

Stenographic Transcript  
Before the

COMMITTEE ON  
ARMED SERVICES

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

HEARING TO  
RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON AFGHANISTAN

Thursday, September 30, 2021

Washington, D.C.

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U.S. Senate

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Committee on Armed Services

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Washington, D.C.

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

12

Committee members present: Senators Reed [presiding],  
13 Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Kaine, King, Warren,  
14 Peters, Manchin, Duckworth, Rosen, Kelly, Inhofe, Wicker,  
15 Fischer, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Cramer, Scott,  
16 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           Good morning. For the information of my colleagues and  
5 for the witnesses, we have a series of five votes beginning  
6 at approximately 10:30. We will work through the votes, but  
7 there will be people coming and going. Don't be alarmed.  
8 We have to do the votes. I just want to give everyone a  
9 heads-up.

10          The committee meets today for the fourth in a series of  
11 committee engagements that seek to assess the United States  
12 military's 20-year mission in Afghanistan; understand  
13 factors that led to the Taliban's rapid takeover of the  
14 country and the collapse of the Afghan Government and Afghan  
15 National Defense and Security Forces. We also are  
16 interested in overseeing DOD operations in support of Afghan  
17 Special Immigrant Visa holders, or SIVs, and other high-risk  
18 Afghans; and explore the lessons learned for  
19 counterterrorism operations going forward while framing  
20 these operations within broader national security priorities  
21 and emerging threats.

22          Today's hearing will explore perspectives from two  
23 expert witnesses. Joining us today are Dr. Vali Nasr,  
24 Professor of Middle East Studies and International Affairs  
25 at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International

1 Studies and former Senior Adviser to the United States  
2 Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan; and Mr.  
3 Thomas Joscelyn, Senior Fellow at the Foundation for the  
4 Defense of Democracies and Senior Editor of the Long War  
5 Journal. And I would like to thank you both for joining us  
6 today. Thank you very much.

7 Recent attention has been focused on the final months  
8 in Afghanistan. I think it is equally important, however,  
9 that this committee examines the broader 2-decade mission  
10 that shaped the outcome we face today. The path that led to  
11 this moment was paved with years of mistakes spanning four  
12 presidencies. There is plenty of blame to go around.

13 This hearing is not just review for history's sake.  
14 There is a temptation to close the book on Afghanistan and  
15 move on to longer-term strategic competition with China and  
16 Russia; however, while the threat from violent extremists  
17 has changed, we must ensure we remain postured to carry out  
18 counterterrorism operations in an effective manner. In  
19 order to move forward, we must capture the lessons of the  
20 last 2 decades.

21 On Tuesday, we heard from Secretary of Defense Austin,  
22 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Milley, and  
23 Commander of U.S. Central Command General McKenzie,  
24 regarding their views on what contributed to the outcome we  
25 now face in Afghanistan. Notably, we heard from Generals

1 Milley and McKenzie that while their military advice was to  
2 keep 2,500 troops in Afghanistan, they acknowledged that  
3 this plan created the real possibilities of more U.S.  
4 casualties and a likely return to war with the Taliban.  
5 President Biden concluded that more troops might buy more  
6 time and casualties, but more time would not create a more  
7 effective Afghan government.

8 General Milley pointed out several strategic decisions  
9 that contributed to the outcome in Afghanistan which  
10 included the invasion of Iraq, Pakistan's support to the  
11 Taliban, and the corruption of the Afghan Government, and  
12 U.S. mission creep into counterinsurgency and nation  
13 building. And I agree with General Milley that these are  
14 important factors to grapple with.

15 I also think the implications of the Doha Agreement,  
16 which required the withdrawal of all U.S. and coalition  
17 forces and international contractors, warrants further  
18 analysis.

19 General Milley also testified that he was committed to  
20 understanding, quote, "how we developed, trained, and  
21 equipped the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and  
22 why they collapsed in 11 days." It is paramount to  
23 understand and learn from this failure as we continue  
24 overseas operations where we must work by, with, and through  
25 partner nations, to achieve shared national security goals.

1           Despite colossal efforts over multiple administrations,  
2 both Democratic and Republican, we were unable to help build  
3 an Afghan Government capable of leading its people, nor an  
4 Afghan security force capable of defeating the Taliban.

5           Afghan soldiers fought bravely in the face of massive  
6 casualties, but faced with the loss of American military  
7 support, and hamstrung by corruption within, they were  
8 unable to stand on their own against Taliban forces.

9           As the committee continues its review and oversight of  
10 the war in Afghanistan, I would ask that during today's  
11 hearing you provide your assessments of the mission. We  
12 would like to understand what events and decisions  
13 throughout the war you believe have shaped the ultimate  
14 outcome, and what lessons we can apply to future operations.  
15 We would also like to hear your thoughts on how to  
16 effectively transition to an "over the horizon"  
17 counterterrorism architecture.

18           In addition, we would like your impressions on the  
19 regional dynamics following the withdrawal of our forces,  
20 including the implications for relations with Pakistan,  
21 China, Russia, Iran and others, and your recommendations for  
22 optimizing regional security arrangements going forward.

23           With that, let me recognize Ranking Member Inhofe for  
24 any opening comments he may have.

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

3           Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4           And I thank our witnesses for being here today.

5           We learned a lot in our hearing on Tuesday about how  
6 President Biden completely mismanaged the withdrawal from  
7 Afghanistan from the start to the finish, and I hope that is  
8 just the beginning of our oversight as to what happened.

9           Today, I want to hear more from our experts about what  
10 comes next. We haven't received any detail yet on that from  
11 the administration, but I hope they create a better plan  
12 than they had for the drawdown. We did hear one message  
13 very clearly on Tuesday, as a result of our withdrawal from  
14 Afghanistan, the threat of radical Islamist terrorism is  
15 increasing even as our capabilities to combat terrorism are  
16 decreasing.

17           General McKenzie told us that he, this a quote, he  
18 said, we are not confident that we can prevent Afghanistan  
19 from being used as a launching pad from terrorism right now.

20           That is quite a statement. That is quite a reality.

21           Our generals have repeatedly told us just how hard it  
22 is to find and track terrorists without partners on the  
23 ground. Our intelligence capabilities are also drastically  
24 reduced, and these are understatements. We will discuss  
25 that today and take a closer look at the threat that Al

1    Qaeda, and the Haqqani Network, and ISIS pose from a  
2    Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

3           President Biden has completely dismissed this threat.  
4    He said Al Qaeda is gone from Afghanistan. We heard on  
5    Tuesday that is just not right. We are going to examine  
6    that threat more closely today. Here is just one example.  
7    The Biden administration claims that the core Al Qaeda  
8    threats are in Yemen, Somalia, and West Africa, but the  
9    leaders of those organizations came from Afghanistan's  
10   training camps. And those training camps will fully resume  
11   operations under Taliban rule. I have no doubt about that.

12           I am afraid that in over 20 years of successfully  
13   preventing an attack from Afghanistan, many have forgotten  
14   the scale and scope of the threat. The withdrawal from  
15   Afghanistan has made our counterterrorism job much, much  
16   harder. We have got to figure out how to get it right and  
17   to protect Americans. That is what this is all about.

18           Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19           [The prepared statement of Senator Inhofe follows:]

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you, very much, Senator Inhofe.

2 And now let me recognize Dr. Nasr.

3 Mr. Nasr: Thank you very much, Chairman Reed.

4 Chairman Reed: It is still not on, Dr. Nasr.

5 Mr. Nasr: Thank you.

6 Chairman Reed: Thank you.

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1           STATEMENT OF VALI R. NASR, PROFESSOR OF MIDDLE EAST  
2 STUDIES AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY  
3 SCHOOL OF ADVANCED INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, AND FORMER SENIOR  
4 ADVISOR TO U.S. SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR AFGHANISTAN AND  
5 PAKISTAN.

6           Mr. Nasr: Thank you very much, Chairman Reed, Ranking  
7 Member Inhofe, and members of the committee, for providing  
8 me with this opportunity to testify before you today.

9           I would like to focus my comments on the longer-term  
10 issues of why didn't insurgency emerge in Afghanistan after  
11 the toppling of the Taliban in 2001, why did it gain steam,  
12 and, ultimately, why did it win in the manner that it did.

13           Now, I think there are a number of key factors that we  
14 have to look at. They are not exhaustive of all the  
15 explanations for why things happened the way they did, but  
16 it is important to keep them in mind. First, it is the  
17 United States won in Afghanistan, toppling the Taliban in  
18 2001, quickly and decisively. But it did not follow that  
19 victory with the reintegration of the Taliban rank-and-file  
20 soldiers into Afghanistan's economy and society and the new  
21 Afghanistan that it was standing up.

22           And as we saw also in Iraq later on, this led to a  
23 disenfranchisement of not just the Taliban soldiers, their  
24 supporters, but also conflated that disenfranchisement with  
25 Pashtun grievances that we began to surface very quickly

1 against a Northern Alliance-led government that was backed  
2 by the United States, and that really sowed the seeds of the  
3 insurgency.

4 Secondly, the United States assumed that Pakistan's  
5 support for destroying Al Qaeda, as it was being promoted by  
6 its president then, Pervez Musharraf, also extended to  
7 Pakistan's, that Pakistan would also support the state that  
8 the United States was building in Afghanistan. This was not  
9 true.

10 Pakistan supported destruction of Al Qaeda, but  
11 Pakistan viewed the kind of state that the United States was  
12 setting up in Afghanistan, as a natural ally of India. In  
13 fact, they would point out that President Karzai had close  
14 ties to India and they saw Afghanistan under a secular  
15 government as a threat to their territorial integrity  
16 fomenting Pashtun separatism.

17 It is important to note that neither, Pakistan, or the  
18 defeated Taliban, were represented at the Bonn Conference  
19 that set up the new state in Afghanistan and, therefore, had  
20 no vested interests in its success, and actually put their  
21 shoulders to undoing it. And the combination of the two  
22 proved to be a very difficult threat for the United States  
23 to overcome.

24 Throughout the past 20 years, the United States did not  
25 manage to either persuade or pressure Pakistan to change

1 course, largely, because our project in Afghanistan was at  
2 fundamental odds with how Pakistan saw its national  
3 security.

4 Thirdly, we went to Afghanistan to destroy Al Qaeda and  
5 to punish and remove the Taliban from power and that mission  
6 was accomplished very quickly. But then, there was a shift  
7 in strategy towards building a modern, democratic state in  
8 country that had been ravaged by civil war over the decades,  
9 lacked the rudiments of institutions of government, and was  
10 deeply divided by regional divisions, ethnic divisions, and  
11 tribal divisions.

12 And this, actually, was not a military mission anymore;  
13 this state-building mission complicated and confounded the  
14 military mission. Most of the mistakes in Afghanistan, most  
15 of the problems we face, such as corruption, misgovernment,  
16 misrule, alienation of the population, had to do with the  
17 state-building, not with the military mission.

18 And in addition to that, as a fourth factor, we very  
19 quickly tried to replicate the military success in  
20 Afghanistan by going to Iraq and the outcome of that war not  
21 only took our eyes off of Afghanistan, providing a critical  
22 time period for the Taliban to build a base, but actually  
23 convince the Taliban and their supporters and other regional  
24 actors that we were going to fall short of both, our  
25 military and state-building objectives, because of what they

1 were seeing in Iraq. And as a result, the demonstration  
2 effect of Iraq favored resistance to the United States.

3 Fifth, I would say that once the insurgency began to  
4 gain ground, we decided to import the strategy that was  
5 working in Iraq, the counterinsurgency strategy into  
6 Afghanistan and for varieties of reasons, they did not prove  
7 successful. The Taliban proved to be fierce fighters. They  
8 were rooted in the majority population in the southern part  
9 of Afghanistan and did receive support. They were protected  
10 by a forbidding geography. And most importantly, they had  
11 support and a safe haven in Pakistan.

12 We, then, turned our attention to the idea of standing  
13 up a resilient and large Afghan security force. Even back  
14 in 2010, 2011, when I was in the U.S. Government, there was  
15 skepticism that this would ever work. It was very  
16 expensive. We were building a military that was modeled  
17 after our own military. It was heavily dependent on  
18 sophisticated technology, ongoing U.S. service support, and  
19 continued U.S. command and control. It also had ethic  
20 components to it that made its work difficult, in many  
21 cases, deploying Tajik troops to Pashtun areas, where they  
22 would be viewed as occupying forces, themselves, and it was  
23 difficult to see how the United States was going to create a  
24 corporate identity for the military in short order, where  
25 other militaries require a good deal of time for that to

1 happen.

2 Finally, the Doha Agreement, I think that anyone of the  
3 war is important. We went to the Doha Agreement after we  
4 decided that the war was not winnable in 2016, after the  
5 fact that the Taliban had been gaining territory and the  
6 scale of their attacks in Kabul had increased significantly.

7 And we went to the talks at a time when the Taliban were  
8 ascendant and were confident, and we were looking at our  
9 military strategy as an impasse.

10 Now, the Doha Agreement was not a peace treaty. It was  
11 a cessation of hostilities agreement between the two main  
12 combatant forces in Afghanistan that is, the United States  
13 and the Taliban. The Doha Agreement, at its core, agreed to  
14 a ceasefire with the Taliban while the talks went on. It  
15 also agreed to a safe passage for the U.S. troops out of  
16 Afghanistan and it stipulated that the Taliban would not  
17 harbor terrorists and Al Qaeda after the United States  
18 departed from Afghanistan.

19 What the Doha Agreement did not do, it did not insist  
20 on a future shape of government in Afghanistan. It did not  
21 insist on an inclusive government. It did not even insist  
22 after that, that the Taliban needed to negotiate with the  
23 Afghanistan Government. This was largely an effort that was  
24 initiated after the initial ceasefire deed was signed.

25 And in the end, although we kept saying that the

1 Afghanistan Government and the Afghanistan military were  
2 independent sovereign actors, but in reality, we didn't  
3 treat them as such. We didn't bring the Afghan Army to the  
4 Taliban as a combatant force in Afghanistan. We treated the  
5 Afghan Army as a subsidiary of the American military effort.  
6 And we negotiated, on behalf of the Afghan Government.

7 Even the Afghan Government was not supportive of the  
8 Doha Agreement at the beginning and that gave the Taliban a  
9 very clear indication that the United States did not care  
10 about either, the Afghan Government or the Afghan military.  
11 All it cared was a ceasefire agreement that would get it out  
12 of Afghanistan. It is also important to note that the Doha  
13 Agreement did not provide for a residual American force to  
14 stay in Afghanistan to do counterterrorism efforts.

15 And, finally, I would say that by January of 2021, long  
16 before, actually, the events of the summer happened, much of  
17 the Doha Agreement had been implemented already;  
18 particularly, the troop withdrawal had gone on aggressively.  
19 And in my opinion, by the summer of 2021, we no longer had  
20 leverage on the ground to demand a reopening of the talks or  
21 change its terms.

22 We had an option of either, finishing and getting out,  
23 or renegeing on it altogether, and, basically, go back to  
24 fighting. And I think that explains, also, the way in which  
25 everything unfolded going forward.

1           Now, how should we look at Afghanistan now after this  
2 war is done?

3           I think we are right to be worried about terrorism in  
4 Afghanistan. We are right to be worried about how the  
5 Taliban will govern, how inclusive they will be, how they  
6 will treat women, and how they will treat, more broadly,  
7 human and civil rights. And, also, we should remain  
8 vigilant about issues, such as drugs.

9           But I would say that the worst-case scenario in  
10 Afghanistan is not a Taliban government; it is no government  
11 at all. That if the Taliban unravels because of economic  
12 collapse or because of political pressure, that then nobody  
13 is accountable for that territory and that, I think, is a  
14 scenario in which we might have to go back.

15           So, I would say that it is important for the United  
16 States to remain engaged, particularly with other regional  
17 actors who share the very same fears about Afghanistan, to  
18 see how that country can be stabilized and that we avert the  
19 worst humanitarian, political, and security threats that  
20 might be forthcoming. Thank you.

21           [The prepared statement of Mr. Nasr follows:]

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you.

