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UNITED STATES STRATEGY IN AFGHANISTAN

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TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2020

UNITED STATES SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m. in room SD–G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator James M. Inhofe (Chairman) presiding.

Committee Members present: Senators Inhofe, Wicker, Fischer, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan, Perdue, Cramer, Blackburn, Hawley, Reed, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Kaine, King, Heinrich, Peters, Manchin, Duckworth, and Jones.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR JAMES M. INHOFE

Chairman INHOFE. Our meeting will come to order.

We meet today to receive testimonies on the United States strategy in Afghanistan.

We welcome our witnesses, and we know them well: General Jack Keane, a four-star general who completed over 37 years of public service culminating in the appointment of—as Acting Chief of Staff and Vice Chief of the Army; Dr. Colin Jackson, who served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central Asia—he's been everywhere; General Kimberly Field, who served as a Senior Advisor to the Commander of Operations Resolute Support in 2018 and 2019.

The United States engaged in Afghanistan following the al Qaeda September 11, 2001, attacks on the Homeland, attacks planned and executed from a Taliban-controlled and al Qaeda-occupied safe haven in Afghanistan. Eighteen years later, the United States and our partners continue to fight terrorists in Afghanistan who aspire to attack the United States and the West. The Taliban, though not in control, remain a dangerous insurgency supporting terrorists with international ambitions; al Qaeda, through weakened and still—though weakens and—but still active; and ISIS [Islamic State of Iraq and Syria] is trying to plant roots in Afghanistan. For this reason, many Americans, including some of my colleagues, ask, "Why are we—the U.S. troops still there?" I'd like to offer a couple of reasons for that:

First, this hearing comes at an inflection point in our Afghanistan strategy. Under President Donald J. Trump, we have tried to negotiate with the Taliban to reduce violence. I'm confident President Trump will only accept a good deal, one that preserves the counterterrorism capability and includes the Afghan Government. But, the success of these negotiations depends on keeping military

pressure on the Taliban. If we suddenly drawn down troops in Afghanistan, it would give the Taliban exactly what they want, and it would be free. There would be no deal at all.

Second, while the U.S. Military posture has been drastically reduced in the last 18 years, the goal for our military engagement has not, to prevent another 9/11 attack. I believe a precipitous withdrawal would give terrorist groups in Afghanistan free rein to regroup tired forces, plot against American interests, and execute terrorist attacks.

I hope our witnesses will address the opportunities that we can still seize in Afghanistan and the risk that a sudden withdrawal might entail. That's what this hearing is all about.

Senator Reed.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JACK REED

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I would, first, like to take a moment to extend my condolences to the United States and Afghan servicemembers involved in the attack over the weekend and their families. Our thoughts are with you, as well as all those who are currently serving in harm's way in the defense of the country.

Thank you, to our witnesses, for appearing today to discuss the United States strategy in Afghanistan. You each bring a wealth of experience and unique perspectives on our efforts in the region. Collectively, you have been involved at nearly every level and every phase of our engagement in Afghanistan, from individual deployments to senior-level civilian roles, to advising and engaging with leaders at the highest levels of our national security apparatus. I hope you will draw on your years of experience, as well as your positions as independent experts, to share your views on the United States strategy in Afghanistan.

We would appreciate your views on where you believe we're currently getting it right and should continue U.S. investments, as well as where we may have gone astray and need a course correction.

General Keane, you have been critical of the recent effort to sit down with the Taliban and said you are not optimistic for a peace settlement between the Taliban and Afghan Government. I'm interested to hear your thoughts on what should be done differently, given the recognition that this conflict will only come to a conclusion, likely, through some type of diplomatic settlement.

Dr. Jackson, in 2017 you described United States efforts in Afghanistan as a tragedy and said that United States plans have seldom corresponded to problems on the ground. I'm interested to hear your assessment of the extent to which we have addressed this issue and whether there's more that should be done to ensure our strategy is aligned with our efforts on the ground.

General Field, you have the most recent in-theater experience. I am interested to hear your views on how the military mission in Afghanistan has been adapted to support our diplomatic efforts with the Taliban, how we are measuring progress in that mission, and whether we are effectively balancing interest in reducing troop levels with the desire to maintain leverage in negotiations.

I would also like to hear the panel's views on the importance of integrating all the tools of national power in Afghanistan. As former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Mike Mullen reinforced this week, this is a moment when more investment in diplomacy and development is needed, not less. Therefore, I was disappointed to see, as just one example, that the administration intends to cut all financial support to the American University of Afghanistan, one of the only independent, coeducational universities in Afghanistan. For years, the University has been a vital part of developing a next generation of Afghan leaders who will be essential to Afghanistan's long-term security and stability.

While this hearing is meant to be mainly prospective, I would be remiss if I did not mention the recent publication of a series of documents by The Washington Post, including interviews with over 400 government officials, looking back across the conflict in Afghanistan. The documents and the Washington Post stories that accompanied their release argue that United States efforts in Afghanistan routinely suffered from poor planning, a mismatch between stated strategy and the resources allocated, and bureaucratic infighting that jeopardized the whole-of-government effort. While some have taken issue with the Post's reporting, particularly the contention that there was a purposeful attempt spanning multiple administrations to deceive Congress and the American people, the documents highlight the need to persistently debate, study, and question our efforts in Afghanistan. We owe our troops and frontline civilians a strategy that is worthy of their sacrifice and one that will finally bring a sustainable end to this conflict.

It is in this spirit that the Chairman and I sought to resume the past practice of holding an Afghan-specific open posture hearing. I've been disappointed that efforts with the Department of Defense (DOD) to schedule this hearing have yet proven to be successful. I believe it is an important part of the full transparency and candor that are due the American people.

With that, let me thank you again, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman INHOFE. Thank you, Senator Reed.

We'll do our usual opening statements, and I think it's the first time we've ever had a request for an additional 1½ minutes. General Keane, I think that's intriguing.

[Laughter.]

Chairman INHOFE. Well, we talked it over, and we voted. It was close.

[Laughter.]

Chairman INHOFE. But, you get your 1½ minutes extra time.

Senator REED. I think you broke the tie.

[Laughter.]

Chairman INHOFE. Yes, I was the tiebreaker, you're right. We look forward to hearing from you. You are recognized first.

STATEMENT OF GENERAL JOHN M. KEANE, USA (RET.), CHAIRMAN, INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR, FORMER VICE CHIEF OF STAFF, U.S. ARMY

General KEANE. Thank you, Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished Members of the Committee, for inviting

me to testify today. I'm honored to be here with such respected and qualified colleagues.

I want to thank the Committee for your support of the defense buildup these last 3 years and your National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAAs). I was appointed by this Committee—specifically, the late Chairman, Senator John McCain—to the National Defense Strategy Commission. As you know, as reflected in our report, we were alarmed by how much the United States military capability had fallen behind in providing an adequate deterrent to Russia and China. You have put the United States military on a path to a much-needed recovery.

As a very late addition to this panel, let me apologize for not providing a written statement to you in advance. This is a first for me in 19½ years of congressional testimony, and it's why I asked for an extra minute and a half.

What I would like to do briefly this morning is so set the strategic framework for Afghanistan and a reasonable path forward. I have had discussions, for well over a year now, with senior United States and Afghanistan Government officials, to include the President of the United States; the President in Afghanistan; Ambassador Zal Khalilzad, on more than one occasion, our chief negotiator with the Taliban; General Scott Miller, our on-scene commander; the Chief of Staff of the Pakistani military, General Bajwa; and I have sources that have close ties to the Taliban leadership, who are not connected to United States or Afghanistan intelligence services.

Let me state up front that Afghanistan remains today, despite 18 years of protracted involvement, despite United States policies that directly contributed to the length of this involvement, that Afghanistan is a vital national security interest; specifically, the security of the Homeland and the security of the American people. Central and South Asia remains the epicenter of radical Islamic terrorism. Afghanistan, a mountainous, landlocked, tribal country, is ideally suited for a terrorist safe haven or sanctuary. It is why UBL—Osama bin Laden—chose that site, invited by the Haqqani family back in the mid-1990s. It is why the al Qaeda leadership remains in close proximity today across the border in Pakistan and their fighters maintain a modest presence in Afghanistan. They welcome the opportunity to return.

ISIS has a growing presence in Afghanistan, so much so that the Taliban recognized that they cannot drive them out. The reality is that, for 18-plus years, the United States-NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] commitment, along with the Afghan National Security Forces, have prevented another catastrophic attack on the Homeland or in Europe. It remains the essential objective of the mission in Afghanistan. Moreover, from covert bases in Afghanistan, we have killed al Qaeda leaders in Pakistan, to include Osama bin Laden in 2011, and denied them safe havens in Afghanistan due to the presence of United States, NATO, and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).

What is the path ahead? First of all, United States troop presence will likely be reduced in the near term to 8,600, an agreement—and also the possibility of an agreement with the Taliban, with conditions based on reduction in violence, peace negotiations

with the Afghan Government, and an open public break with the al Qaeda.

General Scott Miller, one of our very best commanders in Afghanistan who is due to brief you next month, was working on reducing United States troop presence before negotiations began with the Taliban. He concluded, after he took command and did his assessment, that he had more troops than are required to do the mission. In other words, the troop reduction that we will undergo to 8,600 is an acceptable risk, in the mind of the commander in charge.

Second, we need to reduce the financial burden on the United States. Currently, it's around $45.5 billion, down from a high of $110 billion in 2010 during the Afghan surge. Let's get it down—it's possible—to only below $30 billion initially, and eventually below that. Not just because of the troop reductions, but by reductions also in contractors who represent a $27 billion cost of the $45 billion. Ashraf Ghani, who I've spoken to on more than one occasion, if he forms the new government, wants to reduce the United States burden of $5 billion to the Afghan National Security Forces. He wants to provide more funds himself. He thinks he can do that, and he's had negotiations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the UAE [United Arab Emirates], and a couple of others, to assist in the financing.

Third, after a new Afghan Government is formed, the United States should publicly support the constitutional democratic order. Recall that 92.8 percent of the people in Afghanistan wanted these elections to take place. That is a remarkable statement on their behalf, and recall that every single year for 18 years, the Afghan people have rejected the Taliban, to the tune of 85 percent of that population. They represent the most unpopular insurgency in the history of insurgencies since we've been tracking them. We need to ask the Afghan leadership to lay out a concrete plan for taking full responsibility for securing their country and paying for it with less United States resources, and ask the new president to come to the White House and brief our President on it.

Lastly, conduct an Afghanistan-Pakistan broader regional security pact designed to counter terrorism, bolster the region's ability to tackle terrorism without United States capabilities over time. The United States can broker this—the U.N. [United Nations], or NATO. Commit the parties not to use terrorist proxies, not to—to close safe havens, and to respect each other's sovereignty. Pakistan must stop the political, military, or materiel support to the Taliban conducted on Pakistani territory. The reward or payback is a free trade agreement and regional trade deals and economic investment with Pakistan.

In conclusion, listen, I share every Member's frustration with the length of United States involvement in Afghanistan, but it is important to remind ourself that this war with radical Islam came to us, and it is, at a minimum, a generational war, with no easy or quick solutions. Today, we are executing a very different model than what we used to begin our involvement in the 9/11 wars. While radical Islam has spread and is still thriving in the world, to some 40 countries, the United States is only actively involved in those countries where America's national interest and the security

of the Homeland are at risk. As such, the model is to assist the locals in host country in doing the fighting, with a modest amount of troops to support them, and also to provide airpower. So, in Syria, less than 1,000 troops supporting 70,000 Syrians who are doing the fighting against ISIS. In Iraq, 5,000 troops supporting 300,000 Iraqis who are doing the fighting against ISIS. In Afghanistan, it'll be 80,000—8,600 supporting 300 local fighters doing the fighting against ISIS and the Taliban. This is a model that is working. Protecting the American people from ISIS and al Qaeda, with a modest investment.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

Chairman INHOFE. Thank you, General Keane.

Dr. Jackson.

STATEMENT OF DR. COLIN F. JACKSON, PROFESSOR, STRATEGY AND POLICY DEPARTMENT, UNITED STATES NAVAL WAR COLLEGE, FORMER DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR AFGHANISTAN, PAKISTAN, AND CENTRAL ASIA

Dr. JACKSON. Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to discussing the challenges facing us in Afghanistan today.

My comments are strictly my own, not a reflection of the views of the administration, the Department of Defense, the Department of the Navy, or the United States Naval War College. I hope my testimony will shed some light on the connection between the South Asia Strategy, the opportunities, and the risks ahead.

I would echo General Keane's observation that the maturity and seriousness of this body—and, I would also say, of the House Armed Services Committee—was one of the most refreshing aspects of my service in government. This is an incredibly hard set of problems, and you have shown the maturity and the focus that has made this job that much easier.

I would ask to have my written testimony entered into the record. I'll just make my remarks brief.

I do think United States leaders today face two seemingly antithetical imperatives in Afghanistan. The first is the entirely understandable desire to end a nearly-two-decade war. The costs of that war, human and financial, have far outstripped the expectations of leaders in 2001, and there are pressing priorities elsewhere. That said, the imperative of protecting the American Homeland from terrorist attack remains unchanged.

We still, unfortunately, face a very real and substantial threat of external attack by Salafi and Jihadi movements emanating from South and Central Asia. We do not get to decide whether we have a substantial threat of terrorism emanating from the region. All we have is a decision of how to deal with that threat, the threat posed primarily by ISIS–Khorasan (ISIS-K) and al Qaeda. Any responsible policy and strategy on Afghanistan must address both imperatives, not one. The salient question in 2020 is whether the United States political leadership of both parties has the patience and the foresight to see this campaign through to a favorable conclusion and avoid the temptation of a hasty peace.

By staying in Afghanistan for this long period of time, we have succeeded in preventing additional attacks on the American Homeland. But, this effect has not been permanent. The removal of focused United States counterterrorism surveillance and direct action in Afghanistan, whether part of a deal or not, would most likely lead to the rapid expansion of ISIS–K and al Qaeda capabilities and the increasing likelihood of attacks against United States and allied homelands.

It is also easy to lose, in the length of this long war, a sense of what has changed. As General Keane has observed, we are well past the period of nation-building in Afghanistan. That has not really been going on since 2014. Certainly, since 2017, what we are seeing is a focused counterterrorism operation directly linked to the negotiations ongoing with the Taliban.

The Afghans have assumed the vast majority of the fighting and the dying in Afghanistan. This is, in the main, a story of Afghan Security Forces fighting with United States advisors in support against the Taliban and ISIS–K. The reason we are focused on this today is the interest in the deal that may or may not emerge at a bargaining table with the Taliban. I would argue that this is not about getting "a deal," it is about getting "a good deal." A bad deal is on offer every day.

Who are the signatories? What are the terms? Is the agreement enforceable? These are the three primordial questions on any deal.

What would a good deal constitute? A good deal would prevent a Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, it would represent real power-sharing between the existing Government of Afghanistan and elements that have been in contest with it.

Any lasting political settlement in Afghanistan must include the Government of Afghanistan as the senior partner, not an absentee, and not an afterthought.

U.S. access and partnership on counterterrorism must be guaranteed, not simply proposed. We need, for the foreseeable future, the ability to operate until such a time as locals can handle these problems to our satisfaction.

The United States must remain in some small size to enforce any existing or proposed political agreement. There is nothing in the recent 40-year history of Afghanistan to suggest that peace deals will be self-enforcing.

The way out of Afghanistan runs through a lasting settlement, not a phony peace. If we give in to the temptation of a hasty or lopsided or unenforceable settlement, we will be exposed and may well be dragged back in, as we were into Iraq and Syria.

How do we get there from here? The key is not to exercise or exhibit desperation. Good deals only emerge if we are willing to walk away, as the President did in September. We must force the Taliban senior leadership to negotiate with the sovereign Government of Afghanistan. This is the hard right over the easy wrong.

We must also convince Pakistan that they must close the deal, not just open it. They must be willing to restrain the Taliban from attempting to take over a future Afghan political system. They must accept the emergence of a stable and peaceful Afghanistan as the prerequisite for any reconsideration of United States-Pakistan relations.

The beginning of wisdom in negotiations is the willingness to walk away. President Trump exercised that in September, and I hope that that trend continues.

A peace that deserts our allies and enables our enemies to seize power will raise the risk of terrorist attack. Such an outcome would be a bad deal for America. For these reasons, we may be better served waging a focused and increasingly efficient military campaign until an acceptable deal emerges.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Jackson follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT BY DR. COLIN F. JACKSON

Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to discussing the challenges facing us in Afghanistan. My comments today are strictly my own and do not reflect the views of the Administration, the Department of Defense, the Department of the Navy, or the United States Naval War College. I hope my testimony can shed some light on the connection between the South Asia Strategy and the opportunities risks ahead in Afghanistan and the region and I look forward to addressing your questions.

THE SOUTH ASIA STRATEGY, RECONCILIATION, AND THE PROSPECTS FOR AFGHANISTAN

United States leaders today face two seemingly antithetical imperatives in Afghanistan. The first is the entirely understandable desire to bring a nearly two-decade war to an end. The costs of the war, human as well as financial, have far outstripped the expectations of 2001 and the emergence of great power competition with China and Russia suggests that scarce United States resources might be better spent on these priorities. At the same time, the imperative of protecting the American Homeland from terrorist attack remains unchanged. We still face a very real and substantial threat of external attack by salafi jihadi groups emanating from South and Central Asia and this threat will not go away anytime soon. Although al Qaeda has been battered in the years since 2001, it is not dead and its leadership remains focused on external attacks on the United States and its allies. Al Qaeda's longstanding alliances with local militants including the Taliban and the Haqqani network make Afghanistan and Pakistan areas of outsized importance. The rise of ISIS–Khorasan in eastern Afghanistan and areas of Pakistan poses a distinct threat not only to United States and foreign forces but also to the populations of the West. Any responsible policy and strategy on Afghanistan must address both of these imperatives. This is what has made the resolution of the war so challenging and has led three administrations to step back from the illusion of simple endgames.

Complexity is not synonymous with hopelessness. The South Asia Strategy of August 2017 offers a framework within which the United States can either manage the terrorism problem at acceptable cost or bring the war to a reasonable and lasting political settlement consistent with U.S. national interests. Real progress has been made in reducing the cost of the war and increasing the capability of the United States, allied, and Afghan forces engaged there. We are almost a decade removed from the surge and its sweeping ambitions to reform Afghanistan; what we see on the ground today is a focused, highly efficient counterterrorism campaign executed by Afghan security forces in conjunction with very small numbers of United States and allied advisors and counterterrorism forces. The salient question in 2020 is whether the U.S. political leadership of both parties has the patience and foresight to see this campaign through to a favorable conclusion and avoid the temptation of a hasty, phony peace.

THE SOUTH ASIA STRATEGY

On of the greatest contributions of the South Asia Strategy of August 2017 was its laudably clear articulation of the ends, ways, and means of the campaign in Afghanistan. For the first time the United States established a negotiated, settlement inclusive of the Taliban as the political objective. Equally important, the strategy explicitly rejected the timelines that had undermined the impact of the Obama era investments in the surge and transition. Instead, the South Asia Strategy argued that the resolution of the war would be conditions based—we would wage a focused,

military campaign as long as necessary to obtain a favorable political settlement from the American point of view.

The new strategy also marked a shift in the ways the U.S. sought to defeat terrorist groups and bring the war to a successful conclusion. The United States sought to deny the Taliban the ability to seize major population centers and to punish them by increasing the offensive striking power of the Afghan security forces. By imposing a "mutually hurting stalemate" on the Taliban, and credibly threatening to maintain or increase the pressure indefinitely, the United States sought to compel the Taliban to negotiate and rejoin the political process. The strategy also placed heavy pressure on Pakistan. If the defining feature of the war in Afghanistan has been the physical insulation of the Taliban senior leadership inside settled Pakistan, then the United States had to press Pakistan to reduce its active and passive support to the movement. Only by negating sanctuary and shaking the confidence of Taliban leadership could the United States hope to translate military effects in Afghanistan into a change in Taliban calculus and drive them towards good faith negotiations. Throughout this process, United States counterterrorism and intelligence forces waged a parallel campaign against transnational terrorist groups including al Qaeda and ISIS–K.

The South Asia Strategy also changed the means applied to the problem. The most obvious change was the introduction of roughly 4,000 additional advisors to increase the offensive striking power of the Afghan security forces. Equally important, the United States decided to shift critical enablers from other areas of CENTCOM to Afghanistan. These included lift assets, ISR platforms, and artillery and aircraft to enable Afghan forces to increase the tempo of offensive operations. Finally, General Nicholson directed a doubling of the size off the Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) in recognition that those commando, police special units, and high end counterterrorism forces were the primary instruments of offensive operations. The expansion in ASSF, combined with a tripling of the Afghan Air Force (including UH–60, A–29, and MD–530 acquisitions), would enable the Afghans to increase the scale and tempo of operations against the Taliban.

ASSESSING THE SOUTH ASIA STRATEGY

Almost as soon as the strategy was announced, Secretary Mattis directed the Department to develop a means of assess its progress. The framework we developed broke the assessment into three logical elements: inputs, outputs, and outcomes. The external inputs of the strategy were mostly complete by the spring of 2018. The dispatch of additional advisors under the first Security Force Assistance Brigade (SFAB) and provision of critical enablers gave the Afghans the wherewithal to shift from ineffective and vulnerable defensive positions to focused offensive operations. The expansion of the Afghan Special Security Forces and the Afghan Air Force proceeded more slowly but were successful and are largely complete. In tandem with these efforts inside Afghanistan, the United States suspended security assistance to Pakistan and made clear its insistence that Pakistan curtail Taliban activity and cooperate in the United States push for a political settlement. The appointment of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad as the Special Representative for Afghan Reconciliation (SRAR) signaled the seriousness of the United States commitment to that end.

Predictably, the outputs of the strategy took substantially longer to emerge and the results were more mixed. The U.S. push to get the ANDSF out of defensive check points and into expanded offensive operations ran into organizational and political obstacles. General Nicholson and later General Miller labored to replace a raft of ineffective Afghan leaders and install younger and more energetic ones from the Ministries to the tactical level. The success of the Afghan Special Security Forces led to their overuse and deterioration; Afghan political and military leaders often sent these units as "fire brigades" to various threatened areas only to see them pinned down indefinitely in static roles. Resolving this problem and putting these high end Afghan units into a functioning "operational readiness cycle" consumed a considerable amount of time and political capital. The United States initiative to get Afghan security forces out of vulnerable, static check points collided with the political incentives of Afghan political leaders to secure various local constituencies. While United States leadership persuaded senior Afghan leadership of the importance of this shift, the basic tension between the military need to increase focused and coherent offensive operations and the political demands for population and territorial control set up a tug of war that is likely to endure.

The battle between the Afghan Government and the Taliban was also expressed in terms of control of population, territory, and urban areas. Under General Nicholson, the campaign was framed in terms of expanding the government's control over the population. Under General Miller, the focus shifted from the pursuit of popu-

lation or territorial control to a search for leverage in the negotiations with the Taliban. As the prospect of political negotiations loomed, the United States and the Taliban increased the intensity of their respective offensive operations. The result of this contest for has been a very violent, battlefield impasse; the Taliban has been largely unable to seize and hold major population centers or provincial capitals while the Afghan security forces have been unable to displace the Taliban from their rural strongholds. While some have characterized this as a "stalemate," the government unquestionably controls the better half; control of the five major cities of Afghanistan brings control over the future of Afghanistan. The Taliban remains capable of launching terrorist attacks and interrupting movement along major roads; the Afghan security forces, with the support of United States and allied advisors, can launch offensive operations and achieve tactical overmatch in almost every engagement. Paradoxically, the inability of either side to win outright on the battlefield, and the mounting costs to both sides, provide powerful, first-order incentives for political negotiation.

At the same time that the Afghan security forces and United States advisors have focused on maximizing leverage in future political negotiations, those same forces have been waging a sustained counterterrorism campaign against ISIS–K in several areas of Afghanistan. While the United States accepts that the war with the Taliban must end in some inclusive political settlement, the United States has concluded that ISIS–K, like al Qaeda, has no place in a future, Afghan political order. ISIS–K has proven highly resilient, absorbing large numbers of casualties in the face of sustained military operations by the Afghans and the United States. ISIS–K has attracted recruits from both the Taliban and other militant groups; the same ideology and tactics demonstrated in Iraq and Syria have allowed ISIS–K to capture the mantle of hard-line, salafi jihadi resistance in the region. While the Taliban sees ISIS–K as a political and military rival, and has fought with the group for territorial control in multiple areas, United States and Afghan counterterrorism operations are the primary reason ISIS–K has been held in check. The removal of that bulwark would expose the Taliban to the full force of a very capable and resilient enemy and open the way to external attacks on the West.

The final set of outputs has been pressure on the Taliban leadership and its external patrons. While the Taliban leadership laments the impact of intensified Afghan and United States offensive operations, mounting Taliban casualties have not had a decisive impact of the leadership's decision calculus thus far. The senior leadership remains physically insulated from U.S. military action and the group places heavy emphasis on internal unity and consensus. This means that hardliners can veto major changes in Taliban policy and the default of the group is to continue the fight rather than risk internal rupture. United States efforts to persuade Pakistan to play a constructive role have been partially successful. In response to hard pressure and persuasion, Pakistan has played an indispensable role in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table and there are encouraging signs that Pakistani leadership may be reconsidering the strategic utility of proxy militant groups such as the Taliban and LeT. That said, it remains unclear whether this Pakistani cooperation reflects a genuine commitment to forge a durable and balanced political settlement in Afghanistan or whether it simply hopes to lift U.S pressure by taking visible first steps in that direction.

If reconciliation has always been the paramount objective of the South Asia Strategy, the military initiatives and political shifts have at the very least created promising openings. President Ghani's February 2018 offer of negotiations without preconditions, followed by the brief Eid ceasefire of August 2018, suggested that a political settlement might be within reach. The resumption of direct talks between the United States and the Taliban Political Commission in the fall of 2018 offered an opportunity to explore the feasibility of political settlement.

Whereas the inputs and outputs have been to varying degrees controllable, the outcomes of the strategy have depended to a far larger degree on the interaction of independent actors including the United States, the Afghan state, the Taliban, and an array of external parties. The simplest outcome—the steady state prevention of additional terrorist attacks outside the region against United States and allied homelands—has been successfully accomplished only by maintaining heavy, continuous military and intelligence pressure on ISIS–K and al Qaeda. At present this success cannot be considered permanent; the removal of United States focused counterterrorism surveillance and direct action in Afghanistan would most likely lead to the rapid expansion of ISIS–K and al Qaeda capabilities and an increasing likelihood of directed or inspired attacks against United States and allied homelands.

While the United States has made substantial progress in its multi-decade bid to buttress the Afghan state, and the Afghans have assumed human costs of fighting

the war, the regime cannot expect to defeat the Taliban and ISIS–K without substantial United States financial assistance and some level of military advisory support. President Ghani has been a far more effective and supportive security partner in the fight against the Taliban and ISIS–K than his predecessor President Karzai. But the Afghan economy remains too small and the Afghan revenue system too weak to extract the resources necessary to wage a two-front war without substantial external assistance. What has changed dramatically is the share of the fighting the Afghans have assumed; the campaign in Afghanistan is in the main a story of Afghan security forces fighting against the Taliban and ISIS–K with United States and allied forces providing only the key enablers, advice and training to amplify their offensive power and reach.

THE SEARCH FOR POLITICAL SETTLEMENT: GOOD DEAL, BAD DEAL, NO DEAL

For the past 18 months, the focus of attention has appropriately been on the progress of political reconciliation. It bears restating that it is easier to pursue peace than secure it. Ambassador Khalilzad has faced the monumental task of brokering a durable peace settlement favorable to U.S. interests. He has done so under considerable time pressure from various domestic fronts and in the face of rival powers eager either to stymie a settlement or impose costs on the U.S. While the outcome of the SRAR's initiative remains uncertain, any judgment of that outcome must focus on the terms of the settlement and its practical enforceability. Any good deal must provide a real rather than rhetorical answer to the enduring threat of salafi jihadi terrorism to the United States and allied homelands.

A bad deal with the Taliban has been on offer for years and arguably decades and it remains on offer today. From the 1990s to the present, the Taliban has offered a modus vivendi that offers rhetorical assurances that no threats will emerge from Afghanistan in return for non-interference by the West. Under the Taliban regime of the 1990s, the leadership offered sanctuary to Islamist militant groups including al Qaeda. While the Taliban did not endorse external terrorist operations against the West, neither did it demonstrate a willingness or ability to restrain let alone punish al Qaeda. This Taliban policy failed to prevent the Embassy attacks of 1998, failed to prevent the attack on the USS *Cole,* and failed to prevent the attacks of 9/11. Even in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, Mullah Omar's regime preferred to lose power rather than break with al Qaeda and turn over the perpetrators. Careful examination of the Taliban's domestic and foreign policy on militancy reveals how little has changed in the ensuing decades. The new Taliban, like the old Taliban, prefers to offer domestic sanctuary to Islamist militants and rhetorical assurances to the international community rather than break its relationships with these militant fellow travelers.

The opening position of the Taliban in the current talks appears largely unchanged from this longstanding policy. Based on public statements, the Taliban insist on the withdrawal of all foreign forces in advance of any political settlement; in return, they offer vague assurances to prevent future attacks emanating from Afghanistan. Any deal that trades the fact of complete United States troop withdrawal for the fiction of Taliban counterterrorism assistance cannot reasonably guarantee the security of the American Homeland. In this sense, the President's decision in September 2019 to walk away from the talks was fundamentally correct. Barring a durable and reasonably comprehensive ceasefire, some level of enduring United States military and intelligence presence, and a reasonable political settlement between the Taliban and the Afghan Government in advance of withdrawal, it is hard to see a path that leads to the simultaneous accomplishment of the twin goals of ending the war and safeguarding the American Homeland.

Two fundamental threats in any negotiation are desperation and wishful thinking. Secretary Mattis repeatedly insisted that success in the South Asia Strategy depended on avoiding the appearance of desperation. Any opponent that senses his counterparty wants or needs a deal more than he does will be inclined to dig in and wait for concessions. For an array of reasons, public speculation about U.S. timelines and the precedent of United States decisions in Syria have reinforced Taliban impressions that time is on their side. This has led them to hold fast to their opening positions, reject meaningful interaction with the Ghani Government, and cling to longstanding alliances with militant groups including al Qaeda. While it is possible that the Taliban senior leadership is ready to engage in domestic power sharing, to make a genuine break with al Qaeda, and is willing and able to address the ISIS–K threat in conjunction with the United States, the body of evidence suggests this is highly unlikely.

If the history of Taliban policy provides the outlines of a bad deal, what would constitute a good deal? Any good deal would have to address the existing and pro-

jected terrorist threats of ISIS–K and al Qaeda in more than rhetorical terms. In the short run, this would require some level of United States intelligence and military presence until such a time that a future Afghan state can demonstrate it can prevent such attacks. The scale of that United States presence could vary considerably based on the performance of the Afghan security forces and the magnitude of the terrorist threat. Such a settlement would also require meaningful power sharing between the existing government and the Taliban. Any Taliban takeover would most likely end in either an unacceptable return to arrangement of the 1990s or a renewed civil war along ethnic or political lines, most likely fueled by the external support of bordering states including Russia, Iran, and Pakistan. Finally, any good deal would require an ability to enforce the terms and not simply monitor their progress or unraveling. Given the track record of the Taliban, Afghan power brokers, and external patrons, enforcement rather than trust must be the rule in the aftermath of any political settlement. Some residual U.S. and allied military presence might play a useful role in deterring the parties from returning to civil war.

If a good deal would require some mix of Afghan power sharing, residual United States counterterrorism presence and access, and hard power enforceability, then how might we improve our position in the negotiations? The first step would be to convince the Taliban leadership that we are willing to wage an intense but efficient military campaign as long as necessary to secure an acceptable outcome. Unless we can demonstrate a credible commitment to follow through on a conditions-based approach, we are unlikely to persuade the Taliban to move off their traditional and fundamentally unacceptable policy positions on Islamist militancy in Afghanistan. Second, the U.S. may need to follow Sun Tzu's formula of "attacking the enemy's coalition." If the Taliban refuse to change their positions on a general settlement, it may be reasonable to explore "separate peaces" with Taliban leaders, commanders, and factions.

Some of the leaders most exposed to the brunt of Afghan and United States offensive operations inside Afghanistan may be willing to switch allegiances in return for some combination of amnesty and access to status and resources inside the existing Afghan political system. One major challenge here would be to convince the Afghan Government that calculated concessions along these lines are risks worth taking. Any splits within the Taliban coalition inside Afghanistan would force the Taliban leadership to reconsider their staying power and by extension their policy positions at the negotiating table.

At the same time, it will become increasingly important to explain to the Pakistani leadership that the future of the bilateral relationship will hinge more on the final outcome in Afghanistan than the opening act. If Pakistan plays a positive role in convening talks, but the end result is a Taliban takeover or subsequent terror attacks in the West, then Pakistan will be held responsible. Both states, for different reasons, have a strong interest in forging a durable rather than a fictive settlement in Afghanistan. Without a lasting settlement, the United States cannot afford to disengage completely; without a lasting settlement, Pakistan cannot reasonably ask for renewed American assistance on the military, diplomatic, or economic fronts.

What if we are faced with a choice between a bad deal and no deal? What can easily be lost in the larger narrative of the long war is how much more efficient in blood and treasure our campaign today is than at any other period since 2002; with only 10 percent of the troops we had at the peak of the surge, we are, with our Afghan allies, inflicting a similar level of damage on the Taliban. We have today a credible security partner in President Ghani who is determined to help the U.S. wage war on the full range of militant groups in the region. The Afghan security forces are capable of denying the Taliban victory on the battlefield and protecting the population centers of Afghanistan. If we cannot reach a deal that meets our core requirements on counterterrorism, we can fall back on a solid foundation of our partnership with the Afghan security forces and refocus our efforts on reducing the human and financial costs of the battlefield deadlock to a minimum. Paradoxically, a credible demonstration of our military ability and political willingness to hold the line and inflict high levels of damage on the Taliban, ISIS–K, and al Qaeda may be the key to forcing a reassessment by the Taliban leadership. Here again the President's actions in September 2019 loom large. The beginning of wisdom in negotiations is the willingness to walk away. By demonstrating that he preferred no deal to a bad deal, he forced the Taliban to reconsider its positions and its timeline.

Is it worth it?

As General Dunford noted on multiple occasions, insurance is a good metaphor for the dilemma we face today in Afghanistan. We do not get to decide whether we have a substantial threat of terrorism emanating from South and Central Asia; all we have is a decision of how to deal with the threat posed by ISIS–K and al Qaeda.

We could disengage entirely and that would be the equivalent of canceling our terrorism insurance policy: we would save the cost of the insurance premium but we would take on the totality of the future risk. Alternatively, we could continue to try to build the capability of an increasingly competent Afghan security force so that they could continue the fight against the ISIS–K, al Qaeda, and if need be the Taliban; this is the "whole life" insurance policy we currently pursue. Still another option would be to cut costs by switching to a "term life" policy in which we focus exclusively on unilateral, U.S. counterterrorism operations and stop building the capacity of our local partners.

Even if insurance is the appropriate analogy, the question of cost remains. Are we overpaying to insure against the terrorism risks we face? There can be no certain answer to this question; the best we can say is that the resilience of al Qaeda and ISIS–K, and their undiminished desire to strike at the United States and its allies, mean that the threat is likely to be real and substantial for the foreseeable future. One temptation might be to switch from our current insurer—the United States military and intelligence presence and our Afghan security force partners—in favor of an ostensibly lower cost insurer in the form of a reconciled Taliban. In theory, a functioning counterterrorism agreement with the Taliban might allow us to cut costs by removing our own forces and reducing our financial support for the Afghan security forces. The poison pill here is counterparty risk. Based on their military and political track record, we have few reasons to believe that the Taliban are willing or able to contain the risks posed by al Qaeda and ISIS–K that will remain in the wake of a successful reconciliation. Under these circumstances, switching insurance providers might deliver us short-term savings at the cost of a medium-term collapse of our solution to the terrorism problem in South and Central Asia.

A more responsible approach to cutting the costs of the insurance policy would be to focus on driving the premiums down. Here the recent initiatives by General Miller point towards an increasingly affordable, steady-state alternative to a premature and problematic deal with the Taliban. General Miller has already demonstrated the ability to cut the United States troop footprint and the financial cost of the war while increasing military pressure on the Taliban. While the room for future efficiency gains is finite, the least bad option might be for the United States to continue to the insurance premium in Afghanistan to the practical minimum and prepare to wage this increasingly small and efficient counterterrorism campaign until something breaks our way. We should be primed to discuss a deal that meets our minimum requirements but willing to hold the line rather than accept a phony peace. A peace that deserts our allies and enables our enemies to seize power will raise the risks of renewed terrorist attacks on the American Homeland by al Qaeda and ISIS–K. Such an outcome might draw us back into future military operations in the region on far more disadvantageous terms. For these reasons, we may be better served waging a focused and increasingly efficient military campaign until an acceptable deal emerges. This may be less satisfying than a secret plan to win the war but it may be a more realistic and prudent response to the persistence of serious terrorist threats in South and Central Asia.

Chairman INHOFE. Thank you.

General Field.

STATEMENT OF BRIGADIER GENERAL KIMBERLY C. FIELD, USA (RET.), EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALBRITTON CENTER FOR GRANT STRATEGY, BUSH SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SERVICE, FORMER SENIOR ADVISOR TO THE COMMANDER, OPERATIONS RESOLUTE SUPPORT

Brigadier General FIELD. Good morning, Chairman Inhofe, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished Members of the Committee. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to testify.

I first served in Afghanistan in early 2002 as the chief planner of a Civil Military Operations Task Force, and then again in a 2-year stint as the executive officer to the operational commander from 2009 to 2011, and then, most recently, as Senator Reed mentioned, as the designated red-teamer, as General Miller put it. I'm currently the executive director of the Albritton Center for Grant Strategy at the Bush School, and it's from both of those perspectives that I'm speaking.

In my 18 years of observing and participating in this conflict, our objective has, in fact, been consistent. We've sometimes lost sight of it, but we've always been there to protect the Homelands, ours and the NATO member states.

The ways we have chosen to do that have varied from counterterrorism to counterinsurgency, to train-advise-and-equip-assist, then, now, to a negotiated political settlement between the Taliban and the government.

But, looking forward, we have to ask ourselves two things. First, is the original purpose still valid, or have we sufficiently reduced the threat to accept more risk? Secondly, how does Afghanistan fit in a different strategic context and a different conception of our position in the world than that of 2001?

With that in mind, I offer three options that I think are all, frankly, viable: We could leave now, we could accept an indefinite small presence, or we could refine our current theory of victory.

First, we could leave now, knowing that our Homeland will be sufficiently safe in the short run. It's a fact that, with the recent degradation of ISIS in Nangarhar, as well as al Qaeda's disorganization, there is now very little threat to us or our allies from Afghanistan. I just think we need to say that. But, leaving carries a risk of having to return, at significant cost, including the cost that we didn't, or couldn't, live up to our promises. To me, that matters, and so, this option sounds bad. Not only is ISIS likely to reemerge and the Taliban ties to al Qaeda are intercommunal and interfamilial, but the option is incongruent with our values. We have armed the country to the teeth, making a potential civil war a bloodbath. We own part of the blame for the rampant corruption from which the people have suffered. Tens of thousands of civilians—Afghan civilians—have died. We've made promises to women and young people, maybe promises we should not have made, but we made them. But, we did try hard. We can only do so much, and sunk costs are not necessarily a reason to stay.

A second option is to remain indefinitely—and I think you've heard that today—reducing presence and cost as much as we can. The NATO mission will likely stay, as long as the U.S. there. We continue to plug away on a conditions-based withdrawal as part of an intra-Afghan political settlement while pressuring key ISIS and Taliban nodes. Further, we have typically left behind a mid- to long-term presence in places of geostrategic importance to us to guarantee our desired outcomes. Is Afghanistan now of geostrategic importance in this era of great-power competition? I think we have to ask that.

What we should not do is continue to fight on and on without executable theory of victory. Major General Fox Conner said, in World War I, "Never fight unless you have to, never fight alone, and never fight for long," and I might add to that, "Never fight someone else's fight." We're doing all these things, really, and it's bad for our democracy. If we believe Afghanistan carries enough import to make these tradeoffs, it requires a clear message to the American people: where this mission fits in the war on terrorism and/or why Afghanistan and the region are important in an era of major-power competition. It also demands we unmuddle our message to the Taliban. We need to say we're not going anywhere until

our objectives are achieved. That's what it would take for option two.

A third option is to address the shortcomings of our current plan to get that political settlement, and, frankly, this is the one I favor. Military pressure is necessary for Special Representative Khalilzad to bring to the table, but it's insufficient. Taliban fighters are, in fact, reeling from the precision and lethality of the last year. But, the pool of them is seemingly endless. More importantly, tactical pressure will work only if the people with whom we are meeting are actually able to speak for the Taliban, both the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Taliban in Pakistan. Finally, while it is true we have a good partner in President Ghani in prosecuting the military fight, it is less clear he is willing or able to speak for enough of his country in the peace process.

So, to the military pressure in the current—effort, we should add at least three things I can think of:

First, we have to strengthen the diplomatic effort to address Afghanistan in the context of the South Asia Strategy. Further, we should broaden our global engagement to specify the international community's contribution to the peace dividend, and communicate that vision to parties of the conflicts. A forceful Taliban takeover results in none of that. The Quetta Shura and the Military Commission in Pakistan may not fully understand this, but it's time to convey that we have much less to lose than any Afghan or Pakistani. The spoiler owns the carnage, the poverty, the isolation, not really us.

Secondly, the Taliban's doing the fighting, living—the Talibs doing the fighting live among the Afghan people, 89 percent of whom support negotiations and 64 percent of whom say reconciliation is a possibility. The Afghan Government, with our support, should ramp up efforts to encourage Taliban fighters to stop using violence. They should not have to renounce the Taliban as a political movement. They, too, should hear clearly what peace looks like, and the last NDAA gave the Command the authority to support such efforts.

Last, and related to the unity required in our Afghan partner, the current level of corruption and fractiousness in the Afghan Government is unacceptable. Afghan leaders must address it seriously. It's hard, but not impossible, to condition our money and our support on progress in anticorruption and unity.

Again, I prefer the third option, for a limited period of time and against specific benchmarks. Our military campaign is the most precise and effective it has ever been. The use of a relatively small amount of resources has been highly strategic, and the current commander knows exactly how to align those needs with expert ways to achieve our ends.

Further, we should see any forthcoming first step in a peace deal Ambassador Khalilzad can wrangle as better than the status quo. That's the first step. There are choices to be made after that. But, the burden of creating gains out of 18 years of investment cannot fall on these two men alone. If a refined plan to get a negotiated settlement does not work, and the Taliban may continue to think they can wait us out, we have those two sub-par options left.

In closing, this was another horrific week for at least two families of soldiers deployed to Afghanistan. A thinking democracy must ask, as you have today—and thank you very much—is it worth it? I say only if we are extremely clear about the threats and honest about the threats. Our larger interests are values, the future role of our country in the world, and that we are clear-eyed about our theory of victory. We certainly want peace. To me, we have to try our very best to get it, but that does not have to mean forever.

Thank you for hearing me today.

Chairman INHOFE. Very good, General Field.

In the beginning of your comments, you talked about how promises were made to the women and young people, elaborate a little bit on that.

Brigadier General FIELD. We've had a partner in the Afghan Government——

Chairman INHOFE. Yes.

Brigadier General FIELD.—over the years. As we moved from counterterrorism to counterinsurgency in search of enduring solutions in Afghanistan because of the connection between the Taliban and al Qaeda, you know, we moved to a democratization, of sorts, in Afghanistan, and that includes individual rights. Women are half of the population. So, we ended up there. We put a lot of money into women's programs, and we continue to do that. We still have, in fact, an appropriation to train and educate women in the security forces. So, we have made a lot of promises to the women and to young people in general.

Chairman INHOFE. Okay. The word I got from that was that we haven't really kept our promises there to women and young people. I kind of thought we were in pretty good shape on that, because it seemed that progress has been made primarily through—by women.

All right——

Brigadier General FIELD. Sir, we have kept our promises.

Chairman INHOFE. Sure. Sure. I appreciate that.

Dr. Jackson, you and I talked about—kind of bringing up the subject that's been—it's been behind us quite a ways, but it's my understanding that one of our colleagues is going to have a hearing this afternoon on the Afghan Papers. So, I thought we might get some comments in there, in the beginning. Now, you and I have talked about this in the past. We know that we're talking about, primarily, everything that was pre-2016. I'd like to have you elaborate a little bit on the Afghanistan Papers and the—in that that seems to be coming up for another discussion.

Dr. JACKSON. Senator, yes, I would echo your comment. The Afghanistan Papers does cover, exclusively, a period preceding the current administration; that is, sort of, pre-2016. I think there are several other elements that distort the picture unhelpfully in this rendition. I was reminded of George Wills' famous comment, saying—of another subject, he said, "presenting the obvious with a sense of original discovery." That would be my epitaph for the Afghanistan Papers Project. Much of what is said in there is true. Afghanistan has been a violent place, it has been a place we have struggled to understand, it is one that is beset with corruption,

with drug economy, all of these things. True, true, true, and known. To leap from that, however, to arguing that there's a plot to deceive the United States people that's been prosecuted over three U.S. administrations by every senior military, civil servant, and political leader is, I think, unfair and deliberately distortionary.

Chairman INHOFE. