferent to. I do not think any of those are true, so I  
4 will ask the question again after lunch, and I hope we can  
5 get an answer.

6 Two compliments and then a critical observation and  
7 inquiry. First, thanks to President Biden for ending the  
8 U.S. combat mission in Afghanistan after 20 years. It took  
9 guts and it was the right thing to do, and it should have  
10 been done earlier. A Virginia servicemember, whose wife is  
11 expecting, said this to me recently: "I am so glad that my  
12 baby is not being born into a country at war."

13 Some want us to sustain on permanent war footing in  
14 Afghanistan and elsewhere. Some will point out that U.S.  
15 troops are still deployed, still in harm's way, still  
16 carrying out limited militarized strikes around the world.

17 But to the families of those who have been deployed  
18 over and over again into Iraq and Afghanistan over the  
19 course of the last 20 years, they are relieved that America  
20 is now turning the page and rejecting the notion that we  
21 should be a nation in permanent war.

22 Second, the effort to evacuate more than 120,000 people  
23 to safety under chaotic circumstances was remarkable. I  
24 visited the Dulles Expo Center, the principal arrival point  
25 for about 80 percent of the Afghans. I also visited Fort

1 Lee, the first of the eight forts that process Afghans, and  
2 I visited with Afghans, our troops, the many Federal  
3 agencies working together, NGOs. The competent and  
4 compassionate service on the American side and the deep  
5 gratitude among Afghans made a deep impression on me. We  
6 should do all we can to make that transition to safe life in  
7 America as productive as possible.

8 My chief criticism and question is this. Why did the  
9 Afghan Security Force and civilian government collapse so  
10 quickly, and why did the U.S. so overestimate their  
11 capacity?

12 The second half of the question, why we overestimated  
13 their capacity, is very important. To any who have said we  
14 could not see this coming, the members of this committee  
15 know that is wrong. An immediate collapse may not have been  
16 the most likely outcome, but we have heard for years,  
17 particularly from the intel community, that DoD estimates of  
18 Afghan strength were way too optimistic.

19 I believe that the U.S. government had a good  
20 evacuation plan, but it was premised on an Afghan civilian  
21 and military government that showed high resistance to the  
22 Taliban. And so, we did not adequately plan for the real  
23 possibility of a quick collapse. We need to explore both  
24 military and inter-agency decision-making processes to  
25 understand why we were unrealistic, and how to correct that

1 going forward.

2 But the most important part of the question is why a  
3 military we had trained for 20 years at a cost of \$800-plus  
4 billion dollars collapsed so quickly. I can think of three  
5 reasons, but after I put them on the table, I would like  
6 each of you beginning with General McKenzie to address the  
7 question, and if we cannot, we can do it when we come back  
8 after lunch.

9 First, the lightning collapse may show that our  
10 training was insufficient, and that it did not prepare the  
11 Afghan military to defend the country on their own. That  
12 should have been our goal, but we failed to accomplish it.  
13 If so, how must we change our thinking about training  
14 foreign militaries?

15 Second, the lightning collapse may not prove that the  
16 NSF were poor fighters, but that they were demoralized. Did  
17 they lack confidence in their own political and military  
18 leaders? Were they demoralized by a 2020 peace agreement  
19 between the U.S. and the Taliban that did not even include  
20 the Afghan government?

21 Mr. Chair, I would like to introduce the peace  
22 agreement for the record.

23 Chairman Reed: Without objection.

24 [The information follows:]

25 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

1           Senator Kaine: Did U.S. and allied funding deepen a  
2 culture of corruption that long predated our involvement?  
3 Even the best fighting force may give in if they have no  
4 confidence in their leadership.

5           Third, the lightning collapse may show that we wanted  
6 things for Afghans that Afghan leadership did not want for  
7 themselves. We celebrated gains in public health and  
8 women's education, and we assumed that Afghans would fight  
9 to preserve those gains rather than allow the Taliban to  
10 take over. In other words, we thought we knew what Afghans  
11 wanted, what they feared, and what they would fight for.

12           But was our belief, though well intentioned, incredibly  
13 naive? We cannot get one-third of Americans to take a COVID  
14 vaccine, or accept the results of a presidential election.  
15 Do we really think we can transform the culture of another  
16 nation?

17           So to each of our witnesses, when we return in the  
18 second round, I will ask you this question: Why do you  
19 believe the Afghan military and civilian government  
20 collapsed so quickly?

21           With that I will yield back, Mr. Chair.

22           Chairman Reed: Thank you very much. Senator Kaine.

23           Senator Ernst, please.

24           Senator Ernst: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair and  
25 gentlemen, thank you very much for being here today.

1           And unfortunately, this morning's hearing is required  
2 due to the haphazard withdrawal of U.S. forces, American  
3 citizens, and many of our Afghan partners. However, we do  
4 want to thank the men and women in uniform that assisted the  
5 evacuation of those that were able to make it out, and of  
6 course, to those that have given their service and sacrifice  
7 over the past two decades of the global war on terror.

8           The loss of our servicemembers and abandonment of  
9 Americans and Afghan allies last month was an unforced,  
10 disgraceful humiliation that did not have to happen. The  
11 President put a cheap political victory, a withdrawal  
12 timeline timed to the 20th anniversary of 9/11 on his  
13 calendar and executed his vision with little regard for  
14 American lives or the real threats that we face.

15           I do appreciate your open, your honest and expert  
16 participation in communicating to this committee what went  
17 wrong. I think our American citizens are at a real  
18 crossroads right now where they are questioning the  
19 leadership from this President and this administration.  
20 President Biden's blunders cannot be erased, but the United  
21 States must now account for them through a revamped  
22 counterterrorism strategy that recognizes the newfound  
23 momentum of terrorists and new threats emanating from the  
24 Middle East, in addition to rising challenges that we see  
25 coming from China and Russia. Pretty high stakes.

1 Secretary Austin, I would like to start with you. Did  
2 President Biden or any of his national security advisors  
3 express any military or diplomatic conditions for the  
4 American withdrawal from Afghanistan beyond the looming date  
5 of 9/11? What were those military conditions or diplomatic  
6 conditions that were outlined to you?

7 Secretary Austin: Again, once the President went  
8 through a very deliberate decision-making process and made  
9 his decision to exit Afghanistan, there were no additional  
10 conditions placed on it.

11 Senator Ernst: Can you tell me that he did take into  
12 consideration military or diplomatic conditions, and what  
13 were those conditions that he was weighing as he was making  
14 those decisions?

15 Secretary Austin: Sure. One of the things that, you  
16 know, all of us wanted to see happen was for this conflict  
17 to end with a diplomatic solution. And so one of the thing  
18 that we certainly wanted to see was progress being made in  
19 the Doha negotiations. And we did not see, or he did not  
20 see any progress being made, and there was really not much  
21 of a bright future for that process.

22 Senator Ernst: So General Milley had stated earlier  
23 that his recommendation is always, as any military commander  
24 should do, should be conditions based. And we have to be  
25 able to evaluate whether those conditions are achievable,

1 and if we can successfully complete those. It sounds like  
2 there were very little consideration given to diplomatic or  
3 military conditions. The diplomatic, again, going to  
4 conditions based, the diplomatic end to it, I think General  
5 Milley, you also said that the military mission would end on  
6 the 31st, and transition to a diplomatic mission. But I do  
7 not understand how we fulfill a diplomatic mission after  
8 August 31st, when there are absolutely no diplomats on the  
9 ground in Afghanistan. They are gone. They have been  
10 evacuated. Who do we hand that mission off to when there is  
11 nobody there to complete it?

12 So can you then say that the President directed you,  
13 Secretary Austin, to execute an unconditional withdrawal  
14 from Afghanistan? Unconditional. August 31st, done.

15 Secretary Austin: Once he made the decision to  
16 withdraw, I mean, that was the decision, to leave. And we  
17 certainly wanted to make sure that we shaped conditions so  
18 that our embassy could maintain a presence there, and  
19 continue to engage the government of Afghanistan. So  
20 protection of the embassy was pretty important.

21 Senator Ernst: Yes, Secretary Austin, you are  
22 extremely diplomatic in your answers. I can appreciate  
23 that, but this was not a conditions-based withdrawal. And I  
24 think all three of you have stated that you made your best  
25 opinion known to the President of the United States. He had

1 no conditions other than to get our people out of  
2 Afghanistan, which he failed at, because we still have  
3 Americans as well as Afghan partners in Afghanistan.

4 Thank you, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

5 Chairman Reed: Thank you. Senator Ernst.

6 Senator King, please.

7 Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 I am finding this a very interesting hearing. It is  
9 really two hearings at once. One is on the question of  
10 should we leave Afghanistan, and if we should not, what  
11 should be the nature of our troop commitment and our  
12 commitment to the country? The other is the withdrawal,  
13 which I thought was the subject to the hearing.

14 The decision to leave Afghanistan was made by President  
15 Trump in his administration on February 29, 2020, where we  
16 committed to leave by a date certain. There was a  
17 particular provision, or a condition, if you will, about  
18 negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government.  
19 There was even a date specified -- March 10, 2020, less than  
20 two weeks after the signing of the Doha agreement.

21 Clearly that condition was not met. My question is,  
22 and General Milley, you were the only one who overlapped the  
23 two administrations, were there any efforts on behalf of the  
24 prior administration to enforce that condition of  
25 negotiation with the Afghan government and the Taliban?



1           General Milley:  Senator, as I said in my opening  
2 remarks, the conditions that were required of the Taliban,  
3 none of them were met except one.

4           Senator King:  My question is, did we attempt to  
5 enforce those conditions?  Did we inform the Taliban, for  
6 example, we will not advocate for the release of 5,000  
7 prisoners, unless you begin negotiations, or something  
8 similar?

9           General Milley:  I do not have personal knowledge of  
10 that, whether or not Zal Khalizad or others were personally  
11 saying that.  I do not have personal knowledge of that.  But  
12 I do know that none of the conditions were met except the  
13 one, which is do not attack American forces and coalition  
14 forces.  That condition was.

15          Senator King:  The conditions were not met, but you  
16 testified that the troop withdrawals and the release of the  
17 5,000 Taliban prisoners did proceed, even though the  
18 conditions had not been met.  Is that correct?

19          General Milley:  That is correct.

20          Senator King:  And you have testified you provided your  
21 best military advice to President Biden, that there should  
22 be a residual force left in Afghanistan.  Did you provide  
23 the same advice to President Trump when they were  
24 negotiating the Doha agreement?

25          General Milley:  Again, I am not going to discuss

1 precise advice.

2 Senator King: Was it your best military judgment that  
3 a residual force --

4 General Milley: At that time, yes, and that is what  
5 that a series of memos, and advice and meetings, et cetera,  
6 in the September, October time frame, that is exactly what  
7 they were. And you can talk to Secretary Esper and he can  
8 tell you the same thing.

9 Senator King: So your military judgment did not change  
10 on January 20th.

11 General Milley: No.

12 Senator King: Thank you. General McKenzie, you touched  
13 on something that you were the only one to mention it in  
14 this entire hearing. In my judgment, one of the key moments  
15 was the fleeing of President Ghani, and that that is, in  
16 fact, what really pulled the rug out from under the military  
17 and demoralized the entire government. That was really not  
18 the beginning of the end but the end of the end. Do you  
19 have some thoughts on that?

20 General McKenzie: I think, when we consider what  
21 happened to the Afghan military, you have to consider it  
22 completely linked to what happened to the Afghan government.  
23 And when your president flees literally on no notice in the  
24 middle of the day that has a profoundly debilitating effect  
25 on everything else.

1           Now, events were pretty far along on 15 August, so I  
2 would note that it, but I do believe it is possible they  
3 could have fought and held parts of Kabul had the president  
4 stayed. I think that really demoralized those remnants of  
5 Afghans, and there were still considerable Afghan combat  
6 formations around Kabul on 15 August. I believe they were  
7 really disorganized by that, and led to the Taliban really  
8 pushing in as fast as they wanted to go into the center of  
9 the city.

10           Senator King: I do want to point out for the record  
11 that, to my knowledge and memory, this committee never had a  
12 hearing on the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan in  
13 February of 2020. And it now appears that would have been a  
14 beneficial hearing because we could have discussed all of  
15 these issues, but we were already on the path for  
16 withdrawal. And the withdrawal date under that agreement  
17 was May 1, 2021. President Biden extended that -- I do not  
18 know whether it was a negotiation or some kind of  
19 understanding -- until the end of August.

20           General Milley, in questioning from Senator Cotton, you  
21 talked about your military advice about leaving on August  
22 31st versus staying to try to help additional Americans  
23 leave. Was it the unanimous recommendation of the Joint  
24 Chiefs that the August 31st date should be observed? And if  
25 so, why was that the military advice?

1           General Milley: It was of the Joint Chiefs plus  
2 General McKenzie, Admiral Vasely, and General Donahue. The  
3 reason is risk to force, risk to mission, and risk to the  
4 American citizens.

5           On the 1st of September, we were going to go to war  
6 with the Taliban -- of that there was no doubt -- and we  
7 were already in conflict with ISIS. So at that point in  
8 time, if we stayed past the 31st, which militarily is  
9 feasible but it would have required an additional commitment  
10 of significant amounts of forces, probably 18th Airborne  
11 Corps, 15,000, 20,000, maybe 25,000 troops, we would have  
12 had to re-seize Bagram, we would have had to clear Kabul of  
13 the 6,000 Taliban that were already in Kabul.

14           That is what would have happened, beginning on the 1st.

15           And that would have resulted in significant casualties on  
16 the U.S. side, and it would have placed American citizens  
17 that are still there at greater risk, in my professional  
18 view and in the view of all the other generals. So on the  
19 25th, we recommended that we transition to a diplomatic  
20 option beginning on the 31st.

21           Senator King: Thank you, General. Thank you, Mr.  
22 Chairman.

23           Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator King.

24           Senator Tillis, please.

25           Senator Tillis: General Milley, you said that the

1 Taliban had not lived up to the terms of the agreement.

2 Give me a rough date of when they first breached terms of  
3 the agreement. When you said they were not living up to the  
4 terms of the Doha agreement, what was the first evidence  
5 that they were not living up to the terms of the agreement?

6 General Milley: Yeah, the memo signed 29 February, so  
7 through, really the fighting season of the summer of '20.  
8 One of the requirements, for example --

9 Senator Tillis: Okay. So more than a year ago?

10 General Milley: Absolutely.

11 Senator Tillis: Okay. I do not buy the idea that this  
12 President was bound by a decision made by a prior President.  
13 This was not a treaty, and it was clearly an agreement where  
14 the Taliban were not living up to it. This President,  
15 President Biden, could have come in, reasserted conditions,  
16 and completely changed the timeline. He is not bound by the  
17 President's prior agreements any more than he was bound by  
18 President Trump's decision to exit the Iran Deal or the  
19 Paris Climate Accords. So, that to me is a false narrative.

20 I also have to say that this President, moving forward,  
21 with a failed construct, has cost American lives or has cost  
22 lives of North Carolinians. We were working on a case with  
23 an SIV holder who had a sister who worked for an NGO, Save  
24 the Children, and a father who was in the Afghan police  
25 force, and as we were working to get through them, the

1 Taliban -- Taliban 2.0 is every bit as ruthless as the one  
2 that we replaced in 2001 -- they sent pictures of the slit  
3 throats of people that we were working personally with.  
4 They killed this pregnant woman, they killed this police  
5 officer, and they are killing countless other people now,  
6 that we should have gotten out.

7 Secretary Austin, I think we do owe a debt of gratitude  
8 to the people that got 120,000, 124,000 people out. It was  
9 a logistical success, but this is a strategic failure.

10 General McKenzie, General Miller said 2,500. I have  
11 heard you and General Milley also say you agreed with the  
12 idea. You personally agreed. You did not necessarily say  
13 that you recommended to the President, the 2,500. I  
14 understood from General Miller that there was a broader  
15 context within that recommendation. There were 2,500  
16 fighters, U.S. fighters, but I understand almost 5,000 NATO  
17 allies, or 5,000 others that were willing to remain on the  
18 ground. And as General Miller said, "Keep the hand on the  
19 shoulder of the Afghan national forces, so that we could  
20 have a counter to the Taliban." Is that correct, that it  
21 was bigger than that, it was probably the 7,000 range?

22 General McKenzie: Senator, you are correct. Our NATO  
23 allies would have been on board for --

24 Senator Tillis: And also a CIA presence with bases out  
25 there for human intelligence, to help us be more precise,

1 more exquisite with the execution of whatever operations we  
2 had on the ground?

3 General McKenzie: That is correct, sir.

4 Senator Tillis: Okay. Now I know that you will not  
5 say that you advised the President, but is it fair to say  
6 that when General Miller, he said that he advised all of you  
7 on his recommendations, it sounds like two of the three of  
8 you agreed with it. Is it at least fair to say that in the  
9 interagency discussion that those recommendations were made  
10 and that in your best military advice it would have kept the  
11 situation stable in Afghanistan?

12 General McKenzie: Well, I have stated consistently  
13 that my position was if you go below 2,500, you are going to  
14 look at a collapse of the Afghan military. I did not  
15 foresee it to be days. I thought it would take months. But  
16 the rest of the ecosystem would go out with it too, that the  
17 NATO partners are going to leave, the interagencies are  
18 going to leave, and you are going to leave the Afghans by  
19 themselves.

20 Senator Tillis: Did any of you embrace the notion that  
21 the 2,500 plus the several thousand, I think an estimated  
22 5,000 NATO allies and partners who were willing to stay  
23 there as well, did any of you agree with the President's  
24 assessment, that if he acted on that recommendation that he  
25 would ultimately have to send tens of thousands more U.S.

1 service members to Afghanistan, that if we held that one  
2 that it would ultimately just delay the day where we would  
3 be back to 100,000 or 50,000 U.S. forces in Afghanistan?

4 General McKenzie: So Senator, these discussions were  
5 occurring in January, February, March. They are separate  
6 from the late August discussions, so I want to make that  
7 point clear.

8 Senator Tillis: But in your best military judgment, do  
9 you believe that the recommendations that General Miller put  
10 forth, with some 2,500, and I think General Milley said  
11 maybe flex up at 3,500, do you believe that that would have  
12 sown the seeds for ultimately having to send tens of  
13 thousands of U.S. servicemembers back to Afghanistan, as the  
14 President has said, publicly?

15 General McKenzie: Senator, I believe there was a risk  
16 you would incur increasing attacks by the Taliban. That was  
17 a risk withholding at 2,500. That was a very clear risk.  
18 But I will tell you, Senator, I am really humbled recently  
19 by my ability to deduce what the Taliban or would not do, so  
20 I think it is hard to know.

21 Senator Tillis: Thank you. And next round I will get  
22 onto the fate of the SIV holders and people that are  
23 stranded in Afghanistan. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

24 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Tillis.

25 Let me recognize Senator Warren, and I am going over



1 for the vote. Senator Hirono will preside in my absence.

2 Senator Warren, please.

3 Senator Warren: Thank you Mr. Chairman.

4 So I want to begin by zooming out because it is not  
5 possible to understand our final months in Afghanistan  
6 without viewing them in the context of the 20 years that led  
7 up to them. Anyone who says the last few months were a  
8 failure but everything before that was great clearly has not  
9 been paying attention.

10 In 2015, the Taliban conquered its first province since  
11 2001. By October 2018, the Afghan government controlled  
12 only 54 percent of the 407 districts, and by May 2020, the  
13 Afghan government controlled less than a third of Afghan's  
14 407 districts. We poured money and support and air cover,  
15 and the Afghan government continued to fail.

16 By 2021, it was clear that 2,500 troops could not  
17 successfully prop up a government that had been losing  
18 ground and support to the Taliban for years. Secretary  
19 Austin, I understand that you advised President Biden to  
20 stay in Afghanistan, but as you acknowledge, staying or  
21 withdrawing is a decision for the President alone. So I  
22 want to focus on what happened next. Once President Biden  
23 made the decision to have U.S. forces leave the country, who  
24 designed the evacuation?

25 Secretary Austin: Well Senator, again, I will not

1 address the advice I gave the President. I would just say  
2 that, in his calculus, this was not risk free, and the  
3 Taliban, as we said earlier in this hearing, were committed  
4 to recommencing their operations against our forces. His  
5 assessment was that in order to sustain that and continue to  
6 do things that benefited the Afghans, that would require at  
7 some point that he increase our presence there in  
8 Afghanistan.

9 So once he made the decision, then of course, from a  
10 military perspective, in terms of the retrograde of the  
11 people and the equipment, that planning was done by Central  
12 Command, and certainly principally by General Miller. Very  
13 detailed planning, and then we came back and briefed the  
14 entire interagency on the details of that plan.

15 Senator Warren: Okay. So the military planned the  
16 evacuation. Did President Biden follow your advice on  
17 executing on the evacuation plan?

18 Secretary Austin: He did.

19 Senator Warren: Did President Biden give you all the  
20 resources that you needed?

21 Secretary Austin: From my view, he did.

22 Senator Warren: Did President Biden ignore your advice  
23 on the evacuation at any point?

24 Secretary Austin: No Senator, he did not.

25 Senator Warren: Did he refuse any request for anything

1 that you needed or asked for?

2 Secretary Austin: No.

3 Senator Warren: So the President followed the advice  
4 of his military advisors in planning and executing this  
5 withdrawal. As we have already established, the seeds for  
6 our failure in Afghanistan were planted many, many years  
7 ago. So let me ask you one more question, Secretary Austin.  
8 Knowing what you know now, if we had stayed in Afghanistan  
9 for another year, would it have made a fundamental  
10 difference?

11 Secretary Austin: Again, it depends on what size you  
12 remain in at, and what your objectives are. There are a  
13 range of possibilities, but if you stayed there at a force  
14 posture of 2,500, certainly you would be in a fight with the  
15 Taliban, and you would have to reinforce yourself.

16 Senator Warren: I appreciate your looking at it as a  
17 fighter, but I would also add, one more year of propping up  
18 a corrupt government, and an army that would not fight on  
19 its own was not going to give us a different outcome. And  
20 anyone who thinks differently is either fooling himself, or  
21 trying to fool the rest of us.

22 I believe President Biden had it exactly right.  
23 Withdrawing was long overdue. The withdrawal was conducted  
24 in accordance with the advice of his military advisors, who  
25 planned and executed every step of this withdrawal.

1 Thank you, Madam Chair.

2 Senator Hirono: [Presiding.] Thank you, Senator  
3 Warren.

4 Senator Sullivan, you are recognized.

5 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Madam Chair. Gentlemen,  
6 this committee recognizes that your constitutional duty is  
7 to follow the lawful orders of the President or resign if  
8 you do not agree with his decisions and policies like  
9 Secretary Mattis did. But I want to emphasize you do not  
10 have a duty, constitutional or otherwise, to cover for the  
11 commander in chief when he is not telling the truth to the  
12 American people. With that, I have a few questions that I  
13 would like you to keep short, concise answers to.

14 On August 18th, in a media interview to the American  
15 people, the President said that none of his military  
16 advisors told him that he should keep U.S. forces in  
17 Afghanistan. General Milley, that was a false statement by  
18 the President of the United States, was it not?

19 General Milley: I did not even see the statement, to  
20 tell you the truth.

21 Senator Sullivan: I am reading you a truthful  
22 statement. That was a false statement.

23 General Milley: Yeah, look --

24 Senator Sullivan: Look, I do not have a lot of time.

25 General Milley: Okay.

1           Senator Sullivan: Was that a false statement to the  
2 American people?

3           General Milley: I am not going to categorize a  
4 statement of the President of the United States.

5           Senator Sullivan: General McKenzie, was that a false  
6 statement? The President said none of his commanders said  
7 that he should keep troops in Afghanistan. Was that a false  
8 statement by the President of United States? Remember you  
9 do not have a duty to cover for the President when he is not  
10 telling the truth. Was that a false statement or not?

11          General McKenzie: I have given you my opinion on the  
12 matter. I have given you my judgment on it, and I will let  
13 --

14          Senator Sullivan: I think we all know it was a false  
15 statement. Okay, that is number one. President also said,  
16 "If there is an American citizen left behind in Afghanistan,  
17 the military is going to stay until we get them out."  
18 General Milley, was that statement -- did that statement  
19 turn out to be true or untrue by the President?

20          General Milley: I think that was the intent, but we  
21 gave him a recommendation on the 25th of August to terminate  
22 the mission on the 31st of August.

23          Senator Sullivan: The statement was untrue.

24          Let me ask another question. General Milley, General  
25 McKenzie, the President, around the same time said, quote,

1 "Al Qaeda was gone from Afghanistan," told the American  
2 people that. Was that true or not true? Was Al Qaeda gone  
3 from Afghanistan in mid-August? True or not true?

4 General Milley: Al Qaeda is still in Afghanistan.  
5 They were there in mid-August. They have been severely  
6 disrupted and attritted over many, many years. They are not  
7 --

8 Senator Sullivan: So it was not true.

9 General McKenzie, was that true or not?

10 General McKenzie: Al Qaeda was present in Afghanistan.

11 Senator Sullivan: Okay, so it was not true.

12 Let me make one final one. The President called this  
13 entire retrograde operation, "an extraordinary success."  
14 General Miller, in his testimony, disagreed with that  
15 assertion. General Milley, was this Afghanistan retrograde  
16 operation an extraordinary success?

17 General Milley: There were two operations, Senator.

18 Senator Sullivan: Just yes or no. I have a lot of  
19 questions. Was this an extraordinary success?

20 General Milley: Senator with all due respect, there  
21 were two operations. There was the retrograde, which Miller  
22 was in charge of, and there is the NEO, which CENTCOM was in  
23 charge of. The retrograde was executed, and ended by mid-  
24 July, with a residual force to defend the embassy, the NEO  
25 --

1           Senator Sullivan: You and I have discussed this.  
2           Would you use the term "extraordinary success" for what took  
3           place in August in Afghanistan?

4           General Milley: That is the non-combatant evacuation.  
5           And I think one of the other senators said it very well. It  
6           was a logistical success, but a strategic failure, and I  
7           think those are two different terms.

8           Senator Sullivan: Look, I think -- here is the  
9           problem. I think the whole world knows -- this is the cover  
10          of The Economist magazine, "Biden's debacle," that had  
11          stories in it, articles in it called, "The fiasco in  
12          Afghanistan is a huge and unnecessary blow to America's  
13          standing." That was one article. "Joe Biden blames  
14          everybody else." That is another article. "China sees  
15          America humbled." That is another article.

16          And gentlemen, the problem here, these are not marginal  
17          misstatements by the President to the American people.  
18          These are dramatic, obvious falsehoods that go to the very  
19          heart of the foreign policy fiasco we have all witnessed.  
20          These are life and death deceptions that the President of  
21          the United States told the American people.

22          I have one final question. I might leave it because it  
23          is a long one for the follow up, but here is the anger. I  
24          have never seen my constituent more angry about an issue  
25          than this, and it is the combination of everybody knowing

1 that this is a debacle, and yet people defending it as a,  
2 quote, "extraordinary success." And here is the biggest:  
3 no accountability. No accountability. You gentlemen have  
4 spent your lives, and I completely respect it, troops in  
5 combat. You have been in combat. You have had troops under  
6 your command killed in action. You have been part of an  
7 institution where accountability is so critical, and the  
8 American people respect that, up and down the chain where  
9 there are instances, commanders get relieved up and down the  
10 chain. We see it. The McCain incident, the Fitzgerald  
11 incident, the AAV incident with the Marine Corps, three-  
12 star, four-star flag officers, all relieved of duty.

13 But on this matter, on the biggest national security  
14 fiasco in a generation, there has been zero accountability,  
15 no responsibility from anybody. So I will ask this final  
16 question of all of you. Senator Cotton talked about it.

17 Senator Hirono: Senator Sullivan?

18 Senator Sullivan: Madam Chair, if I --

19 Senator Hirono: Could you submit your question for the  
20 record, please? We are trying to keep to a 5-minute  
21 questioning round. You can ask the question in your second  
22 round, if you would like. Thank you.

23 Senator Peters.

24 Senator Peters: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you  
25 to each and every one of you for your service to our



1 country.

2 I want to return to some of the comments made by  
3 Senator Warren, and looking at over the last 20 years. I  
4 think if ever we are going to have a strategic assessment of  
5 what happened in Afghanistan, it is important that any kind  
6 of strategic assessment is not just to look at the present,  
7 but to look at the past, and look at the future, and look at  
8 all three of those elements as we are making that kind of  
9 assessment. And if we are going to do that, we have to look  
10 over the 20 years that we were in Afghanistan, and we are  
11 going to have to have a pretty hard-nosed assessment of  
12 that. General Milley, you mentioned that strategic  
13 decisions have consequences, and there are a lot of lessons  
14 to be learned over 20 years of our involvement in  
15 Afghanistan.

16 I sat at this table here at Armed Services for many  
17 years, served in the House before. I have had an  
18 opportunity to travel to Afghanistan on a couple of  
19 occasions, and when we have ever asked our military leaders  
20 the situation in Afghanistan, we often heard, "Well, it is a  
21 stalemate right now, but this year coming up is going to be  
22 different. This year will be different." I heard that year  
23 after year. "This year is going to be different. Yeah, I  
24 know we were in a stalemate but this year is going to be  
25 different."

1           There is one commentator that said, and Secretary  
2 Austin, I want you to comment on this, he said that we did  
3 not really have a 20-year war in Afghanistan. We had 20  
4 one-year wars in Afghanistan. How would you respond to  
5 that?

6           Secretary Austin: I would certainly say, Senator that  
7 is something to think about. You know, you have heard me  
8 say in my opening comments that we have to ask ourselves  
9 some tough questions. Did we have the right strategy? Did  
10 we have too many strategies? And so if you are reshaping  
11 that strategy every year, one year at a time, then that has  
12 consequences.

13           So I think that is something we got to go back and look  
14 at, and we also have to look at the impact, the effect of  
15 the corruption that was in the environment, weak leadership,  
16 changes in leadership, and a number of factors.

17           Senator Peters: Well, I want to build on that, because  
18 I think it is important, Secretary Austin. For example,  
19 General Milley, when you commanded NATO ground forces in  
20 Afghanistan eight years ago, you called 2013 a critical year  
21 for the Afghan security forces because it was the first time  
22 they had taken responsibility for their security across the  
23 country. Secretary Austin, you offered similar assessment  
24 in 2015 and 2016, during testimony before this committee.  
25 As CENTCOM commander, you emphasized that there were 326,000

1 ANSF forces, and they were ready to lead security  
2 operations.

3 And I will just say, from most my experience,  
4 especially when I was in Afghanistan, the input that I got  
5 from our commanders was that "This year is going to be  
6 different. We are going to be able to do things better."  
7 But I got a completely different assessment when I went to  
8 the mess hall and ate with the soldiers and the Marines and  
9 the folks on the ground, who said, "I do not trust these  
10 folks that we are with. I do not know if they are going to  
11 fight. In fact, they do not even show up. They get their  
12 paycheck, but they do not show up."

13 And now there may have been some instances where they  
14 have performed, and I know you have highlighted some of  
15 those, but my question from a strategic standpoint is, did  
16 we just become fixated perhaps on some tactical performance  
17 from our forces, their forces, and forget to measure the  
18 Afghan Security Force's actual institutional health as a  
19 fighting force that could sustain a fight, even though they  
20 were in an incredibly weak economy and a whole host of  
21 complicated cultural issues?

22 Secretary Austin: Clearly questions that we have to  
23 drill deep on. At one point, as you know, Senator, we had a  
24 number of advisors down to fairly low levels. As we began  
25 to lift the numbers of advisors that we had there and scale

1 back on the people that we had interfacing with the Afghans  
2 on a daily basis we began to lose that fingertip feel. And  
3 so our ability to assess, with some degree of certainty,  
4 continue to erode, the smaller that we got.

5 Senator Peters: My sense is that that was what we were  
6 hearing for years. It was not just at the end, that this  
7 was an endemic problem for over a decade. So hopefully we  
8 will have the opportunity to do that.

9 That is my final question, Secretary Austin. What are  
10 we actually doing to learn from the conclusion of these  
11 military operations, particularly from a strategic  
12 assessment point of view, when it comes to end-of-conflict  
13 transition? We are going to have potentially other  
14 operations like this, even in great power competition.

15 Secretary Austin: Yeah. So as we always do, Senator,  
16 we are going to take a hard look at ourselves in terms of,  
17 you know, what we did over the last 20 years, what worked,  
18 what did not work, and we are going to learn from those  
19 lessons and make sure that we incorporate that into our  
20 planning, and our strategic assessment going forward.

21 Senator Peters: Thank.

22 Chairman Reed: [Presiding.] Thank you very much,  
23 Senator Peters.

24 Senator Cramer, please.

25 Senator Cramer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, thank all

1 three of you for your service and for being here, and God  
2 bless the men and women under your command.

3 General McKenzie, is it true that U.S. forces had the  
4 ISIS-K cell under surveillance prior to August 26th, and  
5 could have struck them before the deadly terrorist attacks  
6 at Kabul, but were not given the authority to strike?

7 General McKenzie: No, that is not true.

8 Senator Cramer: You know, I noticed that the President  
9 was quick to take a victory lap after the first strike and  
10 push this tough guy image he is so famous for. He once  
11 threatened to have union bosses beat me up. He said things  
12 like, "Just do it. If we find more, we will strike them."  
13 Of course, this was after he said of the ISIS-K leaders, "We  
14 will hunt you down." He talks tough. He is going to go get  
15 them.

16 I also noticed he has been equally silent, taking no  
17 responsibility for the strike on innocent civilians,  
18 including children, that was in part caused by, in my view,  
19 his insecure need to appear tough. He just let you take the  
20 blame, General McKenzie. But what I really worry about is  
21 the air crews who actually were pressured into pulling the  
22 trigger that terrible day.

23 Secretary Austin, as you know, the North Dakota Air  
24 National Guard operates reapers around the world, and I know  
25 what kind of pressure those air crews are under, and the

1 level of responsibility they feel to accomplish their  
2 missions properly. And I am worried that whoever was  
3 operating the aircraft involved in the tragic 29th August  
4 strike was set up to fail by an administration that wanted a  
5 political victory more than they wanted an American victory.

6 Have you reached out to the air crew to make sure that  
7 they understand it is not their fault, that there are seven  
8 dead children?

9 Secretary Austin: I have not, Senator. As you  
10 probably know, I have directed a three-star review of this  
11 incident. General McKenzie did an initial investigation and  
12 I have directed a three-star review, and so I will not make  
13 any comments.

14 Senator Cramer: You know, there certainly seemed to be  
15 a lot of indications that a terrorist event was likely, if  
16 not imminent, leading up to the ISIS-K bombing on the 26th.  
17 Why were our military members still exposed after that  
18 threat was known, General McKenzie?

19 General McKenzie: The purpose of our force at the  
20 airfield was to bring American citizens and Afghans at risk  
21 out. In order to do that, you had to have the gates open.  
22 You had to process people.

23 You are right, there were a lot of threats, and we  
24 worked very hard to minimize those threats, and you try to  
25 balance it. Every once in a while, the bad guys sneak one

1 in on you. This is an example of where that occurred. It  
2 was not through any lack of attention to trying to find  
3 those cells or looking hard for them. And we did find a  
4 number and we did, in fact, which I will be happy to talk  
5 about in closed session, we did, in fact, enable and stop  
6 those attacks from occurring. This one we were not  
7 successful on.

8 Senator Cramer: So speaking of that I want to drill  
9 down just a minute since I have a couple. The Taliban was  
10 controlling the checkpoints obviously around the airport.  
11 And you had indicated, General McKenzie, that the U.S. at  
12 that time had, you called it a pragmatic relationship of  
13 necessity with the Taliban. Did we share any information  
14 with the Taliban about the ISIS-K threat, and if so, how did  
15 the Taliban respond to it? In other words, how did they get  
16 in? Is it possible that they let them in on purpose?

17 General McKenzie: So it is possible that they let them  
18 in on purpose, but the body of intelligence indicates that  
19 is not in fact what happened. You know, so one event  
20 happened and that is a terrible tragic event. A lot of  
21 other events did not happen because that outer circle, the  
22 Taliban forces, were there.

23 Look, I defer to no one in my disdain for the Taliban  
24 and my lack of trust for them, but I believe they actually  
25 prevented other attacks from occurring. This event, someone

1 got through. I believe there were other times when people  
2 did not get through.

3 Senator Cramer: All right. Look, the reality is there  
4 are patriotic Americans all over the country and certainly  
5 in North Dakota they are really upset. I mean, they are  
6 genuinely pissed off. And they sense that there is a lot of  
7 sort of political positioning, and apologizing, and  
8 rationalizing. And no one is really saying anything other  
9 than it was an extraordinary event. Now some of you have  
10 admitted that it was not perfect, I think were your words,  
11 General Milley, but "extraordinary success" just rankles  
12 them when they hear that, especially when they see that out  
13 of the 124,000 people that were brought to the United  
14 States, we do not know much about a whole bunch of them, and  
15 yet we know a whole bunch about people that were not brought  
16 back to the United States, and they are upset. They are  
17 really, really upset. I know you know that. I think you  
18 are seeing the reflection of that in their elected  
19 representatives, and this afternoon, we will probably drill  
20 down a little more on some things. But I look forward to  
21 the closed session as well, General McKenzie, to learn more  
22 about August 26th.

23 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Cramer.

24 Senator Manchin, please.

25 Senator Manchin: Thank you very much, and first of



1 all, thank all three of you. I appreciate your service to  
2 our country, and I never have doubted your unwavering  
3 commitment to defend our country and our constitution.

4 I am having a hard time. I am old enough to understand.  
5 I remember Vietnam very well. I was in line to go there,  
6 and had an injury in my playing ball at WVU, and that did  
7 not happen. So anyway, I just cannot figure out, I cannot  
8 explain to the younger generation, to my children and  
9 grandchildren, how do we get into this and never get out?

10 We did not learn from Vietnam? That was a horrible  
11 exit. I remember that very vividly. This was even worse  
12 than that, as far as my recall. And I do not know what  
13 lessons we are taking from this right now.

14 But I look back at lack of an AUMF. We had an open-end  
15 AUMF. We still have an open-end AUMF. If we would have had  
16 an AUMF and basically had a time-certain and specific goal,  
17 do any of you think that could have made a difference? Do  
18 you think, I mean, hindsight being 20/20, what did we learn  
19 from these mistakes? How do we prevent them again? We  
20 thought from Vietnam we learned not to go in and try to  
21 change a nation, and here we are, trading partners with  
22 Vietnam. Is that same going to end up with Afghanistan?

23 I cannot comprehend any of it, to be honest with you,  
24 and I have no explanation. So anybody that wants to help  
25 me. And General Milley, I know that you have a great

1 knowledge of history, and how we have gotten into  
2 situations, and how maybe we should keep from repeating  
3 them.

4 General Milley: Yeah. As I said, Senator Manchin, in  
5 my opening comment.

6 Senator Manchin: I am sorry. I was conducting an ENR  
7 meeting and I was not able to be here for that. I am so  
8 sorry.

9 General Milley: Okay. Sorry. I mentioned, you know,  
10 that there have been four Presidents, 20 commanders on the  
11 ground, seven or eight Chairman of Joint Chiefs, dozens of  
12 Secretaries of Defense, et cetera. And outcomes like this  
13 are not determined in, you know, the last 5 days, the last  
14 20 days, or the last year for that matter. Outcomes in a  
15 war like this, an outcome that is a strategic failure, the  
16 enemy is in charge in Kabul, there is no way else to  
17 describe that. That outcome is a cumulative effect of 20  
18 years, not 20 days, and there are a huge amount of  
19 strategic, operational, and tactical lessons that need to be  
20 learned from this, some of them in the military sphere, the  
21 narrow military sphere. One of them, for example, is the  
22 mirror-imaging of the building of the Afghan National Army  
23 based on American doctrine, tactics, techniques, and  
24 procedures. That made a military that may, I am going to  
25 wait full evaluation, but may have been overly dependent

1 upon us, our presence, contractors, and higher tech systems,  
2 in order to fight a counterinsurgency war. That is one area  
3 that needs to be fully explored.

4 Another is the intel. How did we miss collapse of an  
5 army and a government that big, that fast, in only 11 days?  
6 That needs to be pulled apart. Then there are other factors  
7 that are not strictly military, but things like the  
8 legitimacy of the government, corruption, the parasitic  
9 nature of the police forces. There is a whole series of 10  
10 or 20 that I wrote down just a week or two ago, that need to  
11 be looked at, and looked at in depth, and very seriously and  
12 comprehensively over time.

13 Senator Manchin: Do we know where the president, the  
14 former president of Afghanistan is today and how much money  
15 he took with him? Do we have any idea?

16 General Milley: Secretary Austin, do you have any  
17 idea?

18 Secretary Austin: I think that he may be in UAE,  
19 senator. I am not certain of that. That is what the last  
20 report that I had. And in terms of any money that he may  
21 have taken with him, I have no knowledge of any amounts of  
22 money.

23 Senator Manchin: You all have not been able to -- I  
24 mean there is no way that we can trace that through the  
25 banking institutions? No way that we have any insight on

1 that whatsoever? There has to be exchanges going back and  
2 forth because I am sure he is not keeping it in the bank of  
3 Afghanistan.

4 Secretary Austin: Defense does not have any insight on  
5 that, Senator, but certainly I am not sure if the law  
6 enforcement agencies --

7 Senator Manchin: We will check with Treasury. Maybe  
8 Treasury might. I am just looking for some answers that  
9 maybe are not answerable. Everyone has asked the questions  
10 of how do we prevent this from happening again? Why did we  
11 not see it? There is not a person that is returned that I  
12 have spoken to in special ops that were there, when they  
13 returned. I was there a couple times in 2006. I was there  
14 in 2011. I was there. But every time it got worse. It did  
15 not get better.

16 So this could not be a surprise. They never were going  
17 to step to the plate. And it could not have been a surprise  
18 that they would not fight. They never had allegiance to a  
19 country. I mean, we knew that. And the special ops people  
20 said it gets worse every day. It does not get better.  
21 Every mission was worse. We used to drive from Kabul to  
22 Bagram. After I went back the second time, hell, we could  
23 not do that. I mean, it got so bad, everything got bad.

24 And I have got to tell this one. It drives me  
25 absolutely insane to see the television at night, and see

1 the Taliban, and all of them wearing our uniforms, wearing  
2 our night vision, doing everything, using everything we  
3 have, our MRAPs and everything else that we left there. I  
4 just cannot believe it. I cannot even get an accounting of  
5 how much equipment we really did leave. I know how many  
6 aircraft we left, and I know how many basically MRAPs and  
7 all the different things. But not to plan better to take  
8 that equipment out, it was unbelievable.

9 Secretary Austin: I would just flag for you, Senator,  
10 that all of the equipment that we had, that we used, was  
11 retrograded by General Miller as a part of the drawdown.  
12 Thousands of tons of equipment, and whatever high-end  
13 equipment that we had, that we were using. The equipment  
14 that the Afghan Security Forces had as the Taliban took over  
15 is the equipment that you see. And, of course, all of the  
16 helicopters that were left on the airfield at HKIA, I asked  
17 General McKenzie to demilitarize those so that they could  
18 not ever be used again.

19 And so we took, we retrograded all of our equipment  
20 that we were supposed to retrograde as we drew down.

21 Senator Manchin: Only thing I can say in finishing up  
22 is that I would hope that God would bless America to have  
23 the intelligence not to repeat what we continually have seen  
24 does not work. And with you all, expertise you have, and  
25 knowledge you are gaining from all this, please, please help

1 us from ever, ever repeating what we have done.

2 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Manchin.

3 Senator Scott, please.

4 Senator Scott: Thank you, Chairman. First of all, I  
5 want to thank each of you for being here. General Milley,  
6 one thing I hope at some point you will address is the  
7 context of your calls with regard to the Chinese and whether  
8 what has been alleged is that you would warn them if there  
9 was going to be an attack. Also, address whether there was  
10 any intelligence indicating that the Chinese were actually  
11 nervous.

12 One thing that surprised me about what has been going  
13 on in the last few months is the President has absolutely  
14 blamed everyone else but himself for the botched withdrawal  
15 of Afghanistan. He, as the President of the United States,  
16 he has ability to make these decisions. He can take all the  
17 advice he wants, but he gets to make the final decisions. He  
18 has blamed previous administrations. He has blamed the  
19 people of Afghanistan. He has blamed the military of  
20 Afghanistan, which I think is absolutely disingenuous. The  
21 people in the White House have even blamed our own military.

22 Secretary Austin, some things you have said today  
23 actually surprised me. You said you were ready, you said  
24 you exceeded expectations, you said our credibility is  
25 solid, and you have said the President followed your advice

1 on the evacuation. Let me just ask you, the first question  
2 is, do you still believe that the most effective withdrawal  
3 strategy involves extracting the military, abandoning our  
4 military installations, and reducing our use of force and  
5 ability to use force before we got our civilians out?

6 Secretary Austin: Thanks, Senator. First of all, the  
7 plan was to -- the decision was to end our military  
8 operations and draw down all of our forces and retrograde  
9 all of our equipment, and that was accomplished. General  
10 Miller, I think, put together a great plan and executed that  
11 plan, in accordance with the plan.

12 Also a key part of the plan was to maintain an embassy  
13 in Kabul, and maintaining that embassy would allow us to  
14 continue to engage the government, to continue to provide  
15 resources to support the Afghan Security Forces. So the  
16 plan was to leave a diplomatic presence there. In  
17 conjunction with that plan, we also were going to leave a  
18 small military force there to help secure the embassy. So  
19 that was the plan, Senator.

20 Senator Scott: But you did not address the issue that  
21 -- you all made all these -- it was your plan. You have  
22 acknowledged it was your plan, and your plan said you would  
23 do all these things before we got our civilians out. I  
24 mean, when, in the history of this country, have we ever had  
25 the U.S. military say, and have a plan that we will take our

1 military out first before we take our civilians? I cannot  
2 imagine that.

3 Secretary Austin: When you say civilians, are you  
4 talking about --

5 Senator Scott: American citizens.

6 Secretary Austin: -- American citizens?

7 Senator Scott: Yeah.

8 Secretary Austin: Well, the American citizens would  
9 come out once a non-combatant evacuation is declared, and  
10 until that point, typically we do not evacuate all the  
11 citizens in the country.

12 Senator Scott: But we did not here. There are  
13 American citizens still there.

14 Secretary Austin: And we continue to remain engaged  
15 and work to get those citizens out, Senator.

16 Senator Scott: Why would you propose a plan that did  
17 not get all American citizens out? I just cannot imagine  
18 ever in the history of this country, our U.S. military would  
19 propose to leave a country without our citizens coming out  
20 first. I mean, have we ever done that before?

21 Secretary Austin: All of the American citizens would  
22 not leave, Senator, unless there was a non-combatant  
23 evacuation. And, you know, the plan was to leave the  
24 embassy there, to continue to address the needs of our  
25 American citizens, to engage with the government. And so



1 that was a part of the plan. You know, again, the plan was  
2 never to evacuate the American citizens and leave the  
3 embassy there.

4 Senator Scott: Did it bother you when the President  
5 went on national television and said that he would not leave  
6 until all American citizens were taken out? Did it bother  
7 you when he said that, because it clearly was not truthful?

8 Secretary Austin: Now, Senator, you know, you heard me  
9 say several times that we are going to work as hard as we  
10 can, for as long as we can, to get every American citizen  
11 out that wants to come out, and we continue to do that to  
12 this day.

13 Senator Scott: Well, I am running out of time, but one  
14 thing I want when we have next round, I want to understand  
15 what decisions would you make differently today to save  
16 those 13 lives of service men and women that we lost at the  
17 Kabul airport.

18 Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 General Milley: Senator, if I could comment on your  
20 first opening comment, if I may?

21 Chairman Reed: Go ahead, sir.

22 General Milley: Yeah. I am happy to lay out every  
23 detail in all the intel to you as an individual, to any  
24 other member, or to a committee, or anything you want on  
25 these Chinese calls at your convenience. Happy to do it.

1 Senator Scott: Thank you.

2 Chairman Reed: Thank you. Thank you, Senator Scott.

3 Senator Duckworth, please.

4 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 I share my colleagues' concerns about the rapid  
6 collapse of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces,  
7 and the Afghan government and the failure of our  
8 intelligence. We need some answers.

9 After investing two decades, nearly \$2 trillion, and  
10 most importantly, the lives of almost 2,500 of American  
11 troops, our nation must conduct a thorough and honest review  
12 of the United States government's involvement in Afghanistan  
13 since the September 11th, 2001, terrorist attacks.

14 For the sake of current and future generations of  
15 warfighters, we must capture the hard lessons from  
16 Afghanistan to ensure that these lessons are not forgotten,  
17 or worse, repeated on a future battlefield. This is our  
18 moral responsibility as a nation.

19 Gentlemen, all three of you have been involved in the  
20 war in Afghanistan multiple times, in multiple different  
21 capacities throughout your careers. Secretary Austin, was  
22 the situation on the ground in Afghanistan over the last few  
23 months influenced by previous decisions made over the course  
24 of several years?

25 Secretary Austin: I absolutely believe that, Senator.

1 Foremost among those decisions is the Doha agreement. I  
2 think that severely impacted the morale of the military.

3 Senator Duckworth: Thank you. Secretary Austin, if  
4 that is the case, is it possible to have an intellectually  
5 honest lessons learned exercise that only looks at the most  
6 recent events in Afghanistan of the last couple of months,  
7 or must any effective review look at the whole 20 years  
8 since September 11th?

9 Secretary Austin: I think you have to look at the  
10 entire 20 years. Senator, I think there are some great  
11 lessons learned that we are going to take away once we do  
12 that. But yeah, I believe you got to look at the entire  
13 time span.

14 Senator Duckworth: Thank you. I agree that an  
15 effective review must be comprehensive. After all, the war  
16 in Afghanistan was shaped by 4 different administrations and  
17 11 different Congresses. No party should be looking to  
18 score cheap, partisan, political points off a multi-decade,  
19 nation-building failure that was bipartisan in the making.  
20 Instead, Congress should authorize a long-term effort,  
21 solely devoted to bringing accountability and transparency  
22 to the Afghanistan war and lessons to be learned.

23 That is why on Thursday I will be introducing the  
24 Afghanistan War Study Commission. My bill would establish a  
25 bipartisan, independent commission to examine every aspect

1 of the war, including the political and strategic decisions  
2 that transformed a focused military mission into vast nation  
3 building campaign. Importantly, this commission must  
4 produce actionable recommendations designed to guide the  
5 development of real reform. Just ask the 9/11 Commission's  
6 work inform congressional law making efforts in the years  
7 after its publication.

8 Secretary Austin, would you agree with me that such an  
9 independent, long-term study could serve as an effective  
10 complementary effort to the more targeted lessons learned  
11 reviews that DoD always conducts, particularly in shedding  
12 light on how Congress and civilian leaders from multiple  
13 government agencies can do a better job in defining the  
14 scope of military missions and actually enforcing legal  
15 limitations on the use of force?

16 Secretary Austin: I would, and the point that you are  
17 making, in my view, it needs to be an interagency approach  
18 to this.

19 Senator Duckworth: Thank you. And I do want to note  
20 that my family and I were in Cambodia until the very end. I  
21 am an American. I was born in Thailand, but my father  
22 worked for the United Nations. And to answer my colleague's  
23 question, my father chose to stay as long as possible to  
24 help the Cambodian people as long as possible, and he left  
25 after American troops had left. The American ambassador

1 stayed behind after American troops had left. And in fact,  
2 after the last military transport had left, I know this  
3 because my father was on the last military transport to  
4 leave Cambodia, and the ambassador had to travel over land.

5 So yes, we do leave Americans behind, but this is all  
6 tied to NEO operations and how that is planned, which is why  
7 I think it is so important that we have an independent  
8 investigation. Maybe the failure here was that we did not  
9 have a NEO plan in place, and we did not activate it before  
10 all of our troops left. But if that is the case, we need to  
11 learn that.

12 So I would ask for my colleagues, who considered this  
13 independent commission, we put somebody in charge of it, who  
14 was not in a decision-making capacity during the 20 years,  
15 make it nonpartisan and Let us get those lessons learned so  
16 we do not make these same mistakes over and over again.

17 Our troops deserve better, and the families of the  
18 2,500 American troops who laid down their lives to protect  
19 and defend this Constitution, who followed the lawful order  
20 of all of those Presidents, they deserve better than  
21 partisan fights. We need to get some real answers.

22 Thank you. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

23 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Duckworth.

24 Now, let me recognize Senator Blackburn.

25 Senator Blackburn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1 Gentlemen, we thank you all for being here with us today.

2 As you have heard from all of us, the American people,  
3 Tennesseans are wanting some answers. They deserve to hear  
4 your testimony. And I think it is unacceptable that this is  
5 the first time that I am hearing from you in any forum,  
6 despite attempts at outreach by both me and my staff, save a  
7 few short, all-Senator phone calls that we have had. And I  
8 want to emphasize, all of us here, every one of us, answer  
9 to the American people, and they deserve transparency and  
10 information regarding this administration's botched and  
11 disgraceful withdrawal.

12 Tennesseans are really angry. And as you know, General  
13 Milley, Tennessee is home to the 101st Airborne, one of the  
14 most deployed divisions in the U.S. military. We are also  
15 home to the specialized 160th SOAR, who were among the last  
16 on the ground, extracting U.S. citizens from danger in  
17 Kabul. Tennessee National Guard units have deployed to  
18 Afghanistan at a high-operational tempo, as well as  
19 providing vital, logistical services, such as refueling. We  
20 are home to more than 400,000 veterans, many of whom have  
21 lasting physical and psychological wounds from the time they  
22 have spent in service.

23 And Tennesseans are heartbroken over the loss of one of  
24 our own, Staff Sergeant Ryan Knauss, a patriotic American  
25 who represented the best of all of us in the August 26th

1 suicide bombing at Hamid Karzai International Airport. He  
2 made the ultimate sacrifice.

3 So how did we get here and how did we get to what has  
4 been a complete letdown to most Tennesseans? And I have got  
5 a few questions. These are yes-or-no questions, so quick  
6 answers are appreciated.

7 General Milley, were there options given for keeping  
8 American troops in Afghanistan, rather than the  
9 unconditional, chaotic withdrawal?

10 General Milley: Yes.

11 Senator Blackburn: You presented options and those  
12 options were declined.

13 General Milley: There were options presented and  
14 debated --

15 Senator Blackburn: Yes or no.

16 General Milley: -- and a decision was made.

17 Senator Blackburn: Yes or no is fine. Did you at any  
18 point create options for keeping Bagram open beyond July  
19 2nd?

20 General Milley: Yes.

21 Senator Blackburn: Did you provide options for keeping  
22 Bagram open directly to the President?

23 General Milley: Yes.

24 Senator Blackburn: Had Bagram stayed open, would our  
25 support to the Afghan Air Force have been more effective in

1 your view?

2 General Milley: I am sorry, I did not catch the last  
3 part.

4 Senator Blackburn: If Bagram had stayed open, would  
5 our support to the Afghan Air Force have been more  
6 effective, in your view? Yes or no.

7 General Milley: Frankly, I am not sure on that one,  
8 because most of the Afghan Air Force was at different bases,  
9 specifically at HKIA.

10 Senator Blackburn: President Biden keeps calling it an  
11 extraordinary success. We have discussed some of this  
12 today. Is leaving Americans behind an extraordinary success  
13 in your view, Secretary Austin?

14 Secretary Austin: We are not leaving Americans behind.

15 Senator Blackburn: Yes or no is fine.

16 Is the killing of 13 American service men and women  
17 while trying to secure a chaotic evacuation of the  
18 President's own making an extraordinary success?

19 Secretary Austin: The loss of any civilian life is  
20 always tragic.

21 Senator Blackburn: Is the fact that we failed to  
22 evacuate most of our Afghan partners an extraordinary  
23 success, or the fact that we have Afghans bringing child  
24 brides, people who are hardly vetted, is that an  
25 extraordinary success?



1 Secretary Austin: Again, these are issues that we  
2 continue to work to get our American citizens out and the  
3 Afghans who helped us out.

4 Senator Blackburn: Let me move on. Per Article II of  
5 the Constitution, the President may require the opinion in  
6 writing of the principal officer in each of the Executive  
7 departments. Did the President ever require or request  
8 written recommendations related to the withdrawal of the  
9 Afghan forces? Yes or no. Secretary Austin, then General  
10 Milley, then General McKenzie. Yes or no.

11 Secretary Austin: I provided our input as a part of a  
12 policy process --

13 Senator Blackburn: In written form?

14 Secretary Austin: -- that that was very well and then  
15 deliberately run.

16 Senator Blackburn: We will note that you did not  
17 completely answer that.

18 General Milley, in written form?

19 General Milley: Yes.

20 Senator Blackburn: Would you make those available to  
21 us?

22 General Milley: I will make it available to the  
23 committee upon request in accordance with appropriate  
24 classifications.

25 Senator Blackburn: We will. We will do so.

1 General McKenzie, yes or no.

2 General McKenzie: Yes.

3 Senator Blackburn: And you will make those available?

4 General McKenzie: Based on guidance from the  
5 Secretary.

6 Senator Blackburn: Each of you had committed to make  
7 those available when you went through your confirmation  
8 processes. We will come back to you for those.

9 General Milley, yes or no to this. Did you talk to Bob  
10 Woodward or Robert Costa for their book, Peril?

11 General Milley: Woodward, yes. Costa, no.

12 Senator Blackburn: Did you talk to Carol Leonning and  
13 Philip Rucker for their book, I Alone Can I Fix It?

14 General Milley: Yes.

15 Senator Blackburn: Did you talk to Michael Bender for  
16 his book, Frankly, We Did Win This Election: The Inside  
17 Story of How Trump Lost? Yes or no.

18 General Milley: Yes.

19 Senator Blackburn: And were you accurately represented  
20 in these books?

21 General Milley: I have not read any of the books so I  
22 do not know. I have seen press reporting of it. I have not  
23 read the books.

24 Senator Blackburn: Let us have you read the books and  
25 then let us know if you are accurately presented and

1 portrayed.

2 General Milley: Absolutely. Happy to do that.

3 Chairman Reed: Senator Blackburn, we are adhering to  
4 the 5-minute rule.

5 Senator Blackburn: I yield back my time.

6 Chairman Reed: Thank you.

7 Senator Rosen, please.

8 Senator Rosen: Thank you, Chairman Reed, Ranking  
9 Member Inhofe for holding today's very important hearing.

10 A critical part of this committee's oversight  
11 responsibilities, it is an opportunity for the American  
12 people to get answers about our withdrawal from Afghanistan  
13 and how we plan to counter terrorist threats in the future.  
14 I also want to sincerely thank the brave men and women, who  
15 served our country in Afghanistan, many who made the  
16 ultimate sacrifice, and, of course, their families as well.

17 Secretary Austin, General Milley, and General McKenzie,  
18 I appreciate you all being here to address lingering  
19 concerns we have about the last two decades of war  
20 generally, and the past two months in particular. You are  
21 all men of honor and integrity, who have served our country  
22 nobly, and I so look forward to your candid responses, to my  
23 questions, even if they require admitting that in some  
24 cases, serious mistakes were made.

25 Like all Senate offices, as the Taliban approached

1 Kabul and eventually took over the city and the country, my  
2 team and I worked to help vulnerable individuals evacuate.  
3 These were people who, in many cases, had the State  
4 Department's approval to leave Afghanistan for the U.S. or a  
5 third-party country, but due to crowds, Taliban checkpoints,  
6 or a legitimate fear of being killed along the way, they  
7 could just not physically get to a gate to present their  
8 paperwork, no matter how many times they tried, or no matter  
9 how long they waited. My office worked was CENTCOM and the  
10 Afghanistan Task Force to try to coordinate opportunities  
11 just to grab these people from the crowd so they could  
12 present their paperwork and flee to safety, but  
13 unfortunately, again, these efforts were to no avail.

14 As these individuals continue to wait for help that may  
15 never come, I remain frustrated that the U.S. did not set up  
16 a perimeter around Kabul, or at the very least create a safe  
17 corridor for the S-1 visa holders to get to the airport for  
18 their families' potential asylum seekers, who were  
19 attempting to escape a near-certain death.

20 So continued support, General Milley. I appreciate the  
21 State Department now taking the lead on evacuations, but  
22 like our military, the State Department no longer has any  
23 presence on the ground in Afghanistan. So I would like to  
24 ask you, sir, does the U.S. military's recent experience  
25 facilitating the evacuation from Kabul give you the

1 confidence that the Taliban will be honest brokers in  
2 working with our diplomats to help vulnerable Afghan  
3 nationals leave the country?

4 General Milley: I think that what we have seen so far,  
5 since the 31st, is some Americans have gotten out through  
6 diplomatic means, and they have reached safety through  
7 either overland routes or through aircraft. I do not know  
8 all the details, but I cannot imagine that did not happen  
9 without Taliban facilitation.

10 Senator Rosen: Well, we can get back to Afghan  
11 nationals helping them leave the country as well, those SIV  
12 holders and others who supported us. But Secretary Austin,  
13 the administration has said they will utilize every tool  
14 available to hold the Taliban accountable if they fail to  
15 meet their commitments, to provide safe passage for anyone  
16 who wants to leave the country. Certainly, we know there  
17 are economic levers, but can you elaborate on what the  
18 military tools are, and could there be a shared interest in  
19 targeting ISIS-K?

20 Secretary Austin: In terms of military tools, Senator,  
21 as you know, we have the ability to offer a range of  
22 options, depending on what, you know, the President's  
23 objectives are. So we can do most anything that is required  
24 of us, because we have substantial resources.

25 But in terms of our cooperation with the Taliban to

1 counter ISIS-K, I will not venture to make any comments on  
2 that. I would just say that we have coordinated some things  
3 that are very narrow in scope with them to get our people  
4 out, as you know, and to continue to further evacuate  
5 American citizens. But I do not think it is right to make  
6 assumptions to broader and bigger things from that  
7 coordination. They are still the Taliban.

8 Senator Rosen: Thank you. I would just like to, in  
9 the few seconds I have left and we can take these second  
10 round or off the record, future counterterrorism operations.

11 We have to reorganize our counterterrorism capabilities and  
12 our assets in the region, of course, as we move to an over-  
13 the-horizon scenario.

14 Secretary Austin, General McKenzie, and we will take  
15 these in the second round, think about, I would like the  
16 answer to what is the plan for an enduring counterterrorism  
17 strategy that is going to be able to address and counter the  
18 influence of the violent extremist organizations in  
19 Afghanistan.

20 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Rosen.

22 Senator Hawley, please.

23 Senator Hawley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

24 Let me just sum up where I understand that we are,  
25 based on what has been a fairly, extraordinary hearing.

1 Here is what I have learned so far. Number one, the  
2 President of the United States lied to the American people  
3 about the advice that you gave to him about the military  
4 judgment that you provided for him. I think you have all  
5 testified to that effect now, repeatedly.

6 Secondly, the State Department, and maybe the White  
7 House, appeared to have pushed back the evacuation to such a  
8 time that it became a catastrophe, apparently against your  
9 advice, although I would like to learn more about that.

10 And third, for some reason we still do not quite  
11 understand the Pentagon failed to plan for the potential  
12 collapse of the security forces or the collapse of the  
13 Afghan government, despite there being quite a lot of  
14 warnings -- Senator Kaine referred to this earlier -- quite  
15 a lot warning for really, frankly, years that the Afghan  
16 security forces were ill-equipped, ill-trained, and frankly,  
17 not up to the job. I do not understand any of that. I  
18 would like to explore those things with you in this round  
19 and the next.

20 But first before I do, Secretary Austin, I have to take  
21 issue with something you just said. I know this is an  
22 administration talking point. I have heard it out of the  
23 mouth of the Press Secretary and others. "We are not leaving  
24 Americans behind." That was your quote of just a minute  
25 ago. With all due respect, sir, you have left --past tense

1 -- Americans behind. We have no presence any longer in  
2 Afghanistan. There were hundreds of -- and not just  
3 Americans generally, civilians you left behind, against the  
4 President's explicit commitment not to leave until all  
5 American citizens were out and to safety.

6 That is not what happened and now we have people who  
7 are desperately, frantically trying to get out of this  
8 country, coming to me, coming to members of this committee  
9 asking for help. They cannot get that help. They are stuck  
10 behind enemy lines. So please do not tell me that we are  
11 not leaving Americans behind. You left them behind, Joe  
12 Biden left them behind, and frankly, it was a disgrace.

13 Let me ask you this though.

14 Secretary Austin: Senator, thanks for your help in  
15 continuing to help get American citizens and Afghans who  
16 have helped us out of the country, but as you have seen, we  
17 have continued to facilitate --

18 Senator Hawley: Well actually, I did not ask you a  
19 question, but since you seem to want to address the issue,  
20 so since you do, is it not true that you left Americans  
21 behind on August 31st?

22 Secretary Austin: There are Americans, there were  
23 Americans that were still in Afghanistan, and still are.

24 Senator Hawley: Yes.

25 Secretary Austin: We continue to work --



1 Senator Hawley: Correct.

2 Secretary Austin: -- to try to get those Americans  
3 out.

4 Senator Hawley: Yeah, that is a yes. Let us not  
5 repeat, please, the frankly falsehood that we did not leave  
6 Americans behind.

7 Let me ask you this. Secretary Austin, you have  
8 alluded to several times the fact that the military was  
9 ready -- you say this in your prepared remarks -- by late  
10 April. You say military planners had crafted a number of  
11 evacuation scenarios. You refer later in your remarks to  
12 the fact that you were waiting for the State Department to  
13 make a decision about evacuations. NBC News is reporting  
14 this morning that the military wanted to begin evacuations  
15 earlier, but the State Department and the White House  
16 intervened and by May 8th said, "No, we are delaying the  
17 evacuations of our civilians." Can you just help us get to  
18 the truth here? Was it your judgment and opinion that the  
19 evacuations of civilians should have begun before the middle  
20 of August?

21 Secretary Austin: We provided our input to the State  
22 Department and again, it is the call of the State Department  
23 to --

24 Senator Hawley: I understand that. I understand that,  
25 Mr. Secretary. I am asking for what your judgment was, and

1 I am asking specifically about your testimony that in April  
2 you develop evacuation scenarios, and this is reported by  
3 multiple sources this morning in the news. So I just  
4 wonder, as of last April was it your opinion that the  
5 evacuations of civilians should begin, should have begun  
6 before, should begin earlier than they did?

7 Secretary Austin: We provided input to try to get out  
8 as many Afghans who have helped us along the way as early as  
9 possible, but again, the State Department made its decisions  
10 based upon the fact that even President Ghani had engaged  
11 them and said, "Hey, we are very concerned about the mass  
12 exodus of civilians from the country."

13 Senator Hawley: General Milley, let me direct this to  
14 you. Did you ever advise, in the interagency process, that  
15 the rapid withdrawal timeline that the White House and  
16 Pentagon signed off on, General Miller proposed effectively  
17 getting us to zero by the middle of July, that that would  
18 negatively impact any effort to get out our civilians? In  
19 other words, if we had drawn down to zero by July, if we  
20 then had a civilian evacuation order, we would be in a lot  
21 of trouble. Did you ever advise to that effect during the  
22 interagency process? Did you warn about that possibly of  
23 drawing down so quickly before a civilian evacuation was  
24 underway?

25 General Milley: Yeah, but it is more complicated than

1 that. The drawdown of the forces under Miller, those guys  
2 are advisors. They are not the NEO kind of guys. The NEO  
3 troops are Marine Expeditionary Unit, Special Purpose MAGTF,  
4 and elements of the 82nd Airborne Division. That is what  
5 you need in order to do the NEO.

6 Those are the plans, I believe, that the Secretary is  
7 referring to that were developed early on, and there are  
8 specific triggers that are required in the State Department  
9 calls "the time of the NEO." The Secretary in fact on the  
10 12th of August, started pushing forward forces in orders and  
11 on the 14th, the ambassador, Ambassador Wilson, called the  
12 NEO.

13 Should that have been called earlier? I think that is  
14 an open question that needs further exploration based on a  
15 series of meetings. But the April piece and the drawdown of  
16 the advisors, that is a separate and distinct task than the  
17 retrograde of those forces. Those 2,500 advisors were not  
18 the guys bringing out the American citizens anyway. Those  
19 were the advisors to the Afghan Security Forces.

20 There were concerns that we raised throughout the  
21 interagency that when those advisors, if the advisors were  
22 to stay then there is a possibility that, you know, the  
23 Afghan Security Forces would hang in there. We all knew  
24 that when we pulled the advisors out, when we pulled the  
25 money out, that at some point in the future, most said it

1 was in the fall, that the Afghan Security Forces were going  
2 to fracture and the government would collapse.

3 The speed at which that happens in August is a  
4 different animal. The advisors are already gone by mid-  
5 July. There is still a government. There is still an Afghan  
6 army. And the assumption was that it would remain and the  
7 mission was to keep the embassy open, secure the embassy,  
8 transition that off to contractors, and then all the  
9 military would be out and it would be a diplomatic mission  
10 and there would be money in the over-the-horizon fund.

11 None of that happened because that army and that  
12 government collapsed very rapidly. As soon as those  
13 indicators came of fracture, Secretary Austin and others  
14 throughout the government executed and implemented a NEO  
15 plan for which there was contingencies that were built, that  
16 was a plan for a rapid collapse, and that was the NEO plan  
17 that General McKenzie had come up with, and that is what was  
18 executed. That is why those 6,000 troops could deploy as  
19 rapidly as they did. That is why all those aircraft showed  
20 up. That was not done without planning. That was done with  
21 planning and that was done -- from an operational and  
22 tactical standpoint that was a success. Strategically --  
23 strategically, the war is lost. The enemy is in Kabul. So  
24 you have a strategic failure while you simultaneously have  
25 an operational and tactical success by the soldiers on the

1 ground.

2 So I think we are conflating some things that we need  
3 to separate in this after-action review process so that we  
4 clearly understand what exactly happened.

5 And I am sorry for taking all that time, but I thought  
6 it was necessary.

7 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hawley.

8 Senator Kelly, please.

9 Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 Mr. Secretary, let me begin by expressing my gratitude  
11 to each of the over 800,000 Americans, many of them  
12 Arizonans, who served in Afghanistan over the past 20 years,  
13 and to their families. I also commend our servicemembers'  
14 support of one of the largest airlifts in our country's  
15 history. We will never forget the achievements of the men  
16 and women who worked 24/7 in Kabul, managed impossible  
17 conditions on the ground, and above all, those who made the  
18 ultimate sacrifice protecting innocent civilians. One  
19 hundred twenty-four thousand people are safe today because  
20 of American troops and diplomats.

21 Still, after decades of conflict, 2,500 American  
22 soldiers killed, and billions invested in security  
23 cooperation, the American people deserve to know why the  
24 Afghan government and security forces collapsed in a matter  
25 of days and how there was a failure to prepare for this

1 scenario and ensure that our people were out of the country  
2 before it fell. And I think we have established here that  
3 the withdrawal and evacuation did not account for real-world  
4 conditions and that the intelligence was flawed.

5 The United States wields incredible power as a global  
6 leader, and our accountability must match our influence.  
7 For our own national security and for each of those who  
8 served in Afghanistan during our longest war, we must  
9 understand what happened, but also look forward to ensure  
10 that our posture allows us to provide for our national  
11 security and prevent Afghanistan's use as a base for  
12 terrorist activity.

13 So I want to transition and look forward and not ask  
14 you questions that you have already answered. General  
15 McKenzie, America's armed forces have been on the front  
16 lines fighting terrorists for the past 20 years. During  
17 this time, Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations have  
18 been degraded. While our military presence in Afghanistan  
19 has ended, our commitment to fighting terrorism has not.  
20 With our withdrawal complete, the Afghan government  
21 collapsed, and the Taliban seeking to fill the power vacuum  
22 left behind, how is Central Command postured to prevent  
23 terrorist organizations from gaining strength in the region?

24 General McKenzie: Senator, probably the details of  
25 this would be best left to the classified session which we

1 will have later this afternoon. But I would tell you that I  
2 have today headquarters that has the ability to look into  
3 Afghanistan, albeit limited, and we have the ability to fuse  
4 the different disciplines of intelligence to look  
5 particularly at ISIS-K and Al Qaeda. We are still refining  
6 that, the best practices on that, but we do have a way  
7 forward. I have told this committee before it is very hard  
8 to do this. It is not impossible to do this.

9 Senator Kelly: Well I am looking forward to seeing  
10 those details in the closed hearing. Are you confident that  
11 we can deny organizations like Al Qaeda and ISIS the ability  
12 to use Afghanistan as a launchpad for terrorist activity?

13 General McKenzie: I think that is yet to be seen. I  
14 think, you know, we are still seeing how Al Qaeda and ISIS  
15 are configuring themselves against the Taliban. We are  
16 still seeing what the Taliban is going to do. So I think it  
17 is early. I would not say I am confident that that is going  
18 to be on the ground yet. We could get to that point, but I  
19 do not yet have that level of confidence.

20 Senator Kelly: And you might have to share this in the  
21 closed hearing, but do you have the resources necessary to  
22 accomplish this, even as our national security pivots  
23 towards great power or near-peer threats like China and  
24 Russia that are seeking to expand their influence and  
25 compete with our military?

1           General McKenzie:  Senator, I will just say I am in a  
2 constant dialogue with the Secretary about requirements in  
3 CENTCOM and I will give you some more details in the closed  
4 session.

5           Senator Kelly:  Good.  Well, thank you.  And I know you  
6 cannot go into much detail about the analysis that led to  
7 the August 28th drone strike in Kabul in this open setting,  
8 but I would like to note my serious concerns and give you  
9 the opportunity to make any comment on how the American  
10 people can know that the military will be able to adequately  
11 assess targets before conducting future strikes and  
12 operations, even as we have even fewer local intelligence  
13 and surveillance resources to leverage.

14          General McKenzie:  Senator, again the matter is under  
15 investigation, but what I can tell you broadly and to  
16 restate some things I have said earlier, I am responsible  
17 for that.  It happened in my area of responsibility so I am  
18 the responsible officer for that strike.  Moreover, I was  
19 under no pressure and no one in my chain of command below me  
20 was under any pressure to take that strike.  We acted based  
21 on the intelligence read that we saw on the ground.  We  
22 acted several times on intelligence that we saw and we were  
23 successful in other occasions in preventing attacks.  This  
24 time, tragically, we were wrong and you are right to note  
25 that as we go forward in our ability to create what we call



1 the ecosystem that allows you to see what is going on on the  
2 ground and put all that together, it is going to get a lot  
3 harder to do that, particularly in places like Afghanistan,  
4 but I can share a little more with you later.

5 Senator Kelly: Well thank you, General.

6 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Kelly.

7 Senator Tuberville, please.

8 Senator Tuberville: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9 Gentlemen, thanks for being here today. You are part  
10 of the most powerful military in the world. I will ask all  
11 three of you this question, and I know how you are going to  
12 answer this. Is this any enemy that could defeat the  
13 strongest force in the world, the United States military?  
14 And I know all of you are going to say no.

15 So Secretary Austin, since your confirmation in  
16 January, have you been denied any resources with regards to  
17 Afghanistan? I think I heard you say earlier you got  
18 everything you needed.

19 Secretary Austin: That is correct, Senator.

20 Senator Tuberville: Yeah, thank you. On August 18th,  
21 you were asked why the U.S. would not rescue Americans who  
22 could not reach the airport. You responded, quote, "I do  
23 not have the capability to go out and extend operations  
24 currently in Kabul," end quote. We saw the Germans, the  
25 French, the British rescue citizens in Kabul, but from this

1 administration, which commands the world's most lethal  
2 fighting force, we saw nothing but blame, weakness, and our  
3 American citizens were left to fend for themselves. Our  
4 fighting men and women have the courage, training, and  
5 discipline to defeat the enemy any time anywhere and there  
6 are people all over this country wondering why in the heck  
7 would we let our allies get their people and we did not get  
8 ours?

9 I want to thank all of the hundreds of thousands of  
10 veterans and their families who sacrificed over the past 20  
11 years, and I truly believe our soldiers did not fail us. A  
12 lot of our leadership did.

13 Secretary Austin, before President Biden even took  
14 office, you thought we needed to leave Afghanistan. On  
15 January 19th, you told my colleague Senator Shaheen, quote,  
16 "I think this conflict needs to come to an end and we need  
17 to see an agreement reached and in accordance with what the  
18 President-elect wants to see," end quote. You testified  
19 that General Milley and General Miller had adequate  
20 resources to secure Afghanistan at a troop level of 2,500.  
21 But you told Senator Hawley you wanted to, quote, "assess  
22 the situation to make recommendations to the President," end  
23 quote.

24 I know how you are going to answer this. Did you give  
25 advice to the President on the withdrawal from Afghanistan

1 without conditions, or is that the direction you got from  
2 him?

3 Secretary Austin: Again, my recommendations were a  
4 part of a very deliberate process where we presented a range  
5 of options for the President.

6 And if I could, Senator, I would like to go back to the  
7 first comment that you made about the question that I  
8 answered for a reporter who asked, "Why don't you go out and  
9 establish cordons and create safe passageways for our people  
10 just to move into the airport?"

11 At that point early on in our deployment, we only had  
12 less than 4,000, or about 4,000 troops to secure and defend  
13 the airport. And our troop presence continued to grow as we  
14 flowed people in. We used a number of innovative approaches  
15 to go out and pick up and facilitate the entry of American  
16 citizens into the airport as the situation continued to  
17 develop. But I just wanted to give you a little context for  
18 that answer.

19 Senator Tuberville: Well, thank you. And, you know,  
20 we are all talking about did President Biden know all this  
21 and, you know, my question about withdrawal. You know,  
22 basically there are two options. I can answer that. Either  
23 the President was given bad military advice or he gave his  
24 military the terrible decision and direction to surrender  
25 Afghanistan without condition.

1 I will have some more here in a few minutes. I just  
2 wanted to make a couple of statements. You know, the  
3 American people, especially people I represent, they are  
4 disgusted by how this U.S. surrender happened in  
5 Afghanistan, and I know you have heard that yourselves, all  
6 three of you. America's veterans are pissed off that their  
7 service was squandered, America's allies are in disbelief,  
8 but America's enemies are delighted. The Taliban are  
9 euphoric that the job that happened with our military given  
10 the orders to retreat. President Biden abandoned our allies  
11 who fought alongside us for 20 years. This administration  
12 left American citizens behind enemy lines. We left \$85  
13 billion worth of equipment that the American taxpayers paid  
14 for. And this administration created a sanctuary for  
15 terrorists to plot against United States for years and years  
16 to come. It is just absolutely amazing that we did this.

17 So I will end it there. I know these guys need to  
18 probably take a break, but we will see you after the break.

19 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield my time.

20 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator  
21 Tuberville.

22 We have completed the first round, and as I indicated  
23 we will break at 1:00 for lunch, so we will begin the second  
24 round.

25 Secretary Austin, you said in response to Senator

1 Warren that if we stayed past August 31st, we would  
2 certainly be back at war with the Taliban and that you would  
3 have to reinforce yourself. Do I interpret your testimony  
4 to mean that staying at 2,500 past the 31st was not  
5 sustainable at an acceptable level of risk to American  
6 personnel and that we would be seeing today casualties which  
7 could be accumulating at an unacceptable rate?

8 Secretary Austin: Chairman, I think the point that is  
9 been left out of a lot of the conversation is that, you  
10 know, had we stayed past that date that was agreed upon  
11 early on, that the Taliban would begin to attack us, attack  
12 our forces there. And we would have to make some decisions  
13 on how to reinforce our forces so that we could continue to  
14 operate and that would include quite possibly increasing the  
15 force there.

16 Chairman Reed: Now, in the Doha agreement, President  
17 Trump agreed to leave with certain conditions on May 1st.  
18 Those conditions have been testified by the panel that were  
19 really never achieved, never challenged by the Trump  
20 administration. Would you consider that an abdication of or  
21 a surrender of that agreement?

22 Secretary Austin: I certainly believe that the  
23 conditions were preset, and again, we met -- lived up to all  
24 the things that we were obliged to do. We did not attack  
25 them and we drew down our forces. But the Taliban, the only

1 thing that they lived up to was that they did not attack us.

2 Chairman Reed: And we saw a great deal of difficulty  
3 in meeting the deadline which was August 31st. Would it  
4 appear to you that a May 1st deadline, as President Trump  
5 imagined, would have caused more complications in terms of  
6 getting our equipment out, getting our personnel out,  
7 identifying Americans who were eligible to leave and getting  
8 them the paperwork, since you would be doing it at a much  
9 shorter time frame?

10 Secretary Austin: Yeah, I do not think that would have  
11 been feasible to do that in an orderly fashion, Chairman.

12 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much. General Milley,  
13 regardless of whether the Taliban had met the conditions  
14 required under Doha, were you not already in a trajectory to  
15 go to zero forces, as I said, by May 1st, as required by the  
16 agreement when the President took over, so that you actually  
17 would have accelerated the process of withdrawal and  
18 complicated it more, similar to my question to the  
19 Secretary?

20 General Milley: Yes, we were actually given an order  
21 to go to zero by 15 January which was changed to go to 2,500  
22 by 15 January and then taken down to zero by 1 May,  
23 depending on the decisions of the new administration.

24 Chairman Reed: Thank you. And General Milley, your  
25 prepared testimony indicates that the Biden administration,

1 through the National Security Council process, conducted a  
2 rigorous interagency review of the situation in Afghanistan  
3 in February, March, and April, in which the views of senior  
4 military leadership were all given serious consideration by  
5 the administration. You also testified that you received an  
6 order in November 2020, you just referred to, to withdraw  
7 all forces from Afghanistan by January 15, 2021. Was that  
8 November order similarly informed by a rigorous interagency  
9 review?

10 General Milley: No.

11 Chairman Reed: So that was basically, I think --

12 General Milley: Secretary Esper submitted his  
13 recommendations in a written format on the 9th, the day that  
14 he was relieved, and 48 hours later we received a written  
15 order to go to zero by 15 January.

16 Chairman Reed: I think -- General McKenzie, again,  
17 your advice with regard to maintaining 2,500 troops has been  
18 reiterated repeatedly, but you also recommended in the fall  
19 of 2020, 4,000 troops. Was that correct?

20 General McKenzie: Sir, that is correct. I recommended  
21 that in the fall of 2020, when we were having deliberations,  
22 I recommended that we hold at that level.

23 Chairman Reed: And that was rejected by the Trump  
24 administration?

25 General McKenzie: Sir, it was.

1 Chairman Reed: And there was no recriminations against  
2 you or anyone else? That was the President of the United  
3 States making a decision based on his view of the world?

4 General McKenzie: In so far as I know, that is  
5 correct, sir.

6 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much.

7 And again, adhering to the 5-minute rule, I will cede  
8 back 8 seconds to Ranking Member Inhofe.

9 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. One good way  
10 to judge any President's decision is whether it has made  
11 American people safer. Generals, I will ask all three of  
12 you. You have both noted that the Taliban has not severed  
13 its relationship with Al Qaeda. President Biden stated on  
14 July 8th that Al Qaeda is gone from Afghanistan. I would  
15 ask you, is Al Qaeda gone from Afghanistan? Generals?

16 Secretary Austin: Senator, I think there are remnants  
17 of Al Qaeda still in Afghanistan.

18 Senator Inhofe: Does anyone believe that Al Qaeda is  
19 gone from Afghanistan?

20 President Biden stated at the United Nations recently  
21 that this nation is no longer at war. Is it your personal  
22 view that Al Qaeda is no longer at war with us?

23 Start at the right, General.

24 General Milley: I believe Al Qaeda is in Afghanistan.

25 I believe they have aspirations to reconstitute, and if they



1 develop the capability I believe that they have aspirations  
2 to strike. It is too early in the process right now,  
3 Senator, to determine the capability, but I do believe they  
4 --

5 Senator Inhofe: Do you believe the personal view that  
6 was stated, that Al Qaeda is no longer at war with us right  
7 now? Okay.

8 General Milley: I think Al Qaeda is at war with the  
9 United States, still, and never has not --

10 Senator Inhofe: Thank you. Does the withdrawal from  
11 Afghanistan increase or decrease the likelihood of an Al  
12 Qaeda or ISIS attack on the U.S. homeland?

13 General Milley: You asking me, Senator?

14 Senator Inhofe: Sure.

15 General Milley: My view is that it makes it much more  
16 difficult for us to conduct intelligence surveillance  
17 reconnaissance find-fix functions and then we can strike  
18 almost from anywhere in the world, but the find-fix  
19 function, it is more difficult. We can still do it. It is  
20 not impossible --

21 Senator Inhofe: Okay.

22 General Milley: -- but it will make it more difficult.

23 Senator Inhofe: General Milley and General McKenzie,  
24 we entrusted security to the Taliban, but they failed to  
25 prevent the ISIS-K suicide bomber on August 26th. We do not

1 really even know if they wanted to prevent it. Now, we are  
2 in the same situation, trusting the Taliban to prevent  
3 attacks. The Senator from Missouri brought up and talked  
4 again about the fact of what is the situation right now, and  
5 I think we do not really after this several hours, have an  
6 answer to that.

7 I do want to bring something in the record that I do  
8 not think has been put in the record already, and that is  
9 the conditions under which the previous President, after  
10 making the statement about the Taliban, not only did the  
11 previous President have conditions, and the conditions  
12 included having a presence, a military presence, but they  
13 also had four other things that were stated that was  
14 conditions. One, to prevent Al Qaeda and the terrorists  
15 from threatening the United States from Afghanistan.  
16 Secondly, to make statements and commandments to its members  
17 against threatening the United States. Thirdly, deny  
18 residence and visas and passports to those threatening the  
19 United States' allies. And fourthly, begin negotiations with  
20 the Afghan government.

21 Those were conditions that were made at that time, and  
22 this has been stated several times. It is my opinion and  
23 the opinion of many who have testified at this hearing that  
24 there were no conditions. I believe that is the case.

25 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe.

2 Senator Shaheen, please.

3 Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary  
4 Austin, I am going to go back to my question earlier about  
5 the records that Special Immigrant Visa applicants really  
6 need in order to qualify for those visas, and there has not  
7 been a real -- a good process through DoD to ensure that  
8 they get those records. Is that something that the  
9 Department is looking at, and would you be willing to work  
10 with this committee or others to see if we could set up a  
11 process that would ensure that those folks who worked with  
12 our men and women actually have the documentation they need  
13 to show that? I know that one of the challenges is that  
14 many of those records have been destroyed, but I would hope  
15 there is some way that we can ensure that those people are  
16 able to get the documentation they need to come to this  
17 country.

18 Secretary Austin: Senator, let me first say that I  
19 absolutely agree with you that the process is onerous and  
20 that we need to do something to make it easier for those  
21 people that have helped us to prove that they have in fact  
22 worked with us before.

23 One of my departments in defense is working to try to  
24 find ways to propose ways to truncate the process or come up  
25 with alternative means to demonstrate that they have worked

1 with us in the past. And to answer your question, we would  
2 absolutely welcome working with the committee on this.

3 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. I assume we should  
4 contact your office to find who the appropriate contact  
5 person would be.

6 Secretary Austin: Well we will contact your office and  
7 let you know who he is, Senator.

8 Senator Shaheen: Okay. General Milley and General  
9 McKenzie, it is long been publicly reported that the  
10 Pakistani intelligence services have maintained a close and  
11 continuing relationship with the Taliban. Do we expect that  
12 relationship to become more complicated now that the Taliban  
13 is in power? Are we concerned about Pakistan's nuclear  
14 weapons and the potential that terrorist groups might be  
15 able to get access to those weapons? Can you talk a little  
16 bit about how you see the relationship with Pakistan and the  
17 Taliban playing out and the challenges that presents for the  
18 United States?

19 I will start. Which one of you would like to answer  
20 that?

21 General Milley: Go ahead, Frank. I will follow you.

22 General McKenzie: Senator, some of this we can talk in  
23 a little bit more detail in the closed session.

24 Senator Shaheen: Okay.

25 General McKenzie: But I would tell you that I believe

1 Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban is going to become  
2 significantly more complicated as a result of the U.S.  
3 withdrawal from Afghanistan. In fact, they are going to see  
4 pressure moving into Pakistan from Afghanistan in ways that  
5 they have been able to deflect before because of the  
6 pressure that we and our allies had then. So I think that  
7 is a significant problem that Pakistan is going to face. I  
8 would like to talk about their special weapons perhaps in  
9 the closed session.

10 As has been noted by several people, in order to get to  
11 Afghanistan, you have to fly over Pakistan unless you come  
12 from the north and that is a subject of continuing  
13 deliberation with Pakistan, and I can shed a little bit more  
14 light on that going forward. But they have actually, over  
15 the last 20 years, we have been able to use what we call the  
16 "air boulevard" to go in over western Pakistan and that is  
17 become something that is vital to us, as well as certain  
18 landlines of communication. And we will be working with the  
19 Pakistanis in the days and weeks ahead to look at what that  
20 relationship is going to look like in the future. But I can  
21 again talk a little more in the closed session.

22 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. General Milley, did you  
23 want to add to that?

24 General Milley: Yeah, I have had several conversations  
25 over the years and also recently with Pakistanis and there

1 is no question in my mind that the relationship between  
2 Pakistan and the Taliban is going to become increasingly  
3 complex. There are a whole series of issues there that have  
4 national security interest for the United States that are  
5 best handled in a different session.

6 Senator Shaheen: Okay. Thank you. Well can you, and  
7 Secretary Austin, can you talk about what we are doing to  
8 work with our European counterparts who, based on  
9 conversations that I have had with some of the civilians  
10 from our NATO allies, there was some frustration about the  
11 communication that led to the withdrawal and the evacuation?  
12 Are we working to rebuild those relationships? Do you see  
13 that frustration reflected in the military relationships  
14 that you have?

15 Secretary Austin: I do not, Senator, and, you know, I  
16 understand that there will be concerns. But as I engage my  
17 counterparts, they are very willing to work with us. And,  
18 you know, I do not want us to sound Pollyannish on this, but  
19 they have been very, very thankful for the fact that we  
20 helped them get their people out and we helped them get  
21 thousands of evacuees out that had worked for them, because  
22 of what we did.

23 So I think, as I look at the major players, that there  
24 is still a strong willingness to work with us, and  
25 relationships are things that we just have to continue to

1 work at.

2 Senator Shaheen: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr.  
3 Chairman.

4 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

5 Before I recognize Senator Wicker, at the conclusion of  
6 Senator Wicker's questioning we will adjourn, as I said, the  
7 1:00 adjournment, a little early, a couple of minutes, and  
8 then we will promptly return at 1:30.

9 Senator Wicker, please.

10 Senator Wicker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General  
11 McKenzie, let me ask you, as I understand it one of our  
12 primary missions in Afghanistan was training the Afghan  
13 armed forces. We also equipped them with approximately \$83  
14 billion in military equipment, we always provided them  
15 extensive support in the form of intelligence and  
16 surveillance, air support, logistics, including contract  
17 aircraft maintenance, and special operation advisors.

18 General McKenzie, were the Afghan armed forces ever  
19 trained to fight the Taliban without U.S. support of any  
20 kind?

21 General McKenzie: So, Senator, some elements of the  
22 Afghan military could fight very well without our support,  
23 some of the elite commando units. Obviously, we know from  
24 the example that we saw in August that other elements were  
25 unable to do that. And, in fact, as we began to withdraw

1 our support during the withdrawal operation we began to see  
2 the effects of that. You know, we shift to an over-the-  
3 horizon model for aviation maintenance. That is difficult  
4 to do --

5 Senator Wicker: It really is difficult to do.

6 General McKenzie: -- with a technologically literate  
7 population. It is harder to do in Afghanistan. We were  
8 having some small success with that, and actually Afghan Air  
9 Force continued to fly strikes up until well into August.  
10 But they were, nonetheless, on a general negative attrition.

11 Senator Wicker: What percentage would you term as  
12 elite?

13 General McKenzie: Oh, I would say less than 5 percent.

14 Senator Wicker: Okay. And so really, for 95 percent  
15 it was unrealistic for us to expect them to be able to fight  
16 alone at that point, in July and August of this year.

17 General McKenzie: The combination of the obvious  
18 withdrawal of the U.S., which had a profound psychological  
19 effect -- because I think in the mind of the soldier, you  
20 know, the Taliban and the Afghan military, they have the  
21 same DNA, so it comes down to the fighting heart of the man  
22 on the ground. And I think that the Taliban were heartened  
23 by what they saw happen at Doha and what followed, and our  
24 eventual decision to get out by a certain date. I think the  
25 Afghans were very weakened by that, morally and spiritually.



1           Senator Wicker: Thank you. Good. Let me rush on then  
2 to try to get another question in.

3           Secretary Austin, the reports in The New York Times are  
4 that you warned the President all the way back in March that  
5 there could be dire outcomes in which the Afghan military  
6 folded in an aggressive advance by the Taliban, and that you  
7 drew comparisons between that and our experience in Iraq,  
8 where disaster unfolded and we were required to go back in.

9           According to the same article, you warned the President, we  
10 have seen this movie before.

11           I know you do not want to tell us what advice you give  
12 to the President. Was that your feeling, and did you make  
13 known the comparison with Iraq, and did you feel we had seen  
14 this movie before?

15           Secretary Austin: Thanks, Senator. Again, you are  
16 right. I will keep my conversations, my recommendations to  
17 the President confidential. But I would say that as we  
18 worked our way through the process here we laid out, you  
19 know, all potential consequences that could result from any  
20 course of action that we took, and we were clear-eyed about  
21 that.

22           And so, you know, there were inputs coming --

23           Senator Wicker: With regard to Iraq -- that is my  
24 question, Mr. Secretary.

25           Secretary Austin: Well certainly, then we get back to

1 the specific conversation that I would have had. But it is  
2 clear that I have a history with Iraq. It is clear that I  
3 have learned, you know, there are lessons to be learned from  
4 Iraq. And, you know, I would certainly --

5 Senator Wicker: Was it your feeling that we had seen  
6 this movie before?

7 Secretary Austin: Well, there are certainly some of  
8 the same kinds of things could transpire as we look to  
9 transition.

10 Senator Wicker: Okay. Speaking of things transpiring,  
11 one was that we had to go back into Iraq. Secretary Austin,  
12 does the Department of Defense have plans in place to  
13 redeploy U.S. combat troops to Afghanistan in the event that  
14 our intelligence estimates proved true and our homeland  
15 security is, in fact, threatened?

16 Secretary Austin: Currently, the President's decision,  
17 Senator, as you know, is that, you know, we have left Iraq -  
18 - excuse me, Afghanistan. And so we have not been tasked to  
19 construct any plans to go back into Afghanistan.

20 Senator Wicker: So there are no such plans in place.

21 Secretary Austin: No.

22 Senator Wicker: General Milley, of the conditions that  
23 were required of the Taliban in the agreement only one was  
24 met. Is that correct?

25 General Milley: That is correct. The condition was,

1 the one that was met was the most important one, which was  
2 do not attack us or the coalition forces, and they did not.

3 Senator Wicker: And so President Trump made a  
4 recommendation, gave an order that we leave on 15 January.

5 General Milley: Correct.

6 Senator Wicker: And the advice came back from the  
7 military strongly that that was not a good idea. Based on  
8 that advice, the President rescinded that order. Is that  
9 correct?

10 General Milley: That is correct.

11 Senator Wicker: And none of those conditions that  
12 President Trump based his decision on had been met in 2021,  
13 when President Biden made, in fact, the same decision. Is  
14 that correct?

15 General Milley: Those conditions were never met. That  
16 is correct.

17 Senator Wicker: All right. Thank you very much.  
18 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Wicker.

20 At this point the committee will stand in recess until  
21 1:30. Thank you very much.

22 [Recess.]

23 Chairman Reed: Let me the call the hearing back to  
24 order, and I will recognize Senator Blumenthal for a second  
25 round.

1           Senator Blumenthal: Thank you. Thank you, Mr.  
2 Chairman. Thank you for your testimony earlier and your  
3 continuing testimony now.

4           Secretary Austin, I would like to go back to the topic  
5 of my first round of questions, the evacuation of Americans  
6 and our Afghan allies, translators, guards, and security  
7 officers who sided with us, put their lives on the line, and  
8 who now literally have targets on their backs, along with  
9 their families. I asked you who, at the Department of  
10 Defense, is in charge of our efforts to evacuate them and,  
11 with all due respect, you did not give me the name of the  
12 person at DoD leading these efforts but you pointed me  
13 instead to the Department of State and interagency efforts.

14           I have been involved in working on this evacuation  
15 issue and on the refugee question for some time, along with  
16 coalition of veterans, NGOs, concerned citizens, and some  
17 government officials, and the frustration I have encountered  
18 is that I have been directed, repeatedly and constantly,  
19 from one agency to another. DoD sent me to State, who then  
20 sent me to the National Security Council, who would send me  
21 back to the Department of Defense. It was a Kafka-esque  
22 exercise in bureaucracy and red tape with no clear lines of  
23 authority while lives were on the line. And this private  
24 network or coalition was doing the work that the United  
25 States government would have done if it had maintained a

1 presence there, but it had none, and that is why, at Mazar  
2 and Kabul it was doing that work.

3 So I am concerned that despite this committee's efforts  
4 to call attention to the looming crisis in the evacuation,  
5 we were unprepared. And as I mentioned earlier, a number of  
6 members of this committee went to the White House in the  
7 spring, asked for a plan, a strategy, and none was  
8 forthcoming. I am concerned we will repeat that mistake as  
9 we work to avoid a humanitarian crisis during refugee  
10 resettlement, and that will be a huge undertaking, with  
11 hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees who are literally  
12 escaping torture and murder coming to this country, many of  
13 them with nothing more than the clothes they had when they  
14 left.

15 We currently have tens of thousands of those  
16 individuals on your bases, Department of Defense bases, both  
17 overseas at Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Germany, and  
18 domestically, as you well know, Virginia, Wisconsin, New  
19 Mexico, and Texas. This is a Department of Defense  
20 responsibility. It is a moral imperative. These people  
21 risked their lives for us, as you know on this panel better  
22 than any of us, and it will be shared with the State  
23 Department, the Department of Homeland Security, Health and  
24 Human Services, numerous other Federal agencies. And we own  
25 it. It is our responsibility.

1 I am a United States Senator and I continue to have  
2 difficulty ascertaining who is in charge. I think we need  
3 an evacuation czar, a point person on refugee resettlement,  
4 whose mission is public, and who is known to the American  
5 people to be in charge here.

6 So I would like to ask you, how do we ensure that there  
7 is an official in charge, a point person, someone to ensure  
8 that Afghan children receive schooling, that there are  
9 language services that they received medical care, and can  
10 you give us an update on what the status is?

11 Secretary Austin: Well again, Senator, thanks for your  
12 sustained interest and for all that you have done to  
13 continue to help get people out. And there is a process.  
14 There is a mechanism. State has responsibility, as you  
15 know, for being the lead to continue to evacuate American  
16 citizens and SIV applicants out of Afghanistan. That  
17 process is being run by Ambassador Bass as an interagency  
18 effort, and we contribute to that with a dedicated general  
19 officer as a part of that.

20 In terms of the evacuees or the guests that are being  
21 housed on our installations, Department of Defense has  
22 responsibility for housing them and for their care and  
23 feeding. In terms of integrating them into our society, DHS  
24 and State really are leading that process. And I agree with  
25 you, it is very important that we do this the right way, and

1 it is very important that we do this carefully but as  
2 rapidly as possible, because we do have, you know, children  
3 that need education and all those kinds of things.

4 In the meantime, DoD will remain sighted on making sure  
5 that they receive the very best care and we provide for  
6 their safety as well.

7 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you.

8 Chairman Reed: Senator Fischer, please.

9 Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 General McKenzie, at the beginning of this hearing  
11 Chairman Reed made a comment about the goal and mission that  
12 we are going to be looking at now in the future is to assure  
13 that Afghanistan never again can be used as a base for  
14 terrorists. And as we look at that goal, as we look at that  
15 mission, I think we need to be honest with the American  
16 people on how that will be accomplished. I do not think the  
17 American people should be misled about capabilities that are  
18 needed to make sure that we can conduct over-the-horizon  
19 counterterrorism operations.

20 President Biden has pointed out that we conduct over-  
21 the-horizon CT operations to go after terrorists in other  
22 places in the world, including ISIS in Syria, Al Qaeda in  
23 Yemen, al-Shabab in Somalia.

24 General McKenzie, in those three locations we have  
25 either a U.S. presence or reliable partners on the ground.

1 Is that correct?

2 General McKenzie: Senator, that is correct.

3 Senator Fischer: And in those three locations, do we  
4 have strike assets or basing agreements in nearby countries?

5 General McKenzie: At the level of this briefing, yes,  
6 we do.

7 Senator Fischer: General McKenzie, when the Department  
8 developed its initial plans for an over-the-horizon approach  
9 to counterterrorism in Afghanistan, did those plans assume  
10 that the Afghan Security Forces would serve as our partner  
11 on the ground?

12 General McKenzie: So we developed plans that were  
13 neutral on that. We developed a spectrum of options,  
14 ranging from we would have robust help from some future  
15 government in Afghanistan to a situation, which is what we  
16 have now, where we would have no help from the government of  
17 Afghanistan. So we developed options across that entire  
18 span of future possibilities.

19 Senator Fischer: But as we developed the options, you  
20 developed the options and the reality is now that we did not  
21 see this collapse coming so quickly then we do not have  
22 partners on the ground. Is that correct?

23 General McKenzie: We always had a -- one of the  
24 options for CT in Afghanistan would be that we would be at a  
25 state where there would be no diplomatic presence there and



1 there would be no help from the government of Afghanistan.  
2 So from the beginning we always saw that as one of the  
3 possible futures.

4 Senator Fischer: And that is the situation we are in  
5 right now?

6 General McKenzie: That is correct.

7 Senator Fischer: You stated that during the evacuation  
8 we developed a pragmatic relationship with the Taliban, but  
9 you are not saying we should consider the Taliban to be a  
10 reliable partner, by any means, are you?

11 General McKenzie: I do not trust the Taliban. I do  
12 not consider the Taliban to be a reliable partner. And any  
13 time you deal with the Taliban you have to look at what they  
14 do and not what they say.

15 Senator Fischer: General McKenzie, Yemen, Syria, and  
16 Somalia all border an ocean or a sea and we can use carriers  
17 or other sea-based assets to conduct CT operations.  
18 Afghanistan, however, is a landlocked country, so we cannot  
19 use our sea-based assets in the same way. Our nearest  
20 strike base, or our nearest base in Qatar is about 1,600  
21 miles away from northern Afghanistan, so our strike assets  
22 are significantly further from potential targets than they  
23 are in other operating locations.

24 Is it fair to say that it is more difficult to hit  
25 targets that are further away from where the strike asset is

1 based?

2 General McKenzie: Senator, in general that is a  
3 factor, but I would tell you because of our ability to  
4 refuel aircraft, to position -- for example, during the  
5 withdrawal we positioned a carrier off the Makran coast of  
6 Pakistan, which shortened the range considerably. So there  
7 are ways to get to that finished solution.

8 Senator, if I could just add, it is not the finished  
9 part of the problem that is the most difficult part of the  
10 problem. It is the finding and fixing the target where we  
11 have run into great difficulties, particularly associated  
12 with Afghanistan, because of, as you noted, it is a  
13 landlocked location, it is a great range from our bases.  
14 And while we do have platforms that can fly in there, it  
15 eats up a lot of time and a lot of platforms to conduct that  
16 mission. That is why I said from the beginning, it is hard  
17 to do, very hard to do. It is not impossible to do. But we  
18 can talk more about it in the closed session.

19 Senator Fischer: Right, and it is hard because of a  
20 lack of partners on the ground?

21 General McKenzie: That is a significant factor that  
22 you look at when you look at any CT operation of this  
23 specter.

24 Senator Fischer: To even reach Afghanistan, our strike  
25 assets, they have to fly over other countries. So without

1 an agreement from central Asian nations north of Afghanistan  
2 is it accurate that we are reliant on the continued use of  
3 Pakistani air space for our over-the-horizon strategy?

4 General McKenzie: Senator, you are correct.

5 Senator Fischer: And that is not a sure thing for the  
6 future. Correct?

7 General McKenzie: Senator, I would not predict the  
8 future. I know they were very supportive during the last  
9 phase of our engagement in Afghanistan. I think we are now  
10 talking to them at various levels about how we might  
11 maintain the ability to do that in the future, but I would  
12 not want to get out ahead of the Department, the Secretary,  
13 and the policy people on this.

14 Senator Fischer: But they also have a strong  
15 relationship with the Taliban. Would you consider that that  
16 is going to grow?

17 General McKenzie: I would consider that they are going  
18 to be very conflicted about this, as they have been for the  
19 last 20 years.

20 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

21 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Fischer.

22 Senator Kaine, please.

23 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to the  
24 witnesses.

25 I guess I will direct this to Secretary Austin. What is

1 the administration's current best estimate of the number of  
2 Americans that are in Afghanistan?

3 Secretary Austin: Senator, according to State there  
4 are currently fewer than 100 American citizens who want to  
5 depart and are ready to leave. We got out 21 American  
6 citizens today, along with their family members, and we will  
7 continue to work this, as you have heard us say earlier.

8 The numbers fluctuate daily because more people come to  
9 light as time goes by and they see opportunities to safely  
10 leave, and so this has been a dynamic process. But again,  
11 we will stay focused on this.

12 Senator Kaine: I understand that. I am aware that you  
13 had success in getting Americans out because I have  
14 advocated on behalf of some of them and I have seen the  
15 results of your effort, and I know you will continue that.

16 If I remember correctly, there started to be  
17 communiques to Americans in Afghanistan that they might  
18 possibly consider returning to the United States as early as  
19 March. Is that correct?

20 Secretary Austin: I do not have knowledge of those  
21 communiques.

22 Senator Kaine: I think that may be from a foreign  
23 relations, State Department standpoint. Obviously, you  
24 cannot bring folks home who do not want to come home, but  
25 the number that you are currently looking, and I understand

1 that it changes, who want to come home is now less than 100,  
2 and I trust that you will continue to be diligent about  
3 that.

4 To the question that I posed in my first round of  
5 questions -- and, General McKenzie, I would like to start  
6 with you -- all three of you are leaders but you also have  
7 on-the-ground experience, and I know you have a deep  
8 connection to Afghanistan and people that you fought  
9 together with and your partners and colleagues there, as  
10 well as the Americans who sacrificed so bravely. And for  
11 the purposes of the committee, we really want to dig into  
12 this question about why did the security force and  
13 government fail so quickly? Because it bears upon future  
14 train-and-assist efforts or future humanitarian efforts.

15 Beginning with you, General McKenzie, what are your own  
16 thoughts about the speed of the collapse of both the military  
17 and civilian government?

18 General McKenzie: So, Senator, I believe that the  
19 collapse of the military and the government are completely  
20 linked. You cannot consider one without looking at the  
21 other. And I believe probably the primary accelerant to --  
22 I will take the military side first -- the primary  
23 accelerant to lowering moral and general efficiency of the  
24 Afghan military was what they saw coming in the heels of the  
25 Doha agreement, what they believed was forced upon them.

1 And so I think that had a negative effect.

2 Plus as we get closer to the date that we are leaving,  
3 the clear vision that the United States is going to leave,  
4 and we are going to apply a system of, at best, partial  
5 remedies, from their perspective, to continue the  
6 maintenance of not only the main force, the conventional  
7 force on the ground, but also the really high-priority items  
8 like their air force. And as I have noted before, we had an  
9 over-the-horizon solution to do that. It was not a perfect  
10 solution but it was our best attempt to do that. So I think  
11 that affected the military.

12 But I would tell you what I think -- the DNA of those  
13 Afghan soldiers is the same DNA the Taliban had, and the  
14 Taliban fought pretty hard. And so I think it comes down to  
15 the will to combat and fighting spirit, and I think that is  
16 where you get the link to the government of Afghanistan.  
17 And when your president leaves suddenly in the middle of a  
18 campaign for the capital, I think that finishes any chance  
19 at all you might have had of making a stand there.

20 And, you know, there were signals before then of  
21 disaffection and fractures in the Afghan government -- you  
22 know, probably better people than me to talk about that --  
23 but I think all those came together and had a very powerful  
24 negative synergy towards the end.

25 And this is not new. We have been able to see it for

1 years. But you know, Senator, one point I would make is,  
2 this is not inherently a military problem. There are larger  
3 factors here than just the U.S. military and what we did or  
4 did not do training the Afghans. So I will pause there.

5 Senator Kaine: To your last point, of the two points  
6 you made, you had the best fighting force in the world. But  
7 if they do not have confidence in their military of  
8 political leadership it is hard for them to put it all on  
9 the line for a leadership if they lack confidence in the  
10 leadership.

11 To Secretary Austin or General Milley, any additional  
12 thoughts?

13 Secretary Austin: The three choices that you laid for  
14 us was, your questions were was it because of insufficient  
15 training, was it because the troops were demoralized, or was  
16 it because we wanted thing for them more than they wanted it  
17 for themselves. I would agree with General McKenzie that,  
18 you know, the Doha agreement had a significant impact on the  
19 morale of the troops, but I would say that is compounded by  
20 weak leadership, corruption in the government, and, you  
21 know, the fact that, you know, the Taliban made a concerted  
22 effort to really reach out to provincial leaders and  
23 convince them that the Taliban was going to be in charge so  
24 they might as well side up with them early on.

25 Senator Kaine: My time has expired. I yield back.

1 Thank you.

2 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Caine.

3 Senator Cotton, please.

4 Senator Cotton: General Milley, in the final two pages  
5 of your written statement you lay out some detailed  
6 circumstances of your phone calls with the Chinese  
7 counterparts on October 30, 2020, and January 8, 2021. You  
8 also say you would be happy to make available various  
9 documents. I want to ask for three sets of documents, if we  
10 can get them. I think the first two should be fairly  
11 straightforward. One, could we get the list of people who  
12 joined you on those calls, by name and by title?

13 General Milley: Yes.

14 Senator Cotton: U.S. officials.

15 General Milley: Yes.

16 Senator Cotton: Two, could we get a list of similar  
17 calls you have made to your military counterparts around the  
18 world from, say, September 1, 2020, to January 20, 2021?

19 General Milley: Sure. Yes.

20 Senator Cotton: Again, I think there should not be an  
21 issue, have any classified information.

22 Third, you mentioned in that written statement that  
23 shortly after those two phone calls with General Li you  
24 circulated readouts within the Pentagon and inside the  
25 interagency partners you have. Could we get those readouts



1 as well?

2 General Milley: Yes.

3 Senator Cotton: Secretary Austin, could I get your  
4 commitment that you will work with General Milley and his  
5 team to get that to us, both as quickly as possible and  
6 without unnecessary classification?

7 Secretary Austin: Yes, Senator.

8 Senator Cotton: Thank you. Secretary Austin, on May  
9 8th you conducted, at the Pentagon, what is known as a  
10 rehearsal concept drill, also called a rock drill. Is that  
11 right?

12 Secretary Austin: That is correct.

13 Senator Cotton: And that is pretty important,  
14 especially for such a significant decision as withdrawing  
15 from Afghanistan. Is that right?

16 Secretary Austin: That is correct.

17 Senator Cotton: And it has been reported that you  
18 attended, General Milley attended, Jake Sullivan attended,  
19 Bill Burns attended. Is that correct?

20 Secretary Austin: That is correct.

21 Senator Cotton: Did Tony Blinken attend?

22 Secretary Austin: His deputy attended, Senator.

23 Senator Cotton: His number two deputy, Wendy Sherman?

24 Secretary Austin: No. Yeah, McKeon.

25 Senator Cotton: His number three deputy, Brian McKeon.

1 Do you know where Tony Blinken was on Saturday, May 8th?

2 Secretary Austin: I do not. I do not.

3 Senator Cotton: Do you know if he used any DoD  
4 resources to travel between May 7th and May 10th?

5 Secretary Austin: I can certainly find out, but that  
6 is not something I would --

7 Senator Cotton: Yeah. I understand it is not right at  
8 your fingertips, but I think we could probably get it pretty  
9 quickly. I would like to know if Secretary Blinken used any  
10 DoD assets, whether aircraft or air bases, or personnel, air  
11 crews or ground crews, to travel between May 7, 2021, and  
12 May 10, 2021. Thank you for that.

13 Secretary Austin, who chose September 11th as the date  
14 by which we would withdraw from Afghanistan?

15 Secretary Austin: I am not sure that -- well,  
16 certainly that was not a military recommendation. But the  
17 military, when asked to provide an estimate of how long it  
18 would take to retrograde our people and equipment, that  
19 number fell in the range of possibly up to 120 days, but  
20 certainly much shorter than that if we were uncontested.  
21 And as it turned out we were uncontested.

22 That date takes you to the end of August.

23 Senator Cotton: I am sorry, Secretary. My time is  
24 limited. So can you tell me who it was that directed you,  
25 the Secretary of Defense, that September 11th was the date

1 by which you would complete the withdrawal?

2 Secretary Austin: Nobody directed us that September  
3 11th was the date that we would complete it. I think that  
4 was an objective that was laid out by the administration.

5 Senator Cotton: I believe that President announced  
6 that in mid-April, when he announced the decision. Someone  
7 had to come up with that date. You cannot recall who it was  
8 that recommended September 11th?

9 Secretary Austin: That was not a military  
10 recommendation.

11 Senator Cotton: General Milley, is there any military  
12 significance to withdrawing by September 11th?

13 General Milley: I do not know who came up with it, but  
14 sure there is significance of September 11th.

15 Senator Cotton: General McKenzie, it has been reported  
16 by NBC News that you told Taliban leader Baradar, on August  
17 15th, that if they took Kabul we would bomb them. They  
18 obviously took Kabul on August 15th. We did not bomb them.  
19 Is the report that you told them that correct?

20 General McKenzie: That report is incorrect.

21 Senator Cotton: It is incorrect. Thank you.

22 General McKenzie, why did we not conduct ground patrols  
23 into Kabul? The French did. The British did. The Germans  
24 did. We stepped outside the gates. We flew Chinooks out to  
25 police up our people. Why did we not conduct ground

1 patrols?

2 General McKenzie: Senator, actually, I do not believe  
3 any of those nations conducted ground patrols into Kabul  
4 from HKIA. I believe that the British went out to what they  
5 call the Baron Hotel, which is a facility located about 150  
6 meters off the HKIA compound, and they did business there.  
7 But no one conducted ground patrols from HKIA going out. In  
8 fact, I am very confident of that, based on -- I looked into  
9 it with my commander on the ground, so I am quite confident  
10 when I make that assertion.

11 Senator Cotton: Thank you. Secretary Austin, one  
12 final question. Obviously, this is an issue on which many  
13 of our troops and our veterans feel very passionately, on  
14 both side of the issue. One of those servicemembers, Marine  
15 Colonel Stuart Scheller, posted a very critical video on  
16 social media last month, and he was received of his command  
17 for that posting. Media reports today indicate that he is  
18 being held in pretrial confinement. Why is that?

19 Secretary Austin: I do not have any specifics of what  
20 caused him to be held in pretrial confinement, and I would  
21 certainly ask the Marines to provide that insight.

22 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Cotton.

23 Senator King, please. Do you need a moment?

24 Senator King: The discussion that we have had thus far  
25 today is a peculiar one about decisions, and the assumption

1 seems to be that you could make a different decision, for  
2 example, on August 31st, and everything would have been okay  
3 and we would have gotten more people out.

4 My understanding, General Milley, is that it was your  
5 view that making that decision to go beyond August 31st --  
6 and I am using this as an example -- would have had  
7 consequences which you and your colleagues judged would be  
8 far more damaging and dangerous to American lives than the  
9 decision to leave on August 31st, including being back at  
10 war with the Taliban, subject to terrorist attacks, and  
11 subject to perhaps airplanes being shot down by the Taliban.  
12 Am I right about this, where the risk calculus was?

13 General Milley: That is correct, Senator. We said  
14 risk to mission, risk to force, and risk to remaining  
15 American citizens in Afghanistan was going to go to  
16 extremely high, beginning 1 September if we stayed past 31st  
17 with U.S. military forces.

18 Senator King: And you used that term, "risk to  
19 mission, risk to force" as a kind of -- that is a  
20 descriptive phrase. But we are talking about potentially  
21 hundreds of American lives, are we not?

22 General Milley: Well, when we talk risk to force, we  
23 are specifically talking casualties, killed and wounded, and  
24 our estimate, my estimate at the time -- this is 25 August  
25 we are talking about -- is if we go to war with the Taliban

1 on the 1st of September -- there were 6,000 Taliban and 56  
2 checkpoints in Kabul at that time -- we would have had to  
3 clear Kabul, we would have had to re-seize Bagram and the 30  
4 miles of road between Bagram and Kabul. That would have  
5 taken a significant amount of force. You are looking at  
6 probably a core operation.

7 We probably, my guess, is that we would have had  
8 significant amounts of killed and wounded. Exact numbers  
9 are always imprecise when you are doing those kinds of  
10 estimates, but it would have been significant U.S. military  
11 killed and wounded, and the remaining American citizens  
12 would have been at greater risk.

13 Senator King: You mentioned we would have had to have  
14 retaken Kabul. Then had 6,000 troops. As I remember  
15 discussions in this committee when we were talking about  
16 retaking Mosul, the generally accepted rule of thumb is that  
17 it takes 10 troops to dislodge 1 in a city, that dislodging  
18 of troops in a city is very difficult and takes a large  
19 number of attacking troops. Is that correct?

20 General Milley: It is, but the disposition and  
21 composition of the Taliban in Kabul at that time was not the  
22 same as ISIS in Mosul. Mosul was a prepared defense. They  
23 were dug in. They were ready to go, underground positions,  
24 et cetera. The Taliban had just moved in. So it would have  
25 been not that level of fight that you saw in Mosul, but it

1 still would have been significant -- 6,000 is 6,000 -- and  
2 you are in an urban area of about 5 million people. So it  
3 would have been a significant level of effort, and it would  
4 have resulted in significant U.S. casualties.

5 Senator King: Thank you. Do you know -- and I want to  
6 be clear on this. There was a deadline in the Doha  
7 agreement of March 10th for the beginning of negotiations.  
8 Did the administration, the former administration, make any  
9 objections or raise problems with the Taliban because of  
10 their failure to meet that deadline, or indeed, to ever meet  
11 that deadline in terms of negotiations with the Afghan  
12 government?

13 General Milley: I do not have personal knowledge of  
14 that. Zal Khalizad might be a good one, or former Secretary  
15 of State, but I do not know personally know.

16 Senator King: General McKenzie, I do not want to go  
17 over the same ground, but do you agree with General Milley  
18 that had we gone beyond August 31st, that decision was not  
19 just, oh, we are going to abandon Americans. It was, if we  
20 stay until September 1st we would have to make an additional  
21 troop commitment, and our troops would be at risk. Is that  
22 correct?

23 General McKenzie: Senator, that is exactly correct.  
24 And, actually, in the meeting in the tank with the JCS I was  
25 the principal briefer who advanced that argument, and that

1 does reflect my position.

2 Senator King: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator King.

4 Senator Rounds, please.

5 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 In listening to your testimony today, and I have  
7 appreciated the amount of effort that you put into being  
8 very clear with us, it seems to me that we have left a power  
9 void in central Asia that has already increased the threat  
10 of terrorism and has provided significant opportunities to  
11 our adversaries.

12 Secretary Austin, a little while ago you indicated that  
13 -- and I believe your term was that if we would have had to  
14 have made an earlier withdrawal, perhaps in April or May,  
15 that it would have been very, very difficult to have had  
16 that completed in an orderly manner. And I think that is  
17 the way that you described it. Is that correct, sir?

18 Secretary Austin: That is correct, sir.

19 Senator Rounds: I think also, sir, you would probably  
20 agree that the withdrawal on the August 30, August 31  
21 deadline, was probably not an orderly -- done in an orderly  
22 manner either, was it?

23 Secretary Austin: There are two issues here, Senator,  
24 if I may. First of all, you will recall that we stated that  
25 General Miller planned for an orderly evacuation of people



1 and retrograde of equipment. That plan was laid out, it was  
2 rehearsed, and it was executed so that by early July all of  
3 the equipment that we wanted to retrograde had been  
4 retrograded, and most of the people were out, except for a  
5 small element that was in around the embassy and on HKIA.

6 Senator Rounds: Mr. Secretary, the American people  
7 watched with horror on TV, during the last days in August,  
8 in which our young men and women in uniform not only died  
9 but they were in the middle of huge throngs of individuals  
10 desperately trying to get out. I do not believe that you  
11 would suggest that that was being completed in an orderly  
12 manner.

13 Secretary Austin: No. So that is the second. The  
14 second operation was a non-combatant evacuation, which was  
15 -- I think you heard me say early on, Senator, was -- we had  
16 some challenging times early on. We recovered from that and  
17 were able to --

18 Senator Rounds: But Mr. Secretary, you would not  
19 consider that to have been done in an orderly manner, would  
20 you?

21 Secretary Austin: I would say overall we endured  
22 challenges, but again, we were able to get out an enormous  
23 amount of people.

24 Senator Rounds: I do not disagree that the young men  
25 and women who wear the uniform of this country, on that

1 particular, very challenging time period, did everything  
2 they could. But clearly it was not in an orderly manner.  
3 They were in a very disastrous, and I think we would all  
4 agree, a very deadly situation. Would you agree, sir?

5 Secretary Austin: And you heard me say so, Senator,  
6 that, you know, it was a very dangerous situation that we  
7 were in, and despite that they were able to fight through  
8 the challenges. And because of their heroic efforts, we  
9 were able to do what we did.

10 Senator Rounds: Mr. Secretary, the reason why I asked  
11 this is because I think not only American citizens saw this  
12 but I think our allies saw it as well, and I think what they  
13 saw was, first of all, that because of the date certain  
14 rather than a conditions-based withdrawal, because of a  
15 decision that was made by our President, because of that we  
16 left American citizens behind, and we did leave Afghans  
17 behind who had served directly with our U.S. forces. And it  
18 appears that many of them believe that we did not  
19 appropriately consult with them about our activities in a  
20 timely fashion.

21 And finally, to look at and to see American equipment  
22 being left there, even if it is not quite ready for use but  
23 most certainly there in the hands of the Taliban did not  
24 help our position with our allies, sir.

25 Let me just move on very quickly. General Milley, I

1 have got just less than a minute left on this, and I just  
2 wanted to comment. I think your second statement in which  
3 you shared with the American people and with us today an  
4 expression of how, in a very unclassified way, how the  
5 nuclear chain of command works. Part of this -- and some of  
6 us have had the opportunity to observe, in a tabletop  
7 exercise, how that actually works with the processes working  
8 their way through what the President on down and the  
9 questions that are asked and the responses required, and so  
10 forth. The 2022 NDAA has some very specific exercise  
11 requirements that the White House and other members are  
12 required to follow through. Do you know if either President  
13 Trump or President Biden had the opportunity to do a  
14 tabletop exercise and actually listen to the questions that  
15 were going to be asked of them should there ever be the  
16 possibility of the use of nuclear weapons?

17 General Milley: I do not know if either one, President  
18 Trump or President Biden, has gone through that tabletop  
19 exercise.

20 Senator Rounds: Thank you. Once again, thank you,  
21 gentlemen, for your service to our country.

22 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Rounds.

23 Senator Hirono, please.

24 Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

25 Secretary Austin, my colleague, Senator Duckworth,

1 mentioned the idea of an independent commission to evaluate  
2 what happened before, during, and after the war in  
3 Afghanistan. So, Secretary Austin, are you open to such an  
4 effort?

5 Secretary Austin: Senator, I will also, as you would  
6 expect, always cooperate with my oversight committee.

7 Senator Hirono: Yes, because I, for one, very much  
8 agree that this was a 20-year war and there were four  
9 Presidents involved, and I would like to ensure that there  
10 are some lessons learned from a 20-year forever war.

11 And, at the same time, I feel some of the Republicans  
12 have made a total about-face, a U-turn regarding the war. I  
13 thought that they wanted the war to end and they were very  
14 supportive of President Trump when he made the deal with the  
15 Taliban to get out. So there is that, and clearly there are  
16 lessons to be learned in terms of an evacuation, but I think  
17 the decision to get us out of this forever war was a good  
18 one.

19 Secretary Austin, the President -- I want to move to a  
20 different topic -- the President has touted the Afghanistan  
21 pullout as necessary to free up time and money to deal with  
22 near-peer competitors like Russia and China, but that stated  
23 rationale is somewhat, I think, at odds with the  
24 administration's budget, which fails to align funding  
25 priorities with the lines of effort identified in the

1 INDOPACOM Pacific Deterrence Initiative.

2 Secretary Austin, I have brought this up before when we  
3 had a posture hearing. So you do not have to get into it  
4 now, but I would very much appreciate the efforts and where  
5 we are in terms of meeting the five lines of effort under  
6 the Pacific Deterrence Initiative. Could you provide us  
7 with that?

8 Secretary Austin: We can, and I would just add,  
9 Senator, that I have spent a fair amount of time with our  
10 combatant commander since we last talked. He has laid out  
11 his plans and his intent, and I am fully behind the effort  
12 that he wants to undertake. And so we look forward to  
13 discussing that with you.

14 Senator Hirono: Thank you. And along those same  
15 lines, nuclear disarmament talks with North Korea remain  
16 stalled, and I am concerned that steps taken by the DoD,  
17 including zeroing out funding for the Homeland Defense Radar  
18 Hawaii, HDRH, and objecting, just last week, to  
19 congressional action to reauthorize funds to keep that  
20 program on track put Hawaii at risk in the near future.

21 What is DoD's credible alternative to HDRH Hawaii,  
22 going forward? This is the second time that Congress has  
23 had to put back money for that radar. So what is the  
24 alternative that the DoD has that will protect Hawaii?

25 Secretary Austin: The capability that we currently

1 have, Hawaii is protected, and again, this is an issue that  
2 we continue to look at. And you can rest assured that  
3 Hawaii will not be unprotected.

4 Senator Hirono: Well, I know that we are protected as  
5 of today. I am looking at the future.

6 So a lot of us have concerns about what is going to  
7 happen to the Afghani women and girls with the Taliban  
8 coming back. I would be interested, Secretary Austin, to  
9 hear your perspective about concrete steps the U.S. can take  
10 to influence a future for Afghan women and girls that honors  
11 their human rights and freedoms.

12 Secretary Austin: Well, I certainly share your  
13 concern, Senator, and Taliban's track record on this is  
14 absolutely horrible. We will have to continue to -- we will  
15 have to work to use economic levers and also international  
16 pressure to hold the Taliban accountable for some of the  
17 things that they said they are going to do. And again, I  
18 think this will have to be an international effort to  
19 maintain pressure on the Taliban.

20 Senator Hirono: And at some point I think we would  
21 like to know specifically what kind of international efforts  
22 are bearing fruit with regard to what the Taliban is doing  
23 with women and girls in their country.

24 Regarding our relationship with Pakistan, so I think I  
25 will submit that for the record, because I know we are

1 trying to keep to 5 minutes. But the relationship with  
2 Pakistan going forward with regard to the Taliban.

3 Thank you.

4 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Hirono.

5 Senator Ernst, please.

6 Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair. General Milley,  
7 in a previous round we established that the withdrawal  
8 achieved no security conditions other than an unconditional  
9 withdrawal. We had to withdraw by a time certain, a date  
10 certain. And these are yes-or-no questions, please, General  
11 Miller. Has the military's task to defeat terror threats  
12 from Afghanistan gotten harder?

13 General Milley: Yes.

14 Senator Ernst: Does the Taliban and its other terror  
15 partners have more ability to train and prepare in  
16 Afghanistan now that we have left?

17 General Milley: More ability, yes.

18 Senator Ernst: Has President Biden or his policy staff  
19 provided any -- any -- updated guidance or direction for  
20 countering terror from Afghanistan?

21 General Milley: Yes.

22 Senator Ernst: Are we at a greater or lesser risk of  
23 terror attack from Afghanistan as a result of our  
24 withdrawal?

25 General Milley: Too early to tell.

1 Senator Ernst: Too early to tell.

2 General Milley: Yeah. I think we have got about --  
3 you know, to elaborate a little bit, we have probably got  
4 about 6 months here to really sort this out and see which  
5 direction things are going to go. It is not much time, but  
6 that is my personal estimate. It could be out to 12. And  
7 then we are going to have some indicators and warnings of  
8 what direction this is going to go. But that is where I  
9 would put it.

10 Senator Ernst: In the previous round -- and this is a  
11 comment -- but in the previous round each of you had  
12 admitted that your best recommendation was to leave a  
13 residual force in Afghanistan. Clearly the President  
14 disregarded that opinion, that recommendation, that advice.  
15 And I do believe that this has left us less safe.

16 A number of my colleagues have mentioned over-the-  
17 horizon. General McKenzie, you referenced the fact that we  
18 do not know yet how effective that will be. We do not have  
19 partners on the ground. We talked about the airspace that  
20 would have to be used for over-the-horizon capabilities.

21 There is still a terrorist threat in Afghanistan. Now  
22 on August 20th, President Biden had stated, "What interest  
23 do we have in Afghanistan at this point with Al Qaeda gone?"  
24 First, I did not recognize that Al Qaeda was gone. General  
25 McKenzie, is Al Qaeda gone?



1           General McKenzie: Senator, Al Qaeda still maintains a  
2 presence in Afghanistan.

3           Senator Ernst: And Secretary Blinken had said, on  
4 August 22nd, that "the threat of terrorism metastasized out  
5 of Afghanistan a long time ago." General McKenzie, is there  
6 any terrorist threat in Afghanistan now?

7           General McKenzie: What we see is ISIS nearly  
8 rejuvenated with the prisoners that came out of Harwan and  
9 Pul-e-Charkhi prison. You know, they are gathering their  
10 strength. We have yet to see how that is going to manifest  
11 itself. But we know for a certainty that they do aspire to  
12 attack us in our homeland, and we know the same for Al  
13 Qaeda. So that threat, it has metastasized, and it is  
14 resonant in other parts of the world. In my part of the  
15 world, though, it certainly is in Afghanistan.

16          Senator Ernst: Yes. And it has been reported that the  
17 top 22 officials of the new Taliban government are known  
18 associates of Al Qaeda, including five terrorists who were  
19 once imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay, and 13 more who were  
20 sanctioned by the U.N., the United Nations, as terrorists  
21 post-9/11. And I am very alarmed, Secretary Austin, that  
22 your Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Colin Kahl,  
23 claims there is a minimal threat. He called the terror  
24 threat from Afghanistan "insignificant" on a call with  
25 Senators less than a month ago.

1           He is wrong. I think all of you would admit he is  
2 wrong. The FBI Director even said that he was wrong last  
3 week. He is in denial or he is lying. I would hope that  
4 his testimony and comments are not indicative of your own  
5 thoughts, and if they are different, I just truly hope they  
6 are. Let us just leave it at that.

7           So if the Department of Defense cannot get their lead  
8 policy official off the couch, which is where he told me he  
9 was during closed testimony last week, that he was sitting  
10 on the couch, he did not really care what General Miller's  
11 opinion was, if that is the type of thought process that we  
12 put into decisions that are made at the Department of  
13 Defense, with this lead policy official, maybe he needs to  
14 go back to the couch.

15           I do think that there is still a threat in Afghanistan.  
16 I think we all need to acknowledge that, recognize it. Al  
17 Qaeda is not gone. I hope we all make that very clear to  
18 the President. And we will have to have additional  
19 discussions about over-the-horizon as things develop in the  
20 upcoming months.

21           Thank you, Mr. Chair.

22           Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Ernst.

23           Now let me recognize Senator Gillibrand, please.

24           Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In  
25 continuing on my line of questions from the first round,

1 Secretary Austin and General Milley, are you aware of any  
2 internal audits that are being conducted within the  
3 Department of Defense on the execution of the war over the  
4 last 20 years?

5 Secretary Austin: I am not, other than the AAR  
6 activity that we will conduct within the Department.

7 Senator Gillibrand: What is that?

8 Secretary Austin: After-action review.

9 Senator Gillibrand: And what will make up that review?

10 Secretary Austin: We will focus on, you know, the  
11 things that have occurred as a part of this latest  
12 operation. But I think your initial question was is there a  
13 review of the last 20 years --

14 Senator Gillibrand: Right.

15 Secretary Austin: -- and the answer to that is no.

16 Senator Gillibrand: And do you think a review of broad  
17 scope would be useful to the DoD and useful to policymakers  
18 in the future, particularly this Committee?

19 Secretary Austin: I do, Senator, and I also think  
20 that, as I mentioned earlier, that that should have an  
21 interagency flavor as well.

22 Senator Gillibrand: And do you have any  
23 recommendations for an external independent review of the  
24 war in Afghanistan. For example, what do you think  
25 Congress' role should be and how would such an audit be

1 conducted? What U.S. agencies, countries, and organizations  
2 should be included in the review of America's longest war?

3 Secretary Austin: Yeah, I do not have any  
4 recommendations at this point. I can certainly take that  
5 for the record, Senator.

6 Senator Gillibrand: I would be grateful for that.

7 Secretary Austin and General Milley, this is something  
8 that hits a little closer to home. A number of our  
9 diplomats, intelligence officers, and servicemembers who  
10 assisted with evacuation, including the 10th Mountain  
11 Division from Fort Drum, New York, were subjected to acute  
12 trauma and chronic stress, a problem we are not unfamiliar  
13 with after the last 20 years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq.

14 Families at Fort Drum have told my office it felt like  
15 a full deployment compressed into the time of a few weeks.  
16 Further, so many of our servicemembers have lost their lives  
17 to suicide, which has been devastating. What is DoD doing  
18 to ensure that our combat veterans and their families are  
19 getting adequate mental health assessment and the resources  
20 they need?

21 Secretary Austin: Well, thanks, Senator. I will make  
22 a comment and I will let General Milley comment as well. I  
23 think you asked him as well.

24 But you have heard me say before that, you know, my  
25 belief is that mental health is health, period, and there

1 should be no stigma associated with seeking help if you are  
2 dealing with issues. And I have encouraged the entire  
3 force, all of our leadership, to make sure that, number one,  
4 we have adequate resources available for our troops and our  
5 families, and number two, that they destigmatize the issue  
6 of assisting help with mental health issues.

7 General Milley: Senator, as you know, I commanded the  
8 10th Mountain Division, as well as Secretary Austin at one  
9 point, and that division is one of the most deployed  
10 divisions, along with the 101st Airborne Division out of  
11 Senator Blackburn's state. And there is significant mental  
12 health capability there to help the soldiers that were on  
13 this non-combatant evacuation, and they will get immediate  
14 assessments upon redeployment. It is the normal procedure.  
15 And then those that need counseling, it is there.

16 The key that we have to do is emphasize a culture of  
17 non-stigmatizing any sort of mental health issues that a  
18 soldier, sailor, airman, or Marine have, and so that they  
19 feel free they can seek out the counseling we have  
20 available.

21 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you. I would like to follow  
22 up on the line of questioning that Senator Ernst started.  
23 Can you describe for us the Al Qaeda threat today -- where  
24 it is located, where you believe it will be going, what the  
25 strength is compared to the strength over the last 20 years?

1 And please answer the question for ISIS, ISIS-K and other  
2 variations of ISIS across the world.

3 General Milley: You are asking me, Senator?

4 Senator Gillibrand: Yes. General Milley first and  
5 then Secretary Austin.

6 General Milley: Okay. So first, I think it would be  
7 good to handle it in some detail in the classified session,  
8 but in an unclassified session I would say that the Al Qaeda  
9 threat, globally, is still there. The threat in Afghanistan  
10 has an opportunity now to potentially reconstitute, although  
11 it has been ripped apart pretty steadily over 20 years. And  
12 Al Qaeda has displaced to other parts of the world, with  
13 their affiliates in East Africa, for example, al-Shabab, or  
14 AQAP down in Yemen, also in the Maghreb, et cetera.

15 So there are several affiliates worldwide, some of  
16 which are quite capable and definitely have aspirations to  
17 attack the United States.

18 With respect to ISIS, we saw ISIS core in Iraq and Iran  
19 and all that. That was all ripped apart, but they still  
20 exist up there, by the way. And ISIS has found a new home  
21 in parts of Afghanistan, although right now they are at war,  
22 essentially, with the Taliban. But ISIS has affiliates as  
23 well, in other parts of the world, because of their  
24 brutality.

25 So there are other regions of the world which have high

1 concentrations of very lethal terrorist organizations that  
2 have aspirations to conduct operations against the United  
3 States, and we have operations and intelligence,  
4 surveillance, reconnaissance, et cetera, in all of those  
5 parts, to continue to watch that. But it has moved in  
6 various parts, and we can cover that in some detail in the  
7 classified session, if that is okay.

8 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you. Thank you, Mr.  
9 Chairman. I will pursue both questions in the classified  
10 setting.

11 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Gillibrand.

12 Senator Tillis, please.

13 Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 General Milley and General McKenzie, I ran out of time  
15 before I could thank you for some of the work that your  
16 staff did in August. We were working several cases. I was  
17 involved. I remember a conversation with one of your staff,  
18 General McKenzie, at about 3:00 in the morning, while we  
19 were trying to shepherd someone out, and we did get them out  
20 successfully, along with some American citizens.

21 But unfortunately we have a much longer list of people  
22 that we were not successful with getting out. Between SIV  
23 holders and family members, my office alone has over 900  
24 people still on a list of people who are still in  
25 Afghanistan. And we communicate with these people through

1 WhatsApp. We were trying to shepherd them to HKIA and then  
2 back and forth, and ultimately operations were shut down and  
3 they were stranded and left behind.

4 So what role -- and, Secretary Austin, maybe I will  
5 start with you -- what role, if any -- and actually, before  
6 I ask that, on the mental health issue, we were working with  
7 a Marine who was trying to get an interpreter out, had been  
8 maintaining contact for years. We had all the  
9 authenticating documentation. We were not successful in  
10 that case. That Marine committed suicide about 3 weeks ago,  
11 a retired Marine. So this is having real-life consequences,  
12 not only in Afghanistan but here in the United States.

13 So, Secretary Austin, what role, if any, does the DoD  
14 play in helping us draw down this list of people that we  
15 believe we have documentation that suggests they should  
16 somehow get shepherded out of Afghanistan?

17 Secretary Austin: Senator, first of all, my deepest  
18 condolences on the loss of our Marine. I am really saddened  
19 to hear that. Thoughts and prayers to his family.

20 DoD continues to work as a part of the cell that you  
21 may have heard me mentioned earlier, that is actually run,  
22 or headed up by the State Department, and Ambassador John  
23 Bass is running that. And we are trying to pull in as much  
24 information from every corner that we can and refine lists,  
25 and refine contact information so that we can reach out and



1 make sure that people have the right credentials to be able  
2 to leave the country.

3 And so we continue to work as a part of the State  
4 effort on this issue.

5 Senator Tillis: I think it would be helpful to find  
6 out what our point of contact was. It was literally me  
7 reaching somebody to see if they could help me or moving it  
8 up the chain of command to where I was able to personally  
9 intervene in several cases.

10 General Milley and General McKenzie, some people have  
11 said we are glad that we have ended this war. Is the war on  
12 terror over? General Milley?

13 General Milley: Absolutely not.

14 Senator Tillis: General McKenzie?

15 General McKenzie: The war on terror is not over, and  
16 the war in Afghanistan is not over either.

17 Senator Tillis: Has the exit from Afghanistan made the  
18 war more challenging for us or less challenging, with  
19 respect to continuing to try and protect the homeland and  
20 U.S. interests abroad?

21 General McKenzie: Senator, it has made it more  
22 challenging.

23 Senator Tillis: General Milley, do you agree?

24 General Milley: Yeah, absolutely.

25 Senator Tillis: A related note. A Wall Street Journal

1 article published on August 31st said, "U.S. official  
2 acknowledge the military has lost 90 percent of the  
3 intelligence collection capabilities it had using drones  
4 before the drawdown." Do you agree with that?

5 General Milley: I did not see the report. It said --  
6 say again what it said?

7 Senator Tillis: It said that we have lost 90 percent  
8 of our intelligence collection capabilities it had using  
9 drones before the drawdown.

10 General Milley: I would have to go look at the actual  
11 math. I have got my J-2 actually doing that right now, to  
12 determine the level of ISR assets and the statistics. It is  
13 significant. I do not know if it is 90 percent.

14 Senator Tillis: On the SIVs and folks that are  
15 stranded in Afghanistan, is it fair to say that our human  
16 intelligence network, given the current status and fact that  
17 many were left behind, is it fair to say that that has been  
18 stressed even more so than our drone surveillance  
19 capabilities? I mean, do we have much in the way of human  
20 intelligence on the ground in Afghanistan today?

21 General Milley: We can explain that, I think, in good  
22 detail in a classified session --

23 Senator Tillis: Okay.

24 General Milley: -- but there is still, yes.

25 Senator Tillis: Back to Secretary Austin, I think it

1 is so important for us to show that we are going to move  
2 heaven and earth to try and get these other out of  
3 Afghanistan, because this not only has an impact in  
4 Afghanistan, it has an impact anywhere. You know, SIVs are  
5 not unique to Afghanistan. People working with us, human  
6 intelligence on the ground keeping our forces safe, is  
7 something that standard operating procedure in a lot of  
8 dangerous areas.

9 So I hope that we recognize that we owe it to the  
10 people of Afghanistan, but we owe it to our men and women in  
11 uniform to get this right. Thank you.

12 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Tillis.

13 Now let me recognize Senator Warren.

14 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General  
15 Milley, our military executed a massive operation during the  
16 month of August. As I understand it, it was larger than the  
17 Berlin airlift. For the record, can you just tell us how  
18 many Americans you evacuated?

19 General Milley: Almost 6,000. I can get you a precise  
20 number for the record, but it was about 6,000.

21 Senator Warren: Let us get the right number for the  
22 record, but that is helpful. And how many people, in total,  
23 did the U.S. and coalition forces evacuate?

24 General Milley: 124,000 total. 44,000 went out on  
25 non-U.S. aircraft and the rest came out on U.S. aircraft.

1           Senator Warren: Okay. An extraordinary effort, but  
2 still it is hard to get everyone out.

3           General Milley: The largest airlift in history.

4           Senator Warren: Right. Hard to get everyone out. One  
5 problem, of course, is that there were so many Afghan SIV  
6 applicants in Kabul waiting to be evacuated because the  
7 Trump administration had essentially shut the program down.

8           Withdrawal was a massive operation, conducted in a  
9 chaotic, unpredictable environment, and some people have  
10 criticized you for leaving on August 31st. But I just want  
11 to explore that for a minute. General Milley, once the  
12 Afghan government collapsed in August, would you say that  
13 staying past the date of their collapse would have exposed  
14 the force on the ground to substantial and additional risk?

15           General Milley: Yes, and that is exactly what we  
16 assessed, that if we stayed past the 31st the risk to force,  
17 U.S. military casualties, the risk to the mission, the  
18 ability to continue to execute the NEO, and most  
19 importantly, the risk to the Americans citizens that are  
20 still there was going to go to, we assess, very high levels,  
21 and we thought that that was a level of risk that was  
22 unacceptable.

23           Senator Warren: Okay. And just so I am sure and  
24 everybody has got this on the record, so if we had stayed  
25 another week or two or three then it is likely there would

1 have been another attack that killed American  
2 servicemembers. Is that what you are saying?

3 General Milley: I would say that that is a near  
4 certainty.

5 Senator Warren: All right. For years, we poured money  
6 into the Afghan government, and for years we trained their  
7 army, we outfitted them with all the best American  
8 equipment, we provided them with overwhelming air power.  
9 Even so, both the Afghan government and the army collapsed  
10 almost instantaneously. So General Milley, let me ask you,  
11 given how quickly the Afghan government and the Afghan army  
12 collapsed, do you think that either or both would have been  
13 able to stand on their own with just another few months or  
14 another few years of American assistance and training?

15 General Milley: I think at this point that is  
16 unknowable, but my estimate at the time was if you kept  
17 advisors there, kept money flowing, et cetera, that we  
18 probably could have sustained them for a lengthy or  
19 indefinite period of time. Whether or not you would have  
20 had a different result at the end of the day that is a  
21 different question.

22 Senator Warren: You know, when I hear you say that it  
23 reminds me of all the years that I have sat now in the  
24 Senate Armed Services Committee and how many times the  
25 generals have come in front of us, and when you point out

1 every way in which the Afghan government was failing and  
2 Afghan army was failing, the generals respond with, "But we  
3 are turning the corner now."

4 General Milley: I did not say we were turning the  
5 corner, Senator. I said we could sustain them.

6 Senator Warren: And that we would be able to keep  
7 them, and somehow, when we got ready to withdraw, they would  
8 be so well sustained that they would not have collapsed  
9 instantaneously, the way they did after 20 years of  
10 sustenance and training?

11 General Milley: Well, I think the end state probably  
12 would have been the same no matter when you did it.

13 Senator Warren: Well, you know, I believe that leaving  
14 a force behind would have necessitated that force staying  
15 indefinitely.

16 General Milley: That is right.

17 Senator Warren: And many of those servicemembers would  
18 have been exposed to unnecessary risk and harm.

19 General Milley: That is exactly right.

20 Senator Warren: We agree. And I also just want to  
21 say, this week we will have our fifth hearing on Afghanistan  
22 in the 8 months since President Biden took office. During  
23 the Trump years, as the Afghan government and the Afghan  
24 army racked up one failure after another, the Republicans  
25 seemed far less interested in this topic, holding one public

1 hearing a year. The Republicans' sudden interest in  
2 Afghanistan is plain old politics. It is not the kind of  
3 oversight that we should have been exercising in years past.

4 So thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this hearing.

5 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Warren.

6 Senator Sullivan, please.

7 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and just to  
8 my colleague's statement, it is a little bit rich coming  
9 from one of my colleagues on this committee who wants to gut  
10 the military and its readiness. But that is a whole other  
11 issue.

12 I want to get back to my line of questioning from this  
13 morning, and I will tell you again, gentlemen, I have never  
14 seen so much anger, at least from my constituents, who  
15 witnesses a fiasco, a humiliation, a President who is  
16 consistently telling falsehoods to the American people and  
17 the issues that there is no accountability.

18 And you, gentlemen, have spent decades serving your  
19 country, honorably in combat. I have the utmost respect for  
20 your service, your fidelity to America. And, importantly,  
21 you have dedicated your lives to an institution that has a  
22 culture of strict accountability and responsibility up and  
23 down the ranks. I mentioned a few examples this morning,  
24 the collisions of the U.S.S. McCain and Fitzgerald.  
25 Everybody up and down the ranks, including the three-star

1 admiral, was relieved. The recent, very tragic, Marine AAV  
2 accident -- everybody up and down the ranks, including the  
3 commanding general of the 1st Marine Division was relieved.  
4 If you are a Marine or Army second lieutenant training your  
5 platoon on patrol and one of your soldiers loses his NVGs or  
6 his rifle, that lieutenant is going to get relieved.

7 But on this issue, one of the biggest national security  
8 fiascos in a generation, no one is accountable, and the  
9 American people are livid because they saw it. They see it.  
10 They know it is a debacle.

11 General Milley, this morning you called the Afghan  
12 retrograde a logistical success but, quote, "a strategic  
13 failure." I appreciate your honest assessment. I believe  
14 the President of the United States is solely responsible for  
15 this.

16 Mr. Secretary, do you know if anyone -- the National  
17 Security Advisor, the Secretary of State, or Under Secretary  
18 for Policy of DoD -- has offered their resignation to take  
19 responsible for this fiasco?

20 Secretary Austin: I do not.

21 Senator Sullivan: Okay.

22 Secretary Austin: I do not, but I do not believe they  
23 have.

24 Senator Sullivan: Okay. Thank you. Given the  
25 military culture of accountability that all of you gentlemen



1 come from -- and again, I respect that more than almost  
2 anybody -- have any of you offered your resignation to the  
3 President at any time since his decision to withdraw? And  
4 General Milley, I understand your earlier answer to this  
5 question that senior military advisors and officers cannot  
6 resign every time they disagree with the President. I  
7 actually agree with that. But after the President's  
8 decision, when the American people see such a strategic  
9 failure, as you called it, that is undermining our national  
10 security, they expect accountability, and there has been  
11 none. So have any of you accepted that accountability or  
12 responsibility?

13 General Milley: I am accountable for my actions, and  
14 --

15 Senator Sullivan: No. I am just talking about a  
16 resignation.

17 General Milley: I have not submitted my letter of  
18 resignation.

19 Senator Sullivan: Mr. Secretary?

20 Secretary Austin: No.

21 Senator Sullivan: General?

22 General McKenzie: I have not submitted a letter of  
23 resignation.

24 Senator Sullivan: Mr. Secretary, I want to know, what  
25 will it take for someone, anyone, in the Biden

1 administration to take responsibility or accountability for  
2 this national security fiasco? Anyone.

3 Secretary Austin: Senator, from a DoD perspective,  
4 again, you heard me say that we will continue to review our  
5 actions, and we will not hesitate to be critical of  
6 ourselves. And if there is someone that should be held  
7 accountable for an action then we will certainly do that.

8 Senator Sullivan: I want to switch topics here very  
9 quickly. General Milley, do you think if the Chinese  
10 Communist Party decided to invade Taiwan, would their  
11 military leadership call and give you a heads-up?

12 General Milley: I think there would be a period of  
13 increased tension, indicators, and warnings, and I think  
14 there would be an exchange of various communications at all  
15 levels, Department of State and --

16 Senator Sullivan: Do you really think --

17 General Milley: -- and I think --

18 Senator Sullivan: Do you really think the Chinese  
19 Communist Party, head of the PLA, would call and say, "Hey,  
20 General, FYI, we are going to get ready to invade Taiwan. I  
21 just thought I would give you a heads-up"? Do you honestly  
22 think that?

23 General Milley: I know I would call him and ask him.

24 Senator Sullivan: No, I am asking --

25 General Milley: I would call him and ask him outright.

1           Senator Sullivan: Do you think he would give you a  
2 heads-up --

3           General Milley: I think --

4           Senator Sullivan: -- on the invasion of Taiwan?

5           General Milley: -- I think an invasion of Taiwan would  
6 be a fairly obvious thing to pick up on, and there would be  
7 a lot of communications --

8           Senator Sullivan: No, that is not what I asked.

9           General Milley: -- going back and forth.

10          Senator Sullivan: Let me ask a related question.

11          General Milley: Sure.

12          Senator Sullivan: I think the answer to that is no. I  
13 think if the PLA called you and said, "Hey, we are getting  
14 ready to invade Taiwan," and Xi Jinping found out about it,  
15 he would be shot. But let me ask a related question.

16          You said you were, quote, "certain that President Trump  
17 did not intend on attacking China." That is what you just  
18 said.

19          General Milley: That is correct.

20          Senator Sullivan: Yet you are quoted in the Woodward  
21 book as telling the top Chinese communist military  
22 commander, quote, "If we are going to attack, I am going to  
23 call you ahead of time." Is that true, General Milley?

24          General Milley: Let me tell you what I actually said.

25          Senator Sullivan: So that is not true. I hope that is

1 not true.

2 General Milley: Let me tell you what I actually said,  
3 Senator. What I said, if there is going to be a war, if  
4 there is going to be an attack, there are going to be a lot  
5 of calls and tension ahead of time.

6 Senator Sullivan: But what you --

7 General Milley: And you are going to get calls.

8 Senator Sullivan: -- said in your testimony was that  
9 you were --

10 General Milley: You are going to get calls.

11 Senator Sullivan: -- you thought President Trump would  
12 not attack. That was your testimony this morning.

13 General Milley: That is true. That is absolutely  
14 true.

15 Senator Sullivan: Okay. Then why would you --

16 General Milley: And I was communicating to my Chinese  
17 counterpart on instructions, by the way, to de-escalate the  
18 situation. And I told him that we are not going to attack.  
19 President Trump has no intent to attack. And I told him  
20 that repeatedly, and I told him if there was going to be an  
21 attack there will be plenty of communications going back and  
22 forth, your intel systems are going to pick it up. I said,  
23 "I will probably call you. Everybody will be calling you.  
24 We are not going to attack you. Just settle down. It is  
25 not going to happen." And I did it twice, in October and

1 January.

2 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Sullivan.

3 Senator Sullivan: You are giving a heads-up to the  
4 Chinese Communist Party --

5 General Milley: I did not give him a heads-up we were  
6 going to attack because we were not going to attack. I was  
7 telling him we were not going to attack --

8 Senator Sullivan: If we are going to attack I am going  
9 to call you ahead of time.

10 Chairman Reed: Senator Sullivan?

11 General Milley: -- which was the President of the  
12 United States' intent.

13 Chairman Reed: Time.

14 General Milley: I was being faithful to his intent,  
15 Senator.

16 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much.

17 Senator Peters, please.

18 Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 Secretary Austin, in your confirmation hearing you  
20 spoke focusing on our shared interest with Pakistan. A  
21 readout from your August call with Pakistan's chief of army  
22 staff contained some similar language that you expressed.

23 My question to you, could you please elaborate for this  
24 committee on what you view as our shared interest with  
25 Pakistan today? And I am particularly in how this relates

1 with the Pakistani government's relationship with the  
2 Taliban, now that the Taliban are in power in Afghanistan.

3 Secretary Austin: Well, thanks, Senator. I think that  
4 one key shared interest is the prevention of a humanitarian  
5 disaster in Afghanistan or in the region, and so I think we  
6 will continue to share that interest. I do think there is  
7 some intersection in terms of certain types of terrorist  
8 activity that I think we can both remain focused on. And  
9 again, an in-depth conversation about Pakistan probably  
10 would be better suited in a closed hearing.

11 Senator Peters: Very well. I understand that there  
12 were certain airplanes, helicopters, and ground vehicles  
13 that were disabled as forces left and as the Afghan forces  
14 were overrun. And right now I do not want to talk about the  
15 operability of a Humvee or an MRAP or the pictures we saw of  
16 Taliban sitting on grounded C-130s. What concerns me more  
17 is the potential for our strategic adversaries to have some  
18 time and space to examine the technology inside those  
19 vehicles, to find vulnerabilities. Even if a system has  
20 been disabled, in some ways destroyed, reverse engineering  
21 can still be used on those systems and can provide  
22 information to sophisticated adversaries that may get a hold  
23 of this. And as all of you know, we harden our supply  
24 chains to protect military technology. It is a matter of  
25 national security.

1           So my question for you, Secretary Austin, is the  
2 Department now conducting an extensive counterintelligence  
3 assessment of equipment to get a sense of what might be  
4 reverse engineered and how do we protect against any use of  
5 that information against our forces?

6           Secretary Austin: We will continue to assess what is  
7 exploitable, Senator. I would flag for you that all of this  
8 equipment is not high-end equipment. You know, again,  
9 equipment that we had for our use was retrograded as General  
10 Miller drew down the retrograded equipment and drew down our  
11 forces.

12           I would also like to flag for you, sir, that while the  
13 number, \$84 billion, has been bounced about quite a bit,  
14 that is the number that we invested in Afghan Security  
15 Forces over a 20-year period of time, and less than 20  
16 percent of that was dedicated towards Afghan equipment.  
17 Most of that money was focused on sustainment and salaries  
18 and those types of things.

19           Senator Peters: General McKenzie, if you could go back  
20 in time and change one thing about the strategy in the last  
21 6 months of operations in Afghanistan, which could have  
22 alleviated some of the chaos that we saw at the end, what  
23 would it be?

24           General McKenzie: In the last 6 months, Senator, would  
25 of course infer that decisions made were going to zero. I

1 go back to, could we have gotten more people out earlier in  
2 the process. By that I mean U.S. citizens. And I know the  
3 embassy put out at least a dozen notices to U.S. citizens to  
4 leave. I know that the ambassador was very aggressive on  
5 that. But I would have liked to maybe have seen done more  
6 there, more done in that regard.

7         Additionally perhaps to try to get more of the SIV  
8 population out. But, Senator, I think we need to recognize  
9 that if you are asking the Afghans to fight, and, at the  
10 same time you are bringing out the best and the brightest,  
11 that is clearly a conflicting message that you are sending  
12 them. So I do not say that lightly or recognize there would  
13 not be inherent risk in taking that course of action.

14         Senator Peters: So there would have been risk doing  
15 those things.

16         General McKenzie: There would have been, in my  
17 judgment, yes, but that is the way that we could have -- you  
18 know, we could have been more forceful with our citizens,  
19 although, you know, there are very strict limitations on  
20 what you can say or do to an American citizen abroad, for  
21 good reason. So I think, you know, you have got to trust  
22 the good judgment of the people, of the American citizens  
23 that are in Afghanistan.

24         Senator Peters: Right. Thank you. Thank you, Mr.  
25 Chairman.



1 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Peters.

2 Senator Cramer, please.

3 Senator Cramer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary  
4 Austin, why did the committee not get the testimony for  
5 today until 10:35 last night? Were you guys not prepared?

6 Secretary Austin: We were prepared, and again, I do  
7 not know the specifics of what last-minute adjustments were  
8 being made at what level. But we were prepared.

9 Senator Cramer: Well, it must not have been a level  
10 below you then or you would be aware of it, right? So it  
11 would have to be a level above you. In other words, did the  
12 White House withhold your testimony? General Milley, did  
13 you have your testimony done before 10:35 last night?

14 General Milley: We did, but the White House was not  
15 withholding my testimony, no.

16 Senator Cramer: Who was?

17 General Milley: Nobody. You have to submit -- when  
18 you submit written documents, as you well know, you have to  
19 submit them to OMB.

20 Senator Cramer: Right.

21 General Milley: They reviewed them in the afternoon.  
22 We got them back, I do not know, 1800, 1900, something like  
23 that, and then we made the changes and submitted them. And  
24 yes, we were late.

25 Senator Cramer: But it was not you?

1 General Milley: No.

2 Senator Cramer: It was OMB --

3 General Milley: There was not any intent to block.

4 Senator Cramer: Yeah. It was somebody's strategy, is  
5 my guess. It just might not have been yours. But it  
6 clearly was somebody's.

7 General McKenzie, about a half hour ago you said, "We  
8 know for certain ISIS intends to attack us at home," or  
9 something to that effect, right? Is that correct?

10 General McKenzie: That is correct.

11 Senator Cramer: So 20 years ago, on September 11th,  
12 when the terrorist hijackers took over four aircraft and  
13 attacked the homeland, all of them came here on a visa.  
14 Correct? Now in the last 20 years, Al Qaeda, ISIS, Taliban,  
15 they have not acquired ICBMs or a navy or an air force, as  
16 far as we know. So if they are going to carry out that  
17 intent they are going to have to get here themselves, and  
18 that means either through a visa program or as refugees  
19 across the southern border.

20 My question to all of you is, is not national security  
21 tied directly to good immigration security, and do you feel  
22 like we are adequately prepared to protect the homeland from  
23 visa holders and refugees?

24 General McKenzie: Senator, in the case of ISIS I think  
25 we have done a remarkable job over the last two decades

1 about hardening the entry process and making it very  
2 difficult for them to get their agents into the United  
3 States, and that is a matter of record, just based on  
4 performance. The same thing with AQ. The larger discussion  
5 about immigration I would defer to the Secretary in the  
6 Department.

7 Senator Cramer: But I would submit to you that as good  
8 as the work that has been done in the last 20 years, the  
9 last 6 or 7 months it has been pretty well degraded, I would  
10 say. Others? Is immigration policy pretty important to  
11 national security?

12 Secretary Austin: It absolutely is, Senator, and  
13 again, I would not want to -- again, that is the domain of  
14 Secretary Mayorkas, and I know that he and the interagency  
15 are continuing to work that very hard.

16 Senator Cramer: All right. According to a CENTCOM  
17 press release, General -- this is a quote -- "Post-strike  
18 reflections indicate that Kabir Aidi was directly connected  
19 to the ISIS-K leaders that coordinated the August 26th  
20 attack at the airport." The way I read that, the actual  
21 ISIS-K leaders who coordinated the attack are still out  
22 there. Is that true?

23 General McKenzie: I would prefer to talk about it in a  
24 private setting.

25 Senator Cramer: I thought you might. I look forward

1 to that and I yield back.

2 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Cramer.

4 Now let me recognize Senator Duckworth, please.

5 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 Mr. Secretary, I just wanted to say thank you. I just  
7 received a letter this morning in response to a letter I had  
8 written to you and Secretary Blinken asking about the  
9 process of certifying that somebody did work for the DoD as  
10 a contractor, and I do want to say that the response is a  
11 good one. I think you have made, with regards to Project  
12 Rabbit, which I will give you a couple of minutes to talk  
13 about, but it seems that you have reviewed over 7,800  
14 employment records and matched over 3,400 of those PRECOM  
15 applicants. Would you like to talk about Operation Rabbit  
16 for just a little bit?

17 Secretary Austin: Well, only to say that, you know, I  
18 mentioned earlier, Senator, that when this question came up  
19 that this is important to us. We think we have to do  
20 everything we can to shorten the amount of time that it  
21 takes for somebody who has worked with us before to be able  
22 to verify that they have worked with us. We are going to  
23 continue to work on this, and again, one of my major  
24 directorates is focused on this. And we will work with the  
25 committee on this if you have further requirements. But

1 thanks for your support in this regard.

2 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, and I know each one of  
3 us probably does have folks who have contacted our office  
4 seeking help in verifying their employment as a contractor,  
5 not just under DoD but also with State.

6 I would like to shift gears a little bit and talk about  
7 Mark Frerichs. Although military operations have ended, an  
8 Illinoian and a veteran of the U.S. Navy, Mr. Mark Frerichs  
9 is still being held hostage in Afghanistan. He was abducted  
10 in Kabul on January 31st of last year, and while he has been  
11 held captive too long, recent reporting in Newsweek  
12 indicates Taliban willingness to engage on his release.

13 Anas Haqqani, a senior Taliban official, confirmed that  
14 U.S. and Taliban negotiators have discussed my constituents  
15 and said about the prospect of a deal to secure Mr.  
16 Frerichs' freedom, quote, "There are attempts between the  
17 political bureau and the United States envoy which we hope  
18 will be successful in this regards. We must continue to  
19 press for Mr. Frerichs' swift and safe return. This must be  
20 a priority for our government." And in August, a Pentagon  
21 spokesperson stated the DoD is laser-focused on returning  
22 him home safely to his family and where he belongs.

23 And Secretary Austin, I know from our numerous  
24 conversations, including just yesterday, about my  
25 constituent, that you have been personally involved in

1 attempting to secure his return, both in your engagements  
2 with your counterparts in the region and your role as a  
3 member of the Principals Committee at the National Security  
4 Council.

5 Can you please update me on your discussions regarding  
6 Mr. Frerichs with your foreign counterparts as well as your  
7 interagency partners in our government? And I know his  
8 family is probably watching this testimony today.

9 Secretary Austin: As you have indicated, Senator, I  
10 want him back. And, you know, we are going to continue to  
11 do everything we can to get him back. As you and I have  
12 talked in other sessions, you know, I have engaged the chief  
13 of the Pakistani army on multiple occasions to solicit his  
14 help. I have engaged other senior leadership, Qataris, for  
15 example, to use their influence to see if they can help us  
16 there.

17 We will remain focused on this. You know, this is -- I  
18 am hopeful that we could see some daylight, some movement  
19 here in the future. I do not have anything to offer you in  
20 terms of specific readouts from the interagency process, and  
21 I defer to Mr. Sullivan to provide commentary there.

22 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Secretary, and I  
23 appreciate your commitment to getting Mr. Frerichs home.

24 I am, however, frustrated by how little information  
25 there has been made available to congressional staff and

1 others when it comes to everyone who is trying to get allies  
2 out of Afghanistan. General Milley, I understand from  
3 public reporting that you have been working with some  
4 veterans groups and some other NGOs who have been  
5 voluntarily offering their help in the continued effort to  
6 evacuate Americans and at-risk Afghans from Afghanistan.  
7 Can you share any details with us and the public today about  
8 that effort?

9 General Milley: Yes. So what we did, Senator, is we  
10 did a little bit of outreach to some of the groups that are  
11 probably well-known to folks in this room, had them in for  
12 some sessions in the Defense Department to get coordinated  
13 so we could have a common operating picture of what SIVs,  
14 what P-1, P-2s, and what American citizens, most  
15 importantly, are still there, try to get the information in  
16 a single database, et cetera, from the various groups.

17 In addition to that, get them linked into Ambassador  
18 Bass, because he is the single focal point with the  
19 Department of State, which we have done that now. And we  
20 have a joint staff general officer who is involved in that  
21 working group with them, and he is our liaison and brings  
22 them all together in order to get all the information, in  
23 order to develop course of action to help bring out  
24 additional American citizens and others.

25 Senator Duckworth: Thank you. Will you commit to

1 communicating with me and all of Congress about this  
2 partnership so we can help facilitate the connections with  
3 these people who still remain at risk and are contacting us  
4 through our various offices?

5 General Milley: I will. It is being run by the  
6 Department of State, but I will work with the Department of  
7 State to make sure that they get it over to you, yes.

8 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

9 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Duckworth.

10 Let me recognize Senator Scott, please.

11 Senator Scott: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

12 General Milley, why would you, as the sitting Chairman  
13 of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, talk to a reporter that is  
14 writing a book about a prior administration? Why would that  
15 be part of your job description?

16 General Milley: Well, as Senator Blackburn said  
17 earlier, I deal with the media routinely. Two, three, four  
18 times a week I am talking to the media, and the media,  
19 whether it is books, TV news, reporters, we have a lot of  
20 media here, I think it is very, very important to make sure  
21 that senior officials talk to the media in all of its  
22 various forms in order to explain what we are doing.

23 Senator Scott: But you are talking about what happened  
24 in the past.

25 General Milley: Sure, past --



1           Senator Scott: Why would you do that? I mean, what is  
2 the upside to the American public of you talking to -- you  
3 know, you have sensitive information --

4           General Milley: Sure.

5           Senator Scott: -- you have a full-time job, and then  
6 you go and talk about the prior administration. I just do  
7 not get it. It does not make any sense to me. If the media  
8 wants to ask you about what we are doing right now,  
9 something like that, I get it, but the prior administration,  
10 why would you do that?

11          General Milley: I think it is important to make sure  
12 that the American people are transparent with what our  
13 government does. That is all. Nothing more complicated  
14 than that.

15          Senator Scott: So it has been reported you discussed  
16 sensitive information, including private conversations you  
17 had with the prior President with these reporters. How is  
18 that consistent with your testimony today that you will not  
19 talk about any conversations you have had with the  
20 President. You will only talk about what your position is.  
21 But it has been reported, by these reporters, that you have  
22 told them exactly the conversations you had with the prior  
23 President. Does that seem inconsistent?

24          General Milley: I am not so sure about what they are  
25 reporting about what I said in private conversations, et

1 cetera. I do not share private conversations with the  
2 President, with this President, former President, any  
3 President, period.

4 Senator Scott: So what these reporters are saying is  
5 completely untrue.

6 General Milley: I am not going to say whether they are  
7 -- I do not even know what they have written. I have not  
8 read their books. But I can tell you that I do not share my  
9 personal conversations with the President, period.

10 Senator Scott: So Senator Sullivan was asking about  
11 this conversation about whether you would give prior notice  
12 to the military in Communist China that America was going to  
13 attack. So is it your testimony you will not ever give a  
14 heads-up to the Communist Chinese military if the President  
15 of the United States -- it does not matter who the President  
16 is that you are reporting -- is ready to attack?

17 General Milley: Of course I would not.

18 Senator Scott: I mean, you do not feel like you did  
19 that at all?

20 General Milley: No. The context we were talking  
21 about, Senator, there was a significant degree of  
22 intelligence, and I think I put the unclassified versions in  
23 that timeline. It is not insignificant. It is not like one  
24 report or two. It is an entire body of intelligence that  
25 led us to believe that the Chinese were misinterpreting our

1 actions and misinterpreting what was happening inside our  
2 own country, politically, and they were assessing a  
3 situation that was leading to escalation, possible incident,  
4 and it would have been quite dangerous.

5 So Secretary Esper and I met, and we met with other  
6 members of the team, and we developed an engagement plan to  
7 ensure that we engaged at various levels. Secretary Esper  
8 had his DASD do it and he asked me to do it, so I did that.  
9 And I made a call, and the theme was to de-escalate, to  
10 lower tensions. And I believe that is a faithful and loyal  
11 execution of my constitutional responsibilities, and I  
12 believe that was faithfully executing the intent of the  
13 President of the United States at the time, because I knew  
14 -- I knew, with certainty, that President Trump was not  
15 going to attack the Chinese, just out of the blue. It was  
16 not going to happen. And if things did happen there would  
17 be periods of tension, calls going back and forth.

18 Senator Scott: I have one more question. It has been  
19 reported that you had concerns about the prior President's  
20 fitness for office. Do you have a criteria for Presidents,  
21 and have you reviewed the existing President, President  
22 Biden, for his fitness for office, or do you think that way?  
23 Do you think you have the ability to have a right to make  
24 those decisions, and have you been doing that?

25 General Milley: I am not qualified to evaluate the

1 mental fitness or the health of the former President,  
2 present President, or anybody else, or anybody in this room.  
3 That is not my job. That is not what I do, and that is not  
4 what I did. There was a lot of speculation going on, but I  
5 do not evaluate people's health and fitness. That is not my  
6 job.

7 Senator Scott: Okay. How did you feel when President  
8 Biden attacked the willingness of the Afghan military to  
9 fight? How did that make you feel?

10 General Milley: How did I feel --

11 Senator Scott: Yeah, when he went and attacked -- he  
12 said he did not think the Afghan military had the  
13 willingness to fight. As a military officer, how does that  
14 make you feel? I mean, something that you put your life on  
15 the line --

16 General Milley: I think the Afghan military sacrificed  
17 -- I mean, there were 60,000 or 70,000 Afghans that were  
18 killed in action over the last 20 years, defending their  
19 country, and I personally have witnessed to units that  
20 fought, fought well, and fought bravely, and gave their life  
21 for their country. But I would also say, at the same time,  
22 that over the summer, in those 11 days, the vast majority of  
23 the Afghan units put their weapons down, and they  
24 surrendered without a fight. Kabul was taken with a couple  
25 hundred guys on motorcycles and there was not a shot fired.

1           So my question to myself is how did we miss that? What  
2 happened? How did that happen? And that is one of the  
3 things we have got to figure out. How is it that an army of  
4 that size -- they were trained, they were manned, they were  
5 equipped, et cetera -- how is it that the factors of will  
6 and leadership and morale just collapsed like that? And we  
7 have to answer that to ourselves. But the Afghan army  
8 fought for their country for 20 years and lost a lot of  
9 people.

10           Senator Scott: Thank you, Chairman.

11           Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Scott.

12           Senator Rosen, please.

13           Senator Rosen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank for  
14 being here with us throughout this long day.

15           You know, I just want to speak about how, as Americans,  
16 we are really frustrated, all of us, about the way we  
17 withdrew from Afghanistan, but we, nonetheless, understand  
18 the difficult position that you and our men and women in  
19 uniform, on the ground, were, the position you were in last  
20 month.

21           So what the American people fail to understand,  
22 however, and what I, too, have difficulty accepting, is the  
23 idea that the circumstances we found ourselves in were  
24 inevitable. So I would like to ask about a few areas where  
25 perhaps we might have taken a different approach that could

1 have given us more time to accomplish the mission.

2 General McKenzie, why was it always the responsibility  
3 of the U.S. and coalition forces or contractors to maintain  
4 Afghan aircraft and equipment, and why were the Afghan  
5 forces either not trained or not given this responsibility  
6 over the last 20 years?

7 General McKenzie: So I think you begin with the basic  
8 technological literacy of the country, which began when we  
9 first had dealing with them, in 2001. You know, you are  
10 talking to people who are coming out of rule by the Taliban,  
11 in position of Sharia law, a Stone Age approach to these  
12 things. You cannot impose technological literacy quickly.  
13 So that is why it took a long time, and we were still not  
14 finished with the Afghan air force.

15 And, you know, there is a lot of contract maintenance  
16 done for a lot of air forces around the world. The Afghan  
17 air force is not unique in that regard, although in this  
18 case it was particularly telling because they were so  
19 dependent on it.

20 Senator Rosen: And so understanding that, would it  
21 have been helpful to keep Bagram Air Base open in order to  
22 help with any of this going, any of the evacuation, anybody  
23 else coming through the country, another place for our  
24 citizens, people from other countries, or special SIV  
25 holders, any of those folks?

1           General McKenzie: Ma'am, I was intimately involved in  
2 all the decisions on Bagram, and in no way would Bagram have  
3 been able to contribute to either the effective use of the  
4 Afghan air force, its continued maintenance, or bringing  
5 people out. And very briefly, I can tell you that once we  
6 went below 2,500 people in Afghanistan, we lost the ability  
7 to hold Bagram Air Base. And it was inevitable that we were  
8 going to have to come out Bagram, because we ended up, in  
9 late June, early July, with 650 Marines and soldiers in the  
10 country. It was feasible to hold Bagram under those  
11 circumstances.

12           So we were driven by the plan, which we had all had an  
13 opportunity to work, that we were going to come out of  
14 Bagram. There was no way we were going to be able to keep  
15 Bagram and go to effective zero in Afghanistan. Just not  
16 possible.

17           Senator Rosen: Well, thinking of what we may have  
18 gained or may have lost as we leave, we think about  
19 countering adversaries. So again, General McKenzie, what is  
20 your assessment of the foreign influence in Afghanistan in  
21 the wake of our withdrawal, and what are the measures that  
22 we can take now to prevent our adversaries from filling the  
23 vacuum created by our departure?

24           General McKenzie: Senator, last week I was in  
25 Kazakhstan, in the capital of Kazakhstan, Nur-Sultan, where

1 I hosted what we call the CASA CHOD conference. Uzbekistan,  
2 Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, the Kurdish Republic, and Pakistan,  
3 we all met and we talked about that region after the fall of  
4 Afghanistan. And generally what they want is they want  
5 assurance. They want to continue to have ties with the  
6 United States, because they want alternatives to Russia and  
7 they want alternatives to China.

8 Unfortunately, because of their geographic location,  
9 they are going to always have to deal with Russia and China,  
10 but I think our partners in the region want a message that  
11 the United States is not going to turn our back on them,  
12 even though we left Afghanistan. And we had a very  
13 productive two-day conference, based on those themes.

14 Senator Rosen: Well, I could not agree more, because I  
15 think it makes us more vulnerable if we allow anyone else to  
16 fill that vacuum.

17 I would like to, in the just minute I have left, just  
18 touch briefly on the fate of Afghan women. What we have  
19 seen regarding the status of women in the territories where  
20 the Taliban had retained control prior to overthrowing the  
21 Afghan government, we know how horrible the conditions are  
22 for women. And so what do you see, moving forward, for the  
23 fate of Afghan women? What can we do? What do you see as  
24 the future for women's rights in Afghanistan?

25 General McKenzie: Senator, during our long engagement



1 in Afghanistan I think we made great strides in educational  
2 and other opportunities for women in Afghanistan. I think  
3 those are all now gravely at risk with the return of the  
4 Taliban. So the levers that we have are economic and  
5 diplomatic, which are, you know, not part of the Department  
6 of Defense. But I think that is how we have to work the  
7 problem. And I do think there is opportunity. It will not  
8 be a long-lived opportunity, a matter of months perhaps,  
9 where we can force the Taliban down a certain path, based on  
10 their desire to have international financing, international  
11 recognition, the release of sanctions and other things that  
12 are very important to them.

13 So I think we have got to be very hard-nosed as we  
14 negotiate with them going forward, to ensure these gains are  
15 not lost.

16 Senator Rosen: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I  
17 really appreciate the hearing today, and I will be  
18 submitting more questions for the record.

19 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Rosen.

20 Senator Blackburn, please.

21 Senator Blackburn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 General Milley, I want to come back to you. We  
23 discussed that you have had conversations with Woodward,  
24 Costa, Leonning, Rucker, and Bender on their books.  
25 Correct?

1 General Milley: Not Costa.

2 Senator Blackburn: You did not on Costa.

3 General Milley: Not Costa. Woodward yes, and others.

4 Senator Blackburn: We will leave that as a point of  
5 discussion. Okay. In any of these conversations did you  
6 discuss private meetings with the President or White House  
7 officials?

8 General Milley: White House officials perhaps.  
9 President, I do not think so.

10 Senator Blackburn: So you never discussed any of your  
11 conversations with President Trump.

12 General Milley: With President Trump --

13 Senator Blackburn: With any of these authors.

14 General Milley: -- no, not a prior conversation.

15 Senator Blackburn: Okay. Did you portray the  
16 commander in chief in a negative light or make comments that  
17 were critical of the commander in chief to any of these  
18 authors with which you had conversations?

19 General Milley: Not my comments or my observations,  
20 no.

21 Senator Blackburn: You did not?

22 General Milley: Others that were relayed to me from  
23 others.

24 Senator Blackburn: Okay. Well, I am looking forward  
25 to your book report on this.

1           Would you see these conversations as an abuse of  
2 executive privilege?

3           General Milley: I would not, no.

4           Senator Blackburn: You would not. Okay. Let me ask  
5 you this. What is your standard for determining when to  
6 leak private conversations with the President?

7           General Milley: I do not leak private conversations  
8 with the President.

9           Senator Blackburn: You did not. So you had these  
10 conversations with the authors but you do not see that as  
11 leaking information to which they were not entitled to know?  
12 See, this is the problem --

13          General Milley: No, so --

14          Senator Blackburn: -- that we have. See, as a member  
15 of this committee, and as someone who represents a lot of  
16 our men and women in uniform that are there, as we have  
17 referenced today, I have really got an issue with the fact  
18 that you will talk to authors but then you all come in here  
19 and you say, "Well, we cannot tell you what we told the  
20 President." And then I have to drag it out of you that the  
21 written documents, which, under Article II you are supposed  
22 to give those to us, you cannot go hide behind somebody's  
23 skirts on this, and you do not want to give those to us.

24          So you have repeatedly told this committee that you  
25 will not reveal your private conversations with President

1 Biden, but then you have leaked this information from your  
2 meetings with President Trump. So it is important to us  
3 that you truthfully respond to us on this.

4 General Milley: Yeah, absolutely.

5 Senator Blackburn: And I think what you did with  
6 making time to talk to these authors, burnishing your image,  
7 kind of, you know, building that bluster, but then not  
8 putting the focus on Afghanistan and what was happening  
9 there. General Milley, that is really disappointing to me.  
10 I know it is disappointing to people that have served with  
11 you or under you, under your command, and it does not serve  
12 our nation well.

13 You talked a little bit earlier about the damage, and  
14 you said "damage" was the right word to use when assessing  
15 what has happened in Afghanistan, when you look at America's  
16 credibility. So how do you look the men and women in the  
17 eye that have served under your command? How do you look  
18 young men in the eye that are coming to our military Academy  
19 Days and who want to serve, and say, "You can depend on me.  
20 I have got your back"? Because you know what? I think a  
21 lot of these families right now, they do not feel like you  
22 have their back. The special ops guys I met with Friday in  
23 my office in Nashville that are taking their time, their  
24 money, and risking their lives to do a job that the three of  
25 you could not do -- maybe we are going to remember you three

1 as the three that broke the military.

2 I do not know, but this is causing just a lot of anger  
3 from people who have trusted the military. They have felt  
4 like the military was one of the most trustworthy  
5 institutions. But in order to get a name in a book, in  
6 order to not be drawn into a political fight, what you have  
7 managed to do is to politicize the U.S. military to  
8 downgrade our reputation with our allies. Nobody has  
9 resigned. Nobody has submitted their resignation. And we  
10 have got thousands of people watching this hearing today  
11 that are looking at you all and saying, "I cannot believe  
12 they are sitting there and not answering the questions and  
13 are trying to punt."

14 I yield back.

15 Chairman Reed: Thank you.

16 Now let me recognize Senator Kelly.

17 Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Earlier today  
18 I had the opportunity to ask some questions. At the time,  
19 because we were short on time, I did not have the  
20 opportunity to thank all three of you -- General Milley,  
21 Secretary Austin, General McKenzie -- for your service to  
22 our country, serving in combat overseas, multiple  
23 deployments. You know, your family has served as well, all  
24 of your families, and I want to thank you personally for  
25 that. It is a big commitment. I understand it.

1 Secretary Austin, since U.S. troops departed Kabul on  
2 August 31st, the number of evacuation flights has been very  
3 small. The State Department briefed on Friday that only  
4 four charter flights have departed with U.S. support, and  
5 the ability to leave by a land route is even less right now.

6 The testimony today has indicated that the mission of  
7 facilitating evacuation for Americans and vulnerable Afghans  
8 is ongoing. Can you explain what role the military has in  
9 ongoing evacuation efforts behind led by the State  
10 Department?

11 Secretary Austin: You are correct, Senator. It is led  
12 by the State Department, and it is an interagency effort.  
13 And so as General Milley and I said earlier, we do have a  
14 senior officer participating in that cell that is run by  
15 Ambassador Bass, and they are reaching out to a number of  
16 different entities, veterans groups, many of your colleagues  
17 who have information that can be helpful in contacting  
18 people who have a desire to get out and have the right  
19 credentials. And if they do not have the right credentials,  
20 are there things that we can do to help them obtain those  
21 credentials if they have helped us, worked with us in the  
22 past, or if they are an American citizens with expired  
23 credentials.

24 Senator Kelly: And do you anticipate there will be  
25 transport from third countries? Many of our Afghan allies

1 have left and now find themselves in a third country.

2 Should we expect that there will be flights out of those  
3 places as well?

4 Secretary Austin: I think those individuals, as they  
5 work with our embassy personnel in those various countries  
6 to help them, again, if they qualify as one of the people  
7 who helped us in the past. Certainly either taking a  
8 routine commercial flight or taking a charter flight that we  
9 can help sponsor, I do anticipate there will be some sort of  
10 activity in the future.

11 But again, I do not want to speak for the State  
12 Department. I will tell you, Senator, that from a DoD  
13 perspective we are going to do everything we can to help  
14 enable this effort.

15 Senator Kelly: Throughout this evacuation effort, my  
16 office worked closely with groups of former Afghan pilots  
17 and women who served, in addition to American citizens and  
18 veterans working to assist them in leaving the country.  
19 These are men and women who trained with us, who fought with  
20 us, and who are at heightened risk because of it. So I am  
21 concerned that they were not a priority in our evacuation  
22 efforts, and that guidance on immigration options for them  
23 has been inadequate.

24 Due to the challenges and uncertainties of accessing  
25 evacuation flights, many Afghan evacuees sought alternative

1 means of escape, flying to these third-party countries, as I  
2 mentioned. How is the Defense Department working with State  
3 right now to ensure that these individuals do not fall  
4 through the cracks with regards to resettlement?

5 Secretary Austin: Again, I would have to defer to  
6 State in terms of outlining what the resettlement processes  
7 are, but in terms of direct activity from the Department of  
8 Defense, we do not have much -- we are not a big part of  
9 that effort, that resettlement effort in third countries.

10 Senator Kelly: Well thank you, Mr. Secretary, and  
11 again I want to thank all three of you for being here today,  
12 and thank you for your service.

13 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Kelley.

14 Senator Hawley, please.

15 Senator Hawley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. General  
16 Milley, I have just got one more question for you about  
17 these many book interviews that you did. I Alone Can Fix It  
18 is one book. Peril is another book. Frankly We Did Win  
19 This Election: The Inside Story of How Trump Lost is the  
20 third book. It seems like that is a significant outlay of  
21 time.

22 General Milley: I do not think so. I think --

23 Senator Hawley: They were short interviews?

24 General Milley: Relatively short. I do not think it  
25 took an excessive amount of time.



1           Senator Hawley: What was the time frame on these  
2 interviews for these three different books? By the way, for  
3 folks who do not know at home, you said you did not read the  
4 books. I do not think most people probably do. These are  
5 D.C. insider tell-all type books. But what was the time  
6 frame, did you say, that you were doing these interviews?

7           General Milley: I would say it took a couple of hours  
8 maybe.

9           Senator Hawley: But when? What is the time frame?  
10 When were you sitting for them? Dates?

11          General Milley: I can get you the dates. I do not  
12 know.

13          Senator Hawley: This year?

14          General Milley: I do not know off the top of my head  
15 but I will get you the dates.

16          Senator Hawley: 2021?

17          General Milley: Oh yeah.

18          Senator Hawley: So it was this calendar year.

19          General Milley: I think so, yeah. Sure.

20          Senator Hawley: Well, I just am wondering, clearly  
21 this is a priority for you. You did these on the record, by  
22 the way? All these interviews are on the record with these  
23 reporters? Did they quote you?

24          General Milley: I do interviews on the record, off the  
25 record, and I do background interviews, and I do all of that

1 with print media, television media, books, documentaries,  
2 all kinds of things.

3 Senator Hawley: Why would you do background and off-  
4 the-record interviews -- backgrounds means they cannot quote  
5 you -- background and off-the-record interviews if the goal  
6 is transparency?

7 General Milley: The transparency goes to the fact to  
8 make sure that we are explaining ourselves and make sure  
9 that these authors have correct information.

10 Senator Hawley: Is that attributable to you?

11 General Milley: You know, Let us take Woodward, for  
12 example. Probably 200 people interviewed and they approach  
13 my guys to say, "Are these facts true? This is what we  
14 heard," and we clarify and mitigate any incorrect  
15 information.

16 Senator Hawley: Interesting. Well, it is interesting.  
17 I mean, you are doing these interviews. You are doing them  
18 in 2021. It just makes me wonder, all of these books, were  
19 you maybe a little distracted, maybe a little distracted  
20 about what was going on in Afghanistan?

21 Here is why I am asking. General Miller testified to  
22 this committee that he warned about the rapid erosion of the  
23 military situation in Afghanistan as early as March of 2021.  
24 He further testified that he informed you about his view on  
25 this. He also testified that he said that the collapse of

1 the Afghan Security Forces and the Afghan government could  
2 come very fast in 2021.

3 General Milley: Hard and fast.

4 Senator Hawley: And he said that he informed you of  
5 this. He also said that he informed Secretary Austin of  
6 this.

7 General Milley: He did.

8 Senator Hawley: Now at the same time, however, in  
9 June, you were saying, and I quote you now, "An outright  
10 takeover by the Taliban is unlikely." That is at an Armed  
11 Services Committee meeting in the House, June 23rd. In  
12 July, you said the Afghan Security Forces had the capacity  
13 to sufficiently fight and defend their country. You also  
14 said that they were well equipped. On June 17th, you told  
15 the Senate Appropriations Committee the Afghan government  
16 had a 325,000 to 350,000 person security force, which we now  
17 know is a drastic overestimate, yet a few days later you  
18 lowered that to 300,000, which we still now is a drastic  
19 overestimate.

20 Your generals on the ground, your commander on the  
21 ground is saying one thing, the Taliban has a massive  
22 offensive underway from May 1st on, but yet you told us very  
23 different things in public. How do you reconcile those  
24 things? What am I missing?

25 General Milley: Well, first of all, Scott Miller did

1 say "hard and fast," and he also meant that, at least to me  
2 and to others, that he meant that to be in the fall --  
3 October, November, maybe even December time frame.

4 Senator Hawley: I heard you say that earlier. I am  
5 curious about that. I would have to say that was not his  
6 testimony to this committee.

7 General Milley: Well, what he said in the committee  
8 was "hard and fast." He did not put a date on it, is the  
9 readouts to me. I do not know. Did he put a date on it?

10 Senator Hawley: No, he did not put a date on it.

11 General Milley: But he did put a date on it.

12 Senator Hawley: That is what intrigues me.

13 General Milley: But he did put a date on it with me,  
14 and to us. And when pressed it was after we leave -- that  
15 was point one, which was 31 August -- and probably into the  
16 October time frame, maybe Thanksgiving. And that is about  
17 more or less where many of the intel assessments were --

18 Senator Hawley: He said he was a dissenter on the  
19 intel assessment.

20 General Milley: He did. That is right.

21 Senator Hawley: And he did not put any of those  
22 qualifies on his testimony to us. So are you saying he  
23 shifted his testimony, General Miller, that he was not --

24 General Milley: No. I am saying what he told me was  
25 it was likely to be in the October time frame. The intel

1 assessments were centering around November, Thanksgiving, at  
2 the latest, Christmas. Some intel assessments went into the  
3 next year.

4 Here is my point, Senator, is the intel assessments had  
5 two basic things, in my view, was the scale and scope plus  
6 the speed. All the intel assessments, all of us, got that  
7 wrong. There is no question about it. That was a swing and  
8 a miss on the intel assessment of 11 days in August. There  
9 is nobody that called that.

10 Senator Hawley: Well, can I just -- my time is about  
11 -- I appreciate that you have made these points. I do not  
12 mean to cut you off. It is just that my time is about to  
13 expire. I just want to say this. It seems to me that you  
14 put a high priority on making sure that you were favorably  
15 portrayed by the D.C. press corps. You spent a lot of time  
16 doing that. Fair enough if that is your priority. But at  
17 the same time, we had a rapidly deteriorating, frankly  
18 disastrous situation in Afghanistan, which resulted in the  
19 death of 13 soldiers, including one from my home state,  
20 hundreds of civilians, and hundreds of Americans left  
21 behind. And in my view, that mission cannot be called a  
22 success in any way, shape, or form, logistical or otherwise.

23 General, I think you should resign. Secretary Austin,  
24 I think you should resign. I think this mission was a  
25 catastrophe. I think there is no other way to say it, and

1 there has to be accountability. I respectfully submit it  
2 should begin with you. Thank you.

3 Chairman Reed: Senator, your time has expired.

4 Senator Hawley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 Chairman Reed: Senator Tuberville.

6 Senator Tuberville: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

7 General Milley, you have spoken today a lot about  
8 civilian control of the military. I appreciate the  
9 statements made about that today. On June 10th, though, I  
10 asked formal questions for the record about Bagram Airfield,  
11 and I pointed out that having a major air base within 500  
12 miles of Iranian and Chinese borders would be a  
13 strategically, very strategically and valuable. I asked you  
14 about the feasibility of retaining Bagram Airfield as a U.S.  
15 base. I am still waiting for a reply. I hope you do see  
16 today ignoring, you know, questions that might come up from  
17 civilian oversight sometimes backfires on you a little bit.

18 You apologized for being late with your statement today,  
19 the hearing. But you have just got to understand the  
20 pattern here. I heard Senator Blackburn say about the book.

21 You know, you have got to see how demissive it looks to  
22 Congress that you have had time to interview and do all  
23 these interviews but questions are not answered. So I am  
24 just troubled by some of those things.

25 And also, on August 18th you said, quote, "There is

1 nothing that I or anyone else saw that indicated the  
2 collapse of the army and this government in 11 days," end  
3 quote. I find it unbelievable, with your staff of 3,200  
4 people and a budget of \$419 million taxpayer dollars that we  
5 did not see the obviously. But I do think you saw it,  
6 because July 11, 2019, you said, quote, "I think pulling out  
7 prematurely would be a strategic mistake," end quote. You  
8 also said that here today. Do you agree?

9 General Milley: I 100 percent agree.

10 Senator Tuberville: Thank you.

11 General Milley: May I comment?

12 Senator Tuberville: Yeah. Go ahead.

13 General Milley: On your first two points. On the  
14 intel piece, I stay with what I said. Nobody called it, 11  
15 days in August. There was nobody who did that. And I  
16 brought the intel reports, and when we go into classified  
17 session I am happy to go over all of them, on the first  
18 thing. And then the Bagram thing, I did put a very lengthy  
19 response in my written statement. I do not know if you had  
20 an opportunity to read it yet. I would encourage you to  
21 read it. It is also something that General McKenzie put in  
22 his. And I can assure that we looked at that whole Bagram  
23 issue very, very carefully.

24 Senator Tuberville: And here is what I am struggling  
25 with, General McKenzie. In 1945, we left Japan. They are

1 one of our biggest allies today and we are still there.  
2 Germany is the same way. Korea, the same way. We had 2,500  
3 troops. The war stopped in 2014, and we started Operation  
4 Resolute Support, and we are having all these people -- we  
5 have got to get out here. Folks, we are going to pay for  
6 what we just did. I mean, I have got young kids. You all  
7 got kids and grandkids, and we are going to be back in there  
8 fighting.

9 What are your thoughts about that, General McKenzie?  
10 And I know we are not talking about the President. You  
11 know, what do you think about the future of what we have got  
12 to do in Afghanistan?

13 General McKenzie: So we have very few levers in  
14 Afghanistan right now, because we have completely pulled  
15 out.

16 Senator Tuberville: Will we be back?

17 General McKenzie: I think we are always going to  
18 reserve the right to go in, to go after ISIS and Al Qaeda  
19 targets as they present themselves. We have been very clear  
20 on that. And that is not going to be easy, and we will talk  
21 a little bit more about that in the closed session. It will  
22 not be easy to do that. It will be possible to do that.

23 As for larger engagements, with the Taliban or whatever  
24 government follows them, I mean, that is going to be hard  
25 road, from where I sit, and I see a very small slice of



1 that. That is really a question, you know, for diplomats  
2 and others to talk about how our future relationship with  
3 the government as a whole will be.

4 But I think, my judgment will be they are going to  
5 regress significantly in every sphere of activity in  
6 Afghanistan over the next few years with the Taliban in  
7 charge.

8 Senator Tuberville: We can afford to survive with our  
9 military. We have got that kind of money. And it just  
10 burns me up that we are eventually going to have to go back  
11 there. We are going to have problems here. I think we  
12 should have looked at it, and I know President Biden wanted  
13 to get out. He told people. President Trump wanted to get  
14 out. I disagreed with it. I mean, we gave up the best base  
15 in that area, and it is just amazing to me that we are going  
16 to have to go back, and hopefully we do not lose its  
17 challenge. What are your thoughts about it, as we end it up  
18 here, Secretary Austin?

19 Secretary Austin: I do not think it is preordained  
20 that we are going to have to go back, Senator. I would tell  
21 you that what you have heard us say is that we recognize  
22 that transnational terrorists will migrate towards  
23 ungoverned spaces. We also are committed to not allowing Al  
24 Qaeda to regenerate and be able to export terror from  
25 Afghanistan to the United States of America. And we will

1 remain laser-focused on that going forward, and we will do  
2 everything within our power to make sure that that does not  
3 happen.

4 Senator Tuberville: Thank you. Could I ask you one  
5 question? Are you against dishonorable discharges to the  
6 military for not taking a vaccine? You are the leader of  
7 the DoD.

8 Secretary Austin: I am the leader, and again, we have  
9 a nonjudicial -- excuse me, a UCMJ that really addresses all  
10 of the issues in the military, and gives our leadership what  
11 they need to be able to enforce standards.

12 Taking the vaccine is a requirement, and again, I will  
13 just leave it at that.

14 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator  
15 Tuberville. Gentlemen, thank you very much. This has been  
16 a long day, and we still have a closed session in SVC-217.  
17 There is a vote ongoing now, so I would suggest we reconvene  
18 in SVC-217 at 3:45. We will give an opportunity for a brief  
19 respite, a very brief respite.

20 With that I will adjourn the open session.

21 [Whereupon, at 3:24 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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