2 Mr. Joscelyn, please?

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1           STATEMENT OF THOMAS JOSCELYN, SENIOR FELLOW,  
2           FOUNDATION FOR THE DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES, SENIOR EDITOR,  
3           THE LONG WAR JOURNAL

4           Mr. Joscelyn: Well, Chairman Reed, Ranking Member  
5           Inhofe, and members of the committee, thank you for inviting  
6           me to testify here today. I have testified more than 20  
7           times and, unfortunately, many of those times was to discuss  
8           the pending disaster in Afghanistan and now we are  
9           discussing the aftermath.

10           I want to take my oral testimony to comment on a few  
11           things I heard on Tuesday, just for clarification, because  
12           as you continue to explore the war in Afghanistan and how it  
13           went this way, I think there are a few things that need to  
14           be clarified. I heard, for example, that General Milley say  
15           that nobody saw that the Afghan forces and government would  
16           collapse in 11 days.

17           As the senior editor of The Long War Journal, who has  
18           been covering this insurgency for the last dozen years of my  
19           life, I got to say that is inaccurate. The military and  
20           government did not collapse in 11 days.

21           My colleague, Bill Roggio, has been producing a map of  
22           the insurgency in Afghanistan for several years. He  
23           documented in great detail, how the insurgency was gaining  
24           steam over time and he documented how this insurgency kicked  
25           off its final offensive around May 1, a date we can come

1 back to.

2 So, really, the final act of this play was 3 and a half  
3 months; it was from May 1 to mid-August. And I think that  
4 is important because I think that by saying it fell in 11  
5 days, I think that connotes a certain ignorance of the  
6 insurgency strategy and what they were doing all along. And  
7 it is not just in terms of what the insurgency strategy  
8 behind it was; it was a certain underlying ignorance of the  
9 insurgents themselves. And this is a very difficult point  
10 to get at. It is almost unfathomable.

11 But when I hear, you know, during the hearing on  
12 Tuesday, I heard all three of the generals, I think, say,  
13 rightly, that the Taliban has not broken with Al Qaeda.  
14 That is correct.

15 However, I also heard one of the generals say that  
16 there was, I think it was General Milley, say that there are  
17 remnants of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Well, the remnants  
18 word, or similar verbiage, has been used for more than 10  
19 years in terms of describing Al Qaeda. It is a buzz word  
20 that has no meaning, and I want to explain what I mean by  
21 that.

22 So, in June of 2010, the U.S. Government came up with  
23 an assessment of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and said that there  
24 were only 50 to 100 Al Qaeda guys in Afghanistan at any  
25 given time. And so, at The Long War Journal, we kept

1 covering this. Every time they would kill 20 guys in Kunar  
2 or 30 guys in another province, the assessment was sticky.  
3 It never changed. It was always 50 to 100, 50 to 100. They  
4 never updated it to say what does this actually look like.

5 Well, that assessment, when it came out on June 2010,  
6 we now know, because we have been advocating for the release  
7 of these files, and we got the files from Bin Laden's  
8 compound. So, these are the files recovered in Osama bin  
9 Laden's Abbottabad compound. This is a contemporaneous memo  
10 that was written when the U.S. Government started its  
11 assessment of what Al Qaeda looked like in Afghanistan.  
12 This memo was written to Bin Laden 11 days beforehand, okay,  
13 so this is contemporaneous.

14 And here is what Osama bin Laden was told by his chief  
15 lieutenant, Sheikh, we have very strong military activity in  
16 Afghanistan, many special operations, and the Americans and  
17 NATO are being hit hard.

18 He goes on to recount how Al Qaeda is not 50 to 100  
19 across the whole country, but is, in fact, operating across  
20 eight or more provinces at that time. They are operating  
21 with the permission, and in conjunction, and with collusion  
22 with the Taliban.

23 In fact, one of the reasons why this is not ancient  
24 history, and I have more memos here, is that one of the key  
25 figures identified in these memos to Bin Laden, and, again,

1 these are in my written testimony, so you can see them for  
2 yourselves. I have the U.S. Government's English  
3 translation, so everybody can download them.

4 One of the key figures he identifies in these memos is  
5 a guy known as Siraj Haqqani. He is the one they are  
6 cooperating with, one of the main guys they are cooperating  
7 with on the ground in Afghanistan.

8 That name should ring a bell. Siraj Haqqani has been  
9 the Deputy Amir of the Taliban, in other words, top two,  
10 since 2015.

11 The evidence is overwhelming that Siraj Haqqani is in  
12 fact, an Al Qaeda man. And Siraj Haqqani, it should be  
13 noted here, his right-hand man protected Hamza bin Laden,  
14 Osama's son. His father protected Osama bin Laden. So, the  
15 Haqqanis have been intertwined with Al Qaeda since the 1980s  
16 and they now have a controlling share in the new Taliban  
17 regime.

18 So, this is all very important because this  
19 underestimation of Al Qaeda in Afghanistan all these years  
20 directly plays into the failures that we saw play out in the  
21 last several months. They also factor into our assessments  
22 of the Taliban regime.

23 I will wrap this up very quickly. I will just say  
24 this, in recent weeks, we have also heard some current U.S.  
25 officials say that the Haqqani Network isn't really part of

1 the Taliban or isn't wholly part of the Taliban. This is  
2 false. The Haqqani Network not only has senior hierarchical  
3 positions throughout the Taliban, including Sirajuddin  
4 Haqqani's senior role, now, is the interior minister for the  
5 regime. The Haqqanis also control most of the potent, most  
6 potent special forces for the Taliban, which actually won  
7 the war. And we know, based on all the evidence we have  
8 accumulated for many years, that Al Qaeda, in fact, played a  
9 key role in standing up those special forces.

10 So, one of the things I want to just leave this thought  
11 with you, and I am eager to answer all of your questions,  
12 is, yes, the Taliban won this war, but so did Al Qaeda.

13 [The statement of Mr. Joscelyn follows:]

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, gentlemen, for  
2 your testimony.

3 Dr. Nasr, your written testimony indicates that there  
4 was a long sort of transition towards the events of August.  
5 Can you give us sort of a summary of the high points of that  
6 transition, where the Taliban, as Mr. Joscelyn indicated,  
7 the Taliban kept expanding its influence and working  
8 deliberately towards the events of August.

9 Mr. Nasr: Mr. Chairman, even if we went back to 2015,  
10 2016, the Taliban were steadily gaining territory. They had  
11 a true support of Pakistan. Through varieties of other  
12 methods, had gained a great deal of military capability.

13 And even though American forces were not on the  
14 forefront and the casualty numbers were down, but the  
15 casualty numbers of Afghan forces were rising. And if we  
16 looked at their gaining territory as a measure of how were  
17 the Taliban doing, they were winning; they were winning at a  
18 slow pace.

19 The Doha Agreement, essentially, created a ceasefire  
20 between U.S. forces and the Taliban, but during those  
21 negotiations, the Taliban gains continued and the casualty  
22 rate of the Afghan security forces continued to mat. The  
23 Taliban at Doha made a promise, I guess, that they would not  
24 inflict casualties on American troops, but they made no such  
25 promise about reigning in either, violence in Afghanistan or

1 attacking Afghan security forces.

2 And then the surprising part is the pace at which they  
3 began to accumulate territory in 2021, leading up to the  
4 events of August. And that has a number of factors to it.  
5 One is the fact that they pragmatically made a lot more  
6 pacts with different warlords, with different tribal leaders  
7 with an influence; some members of their tribes were part of  
8 the troops. They made promise about protection of  
9 particular parts of Afghanistan if certain troops laid down  
10 their weapons. And we saw that whole scale segments of the  
11 Afghan security forces made a deal.

12 And, finally, the Afghan security forces were poorly  
13 managed. They had not been paid for a very long time. And  
14 many said that the failure of the president of Afghanistan  
15 and the leadership in Kabul to create a united political  
16 front that the military could look up to and have confidence  
17 that there will be a political order after the United States  
18 left, led them to the conclusion that there would not be a  
19 government surviving in Afghanistan. It was too weak. It  
20 was too divided. And, therefore, they began to devolve to  
21 protect their own personal interests. And that led to a  
22 snowballing effect that a small force of 75 to 100,000  
23 fighters, perhaps supplemented with vigilante or other  
24 fighters coming over the border from Afghanistan, was able  
25 to sweep across the country at a rapid pace.



1 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much.

2 Mr. Joscelyn, we stick to, or try to stick to a  
3 5-minute deadline, so I only have a brief bit of time, but  
4 you have made the point, very incisively, about the  
5 persistence of Al Qaeda, the association of Al Qaeda.

6 One of the issues that we took some comfort from was  
7 the fact that they were present, but they did not appear to  
8 have the ability to project power outside of Afghanistan.  
9 And that was the key, sort of, our presence.

10 Can you just very quickly comment on that?

11 Mr. Joscelyn: Very quickly, most of Al Qaeda's assets  
12 in Afghanistan were devoted to winning the war. Some of  
13 those assets were actually devoted to striking outside of  
14 Afghanistan.

15 It is no doubt in my mind, the U.S. presence did keep a  
16 lid on that; for example, right before the 2016 presidential  
17 election, a guy named Farouq al-Qahtani was killed in Kunar  
18 in a drone strike. He was actually one of the top external  
19 operations guys that means targeting the West, for Al Qaeda  
20 globally.

21 I can give you, as you can probably guess, a lot of  
22 other details along those lines, but the bottom line is that  
23 you can sight guys like this who were taken out over the  
24 last several years, even, who were absolutely involved in Al  
25 Qaeda's global operations.

1 Chairman Reed: And, obviously, we have to continue  
2 that, but now over the horizon and we will hopefully get to  
3 those questions later.

4 But my 5 minutes has expired, and with the concurrence  
5 of the ranking member, I emphasize that 5 minutes is the  
6 limit we like. Thank you.

7 Senator Inhofe: Well, first of all, I have three  
8 questions I would like to get to and I am afraid I won't be  
9 able to, but hopefully someone else will.

10 Mr. Joscelyn, how do you think the Taliban will treat  
11 the Americans, and even the at-risk Afghans, the ones who  
12 are left behind? Are they going to be hostages or what is  
13 going to happen?

14 Mr. Joscelyn: The at-risk Afghans are, well, at-risk.  
15 I mean, I think that there is a lot of trouble ahead for  
16 them. We already see credible reports throughout  
17 Afghanistan of them hunting down former opposition, their  
18 former enemies. I think that their situation is dire.

19 If I were a member of this committee, I would be asking  
20 a lot about what is going on behind-the-scenes when it comes  
21 to the Americans who were left behind and what sort of  
22 wrangling is going on to try to get them out.

23 Senator Inhofe: Good answer.

24 And what are the terrorist groups saying about the  
25 Taliban, the Haqqani, and the Al Qaeda victory in

1 Afghanistan? What do they say? What is their  
2 communication?

3 Mr. Joscelyn: So, there is no doubt that the Taliban's  
4 victory in Afghanistan is a boom for the global jihadist  
5 movement and Al Qaeda, in particular. We have tracked now,  
6 over 30 statements across Africa, the Middle East, and South  
7 Asia from different Al Qaeda branches and affiliated groups  
8 and individuals who we know are important. They are all  
9 heralding this as a monumental, historic victory; in fact,  
10 that is what Al Qaeda's senior leadership calls it, as well.

11 Senator Inhofe: And the administration has repeatedly  
12 mentioned that they could eventually support recognition of  
13 the Taliban as the legitimate government in Afghanistan. I  
14 would like to have your ideas, I have good ideas, but I  
15 would like to have your ideas of what this would mean.

16 Mr. Joscelyn: I think to recognize the Taliban's  
17 regime as the legitimate government in Afghanistan would  
18 give them a political victory that would compound their  
19 military victory. Remember from 1996 to 2001, they were not  
20 recognized internationally. You can look at my written  
21 testimony and see that many of the same men who ran that  
22 regime from 1996 to 2001, are now running it once again,  
23 including Hasan Akhund, who has been named as the so-called  
24 Head of State, who actually defied the U.N.

25 When the U.N. demanded that Osama bin Laden be turned

1 over, Akhund very publicly said, no, we are not going to do  
2 that. So, I don't think there is any reason to reward them  
3 with recognition at this point. I think the new Taliban is  
4 the same old Taliban.

5 Senator Inhofe: Well, those are great specific  
6 answers. Thanks so much.

7 Mr. Chairman?

8 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Inhofe.

9 Senator Shaheen, please?

10 Senator Shaheen: Oh, good.

11 Senator Inhofe, can I have your 2 minutes?

12 Senator Inhofe: No.

13 [Laughter.]

14 Senator Shaheen: Dr. Nasr, I think one of the things  
15 that many Americans looked at with respect to our time in  
16 Afghanistan and felt proud of was the human rights that were  
17 afforded to women and the constitution in Afghanistan that  
18 gave other minorities rights that they had not had under the  
19 Taliban or under previous governments.

20 I appreciate that in the culture of Afghanistan, there  
21 are a lot of people who don't support that, but given what  
22 we know about the Taliban, is there any reason to think that  
23 they are going to treat women and girls any differently than  
24 the previous Taliban regime did?

25 And if the answer so that is no, what should we be

1 thinking about doing to address the human rights of women  
2 and girls in the country, which, obviously, are going to be  
3 at risk?

4 Mr. Nasr: So, Senator Shaheen, your observation is  
5 correct, and I think it even goes much broader. There is a  
6 large, modern, middle-class society that the United States  
7 helped step up in Afghanistan, which is now under threat.

8 There is no reason to think that the Taliban, either  
9 because of their tribal views or because of their religious  
10 views, that they are going to be supportive of the kinds of  
11 liberties and civil rights that Afghan women, minorities,  
12 and, generally, the Afghan civil society has.

13 And I think the only leverage we have is to work with  
14 other countries around to put pressure on the Taliban, at  
15 least from top down, to make a recognition of these rights.  
16 There are certain things they want, not only from us, from  
17 China, from Russia, from Uzbekistan, and the like, that  
18 should be made conditional on better behavior and observance  
19 of some of these laws.

20 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

21 And I am going to ask both, you and Mr. Joscelyn this  
22 next question, because you mentioned in your comments, both  
23 of you mentioned the challenges of Pakistan. And how should  
24 we view Pakistan going forward and how are they going to see  
25 the challenges because of the changes in the Taliban's now

1 taking over Afghanistan.

2 Dr. Nasr, do you want to go first on that?

3 Mr. Nasr: Sure. I think we are going to still have  
4 difficulty dealing with Pakistan, because Pakistanis have a  
5 particular view of what kind of Afghanistan is safe for  
6 them, what kind of Afghanistan will deny India a footprint  
7 close to their borders.

8 And they have, basically, now close to 3 decades, have  
9 invested in jihadism and in the Taliban as the horse that  
10 they are going to back. And so, we are going to have very  
11 difficult relations with Pakistan on this issue.

12 They do have enormous amount of influence in Kabul and,  
13 as Mr. Joscelyn said, with various elements of the Taliban.  
14 I think we should use that in a way to get some of the  
15 things that we want in Kabul, where there is protection of  
16 human civil rights or other sets of issues.

17 But we should not kid ourselves that the Pakistanis are  
18 not supportive of a different Afghanistan than the one that  
19 is now we are seeing.

20 Senator Shaheen: Mr. Joscelyn?

21 Mr. Joscelyn: I have to note that The Long War  
22 Journal, the publication that I help run, has been banned in  
23 Pakistan, physically, for more than a decade. So, the  
24 Pakistanis don't like our reporting on their duplicity and  
25 their sponsorship of our enemies in Afghanistan who were,

1 obviously, they were harboring and sheltering and  
2 facilitating the very same leaders who were sending  
3 insurgents to go kill Afghans and Americans and Europeans  
4 and others.

5 So, I have a very critical view of Pakistan's role in  
6 all of this. I think if you go back through the history of  
7 all of this and if you do keep diving into the failures of  
8 the history of the war here, you should note that in late  
9 2001, the State Department gave a list of demands under  
10 Secretary of State-then, Colin Powell, and Dick Armitage to  
11 the Pakistanis. A good place to start exploring how  
12 Pakistan betrayed us and worked against us for all these  
13 years is you will realize, I think, only 1 of those 10 or 11  
14 demands was actually satisfied.

15 Senator Shaheen: Yeah, I am sorry to interrupt. I  
16 don't disagree with that at all.

17 Mr. Joscelyn: Sure.

18 Senator Shaheen: The question I have is --

19 Mr. Joscelyn: Sorry.

20 Senator Shaheen: -- going forward --

21 Mr. Joscelyn: Yeah.

22 Senator Shaheen: -- what should we be doing?

23 Mr. Joscelyn: Well --

24 Senator Shaheen: Do we take a hard line with Pakistan?  
25 Do we think about, what leverage points do we have as we are

1 thinking about the future?

2 Mr. Joscelyn: My point in bringing that up is, I  
3 haven't seen any leverage all these years; that is my  
4 problem, going back to 2001. So, I can't imagine we have  
5 great leverage now. That is basically why I brought up that  
6 whole history.

7 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

8 And can you say to what extent you think ISIS-K will be  
9 a challenge for the Taliban and is that something that we  
10 should be looking to as a problem for them going forward?

11 Mr. Joscelyn: So far, they have a very small presence  
12 in Nangarhar and some other areas of Afghanistan. They are  
13 doing, basically, roadside IED bombings against Taliban  
14 convoys. They are going to continue to fight the Taliban  
15 and Al Qaeda, by the way, but they don't have the power to  
16 overthrow the state the way the Taliban and Al Qaeda had the  
17 power to overthrow Kabul.

18 So, I think they are going to have a lingering issue  
19 there for the Taliban, but it won't be, to my mind, they are  
20 not going to start seizing significant territory anytime  
21 soon.

22 Senator Shaheen: Thank you. Thank you both.

23 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator.

24 Senator Cramer, please?

25 Senator Cramer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.



1           And thank you to both of you for being here. I want to  
2 focus a little bit on the "over the horizon" strategy which  
3 gets varying degrees of, you know, enthusiasm, I suspect.  
4 But, obviously, the generals have been pretty clear; it is  
5 going to be much tougher to both, collect data and to  
6 strike.

7           Now, of course, in the last day or so, we are hearing  
8 that now the Taliban are calling on us to stop the breach of  
9 international laws and whatnot and joining them is China.  
10 And I would be interested in knowing a couple of things;  
11 first of all, your opinions about "over the horizon" as a  
12 strategy. And you probably won't say anything that we  
13 haven't already heard several times. But beyond that, is it  
14 possible for the Taliban to get systems from their friends  
15 in China or Russia that could actually prevent an effective  
16 "over the horizon" ISR and strike missions?

17           And I will start with you, Mr. Joscelyn.

18           Mr. Joscelyn: Yeah, I mean, I think my criticisms or  
19 concerns of "over the horizon" are basically a lot of what  
20 you heard on Tuesday and probably heard elsewhere. We don't  
21 have any basing rights right now in the region to launch  
22 even anything close to the theater.

23           I would just add one concern I have, which is that  
24 after documenting this for so long, Al Qaeda, in particular,  
25 the U.S. never really developed a working model of Al Qaeda

1 in Afghanistan. Even across 20 years of being there, there  
2 are blind spots. There were large training facilities that  
3 operated for months at a time that nobody knew about. So,  
4 this is going to get even more difficult now. The blind  
5 spots are going to get even larger, I would say, for that.

6 In terms of China, all I would say is that they  
7 signaled very early on they were going to deal with the  
8 Taliban. Even before the fall of Kabul and then immediately  
9 after the fall of Kabul, you saw the Taliban delegation that  
10 actually negotiated with the Americans in Doha, made a trip  
11 to Beijing and was able to get, you know, pledges of some  
12 sort of support from the Chinese. I would very much keep  
13 tabs on that relationship.

14 Senator Cramer: Dr. Nasr, the same, especially this  
15 relationship with our near-peer adversaries that we are  
16 supposed to put under focus on while we take our eye off of  
17 the war on terror, it looks to me that it might be the same  
18 war.

19 Mr. Nasr: Well, there is no doubt that Afghanistan  
20 matters to China and the Chinese are now much more vocal in  
21 terms of policy there. It also matters to Russia greatly.  
22 It matters to Iran.

23 On some issues, they also have similar concerns as us,  
24 but they are also developing their own independent policies  
25 towards the Taliban, and that, at some point, will interfere

1 in the way in which we want to manage the Taliban or manage  
2 Al Qaeda in that region.

3 So, I think the China factor is important. We often  
4 think about China as if it is only a Pacific Ocean power --

5 Senator Cramer: Uh-huh.

6 Mr. Nasr: -- but China is a West Asian power. It  
7 actually expanding further into West Asia and Afghanistan is  
8 going to be pretty important.

9 And I would say, at least that one of the things that  
10 the Chinese often have asked from the Taliban in exchange  
11 for support is that the Taliban would not set up bases or  
12 support the Uyghur Islamic minority and that they would not  
13 encourage Islamic activism in Central Asia. So, it remains  
14 to be seen whether that pledge holds and what did the  
15 Taliban get in exchange for it.

16 Senator Cramer: Mr. Joscelyn, with regard to allies,  
17 you know, we have heard some conflicting reports.  
18 Certainly, our President speaks glowingly about his  
19 relationship across the world.

20 The other day, General Milley did admit that, you know,  
21 our allies are probably at least questioning.

22 What is your sense of how our allies are feeling right  
23 now and preparing, right now, given what I think was not  
24 just a debacle, but it just appears like there is a lot of  
25 weakness right now, and I am just wondering what our allies

1 are thinking about the United States, in your view.

2 Mr. Joscelyn: I am very worried about our country,  
3 overall, in terms of our weak standing right now. I think  
4 you can note that the French, British, and Germans, all made  
5 comments after this chaotic withdrawal, recognizing that  
6 there was a lack of American willpower here.

7 I don't think this is just unique to this  
8 administration. I think we are dealing with real problems  
9 here, long term.

10 But the thing is that if the Europeans are saying they  
11 don't trust us, and these are some of our longest and  
12 closest allies going back to the revolution, I think we have  
13 a problem.

14 Senator Cramer: I have about 30 seconds left.

15 Maybe, Mr. Joscelyn, if you could just elaborate a  
16 little bit more on our sort of missed cues in understating  
17 the Al Qaeda. I mean, that is really one of the more  
18 concerning issues for me.

19 Mr. Joscelyn: I can't get over the fact that for all  
20 of the hundreds of billions of dollars that were spent on  
21 this war in Afghanistan, that if you were to ask the  
22 decision-makers and leaders of this war basic questions  
23 about the Al Qaeda and its relationship with the Taliban, I  
24 can assure you they would fail to answer them. They would  
25 not understand them, because I have been doing this a long

1 time, and it is dumbfounding.

2 And so, when you hear these buzz words like  
3 "remnants" or, you know, "degraded" or "decimated" or "a  
4 shadow of its former self," these are all catch phrases,  
5 right, I always ask, what is the "there" there, you know,  
6 what is the evidence?

7 We deal in evidence, right; that is what we deal in.  
8 Where is the evidence for what they are saying about all  
9 this?

10 And so, you know, as the U.S. has been saying there is  
11 a minimal or a nonexistent Al Qaeda presence, I can tell you  
12 that in Al Qaeda's Arabic newsletter, Thabat, which we  
13 translate, they have been documenting that they are  
14 operating throughout the country, and they do that on a  
15 weekly basis.

16 So, why isn't anybody, why wasn't anybody checking on  
17 this to actually develop a working model that actually was  
18 rooted in evidence, instead of wishful thinking?

19 Senator Cramer: Well, I sometimes wonder if they  
20 didn't know, we just have been understating it.

21 But, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Cramer.

23 Senator Kaine, please?

24 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair and Ranking Member  
25 Inhofe.

1 I am going to ask some questions about the expansion of  
2 control of Afghanistan by Taliban over time. In  
3 January 2017, U.S. forces in Afghanistan were about 10,000  
4 and then there were NATO forces, coalition forces, too. The  
5 Afghan Government was estimated by the DOD to be in control  
6 of 63 percent of the districts in Afghanistan in 2017.

7 One year later, we had 8,600 troops, so we were down a  
8 bit. A BBC fairly intensive study suggested that the  
9 Government was only in control of 30 percent of the  
10 Afghanistan, and that matches something; there was a Special  
11 Inspector General Report in January of 2018 just talking  
12 about historic, quote, historically, the number of districts  
13 controlled or influenced by the Government has been  
14 following since SIGAR had been reporting on it, while the  
15 number controlled or influenced by insurgents has been  
16 rising.

17 President Trump took the number of U.S. troops in  
18 Afghanistan down to about 2,500 when he left office and it  
19 was sort of at that level when President Biden announced in  
20 April that we would leave by September.

21 Do you know in April of 2021 what percentage of the  
22 country was controlled by the Afghan Government and what  
23 percent was either controlled by the Taliban or the Taliban  
24 were operating, basically, freely?

25 Mr. Joscelyn: Senator, I am kicking myself because my

1 colleague has those statistics and he tracked that very  
2 granularly every month. And I wish I had them in front of  
3 you to answer you. Maybe I can follow-up with a specific  
4 answer.

5 But the issue is, it was dire. I mean, the number of  
6 districts that were controlled by the Afghan Government has  
7 already slipped. They were basically priming the pump for  
8 this final offensive on May 1.

9 They had already, the way I described it, they had tied  
10 the nooses around all these provincial capitals and they  
11 were waiting for May 1 to start to pull them.

12 Senator Kaine: Yeah.

13 Mr. Joscelyn: So, that is --

14 Senator Kaine: And, Dr. Nasr, do you have any  
15 additional on that? In April, what percentage of  
16 Afghanistan was controlled by the Afghan Government?

17 Mr. Nasr: So, first, based on that I have heard, about  
18 60 to 70 percent of the country was under Taliban control,  
19 but there was also a gray area in which they had great  
20 presence, if not total control.

21 Senator Kaine: Right. So, there would be some, a  
22 shrinking percent, a dramatically shrinking percent was in  
23 Government control, a dramatically growing percent was in  
24 Taliban control, and then there was this gray area where  
25 maybe neither was in control, but the Taliban were operating

1 significantly.

2 So, here is my question, if a force of 8,600, back in  
3 2018, could only provide support to ensure Government  
4 control of 30 percent of the country, what could we expect,  
5 long-term, from maintaining 2,500 U.S. troops in  
6 Afghanistan?

7 I mean, weren't we just going to see a tiny fraction of  
8 the government, of the nation being controlled by the  
9 Government if the U.S. had 2,500 troops there?

10 Mr. Joscelyn: I think it is obvious that 2,500 was not  
11 going to turn the war around at all. I think what 2,500  
12 would have done is it probably would have prevented the  
13 final collapse. That is the one thing.

14 It would not have liberated all the territory under  
15 Taliban control. It would not, the Taliban, probably, in my  
16 estimation, would have still taken some of the provincial  
17 capitals, maybe a number of them, with only 2,500 there.

18 However, the only benefit I would see the 2,500 is, and  
19 I think Senator Inhofe was right about this; he wrote an  
20 op-ed in which he suggested that we use, at least, keep a  
21 presence to test whether the Taliban has any, you know,  
22 intention of actually sticking to anything in the Doha  
23 Agreement, and that would have been a little bit better than  
24 just not testing them at all. That is what I would say.

25 But it definitely was not, believe me, I am not



1 advocating for any kind of long-term 2,500 presence.

2 Senator Kaine: Well, what would the U.S. troop  
3 strength have needed to be to enable the Afghan Government  
4 to control Afghanistan and not the Taliban or is there no  
5 such number?

6 Would infinity still have not been sufficient?

7 Mr. Joscelyn: You know, Senator, I don't want to sound  
8 flippant, but when it comes to counterfactuals on  
9 Afghanistan now, I often feel like it is sort of like  
10 saying, if I were a horse with a horn and wings of a  
11 unicorn, you know, because at this point, I don't know what  
12 the counterfactual is that would have worked, you know, so  
13 --

14 Senator Kaine: But you studied this and wrote about it  
15 for years. So, if the U.S. had had a hundred thousand, if  
16 we put a hundred thousand troops in, would the Afghan  
17 Government controlled the nation or not?

18 Mr. Joscelyn: Well, they would have controlled much  
19 more of it, sure, I mean, but not all of it, no.

20 Senator Kaine: Yeah. Even with a hundred thousand,  
21 they could not --

22 Mr. Joscelyn: When we had a hundred thousand in  
23 country, they didn't control all of it. Yeah. Yeah.

24 Senator Kaine: Thank you.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Kaine.

1 Senator Wicker, please?

2 Senator Wicker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 It is kind of ironic that the Taliban and other  
4 terrorist groups ran Russia out of Afghanistan and now it  
5 seems that the Taliban and Russia are somewhat cozy.

6 Let me ask you, Mr. Joscelyn, what effect this debacle  
7 and the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban, what effect  
8 that is likely to have on the former Soviet Republics in the  
9 neighborhood, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and, particularly,  
10 Kazakhstan; are they more surrounded now by Russia and  
11 vulnerable to Mr. Putin?

12 Mr. Joscelyn: Well, there are just two parts to that.  
13 There is the Putin angle and then there is the Taliban  
14 angle.

15 When it comes to the Taliban threat to the Stans, there  
16 is a very clear danger to some of them, including  
17 Tajikistan. When you look at what the Taliban did and we  
18 talk about how they cut off the north and they won the  
19 north, the way they did that was with Al Qaeda-affiliated  
20 Tajik groups, including Ansarullah, which is actually what  
21 took over much of the territory this year and actually  
22 started controlling the border crossing with Tajikistan.

23 So, the Tajiks, you can see that Tajikistan is very  
24 concerned about all this right now when it comes to what is  
25 coming out of Afghanistan. They are harboring. They

1 brought in the so-called resistance leaders that were in the  
2 Panjshir Valley. I have seen recent reports that they have  
3 relocated Tajikistan.

4 When it comes to Russia and all of this, what I would  
5 say that it is very curious is we were watching how Moscow  
6 was bringing delegations of the Taliban to Moscow to stand  
7 them up without the Afghan Government being present, and  
8 they did this over and over again. They had to know that  
9 this was diplomatically contributing to the undermining of  
10 the Government of Afghanistan and Kabul.

11 And it was so embarrassing for the Taliban; at one  
12 point, they actually issued a statement saying, no, no, we  
13 know we beat them, the Mujahideen beat them in the first  
14 time around, the Soviets, but this is different. They  
15 basically had to explain it away for their own audience  
16 because it was that uncomfortable. But no, to me, it is  
17 very puzzling -- it is not puzzling, but you can see that  
18 Moscow actually shifted its behavior here.

19 Senator Wicker: If you were the leadership of  
20 Kazakhstan wanting to remain free from Russian domination,  
21 as they have been there for some 20 years, what would your  
22 apprehension be?

23 Mr. Joscelyn: I would be concerned, obviously, that  
24 Russia is always going to look out for Russian interests  
25 first; that is who Moscow is going to look out for and,

1 obviously, not theirs. And I see a willingness from Moscow  
2 to do business with, even, jihadis in different areas, so --

3 Senator Wicker: Do they need to look to their south to  
4 be worried about Russia now?

5 Mr. Joscelyn: Absolutely.

6 Senator Wicker: Okay. Let me shift to one other  
7 thing. In the way we avoided going out into Kabul to rescue  
8 our friends and in the way that we signaled that we wanted  
9 to avoid casualties at any cost, does that send a signal?  
10 Haven't we, over time, resisted sending the signal to our  
11 enemies that we were averse to risking any casualties and  
12 has the perception of our U.S. military changed because of  
13 what happened in Kabul?

14 Mr. Joscelyn: I think that that was absolutely the  
15 calculation by a withdrawal was, I think the President  
16 decided, and I think President Trump had decided, too, that  
17 they didn't want to risk any more casualties on the American  
18 side in Afghanistan any longer.

19 What I can say about that is, since 2014, when you hear  
20 people say that the Afghans didn't fight for their country,  
21 I have to disagree with that. About 60 to 70,000 Afghans  
22 died under U.S. military leadership, fighting for their  
23 country on the ground. They took on a lot of casualties.  
24 But since 2014, the Americans took on a very small number of  
25 casualties, including even up to the Doha Agreement last

1 year, you can see the number of casualties had decreased.

2 Now, that is not explaining them away. You know, I  
3 think about the people who were lost there all the time.  
4 All I am saying is that we have absolutely signaled to the  
5 world that we are risk-averse in that regard.

6 Senator Wicker: Well, what is true, also, is that the  
7 Afghan military was trained almost entirely to fight with  
8 the help, with the close air support and the ground support  
9 of the United States military; is that not correct?

10 Mr. Joscelyn: That is absolutely correct.

11 You heard that even on Tuesday, that there was some  
12 mirror imaging, which was part of the problem with the  
13 effort. The air support, the logistical support in that  
14 regard, if you are an Afghan fighting alongside the U.S.  
15 military and get logistical air support and then all of a  
16 sudden one day it is gone, right, that is a big deal. That  
17 is a huge deal.

18 And, you know, the Taliban was used to fighting without  
19 air support all these years.

20 Senator Wicker: And I can tell you the then-ambassador  
21 from Afghanistan to the United States called me, a member of  
22 this committee, a couple of days before the fall and said,  
23 would you please implore the administration to return to  
24 close air support and that did not happen.

25 Have you heard that?

1 Mr. Joscelyn: Oh, we were documenting it in real time.

2 Senator Wicker: Yeah.

3 Mr. Joscelyn: You can see in the last several months,  
4 there were only sporadic air strikes by the Americans to  
5 come to the defense of the Afghans and they were just  
6 sporadic. They weren't anything that was going to actually  
7 keep them afloat.

8 And part of the reason why they crumbled was they were  
9 used to fighting with close air support and now they no  
10 longer had it.

11 Senator Wicker: Thank you, sir.

12 Chairman Reed: Senator King, please?

13 Thank you, Senator Wicker.

14 Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 There are going to be lots of lessons from this episode  
16 and I think one of the biggest ones is one that we keep not  
17 learning, and that is we don't understand other cultures.

18 And, Mr. Nasr, I think you started your testimony  
19 talking about, we didn't really, we think everybody thinks  
20 like us and everybody wants to be a liberal democracy and  
21 everybody wants to have elections and everybody wants to  
22 have a structure. And we don't understand the ethnic  
23 divisions of sending Tajik troops to Pashtun areas. And  
24 this is more of a comment than a question, but it seems to  
25 me this is something Americans, we get that wrong. Vietnam,

1 Iraq, and Afghanistan, that is one of the fundamental errors  
2 of American foreign policy is thinking and not understanding  
3 other cultures.

4 Here is my question. Mr. Nasr, you testified, the  
5 quote was, Doha ended the war. And I think that is really  
6 important that the die was cast when the administration  
7 agreed, number one, they made a deal with the Taliban,  
8 excluding an Afghan Government, entirely, and, number two,  
9 it was a fixed, May 1, 2021, American troops a going to be  
10 out. That was the, our war in Afghanistan was over when  
11 that agreement was signed.

12 Now, President Biden could have reversed it. It  
13 understand that, but that was the crucial moment, was it  
14 not, in terms of the beginning of the collapse of the morale  
15 of the Afghan Government and the Afghan military. And the  
16 only real condition was that there would be negotiations,  
17 which never occurred and we didn't enforce, as near as I can  
18 tell.

19 Is that correct, wasn't the Doha Agreement the real,  
20 that was the end of the war in all practical senses?

21 Mr. Nasr: Yes, Senator. That is my understanding,  
22 that when Doha Agreement, first of all, the negotiations  
23 already sent a very powerful signal to the region that the  
24 United States was willing to negotiate with the Taliban  
25 directly. And that was, obviously, very different from our

1 attitudes the Taliban for over the past 15 years.

2 And, secondly, that we did arrive at an agreement. The  
3 agreement was around a ceasefire and an exit of the United  
4 States from Pakistan.

5 Senator King: And people talk about it being  
6 conditions-based, but the conditions were pretty vague and  
7 they were never enforced. The only real condition was not  
8 harboring Al Qaeda and negotiations with the Afghan  
9 Government, neither one of which occurred.

10 And I asked the generals that were here the other day,  
11 were there any efforts to enforce those conditions or to  
12 pause the withdrawal, and the answer I got was no.

13 So, let me ask this question, if President Biden had  
14 decided in April to abrogate the Doha Agreement, number one,  
15 what would have happened with regard to the Taliban's  
16 ceasefire with the Americans, and number two, what would  
17 have been required in order to return to a situation where  
18 the Afghan Government could retain some measure of control;  
19 in other words, where would we have had to go?

20 I think your testimony, Mr. Joscelyn, was 2,500 troops  
21 wasn't going to do it. Clearly, there would have had to  
22 have been an escalation of our presence; isn't that correct?

23 Mr. Nasr: Yes, that is correct. The 2,500 troops were  
24 only viable at that point in time because there was a  
25 ceasefire; in fact, the 2,500 troops were not permitted for



1 under the Doha Agreement. So, in a sense, we would have  
2 needed even a force protection plan to just protect those  
3 2,500, and then, you know, there could be a military  
4 assessment to see how many more troops we would have needed  
5 to stabilize the situation and give the Afghan Government  
6 breathing room.

7 I would say that when the Doha Agreement started, we  
8 had multiples of that, close to 30,000 troops, perhaps more,  
9 and we still were not able to stave off the Taliban  
10 offensive.

11 Senator King: Was this mission doomed almost from the  
12 beginning?

13 Mr. Nasr: My testimony was that there were strategic  
14 problems with our approach right after we talked with the  
15 Taliban in 2001 that sowed the seeds of an insurgency that  
16 we were never able to control.

17 Senator King: Mr. Joscelyn, you talked about the  
18 resurgence of Al Qaeda and I don't doubt it. I think you  
19 are absolutely right and it is certainly going to be a  
20 problem. And I think the "over the horizon" solution is  
21 being oversold.

22 On the other hand, the whole safe havens argument, the  
23 trouble with that is we would have troops everywhere. I  
24 mean, there are safe havens, potentially, in Mali, in Syria,  
25 in Yemen.

1           How should we react to trying to control Al Qaeda when  
2 it has now metastasized throughout the Middle East and, in  
3 fact, into Africa?

4           Mr. Joscelyn: Well, Senator that is a valid point. We  
5 have tracked how the Al Qaeda has spread out over time to  
6 those areas you just mentioned and it is the case that today  
7 Al Qaeda would not need to train the 19, 9/11 hijackers,  
8 let's say, in Afghanistan, the way they did in the late  
9 1990s and 2000. You can go to the 9/11 Commission Report,  
10 all 19 were trained there. They could get training in a  
11 number of different places now.

12           The problem is that Afghanistan, now, is the only one  
13 of those areas that I can think of where the Government is  
14 Al Qaeda's ally and so they have a special amount of  
15 protection that they don't have in those other areas where  
16 they have local adversaries that they have to fend off in  
17 those other areas that they don't necessarily have to fend  
18 off now in Afghanistan, other than, you know, the remnants  
19 of ISIS, and I will use "remnants" there, the remnants of  
20 ISIS in Afghanistan.

21           And so, I think the other point is that this is a boom  
22 for them in terms of their messaging. Remember, the jihadis  
23 have a strategic ideological problem, which is that they  
24 weren't able to win anywhere. They weren't able to  
25 actually, you know, ISIS lost --

1 Senator King: ISIS was collapsed, it collapsed.

2 Mr. Joscelyn: Right. It collapsed.

3 Now, they have won and now they have a victory message  
4 to go out and say, we won here in Afghanistan. Not only did  
5 the Soviets lose to the Mujahideen the first time around to  
6 Jalaluddin Haqqani, by the way, but his son, Sirajuddin  
7 Haqqani, now, defeated the Americans the second time around.  
8 That is a pretty powerful message.

9 Senator King: My time is up.

10 If there is any one phrase that summarizes what  
11 happened is the Taliban saying that the Americans have the  
12 watches, but we have the time.

13 Mr. Joscelyn: Absolutely.

14 Senator King: That is what happened. Thank you.

15 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator King.

16 Senator Rounds, please?

17 Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

18 Gentlemen, thank you for your willingness to appear  
19 before this committee and to answer questions on the  
20 withdrawal from Afghanistan.

21 You are both recognized experts in this region. This  
22 committee and others have focused exhaustively on the damage  
23 the withdrawal has done to our national security and the  
24 challenges our nation faces as we look to the future.

25 I would like to focus on two nuclear powers in that

1 region and the impact on our ability to develop  
2 relationships with both, Pakistan and with India. Clearly,  
3 this is an area in which you have two countries that we have  
4 relied on and have worked with and yet, they don't see  
5 eye-to-eye. They have border conflicts. It is a hot spot.  
6 They are both nuclear-armed, and yet, we need to be able to  
7 coordinate our diplomatic efforts and our military  
8 relationships with both.

9 With Afghanistan, now, a location where, as General  
10 Milley has suggested, there will be a place for Al Qaeda and  
11 they will be able to begin the planning for additional  
12 attacks against our homeland out of Afghanistan.

13 Can you share with us your thoughts about the  
14 relationship that we have to develop in order to maintain  
15 what the administration wants to do with regard to an "over  
16 the horizon" capability directly into Afghanistan and yet,  
17 at the same time, diplomatic challenges we have trying to  
18 work with both, India and with Pakistan.

19 Mr. Joscelyn, would you like to begin.

20 Mr. Joscelyn: I am very skeptical of our ability to  
21 deal with Pakistan and have any kind of leverage there,  
22 whatsoever, in dealing with them.

23 When it comes to the "over the horizon" strike  
24 capabilities, we have already seen senior Pakistani  
25 officials basically say they are not going to give it to us

1 and, you know, I don't know if they will change their minds.

2 But, remember, President Obama, when they launched the  
3 raid on Osama bin Laden, didn't inform the Pakistanis that  
4 we were coming, because we didn't trust them.

5 Remember back in the 1990s when cruise missiles were  
6 launched at Al Qaeda training camps in Afghanistan in  
7 response to the embassy bombings, we didn't tell our -- or  
8 the Pakistanis -- I'm sorry -- we did tell the Pakistanis  
9 and they tipped off Bin Laden at the time and he escaped.

10 This is the type of problems that we have been dealing  
11 with Pakistan going back to the 1990s in this regard, but I  
12 just may say one thing real quick. When it comes to all  
13 this, and the question you are asking about a nuclear-armed  
14 state, in my testimony, I use the phrase, my written  
15 testimony, I use the phrase "Wheel of Jihad." Pakistan has  
16 sponsored and harbored and worked with the Haqqanis and  
17 senior Taliban officials and mid-level Taliban officials to  
18 win the war in Afghanistan.

19 The complexity of this is, is that those same parties  
20 are in bed with Al Qaeda and the Pakistani Taliban, which  
21 comes back around against the Pakistani state. And so, it  
22 is the case, and I think you heard the general say something  
23 like this on Tuesday, that they could have miscalculated  
24 here. You have a nuclear-armed state that has been a hotbed  
25 of jihadism now for two generations or more and they have

1 been deeply in bed with some of the same parties that are  
2 actually working with the entities that actually threatened  
3 the Pakistani state. So, that is something to keep an eye  
4 on.

5 Senator Rounds: Thank you.

6 Mr. Nasr?

7 Mr. Nasr: Well, it is very clear that India is  
8 particularly unhappy with U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.  
9 They see it as an absolute strategic defeat and they have  
10 their worries.

11 But we have to be careful also not to put the past as a  
12 model for the future. Things have changed quite  
13 considerably. India is not part of the Quad for us. It is  
14 about our China policy.

15 China now has a strategic partnership with Pakistan  
16 that didn't exist before. And Afghanistan is not the only  
17 issue, as we try to navigate between these two powers, and  
18 the Chinese, themselves, now have a much bigger voice in  
19 Afghanistan than they did before. And so, we have to  
20 navigate a much more complicated set of issues than was the  
21 case in the past. And the Pakistanis also have certain  
22 leverage because of the relationship with China that does  
23 impinge on our ability to pressure them.

24 Senator Rounds: Thank you, gentlemen.

25 Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

1 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Rounds.

2 And for the information of my colleagues and the  
3 witnesses, the vote has now been pushed back to 11:00 a.m.

4 With that, let me recognize Senator Gillibrand.

5 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

6 Given the recent testimony from military leaders  
7 stating that we were overly optimistic about the capacity of  
8 the Afghan military to fight the Taliban or that we didn't  
9 quite assess properly that once our logistics was no longer  
10 there to support them, once our air support wasn't there,  
11 once our contractors weren't there, that they didn't have  
12 the confidence to fight against the Taliban, nor did we  
13 fully recognize that many, many, many of the Afghan  
14 military, when given the option of putting down your weapons  
15 or dying, they wanted to put down their weapons.

16 And we now know that is largely because they didn't  
17 have faith in the government in Afghanistan, that the  
18 corruption there was too significant and that they didn't  
19 want to die or see their families die to fight for that  
20 particular Government.

21 Do we want to run the risk of not understanding or  
22 being overly optimistic about other training missions around  
23 the world, and if so, where, and what recommendations do you  
24 have for changes to our strategy of training partner forces  
25 to counter violent extremist groups?

1           And to further amplify Senator King's question, it  
2 seems that we were not thoughtful enough about the culture  
3 in which we were trying to instill our democratic values, to  
4 the extent that we didn't have the appropriate or the  
5 knowledge of what would actually happen.

6           Mr. Nasr: Senator, I think you pointed out a number of  
7 key issues, but, also, I would add to that the fact that the  
8 soldiers had not been paid for 6 to 8 months; it is quite  
9 important. I mean, they literally had serious grievances  
10 that what was meant to be for their salaries was being  
11 hoarded by military leaders, civilians that had been put in  
12 charge of the military, or generals by the Government in  
13 Kabul. There was a tremendous amount of disgruntlement.

14           They did not look at the Kabul Government as a  
15 political leadership that they would respect or that it can  
16 keep Afghanistan together. And, also, at a critical point,  
17 the Taliban began negotiating with the tribal leaders from,  
18 of the tribes that these soldiers came from.

19           And if there is not going to be a government in Kabul,  
20 there were all these kinds of tribal deals that protection  
21 would be given to a particular region or a particular tribe  
22 or a particular province if the soldiers laid down their  
23 weapons. So, it was not so much about them not being  
24 willing to die, is that, essentially, the Afghan military  
25 began to dissolve along Afghan lines, along the lines of



1 tribal conversations, et cetera.

2 And I think what we ought to learn is that we cannot  
3 lead a military only on military matters and not have a say  
4 on whether the soldiers are getting paid. We cannot lead a  
5 militated on military matters when we don't have a say on  
6 who their commanders are or if the President of Afghanistan  
7 decides to put some political appointee in charge of  
8 operations.

9 So, there was a discrepancy between treating  
10 Afghanistan as a sovereign state when, in essence, we were  
11 the military and we were not in control of every aspect of  
12 the military operation.

13 Senator Gillibrand: Could, therefore, not say that one  
14 of the original sins, then, was not including the Afghan  
15 Government in the negotiations in Doha?

16 Mr. Nasr: Yes, I think that was a big problem, because  
17 we delegitimized the Afghan Government, not only in the mind  
18 of Afghans, but everybody else around the Middle East that I  
19 know. That, you know, this is a sovereign country that is  
20 our ally, except when we went to the negotiating table.

21 And we also did not bring the Afghan security forces as  
22 an independent military combatant force that was doing the  
23 fighting to the ceasefire negotiations. So, we basically  
24 chopped them off at the legs. We sent a signal that we were  
25 recognizing only the Taliban as our interlocutory in

1 Afghanistan.

2 And I think American withdrawal from Afghanistan and  
3 its regional reverberations started with the Doha Agreement,  
4 not in the summer. I think a lot of, it was clear that we  
5 were leaving and we were leaving the country to the Taliban.  
6 That is when Iranians, Chinese, Russians, everybody started  
7 diplomatic initiative with the Taliban because they saw  
8 that, basically, they were coming.

9 Senator Gillibrand: In the summer of 2000, right?

10 Mr. Nasr: No, before that, Senator.

11 When the Doha Agreement was being negotiated, the  
12 understanding was that the United States is negotiating its  
13 exit with one political force, called the Taliban. So,  
14 sooner or later, these are masters of Kabul. There won't be  
15 a Government. The Afghan Government doesn't matter.

16 If the Afghan Government doesn't matter to the United  
17 States, it doesn't matter to anybody else, either.

18 Senator Gillibrand: So, therefore, failure was baked  
19 in the cake because of the negotiations?

20 Mr. Nasr: Well, the negotiations brought us to the  
21 summer. I mean, all the essence of it from the ceasefire,  
22 from troop numbers, from the date of the exit, and,  
23 essentially, from who, literally, would be deciding the fate  
24 of Afghanistan was baked into the negotiations.

25 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you.

1 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Gillibrand.

2 Senator Tillis, please?

3 Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 I tend to agree with Senator King's comments about us  
5 trying to project expectations for the society we have here  
6 in other parts of the world. But I also have to say that  
7 with half of the nearly 39 million people who live in  
8 Afghanistan being under the age of 19, they have seen a very  
9 different opportunity that generations before them in  
10 Afghanistan, and I think the number is somewhere around 60  
11 percent, just below 70 percent, are under the age of 25.

12 So, to the people who served there, I think it is  
13 important to think that we have sowed a seed that may give  
14 them an opportunity after the current conflict resolves  
15 itself in the almost impossible to assume, otherwise, civil  
16 war that is going to occur there in the coming years.

17 I have heard the twenty-five-hundred number discussed  
18 in the prior hearing and this hearing, and I just want to  
19 see if I can get agreement with you all on what the real  
20 number is. We heard General Miller a few weeks ago and  
21 General Milley and General McKenzie this week say that the  
22 2,500 were fighters. You know, then, that there is going to  
23 be some logistical tale to support those fighters.

24 You heard General Milley say that depending upon  
25 circumstances, they would probably have to have a surge

1 capacity of another 3,500.

2 But what hasn't been talked about is the unusual  
3 situation where NATO allies and partners were talking about  
4 another 6,000. So, the number is really 8,000 to 10,000,  
5 disbursed across the country, not only with fighters, but  
6 also with intelligence assets and other strike capabilities.

7 And to use General Miller's term, he believed with the  
8 advice that he got from people in forward positions, that  
9 that would be a sufficient number to put the hands on the  
10 shoulders of the Afghan national forces and probably keep a  
11 reasonably stable environment.

12 Would you all agree with those numbers?

13 We are not talking about 2,500; we are talking about  
14 something between 8,000 and 9,500 that would be in country  
15 to stabilize the situation.

16 Mr. Joscelyn: Senator, that sounds accurate. The only  
17 thing I will say is for years, we haven't been able to get  
18 reliable, public numbers out of the Defense Department about  
19 what the forces actually look like in Afghanistan, so I  
20 can't say with certainty that that is right. But that  
21 sounds about right.

22 And I don't think, when you say, put a hand on the  
23 shoulder of Afghan security forces, what that number would  
24 have done, what that platform would have done, it would have  
25 prevented the -- it would not have turned the situation

1 around. It would not have won the war.

2 What it would have done would probably prevented how  
3 quickly we saw the collapse. It probably would have done  
4 that. I think you would have seen Afghan forces would have  
5 fought in different parts of the country to keep the country  
6 under the control of the Government in a better way,  
7 especially if they have had logistical air support, but it  
8 obviously wasn't going to win the war.

9 Senator Tillis: And, incidentally, I was against the  
10 Doha Agreement and the prior administration. We heard  
11 General Milley testify that it was clear last year that the  
12 Taliban were not living up to the spirit of the letter of  
13 the agreement. President Biden had to know that when he was  
14 making a campaign promise to move forward with the  
15 withdrawal, it would just seem to me.

16 And I don't buy the argument that the only reason that  
17 we moved forward with the withdrawal was because it was a  
18 prior agreement, because we have seen reversals of other  
19 decisions made by the prior administration.

20 But it would just seem to me that even if the ultimate  
21 goal was to exit Afghanistan or to potentially exit, but  
22 maintain a diplomatic presence, if they had, if the  
23 administration had listened to the advice of at least some  
24 people with extensive experience on the ground in  
25 Afghanistan, that you could have reset and said, we actually

1 meant that the terms of the Doha Agreement had to be  
2 satisfied, we meant that the Taliban had to work with the  
3 Afghan Government for some sort of peaceful transition, and  
4 we just simply got so focused on exiting that we did so at  
5 the expense of 13 military personnel and what I believe will  
6 be thousands of people who were left behind.

7 The last question is on "over the horizon." You know  
8 if, and I think Senator King said that he has not sure that,  
9 I think you said that maybe "over the horizon" is being  
10 oversold. If we really believed with the issues of the air  
11 corridors and the lack of reliance or the lack of  
12 credibility with the Pakistani Government, if we believe  
13 that we can conduct counterterrorism and intelligence  
14 motions "over the horizon" in Afghanistan, a landlocked  
15 country with very, very narrow corridors to execute, why  
16 wouldn't we withdraw from any other dangerous place in the  
17 world where we have a coast and air pathways? Why wouldn't  
18 that be the logical conclusion to withdraw?

19 If you can do it in Afghanistan, then you can do it in  
20 Somalia and any other dangerous place where we think we need  
21 to be there to maintain assets, to protect the homeland, and  
22 U.S. interests. Why wouldn't that be the logical  
23 conclusion?

24 Mr. Joscelyn: You know, no, it would be the logical  
25 conclusion, Senator.

1           And the bottom line is anytime we have talked to the  
2 military over the last 15 years or whatever it was talking  
3 about "over the horizon," "over the horizon" was always  
4 problematic; it wasn't necessarily a good thing.  
5 Afghanistan is going to be even more problematic in a lot of  
6 ways.

7           You know, just on the Doha Agreement real quick, I was  
8 very loudly critical that as early as 2018, and then, again,  
9 in 2019, you can Google me and Google the Doha Agreement,  
10 and I laid it all out for everybody very quickly what was  
11 going to happen. There is another part of the Doha  
12 Agreement, I think you, Senator, should pay attention to,  
13 which is, I don't have it in front of me, but Section 1(f)  
14 of the agreement actually prevents the U.S. from using  
15 military force in Afghanistan.

16           And so, if the U.S. says that this agreement is binding  
17 and in effect, the Taliban will say, well, therefore, you  
18 cannot, then, use any kind of force in Afghanistan. And, in  
19 fact, just yesterday, the Taliban released a statement in  
20 English saying that the flying of U.S. drones in Afghan  
21 airspace was a violation of the Doha Agreement.

22           They actually, when Secretary Austin said that the  
23 Haqqanis, including Sirajuddin Haqqani, he implied that he  
24 could still be targeted by the U.S., the Taliban came out  
25 and said, no, the Doha Agreement says you can't target him.

1 That, actually, he has protected by the Doha Agreement,  
2 which means, in effect, the Doha Agreement, if we accept  
3 that reading, is protecting Al Qaeda.

4 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Tillis.

5 Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

6 Chairman Reed: Senator Warren, please?

7 Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 When General Miller appeared before this committee at  
9 his nomination hearing in 2018, I quoted four previous  
10 Defense Department leaders who had come before this  
11 committee and proclaimed that we had finally turned the  
12 corner in Afghanistan. I said that we had turn the corner  
13 so many times that we were going in circles. That was in  
14 2018.

15 And for years before that, DOD leaders told this  
16 committee and the American people about the progress we were  
17 making, but as we know from the Afghanistan papers published  
18 by the Washington Post that simply wasn't true. As early as  
19 2006, senior leaders knew that the Afghan Government, under  
20 Karzai had, quote, self-organized into a kleptocracy, end  
21 quote. And in 2010, David Petraeus reportedly said in a  
22 Situation Room meeting that the Afghan Government was a,  
23 quote, criminal syndicate.

24 Dr. Nasr, do you think that a kleptocratic Government  
25 that acts like a criminal syndicate is likely to win and



1 maintain genuine support from the population?

2 Mr. Nasr: No, Senator, it did not.

3 And as I said in my testimony, when we had mission  
4 creep from fighting terrorism to state building in  
5 Afghanistan, the amount of money that we put into it  
6 actually created circumstances that made the war more  
7 difficult.

8 Senator Warren: I actually want to go directly to that  
9 point. We knew that the Afghan Government was weak. We  
10 knew that there was little effective oversight and even so,  
11 over the years, the United States poured hundreds of  
12 billions of dollars into Afghanistan.

13 So, let me ask you, Dr. Nasr, by flooding the country  
14 with cash like we did, were we fueling corruption in the  
15 country?

16 Mr. Nasr: Yes. The corruption obviously was based on  
17 the money that came from the outside. There was no money  
18 within Afghanistan itself. And that did cause unhappiness.  
19 It caused disgruntlement. And it did help Taliban  
20 recruitment going forward.

21 And part of the legitimacy problem of the Afghan  
22 Government is corruption, and I think in the collapse of the  
23 Afghan security forces, we saw that again, that most of the  
24 money that was supposed to go to salaries lined the pockets  
25 of commanders.

1           Senator Warren: We also know that the public military  
2 assessments of the Afghan National Security Forces were  
3 wildly inaccurate. In 2008, General David McKiernan said,  
4 quote, I will report to you that the Army is on the right  
5 path. The Afghan Army has good soldiers. We are developing  
6 that Army from scratch. It is well-trained. It is  
7 well-led, end quote. And then in 2010, General Mattis said,  
8 quote, this is the worst nightmare for the Taliban that the  
9 Afghan Army is increasingly effective, partnered with our  
10 forces, in moving against an enemy that they know better  
11 than anyone, end quote. And there are a whole lot more  
12 statements like that that I could read. I won't continue to  
13 quote them.

14           Despite a decade-plus of rosy public statements like  
15 that and throwing truckloads of money and the finest  
16 American equipment at them, when we said we were leaving,  
17 the Afghan Army collapsed almost instantly.

18           So, Mr. Joscelyn, given how quickly the Army collapsed,  
19 do you think they would have been able to truly stand on  
20 their own with just another few months or few years of  
21 American assistance and training?

22           Mr. Joscelyn: You know, it is tough to answer in  
23 years. Months, definitely not. You know, another year,  
24 probably not. You know, there were a lot of problems baked  
25 in here.

1 I mean, we shared, Senator, we shared, you know, you  
2 were reading all of these comments from the generals. The  
3 Long War Journal, the publication I run, we have been  
4 documenting this for years, and that there were all sorts of  
5 rosy assessments that were given that did not match what we  
6 were documenting. So, we are in, you know, agreement.

7 Senator Warren: So, we spent \$80 billion training and  
8 equipping the Afghan National Security Forces.

9 Let me ask you, Dr. Nasr that is taxpayer money. Was  
10 that money well-spent?

11 Mr. Nasr: With the benefit of hindsight, no.

12 Senator Warren: No. So, I agree, you know, that money  
13 could have done so much more good at home and, instead, we  
14 foolishly tried to build an Army without stable state  
15 institutions under it.

16 This Afghan experience should humble everyone in this  
17 room. It should cause us all to reflect on how badly our  
18 country and our leaders got it wrong over the course of 2  
19 decades. The rosy predictions we heard for years failed  
20 time after time and there was no accountability for it.

21 I hope that each of us will start exercising a great  
22 deal more skepticism the next time that we are asked to  
23 support, putting our servicemembers in harm's way and engage  
24 in major military operations abroad. Thank you.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Warren.

1 Senator Scott, please?

2 Senator Scott: Thank you, Chairman Reed.

3 Dr. Nasr, you tweeted against the Trump administration  
4 in 2019 that he was costing the U.S. credibility and  
5 creating instability.

6 We heard this week from General Milley and he said that  
7 President Biden's decision to leave Americans and Afghan  
8 partners behind in Afghanistan and allowing the Taliban to  
9 take over has done substantial damage to American  
10 credibility.

11 So, for both of you, do you think that the withdrawal,  
12 the way we have done the withdrawal has impacted American  
13 credibility?

14 Mr. Nasr: I think the entire endgame in Afghanistan  
15 has damaged American credibility. We waged our longest war  
16 in this country and then ended up negotiating on happy  
17 agreement with an enemy that we said we would never talk to,  
18 and then we withdrew very rapidly. And then what we hoped  
19 would stand up when we go, collapsed completely.

20 And so, we are in a position where our ability to see  
21 through our projects are suspect. Our ability to stick with  
22 our strategies are suspect. And also, our ability to  
23 execute our policies are suspect.

24 So, I agree, I do think the whole thing has damaged our  
25 credibility.

1           Mr. Joscelyn: I agree with Dr. Nasr, I think the whole  
2 endgame here has damaged our credibility. I think that  
3 particularly that this year, the scenes that we witnessed in  
4 Kabul, as somebody who monitors the jihadi world very  
5 closely, those scenes are playing out across the world right  
6 now in recruitment videos and propaganda and media.

7           They took the last shot of the last American soldier  
8 leaving Kabul, which then got put online for some reason,  
9 they take that shot and they put it next to the last Soviets  
10 leaving Afghanistan and next to an image that is supposed to  
11 be the British leaving. And what the jihadis around the  
12 world are saying is, see, we defeated the Americans, just as  
13 the Soviets and the Brits were defeated here.

14          Senator Scott: Would each of you view the, and do you  
15 think the American people should view Pakistan as an ally  
16 and do you think they will, if so, do you think they will  
17 remain an ally?

18          Mr. Nasr: Pakistan was not an ally on our project in  
19 Afghanistan. Their interests were not aligned with ours.  
20 They wanted a different kind of government in Kabul and they  
21 bet on the Taliban to bring it about. And we continuously  
22 were trying to square the circle with the Taliban, I mean,  
23 with Pakistan, and it didn't work.

24          Mr. Joscelyn: No, Pakistan is not our ally. Pakistan  
25 was the Taliban's ally and they helped defeat us in this

1 war.

2 Senator Scott: So who, right now, based on our lack of  
3 credibility and just the lack of relationships, who is going  
4 to be our ally over there to fight terrorism?

5 Mr. Nasr: Among the major countries that are around  
6 Afghanistan, we don't have a very obvious ally, because  
7 China, Iran, and Russia are not likely to be cooperating  
8 with the United States closely on counterterrorism.

9 Pakistan remains to be seen. We might get some things  
10 from Pakistan on the margins, but not if it means bringing  
11 down the Taliban or completely changing the composition in  
12 Kabul.

13 So, we are left to be working with our Persian Gulf,  
14 Arab allies like Qatar, U.A.E., or with Uzbekistan, and the  
15 like, on these sets of issues. So, we don't have an  
16 obvious, strong ally over there.

17 Mr. Joscelyn: I agree with that, too. I think we  
18 don't have an obvious, strong ally. We certainly don't have  
19 any allies in the theater right now, and I think,  
20 regionally, the situation is, of course, a mess. We don't  
21 even have any basing around Afghanistan right now to conduct  
22 operations. So, I don't think we have any clear alliances  
23 against the jihadis right now.

24 Senator Scott: So, how is this going to impact, how is  
25 our withdrawal from Afghanistan going to impact India?

1           Mr. Nasr: My understanding, in talking to a lot of  
2 people there, is they are very worried about, first of all,  
3 Pakistan becoming much more bullish, now that the United  
4 States has left and their allies have taken over  
5 Afghanistan. And, secondly, that they would be cut off from  
6 Central Asia, because they also are losing their footprint  
7 of access through Iran, as well, and that is all to China's  
8 benefit. And, finally, they are worried that Afghanistan  
9 may become a base of operations against India.

10           Mr. Joscelyn: One of the ways that Al Qaeda's presence  
11 in Afghanistan was underestimated was the role of Kashmiri  
12 jihadists, who were going to Afghanistan, retraining, and  
13 then going back to Kashmir to fight Indian forces. And in  
14 fact, for a time, one of Al Qaeda's biggest paramilitary  
15 commander, the biggest paramilitary commander in Afghanistan  
16 and fought in Kashmir, a man named Ilyas Kashmiri, they have  
17 had their sights on Kashmir and fighting Indian forces there  
18 all along. I expect to see an uptick in operations there.

19           There is also a footprint, a terrorist, cellular  
20 footprint in India, itself, and I expect you are going to  
21 see more operations inside India.

22           Senator Scott: Thank you.

23           Thank you, Chairman Reed.

24           Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Scott.

25           Senator Peters, please?

1           Senator Peters: Thank you, Chairman Reed, for the  
2 hearing and thanks to each of our witnesses.

3           You know, I think it is critically important that we do  
4 a strategic assessment of what happened in Afghanistan over  
5 the 20-year time frame and hopefully, we will be getting  
6 that kind of assessment and it won't get buried, as other  
7 previous assessments have been made with previous conflicts  
8 if folks don't like what comes out of those assessments, but  
9 we need to do it.

10           My question is going to be for both of you. The  
11 Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction  
12 Report on lessons learned in Afghanistan, stated that the  
13 State Department was unable to craft a strategy for the ways  
14 and means of this mission in Afghanistan for a variety of  
15 reasons and the only organization that was well-positioned  
16 to fill that void was the Department of Defense.

17           So, my question to both of you, could you give me an  
18 assessment of our diplomatic efforts in Afghanistan and what  
19 could we have done differently that would have been more  
20 successful over the span of years that we were there.

21           Dr. Nasr, we will start with you.

22           Mr. Nasr: Based on my experience, we did not have a  
23 diplomatic effort in Afghanistan for a very long period of  
24 time. I don't mean the embassy, but in the sense that there  
25 was very little diplomacy going on. The State Department



1 was put in the position to do nation building, oversee you  
2 know, irrigation, building electricity, helping with  
3 development of agriculture and the like, and I don't think  
4 the State Department was well-suited for that mission and,  
5 therefore, was not capable of achieving those goals,  
6 especially in a country like Afghanistan.

7 Senator Peters: So, what should have been done  
8 differently?

9 Mr. Nasr: Well, I think we should have had a different  
10 approach to the agencies of the U.S. Government that would  
11 be in charge of state building, but it is also a completely  
12 new task for the United States. I mean, what we did in  
13 Afghanistan of trying to take a country that had virtually  
14 no institutions, had been through 2 decades of civil war,  
15 and try to create a viable economy, create bureaucracies,  
16 create banks, re-dig the irrigation channels, you know,  
17 create a finance system, for instance, that Afghanistan  
18 didn't have. You know, these were tall orders that we  
19 hadn't done before.

20 Senator Peters: Thank you.

21 Mr. Joscelyn?

22 Mr. Joscelyn: That is a tough question to answer  
23 quickly. All I would say is that should have been a lot  
24 more internal diplomacy within Afghanistan to understand the  
25 different factions, the different competitors, not just

1 dealing, you know, unilaterally, with the Government of  
2 Afghanistan. There were other parties that could have had  
3 more regular diplomatic contact.

4 Critically, I think the U.S. didn't drop the ball from  
5 2001 on. It didn't have any sustained diplomatic pressure  
6 on Pakistan at all. There should have been at least an  
7 attempt to have a sustained campaign to keep pressure on  
8 Pakistan when it comes to Pakistani safe havens. It may not  
9 have worked, but at least it would have been better than  
10 this sort of erratic policy making that we saw.

11 Senator Peters: Dr. Nasr, the IMF, the World Bank, the  
12 Federal Reserve, and Asian Development have all frozen  
13 Afghan Government's accounts overseas or ceased  
14 disbursements to fund the Afghans. And coupled with  
15 hundreds of thousands of Afghan public servants, members of  
16 the security services, and other individuals who are no  
17 longer receiving a paycheck, I think we all know Afghanistan  
18 is facing a very precarious situation and a humanitarian  
19 situation.

20 The question for you, though, is, what is the appetite  
21 both, of the Taliban to court foreign investment and that of  
22 the global business community and other governments to  
23 invest in Afghanistan, and how do we balance the need to  
24 take a look at the humanitarian issues with preventing any  
25 money from going to the Taliban. That is obviously a

1 complex situation.

2 What do you recommend for us going forward?

3 Mr. Nasr: There is no Afghan that I have talked to who  
4 believes that, you know, starving the Afghan people right  
5 now is a good idea. And although it is understandable why  
6 IMF and the World Bank will not give money to a government  
7 that hasn't been recognized internationally, but if the  
8 situation continues, the Afghan people will suffer.

9 There is now reports that 97 percent of the country  
10 could fall under poverty and there could be famine in  
11 Afghanistan and the Taliban could unravel if they cannot  
12 meet payroll, if they cannot manage the country. And those  
13 could create more dire situations for us.

14 We have to work with other actors who are engaged in  
15 Afghanistan, from Qatar to Russia to China to Uzbekistan, et  
16 cetera, to come with an economic path forward that would not  
17 be supporting the Taliban's worst behavior but would make  
18 sure that fundamental things like food and other  
19 humanitarian issue things would reach the Afghan people.  
20 Some of those could be done without giving them funds. It  
21 essentially requires direct aid in terms of food and other  
22 material for people of the country.

23 Senator Peters: All right. Thank you.

24 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Peters.

1           Before I recognize Senator Sullivan, I am going to go  
2 over and vote and ask Senator King to continue.

3           Senator Sullivan, please?

4           Senator Sullivan: I would appreciate the witnesses  
5 being here today. You know, we had a hearing 2 days ago  
6 that had a lot of information that we received. I would  
7 like to get your gentlemen's assessment on what is a clear  
8 disagreement between the President of the United States'  
9 assessment of the withdrawal from Afghanistan and his  
10 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

11           The President has referred to this retrograde operation  
12 as a, quote, extraordinary success. The Chairman of the  
13 Joint Chiefs called it a logistical success, a strategic  
14 failure.

15           I have shown this cover story from The Economist  
16 magazine with banner headlines calling it, Biden's debacle,  
17 and going into all of these subarticles about America's  
18 standing in the world is significantly diminished. China is  
19 enjoying seeing America humbled. These are different  
20 articles.

21           What is your gentlemen's assessment, strategically,  
22 what that has done to our interests and our credibility in  
23 our --

24           Mr. Joscelyn: I think the whole endgame, as we  
25 discussed, was a debacle. I think it has absolutely hurt

1 American credibility.

2 And, really, I think if you are an American ally or  
3 partner, you now have to question, you know, how much  
4 America is going to come to your defense or stand with you.  
5 I think those are the questions that the Chinese are asking  
6 of Taiwan right now --

7 Senator Sullivan: Yeah.

8 Mr. Joscelyn: -- among others. So, I think this whole  
9 thing absolutely speaks to American weakness and that is  
10 what I am concerned about long run.

11 Senator Sullivan: Let me just follow-up on that and  
12 then I do want to get our other witness' answer to the  
13 question.

14 You mentioned weakness. The one thing I have been  
15 mentioning to the administration, I worry, and to be quite  
16 frank, we have seen it; the Chinese are already saber  
17 rattling with regard to Taiwan, openly, kind of in our face,  
18 in Taiwan's face. You can't trust the Americans. Here we  
19 come.

20 I think other adversaries of ours, Iran, Russia, are  
21 going to be testing us, whether it is Iran and Israel,  
22 Russia and the Baltics.

23 Do you agree with that, China, certainly, and Taiwan,  
24 do you agree with that assessment?

25 And my caution to the administration is better be

1 ready, better be tough. What is your sense on that?

2 Mr. Joscelyn: I totally agree. I think we are going  
3 to be tested across the board in the coming months and years  
4 now. I think we have already been being tested in various  
5 ways for the last several years. And even if you look at  
6 the whole period, really, from 9/11 on, there has been, you  
7 know, one test after another.

8 But now I think that we probably, are at one of our  
9 weakest points, I would say.

10 Senator Sullivan: Dr. Nasr?

11 Mr. Nasr: Senator, clearly, the endgame in Afghanistan  
12 has not been our finest moment at various stages. And I  
13 think different allies --

14 Senator Sullivan: But not an extraordinary success?

15 Mr. Nasr: No. I think, you know, the lessons are  
16 different for various countries around the world, whether  
17 they are our allies or they are our adversaries.

18 To our allies and adversaries, it looks, generally,  
19 that the United States will tire of its strategies, that it  
20 ultimately did not win this war. That, ultimately, it said  
21 it would never talk to the Taliban. He talked to the  
22 Taliban. And when it came to the endgame, that it didn't  
23 manage its own exit well and there was more damage done on  
24 the way out than when we were in.

25 So, I think countries are going to look at what it

1 means for them. I would say our enemies may look and say  
2 that, you know, they can wait out our strategies,  
3 ultimately. That we can be pushed out of regions of the  
4 world if they have the time and the effort. And our allies  
5 are really worried, as well, because they think that they  
6 could be the next President Haqqani or the next Afghan  
7 military, as well.

8 Senator Sullivan: Yeah. Let me ask one final  
9 question, Mr. Chairman, and it is a two-part question. One  
10 is more tactical, operational and then one is strategic, as  
11 it relates to our allies, for both of you.

12 I had the honor of having breakfast with my old boss,  
13 Condoleezza Rice, and some of her colleagues at the Hoover  
14 Institution, very, very smart foreign policy thinkers, and  
15 they were all just mentioning the real strategic aspects of  
16 Bagram, where it is located, what you can do with it,  
17 keeping it close to China, close to Russia, Central Asia,  
18 India, Pakistan. So, so strategically important.

19 That is now gone, of course. I wouldn't be surprised  
20 if we see the Chinese or Russians there, soon.

21 And then in India, I worry about you know, a growing  
22 jihadist sanctuary and Afghanistan will force our growing  
23 partnership, which I think has been very important with  
24 regard to India, to have to devote greater resources and  
25 bandwidth there, as opposed to working with us on addressing

1 what I see as certainly the biggest challenge of the 21st  
2 Century, which is the rise of the Chinese Communist Party,  
3 and the export of their authoritarian model around the  
4 world.

5       Could you gentlemen, quickly -- I know I have run out  
6 of town, Mr. Chairman -- comment on how Bagram is strategic  
7 and India is strategic.

8       Mr. Nasr: I would say very briefly, Senator that I  
9 always have thought that we should have thought about  
10 Afghanistan, not just in terms of Al Qaeda, but also in  
11 terms of China. China is not a Pacific power. China is an  
12 Asia power and it is actually moving more and more in West  
13 Asia.

14       And we should have looked at Afghanistan as a way of  
15 containing China's westward move, but --

16       Senator Sullivan: And Bagram would have certainly  
17 happened that.

18       Mr. Nasr: -- Bagram would have certainly helped that,  
19 yes.

20       Senator Sullivan: Any thoughts on India?

21       Mr. Joscelyn: I agree with your assessment of the  
22 concern, when I comes to India and having to deal with the  
23 rising jihadi challenge and a distraction from the  
24 competition with China.

25       I also agree with what Dr. Nasr said, that there should



1 have been a more holistic look at Afghanistan, in terms of  
2 the Chinese threat and what is going on, in terms of what  
3 you are talking about, Bagram, and other ways, too. I would  
4 just say this, we couldn't even get the Al Qaeda part right  
5 in Afghanistan, so I can't really argue that we should have  
6 done a better job when thinking about China or any of these  
7 other issues when we failed on one of our fundamental  
8 missions.

9 And that is my main concern here is that something that  
10 should have been narrowly defined and we have a narrow focus  
11 on that we really understand, we didn't get it right.

12 Senator Sullivan: All right. Thank you, gentlemen.

13 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 Senator King: [Presiding.] By Webex, Senator Manchin?

15 Senator Manchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I  
16 appreciate it very much.

17 And thank both of you for sharing your expertise with  
18 us today.

19 Mr. Joscelyn, in your written testimony, you outlined  
20 how the bond between the Taliban and Al Qaeda still goes  
21 unbroken. In 2014, you testified before Congress saying  
22 that since the Al Qaeda was founded, its assets have not  
23 been on focused on attacking us, but on waging insurgencies  
24 against local governments.

25 So, my question would be, now that Al Qaeda can now

1 enjoy a really friendly relationship with Taliban government  
2 and power in Afghanistan, do you believe that their  
3 priorities will shift from establishing footholds first,  
4 since they already have it, to now launching attacks first?

5 Mr. Joscelyn: Senator, thank you for bringing that up.

6 I forgot about that quote.

7 I think what I said probably was that most of their  
8 assets or resources since their founding, were devoted to  
9 waging local insurgencies against local governments, not  
10 actually toward attacking us. Only a small part of the  
11 resources were always devoted to attacking us.

12 And in my testimony today, you can see I added a line,  
13 actually. I think it was the last line I had to the written  
14 testimony, saying that now that they have won in  
15 Afghanistan, those personnel are going to have more  
16 resources to devote toward regional and global operations.

17 Senator Manchin: Okay. So, my follow-up would be, I  
18 am concerned with the "over the horizon" strikes. That is  
19 supposed to keep everything at bay, but will that simply  
20 delay it?

21 It is not going to deter terrorists from launching  
22 attacks against, I don't believe, and now that we are out of  
23 Afghanistan, how do we go after the foundational  
24 organizations like Al Qaeda and ISIS?

25 Mr. Joscelyn: No, I agree, Senator. I think the "over

1 the horizon" model is going to be very problematic. Even  
2 when the U.S. had a large footprint in Afghanistan, we  
3 couldn't get a working model of Al Qaeda, the U.S. couldn't,  
4 to figure out how to really degrade them.

5 They talked about Al Qaeda being decimated for so long,  
6 they actually never got around to defeating Al Qaeda in  
7 Afghanistan. I think that there have been large training  
8 camps, including in 2015, one of the largest training camps  
9 in Al Qaeda's history in Afghanistan was found in October of  
10 2015. It took something like 3 to 6 days of air strikes and  
11 special operations raids to destroy it.

12 We don't have that capacity now to go destroy a camp  
13 like that and it is not something that could be done with  
14 just "over the horizon" strikes.

15 Senator Manchin: Let me ask you, do we have to have  
16 separate, what I would think, separate strategies against  
17 the Al Qaeda and ISIS or we have one strategy that is going  
18 to attack both?

19 Mr. Joscelyn: I think we have to think about them as,  
20 they are both obviously jihadists. In some cases, they have  
21 actually shared the same personnel over time.

22 I think we need have to be very careful. I think there  
23 has been this tendency to think that we could work with the  
24 Taliban, in particular, against ISIS. I wholeheartedly  
25 disagree with that. The problem is that when you do that,

1 you are also working with Al Qaeda's so-called local  
2 branches or just outright Al Qaeda, in the fight against  
3 ISIS and I don't think that really serves any greater  
4 strategic interest to the U.S.

5 So, we shouldn't look at it as, well, now that we have  
6 this ISIS threat, we have to worry about ISIS so we can work  
7 with the Taliban, which is aligned with Al Qaeda against  
8 ISIS. We have to look at it as somewhat of a distinct  
9 threat stream, I would say.

10 Senator Manchin: Thank you.

11 Dr. Nasr, this would be for you and Mr. Joscelyn, if  
12 you want to chime in, also. Part of the reason we left  
13 Afghanistan was to focus our efforts on Defense spending  
14 towards the rising great power competition. That is the  
15 reason we have used it to leave, now, the way we did.

16 But China and Russia are increasingly defying  
17 international rules and norms and we can't turn a blind eye  
18 towards that. I am a believer that we can walk and chew  
19 gum, however, and while we need to be countering these bad  
20 actors, I also see opportunities where we can work together,  
21 maybe -- I don't understand that at all -- with them.

22 So, my question would be, what areas do you think that  
23 China and Russia, their intent with Afghanistan and the  
24 region, and what do we need to be concerned about to thwart,  
25 if we could, to make sure that we are in front of this. And

1 my follow-up would be, what overreaching strategic goals  
2 should we have with Russia and China trying to make a  
3 foothold or make gains there that would be detrimental to  
4 us?

5 Mr. Nasr: I believe that both, China and Russia, do  
6 not want the United States to have a footprint in their  
7 backyard. Afghanistan is sort of the southern belly of  
8 Russia and it is the western border of China. So, I think  
9 to that extent, they are not supportive of serious U.S.  
10 presence, be it military or, ultimately, economic diplomatic  
11 in Afghanistan.

12 But they do have counterterrorism worries of their own  
13 against the different kinds of groups. The Chinese have a  
14 restless Uyghur minority that they don't want to be either  
15 inspired or supported by the Taliban. I think both, the  
16 Russians and the Chinese, don't want too much Islamic  
17 activism in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and the like.

18 How they are going to pursue their counterterrorism  
19 objectives may be very different from our approach. They  
20 are not talking about "over the horizon" and the like, but  
21 that is an area that there might be a common ground, in  
22 terms of making sure that terrorism doesn't emanate from  
23 Afghanistan and how to fight that.

24 Senator Manchin: Mr. Joscelyn?

25 Mr. Joscelyn: I think that is right, they don't want

1 America in Afghanistan, obviously. The issue now is, do  
2 they assume that America won't return to Afghanistan, even  
3 if America is struck from Afghanistan. Right now, I think  
4 it is an open question about how America will respond to  
5 anything in the region and what sort of presence we are  
6 going to have in the region.

7 So, I think that their concerns, when it comes to  
8 Russia and China, their concerns are obviously very  
9 self-interested; they are about their own interests. Dr.  
10 Nasr is right that they have counterterrorism concerns  
11 flowing out of Afghanistan.

12 We have seen the Taliban has supposedly made some  
13 assurances to China that the Turkistan Islamic Party, which  
14 is part of Al Qaeda, and also fought for the Taliban, won't  
15 strike in Xinjiang or, actually, strike targets inside  
16 China, remains to be seen, also, as Dr. Nasr said, whether  
17 or not they live up to that pledge.

18 But I think in the grand scheme of things, since they  
19 do look at this as a grand power competition, I don't think  
20 anything that weakens America bothers them too much.

21 Senator Manchin: Thank you both.

22 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23 Chairman Reed: [Presiding.] Thank you, Senator  
24 Manchin.

25 Let me also thank Senator King for presiding.

1 Senator Hawley, please?

2 Senator Hawley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 Thanks to the witnesses for being here.

4 Mr. Joscelyn, can you help me understand something that  
5 really puzzles, especially after what we heard a couple of  
6 days ago. Why would the administration drawdown our troop  
7 presence to zero by July without evacuating or even  
8 attempting to begin the evacuation of thousands upon  
9 thousands of American citizens, plus all of our embassy  
10 personnel that we knew were in the country, by the way, when  
11 the Taliban was in the middle of a major offensive that they  
12 began in the spring, why would you do that?

13 Mr. Joscelyn: Well, Senator, I wouldn't have done  
14 that, you know, as I tweeted. Or -- even all the way back  
15 in April, you should start the evacuation then.

16 You know, what the administration is saying and you  
17 hear military officials are saying is that they had to keep  
18 the embassy going. They wanted to keep the embassy going,  
19 and so, therefore, their posture was about protecting the  
20 embassy.

21 I just disagree with that. If what they are saying is  
22 that they needed to keep embassy personnel and civilian  
23 personnel there because, otherwise the government of  
24 Afghanistan might collapse, well, it collapsed, right. So,  
25 it is sort of a nonstarter of an argument for me.

1 I would have had, I would have been down to a skeletal  
2 staff and I would have had most of the evacuation, I would  
3 not have been evacuating through Kabul at all. The last  
4 American, in my mind, in Afghanistan would turn the lights  
5 out in Bagram.

6 Senator Hawley: Wouldn't you agree that the decision  
7 to draw down to zero by July and to give Bagram away,  
8 leaving thousands of Americans in the country and leaving  
9 KIA as the only departure point directly led to those scenes  
10 of chaos and disaster, the death of those servicemembers,  
11 ultimately leaving behind potentially now thousands of  
12 Americans we now learned; in other words, the crisis that we  
13 saw in August was directly precipitated by the fact that we  
14 had zero troops on the ground by July, we had thousands of  
15 people left, and we didn't even order an evacuation, I say  
16 "we," the President, by August 14th. Wouldn't you say those  
17 two things are connected?

18 Mr. Joscelyn: I think the issue of evacuating through  
19 KIA was the issue. I mean, I wouldn't have done that. I  
20 argued at the time that I wouldn't have done that.

21 If you know where that is situated in the city, with  
22 civilian neighborhoods surrounding it, it is an incredibly  
23 difficult place to try and organize all this. I think our  
24 servicemembers did an amazing job, given what they were  
25 asked to do. I am actually amazed that there was only one



1 terrorist threat got through, because if you just know the  
2 threat streams around there, I could have pictured something  
3 much worse.

4 This is not the way that I would have evacuated. I am  
5 certainly not a military logistical expert, but this is not  
6 the way I would have done it.

7 Senator Hawley: Well, we know, actually, now, that the  
8 military recommended evacuations much earlier. I am looking  
9 here at an article from Politico that just came out about  
10 half an hour ago, State Department, Pentagon trade blame  
11 over Afghanistan evacuation. The article reports that  
12 General Miller, Scott Miller, who was, of course, our  
13 commander on the ground in Afghanistan, recommended that the  
14 embassy be closed and that evacuations of American citizens  
15 begin before the drawdown of troops was complete. He wanted  
16 them to begin in the spring. Lloyd Austin has apparently  
17 said that he recommended, the military recommended that  
18 evacuations begin much earlier. For reasons that are  
19 totally unknown, the President did not order an evacuation  
20 until August 14, directly leading to this crisis.

21 Now, the State Department, what is interesting is in  
22 this article, the State Department says, oh, no, that is not  
23 right. The military actually doesn't recommend an  
24 evacuation earlier, so we have this embarrassing and,  
25 frankly, childish finger-pointing between these different

1 agencies of the government.

2 I would just submit to you, we have got to get to the  
3 bottom of this. I mean, we have got to figure out what in  
4 the world was going on in this administration that they were  
5 apparently, and when I say "they," I mean the President of  
6 the United States, was apparently rejecting the advice of  
7 military leaders who said, don't take us down to zero in the  
8 country with thousands of Americans stranded there. They  
9 warned him that would be a catastrophe.

10 It was a catastrophe. People died because of it.  
11 Americans died because of it, because he wouldn't order an  
12 evacuation, which his generals advised him to order, and now  
13 they are engaged in finger-pointing battle.

14 Mr. Chairman, my view is this, we need an investigation  
15 right now into what happened here with this evacuation and  
16 with this drawdown. We need a select committee. We need  
17 hearings held in public to get to the bottom of this  
18 decision.

19 Now, I agree that we need to look back over 20 years of  
20 a failed policy in Afghanistan and a failed 20 years of  
21 nation building, and I agree with that completely, but what  
22 is happening before our eyes here with various officials in  
23 this Government saying, it is your fault. No, it is your  
24 fault. No, it is your fault, is outrageous when you have 13  
25 servicemembers who are dead because of decisions that,

1 ultimately, the President of the United States made. And to  
2 see these officials, to see the Secretary of Defense blaming  
3 one set of people and the Secretary of State blaming  
4 somebody else, and going back and forth, it is just  
5 outrageous. It is just ridiculous and, frankly, it is  
6 embarrassing.

7 We have got to get to the bottom of it. If Congress  
8 doesn't, nobody will. Nobody will. The Defense Department,  
9 they are not going to. The State Department, the  
10 administration has proved they have no interest in actually  
11 getting us the facts. They have misled us at every turn.

12 And if it seems like I am angry about this, it is  
13 because I am. A Missourian is dead because of this. Lance  
14 Corporal Schmitz, 12 other servicemembers are dead, hundreds  
15 of civilians are dead. Hundreds of Americans, maybe  
16 thousands, are still there and all we have is the  
17 administration officials saying, it is your fault. No, it  
18 is your fault. No, it is your fault.

19 It is the President's fault. But we need to figure out  
20 who in the world advised him and why he made the decisions  
21 he made, and I submit to you the time to do that is right  
22 now. We need to act post haste.

23 Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the witnesses  
24 for being here.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you.

1 Now, let me recognize via Webex, Senator Duckworth.

2 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

3 I am so glad to hear my colleague just across the  
4 border from Illinois agree that we do need a look into the  
5 long-term decisions, as well as the immediate decisions that  
6 were made with regard to Afghanistan.

7 Mr. Joscelyn, on a recent podcast, you discussed the  
8 need to examine the decisions over the past 20 years that  
9 led to the failure in Afghanistan and you stressed the  
10 importance of that accountability. I couldn't agree with  
11 you more. You criticized government leaders at multiple  
12 echelons and agencies for the outcomes in Afghanistan, and  
13 you critiqued presidential decision-making, going all the  
14 way back to the 1990s, including missed opportunities to  
15 decimate Al Qaeda immediately following the 9/11 attacks.

16 Mr. Joscelyn, would you agree that decisions made by  
17 the Department of Defense, the Department of State, the  
18 White House, members of Congress, and the intelligence  
19 community, all contributed to the failure we have seen in  
20 Afghanistan?

21 Mr. Joscelyn: No question, Senator. I heard you on  
22 Tuesday when you called for your own commission. I don't  
23 know what the status of that is, in terms of the bill you  
24 introduced to examine over 20 years.

25 I would say it is probably even more than 20 years of

1 decision-making, going back to the 1990s, but I  
2 wholeheartedly endorse the effort to understand the  
3 long-term ramifications of one bad decision after another.  
4 What I suggest going forward is that we always keep clear  
5 minds about what the decision is that is in front of our  
6 leaders and then make a clear decision.

7 My number one critique of the war in Afghanistan is  
8 that it seems to me like the decision-making was not clear  
9 at any point in time.

10 Senator Duckworth: I couldn't agree with you more and  
11 that is why I think that my proposal for an independent  
12 commission, not -- you know, I served on the Benghazi  
13 Committee. That was bipartisan, but highly political.

14 I think we need a clear-eyed look at what happened and  
15 all the bad decisions along at way, and all the times that  
16 military leaders and commanders on the ground were not  
17 listened to, look at the corruption and all of that, poor  
18 practices by DOD, poor practices by State.

19 Given all of these failures, the persistent threat of  
20 terrorism and the blood and treasure expended in this  
21 conflict, what is the importance, in your mind, of capturing  
22 the hard lessons learned from the war in Afghanistan so that  
23 future policymakers and warfighters can avoid a familiar  
24 fate?

25 Mr. Joscelyn: I probably can't answer that in the time

1 that I have got. All I can say is I think Senator King and  
2 a few others here have gotten at, has started to get at what  
3 I think is the core issue, which is that when America is  
4 fighting insurgencies or in a counterinsurgency posture  
5 against insurgency warfare, whether it be in Vietnam or Iraq  
6 and Afghanistan, these are incredibly difficult, complex  
7 fights. My view is that America should not provoke them,  
8 should not get involved in an area where we don't need to  
9 be. We have to be very careful about getting involved in  
10 any kind of counterinsurgency warfare; it is costly.

11 And as you are saying, Senator, America doesn't know  
12 what it is doing often times, you know. I mean, if you  
13 listen to my testimony today, this is what I want everybody  
14 to take away from it, you know, the one thing that we should  
15 have gotten right was Al Qaeda and Afghanistan and they  
16 didn't get it right, you know. I mean, this is the most  
17 basic part of all of this.

18 So, to my mind, I think when it comes to -- I think,  
19 unfortunately, the jihadis are organizers, insurgents; that  
20 is their main goal. Senator Manchin quoted me from 2014.  
21 That has always been their main posture; Al Qaeda is an  
22 insurgency organization. We just have to be very careful  
23 about what resources we devote to fighting it and where.

24 Senator Duckworth: I couldn't agree with you more.

25 And I have to say an independent commission with

1 leaders who were not in a decision-making position in those  
2 20 years, I think that is an important component of it to  
3 keep it completely nonpartisan, so that we can have a hard,  
4 clear-eyed look.

5 Because, in my opinion, and I don't know if you agree  
6 with this, but internal lessons learned, you know, the AARs  
7 that everybody conducts, the internal lessons learned,  
8 exercises conducted by a single agency like DOD, I don't  
9 think is sufficient to capture the total scope of the  
10 decisions that we need to analyze from the 20-year war in  
11 Afghanistan.

12 I think we have to look, overall, yes, you know, we are  
13 going to have a look at procurement and contracting. We are  
14 going to look at State Department decisions and DOD  
15 decisions. But I think we need an overall look across the  
16 whole span.

17 Would you agree with me that, you know, just as a  
18 single department within our government looked at itself, is  
19 that going to be sufficient, if it is just DOD looking at  
20 the decisions that it has made?

21 Mr. Joscelyn: It is absolutely not sufficient.

22 What you are calling for, Senator, is accountability.  
23 Accountability has been sorely lacking over the last 20-plus  
24 years for decisions that were made.

25 I think we need to start looking at foreign policy and

1 warfighting and all these related issues through a metrics  
2 of accountability. I have often said, look, if I were ever  
3 in a government position and I screw up, I want to be held  
4 accountable. I want people to know. I will want to admit  
5 that I screwed up.

6 And you hear some little inklings of accountability  
7 from the generals on Tuesday, but not enough for my  
8 purposes. Not enough to actually explain what actually  
9 happened here.

10 There are too many examples that I can give you of  
11 things that went wrong over the last 20 years and for which  
12 there was no accountability. And so, I applaud your cry for  
13 some sort of accountability here.

14 Senator Duckworth: Thank you.

15 And I will submit additional questions for the record,  
16 Mr. Chairman.

17 I yield back.

18 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Duckworth.

19 Let me now recognize Senator Rosen, via Webex.

20 Senator Rosen: Thank you, Chairman Reed, Ranking  
21 Member Inhofe, for holding this hearing.

22 Thank you for the witnesses, for testifying here today.

23 And I appreciate the opportunity to get answers for the  
24 American people about the past 20 years of war in  
25 Afghanistan, mistakes made up in the lead to our withdrawal,



1 of course, and how we can safeguard our national security  
2 and enhance stability in our region going forward.

3 And once again, I want to thank the brave men and women  
4 in uniform who have served our country proudly in  
5 Afghanistan over the last 20 years. Far too many of these  
6 individuals made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation and  
7 many more carry with them the wounds of battle. All of us  
8 on this committee thank our servicemembers and their  
9 families for defending our nation and ideals.

10 But I want to go on to talk about ongoing support to  
11 those who are fleeing Afghanistan. As I mentioned in  
12 Tuesday's hearing, as the Taliban approached Kabul and  
13 eventually took over the city and the country, my team and I  
14 worked to help vulnerable individuals evacuate. But given  
15 the rapid collapse in Afghanistan and its capital, far too  
16 many Americans, SIV holders, potential asylum seekers and  
17 their families were left behind.

18 So, Dr. Nasr, what more could we have done to save U.S.  
19 lives in Kabul and better anticipated the rapid, this  
20 so-rapid surrender of the Afghan security forces, and more  
21 importantly, what can be done at this point to evacuate  
22 family members of American citizens, SIV holders, and other  
23 Afghan nationals, who we believe are in great danger?

24 Mr. Nasr: Well, Senator, to your second point, I think  
25 we need to use all our leverage around the issues of

1 economic support, recognition, et cetera, to make sure that  
2 the Taliban do allow those who want to leave and are  
3 qualified to leave, to leave. We also need to work with  
4 countries that are engaged with the Taliban, know them,  
5 speak to them, from Qatar, Pakistan, et cetera, to also  
6 drive that point home.

7 I think we raised some of the issues about why the  
8 Afghan security forces collapsed are clear to us. I am sure  
9 we need to take greater stock-taking of that and also find  
10 out why is it that our estimation that the Government and  
11 the military would hold longer, did not come to pass.

12 But I think at a larger level, it goes to our  
13 misunderstanding of many of the cultural, political, and  
14 economic factors in Afghanistan. And I would say that,  
15 also, the Doha Agreement, that the way in which we  
16 approached it, already demoralized the Government and the  
17 Afghan security forces, that they understood that the United  
18 States is going to leave and at some point, they basically  
19 decided to take their own decisions and the military began  
20 to fracture along tribal and regional lines.

21 Senator Rosen: Thank you.

22 And you mentioned neighboring countries, and I want to  
23 talk a little bit about leveraging relationships, because it  
24 is understood that Afghanistan's borders allow for violent,  
25 extremist organizations to thrive and it enables the Haqqani

1 smuggling networks and the possible cross-border operations  
2 to and from Iran and the use of Pakistan's federally  
3 administered tribal area; of course, they could use that as  
4 a safe haven.

5 So, to both, Dr. Nasr and to Mr. Joscelyn in the short  
6 time that I have left, in your opinion, how do our  
7 relationships with the border countries affect security and  
8 stability in the region and how do you think we can best  
9 leverage these relationships for safety, again, in the  
10 region and our own?

11 Mr. Nasr: Very shortly, I mean, the country that has  
12 the longest border with Afghanistan is Iran and we,  
13 obviously, are not on talking terms with Iran. So that, we  
14 have to hope that the Iranians will follow some policies  
15 that would be in line with ours.

16 But with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan,  
17 we have relations. We should talk to them. We should try  
18 to align policies. And where we can, we should try to  
19 influence them to use their leverage in Afghanistan where  
20 they can.

21 Senator Rosen: Thank you.

22 Mr. Joscelyn, I only have 30 seconds left. If you  
23 would like to just try to say a few words and we can ask the  
24 rest for the record.

25 Mr. Joscelyn: I would just reiterate what I said about

1 Pakistan, in particular, earlier. You know, if you go back  
2 through the history of all this, obviously, everybody here  
3 has recognized today Pakistan's role in supporting and  
4 sponsoring, harboring and facilitating, use your adjective  
5 you want or verb you want, I mean, for the Taliban and  
6 Haqqanis in helping them win this war.

7 I think that we need a critical reassessment of our  
8 relations with Pakistan, the Pakistani State, and there  
9 needs to be a reassessment that is clear-eyed about what has  
10 happened over the last 20 years.

11 Senator Rosen: Thank you.

12 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be submitting the rest  
13 of my questions for the record.

14 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Rosen.

15 Senator Kelly, please?

16 Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Gentlemen, on Tuesday, we heard testimony that one of  
18 the key elements U.S. intelligence assessments missed when  
19 overestimating the capability of the Afghan security forces  
20 were the human aspects of the forces, by ability; things  
21 like, local political dynamics, corruption, morale,  
22 leadership, and, critically, the willingness to fight.

23 Mr. Joscelyn, did you see any evidence of these factors  
24 in your own analysis?

25 Mr. Joscelyn: Those factors have been long in play;

1 everything you just mentioned has been an ongoing concern  
2 for a long time. SIGAR, which we do some work with, the  
3 Inspector General, they have documented a lot of these  
4 problems in their reports and we agree with a lot of their  
5 language along those lines.

6 All I can say is that what I think happened here, my  
7 view is that the U.S. military, for all the shortcomings in  
8 Afghanistan, what they were doing was providing, basically,  
9 the leadership that the Afghans, themselves, needed and  
10 lacked, and that was why you had between 60 and 70,000  
11 Afghans die for their country, fighting for our side from  
12 2014 on, because they were willing to fight if they had the  
13 right leadership in place. The problem was that no Afghan  
14 leader stood up to take our place once we left.

15 Senator Kelly: Was there ever a period of time that we  
16 saw some Afghan leadership in their Armed Forces that we  
17 felt, okay, we are on the right track, or was this a problem  
18 from 2014 on?

19 Mr. Joscelyn: I think if you heard on Tuesday, and  
20 maybe yesterday, too, they were talking about the special  
21 forces, the elite commandoes of the Afghans, which were only  
22 like 5 percent of the overall Afghan security forces. There  
23 was some leadership there. There was capability there.  
24 They won some fights. The problem is that that elite force  
25 didn't represent the, you know, that 5 percent can't take

1 care of the 100 percent.

2 So, I think that this has been, there have been  
3 problems for a long time, now. I would just add this one  
4 point, and this isn't a defense of the project whatsoever,  
5 it was always erratic. If you go back through the history  
6 of this, people forget that, actually, the U.S. did not lead  
7 the way in building security forces early on; the Europeans  
8 did for the first several years. It wasn't prioritized on  
9 the American side, and it was sort of only after the  
10 insurgency really got ramped up that the Americans tried,  
11 basically, at the last minute, to start security forces, to  
12 start ramping up our own role in this, and we were basically  
13 behind the eight ball already by the time that that  
14 happened.

15 Senator Kelly: Dr. Nasr, would you like to add  
16 anything?

17 Mr. Nasr: I agree, I mean, ultimate, the military has  
18 to fight for military commanders and also for political  
19 leaders. And while we were there, at least the military  
20 command was solid and it bolstered the Afghan forces, but  
21 the political leadership was not there.

22 And when that began to melt away, and when the military  
23 leadership indicated that it was leaving, then all those  
24 other issues that you mentioned came to the forefront, the  
25 fact that the soldiers had not been paid for a long time,

1 the fact of corruption issues, the local, regional, tribal  
2 issues, they all came to the forefront.

3 But I do believe that, you know, given the right  
4 leadership, this force was willing to fight. And I would  
5 also say it was not as large as often it is made out to be.  
6 I mean, you know, the larger numbers often include police  
7 and others.

8 At its core, it was probably 100,000. So,  
9 well-trained, militarily well-trained force, but it didn't  
10 have the right political leadership, and, perhaps,  
11 culturally, it was not as homogenous as you would like a  
12 military to be, to have a clear, core identity.

13 Senator Kelly: Have we seen anything like this,  
14 historically, any other area of the world, any conflict we  
15 have been involved in or other countries have?

16 Mr. Nasr: Well, I would say very, very simply, it was  
17 Iraq, when also the Iraqi military melted away when ISIS  
18 attacked them also.

19 Senator Kelly: Uh-huh.

20 Mr. Joscelyn: Yeah, I think any kind of, this is why I  
21 brought up the point about counterinsurgency and fighting  
22 insurgents. I think America is not very good at this type  
23 of warfare. We have problems going back decades now and we  
24 need to be very careful about what types of resources are  
25 used to fight them.

1 I am recognizing that as the nerd who covers the  
2 jihadis and knows that they are organized as insurgents and  
3 that is how they pose a threat to us. Just, there are all  
4 sorts of liabilities baked into this type of warfighting and  
5 there are also sorts of problems that we don't seem very  
6 capable of solving.

7 Senator Kelly: Well, thank you. Thank you both.

8 Mr. Chairman, I would yield back the remainder of my  
9 time.

10 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much for those 35  
11 seconds, Senator. I appreciate it.

12 [Laughter.]

13 Chairman Reed: Gentlemen, let me pose a question.  
14 There may be some members who are trying to get back.

15 One of the critical issues here was the timing of the  
16 evacuation of American civilians and diplomatic personnel.  
17 My sense is that having not included the Afghan Government  
18 and President Ghani, particularly, in Doha in any of the  
19 negotiations, et cetera, the one request I believe they made  
20 was, you know, at least give me coverage that we are going  
21 to endure, we are going to continue the fight even after the  
22 departure on whatever day his departure was. And had we  
23 withdrawn the embassy completely, do you think that would  
24 have accelerated the deterioration of not only the Afghan  
25 military forces, but the Government?



1           And Mr. Joscelyn, I will start with you.

2           Mr. Joscelyn:   Senator, what I can say is I understand  
3   that argument about, you know, keeping personnel in place  
4   for coverage, as you said.  The problem is that the final  
5   act was 3 and a half months, so they couldn't really, I  
6   mean, at that point, you are talking about what is faster, a  
7   month?  You know, 2 months?  You know, basically, that the  
8   final collapse is really over that final 3 and a half month  
9   time period.

10          What I would say is if, I think the miscalculation here  
11   was they, on the military side and also on the civilian  
12   leadership side, they had misjudged how fast the insurgency  
13   was going to go.  They thought they had more time than they  
14   did and that was baked into their decisions with keeping  
15   civilian personnel in Kabul.

16          We didn't have those allusions.  We thought it was  
17   going fast and so that is why we wouldn't have done it the  
18   way they did it.

19          Chairman Reed:  And one factor that has been brought  
20   up, and it is very difficult to evaluate the significance  
21   is, is of President Ghani's sudden departure from the  
22   country.  In fact, I have heard that there were, in fact,  
23   Afghan forces around Kabul, ready to fight, but once it  
24   became clear that the president had left, they disappeared  
25   quickly.

1           So, is that a factor that we could have anticipated or  
2 should have anticipated?

3           Mr. Joscelyn: I think there are a lot of criticisms of  
4 President Ghani's tenure that we should elaborate on. I  
5 don't buy this one and the reason is because the war was  
6 already lost. Kabul was surrounded. We had all the data on  
7 the approaches into Kabul were Taliban-controlled. You had  
8 Taliban fighters who were already in the city. They were  
9 already there. You know, they have had networks there the  
10 whole time. So, I think the game was already over.

11           You know, now, again, Ghani's leadership leaves a lot  
12 to be desired, and I would have criticized him throughout  
13 all of this. He also, I would say, Senator, in your opening  
14 remarks on Tuesday, I heard you talk a lot about the Doha  
15 Agreement. There is no doubt that that undermined his  
16 Government, and as I argued at the time, it undermined  
17 fatally.

18           Chairman Reed: Thank you.

19           Dr. Nasr, your comments?

20           Mr. Nasr: I would add to that, you are right, already,  
21 the Doha Agreement had indicated to the Afghans that the  
22 Taliban were likely to inherit power. They were already  
23 sweeping through Southern Afghanistan at a rapid click.

24           Thousands, tens of thousands of Afghans were escaping  
25 from where the Taliban had conquered territory and were

1 swarming in the direction of Kabul. So, the city already  
2 was a powder keg. And I think at any moment, anytime, as  
3 prepared as we would be, that we would have announced that  
4 we are closing the embassy and leaving, the panic would have  
5 set in, because a lot of Afghans don't want to live under  
6 the Taliban, regardless of how much preparation you make.

7 And I agree with Mr. Joscelyn that Ghani's departure  
8 did not change that dynamic, but to Afghans, it signaled the  
9 sort of last act that the Government is gone; in fact,  
10 police and many security elements around the city abandoned  
11 their positions. The military stopped fighting. And it  
12 contributed to the panic in the city which then, you know,  
13 translated into thousands of people swarming in the  
14 direction of the airport and trying to get out.

15 So, he did contribute in that way, but I think the  
16 Afghans were afraid. They wanted to leave and the minute  
17 the United States indicated that it was out, I think we  
18 would have had some kind of a panic setting in among the  
19 Afghans.

20 Chairman Reed: Well, thank you very much.

21 There is movement in the back of the room. I will  
22 yield 10 seconds to Senator Tuberville, plus his 5 minutes.

23 Senator Tuberville, you are recognized.

24 Senator Tuberville: I have got all I need. Thank you,  
25 Mr. Chair.

1 Good morning, gentlemen. You are probably getting  
2 tired. My lunch was good. That is what -- no, I wasn't  
3 eating.

4 [Laughter.]

5 Senator Tuberville: Just a couple questions.

6 You know, since Guantanamo Bay was opened in 2002, the  
7 U.S. has detained close to 800, but roughly 730 have been  
8 transferred or released. What repercussions do you guys  
9 think we will see, moving forward, when we have already seen  
10 some of the prisoners moving into the Taliban's new  
11 government in Afghanistan, either one of you?

12 Mr. Nasr: I think the symbolism is very strong,  
13 Senator, that in the end, you know, those same people that  
14 we cleaned off the battlefield and put in prison and the  
15 force that we went there to remove, 20 years later, is back  
16 in power.

17 Mr. Joscelyn: Yeah, I mean, so, you know, I have  
18 testified before about the Guantanamo detainees and exactly  
19 who they are. Mullah Zakir is now a deputy defense  
20 minister. He was at Guantanamo studying insurgency warfare  
21 for years.

22 Four of the five ex-Guantanamo detainees who were  
23 traded for Bowe Bergdahl in 2014, are now ministers in the  
24 Taliban's government. All four of them were detained, by  
25 the way, with Al Qaeda ties and connections, including, now,

1 the head, the director of intelligence for the Taliban's new  
2 regime is Abdul Haq Wasiq. He was an Al Qaeda man before  
3 9/11. I have no reason to doubt that he still is. And  
4 there are ex-Guantanamo detainees all throughout the Taliban  
5 infrastructure.

6 Senator Tuberville: Thank you.

7 Dr. Nasr, on July 3, right after the U.S. withdrew from  
8 Bagram, you tweeted, quote, the U.S. is telling Americans  
9 that it is ending forever wars, while signaling to Afghans  
10 that it is not abandoning Afghanistan, it is hoping that  
11 things hold long enough for the last of the troops to have  
12 left, end quote.

13 I want to pick up a bit here. By pulling out of  
14 Bagram, the U.S. was effectively ending its ability to  
15 provide significant support to Afghan military, correct?

16 Mr. Nasr: But Bagram was the most important military  
17 base for the U.S. in Afghanistan.

18 Senator Tuberville: So, the signal that President  
19 Biden was sending that day, he wasn't abandoning Afghans and  
20 our partners, that was pretty much a dishonest statement,  
21 correct?

22 Mr. Nasr: It was a political, politically, basically,  
23 the United States was saying that it will hold on to  
24 supporting the Afghans, but not with holding onto military  
25 assets and was going to abide by the terms of the Doha

1 Agreement.

2 Senator Tuberville: Yeah.

3 Mr. Nasr: They were hoping that there would be a  
4 Government in Afghanistan that would be inclusive.

5 Senator Tuberville: But at the beginning, it was  
6 pretty dishonest.

7 And just one more point on abandoning our partners.  
8 There are thousands of Afghans who work with our troops and  
9 save Americans lives. Somehow the Biden administration says  
10 it has evacuated almost 124,000 Afghans, yet, it got out  
11 fewer than half of our actual Afghan partners.

12 Would you call this an abandonment?

13 Mr. Nasr: Well, you know, we had a deadline to leave.  
14 It wouldn't say, necessarily, it is abandonment, but we had  
15 varieties of categories of people who wanted to come out.  
16 There were SIVs, there were those who had worked with us.  
17 They had family members along with them.

18 And I think at any point in time, getting out hundreds  
19 of thousands of people out of the country, finding a place  
20 to take them would have been difficult --

21 Senator Tuberville: Yeah.

22 Mr. Nasr: -- and especially with the circumstances we  
23 left, it has created a chaotic situation.

24 Senator Tuberville: I want to you ask you this. This  
25 might be a little off the subject, but I was recently, a few

1 weeks ago, in Europe, talking to some of our officers  
2 handling the Afghans once they were evacuated. Huge  
3 problems. Huge problems with the young teenagers. They  
4 actually had to get the Taliban leaders to control them.  
5 Huge problems with wearing our clothes we gave them. Huge  
6 problems with discipline.

7 How in the world are we going to bring in all these  
8 people that, number one, they don't like us very much;  
9 number two, they are not going to listen to anybody, and, we  
10 are going to turn them out on the streets. How is this  
11 going to work?

12 I will start with you, Mr. Joscelyn.

13 Mr. Joscelyn: I don't really have any clarity on the  
14 process or how it is going to work, so I can't really answer  
15 the question. I know that there are a various range of  
16 issues here at play.

17 Senator Tuberville: Doctor?

18 Mr. Nasr: It is just difficult; in other words, you  
19 know, we have evacuated large numbers of Afghans, not only  
20 in the United States, but in a lot of other countries.  
21 Evacuation is only the first part. Actually settling them,  
22 integrating them into different societies, where they are,  
23 whether it is in the U.A.E. or the United States or Europe,  
24 is a whole different task.

25 Senator Tuberville: Thank you.

1 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding up for  
2 me.

3 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Tuberville.

4 Gentlemen, thank you for your excellent testimony.

5 Senator King also wanted me to express his thanks.

6 These are difficult issues, but your insights and your  
7 candor are incredibly helpful to this committee. Thank you  
8 very much.

9 And with that, I will adjourn the hearing.

10 Mr. Nasr: Thank you.

11 [Whereupon, at 11:46 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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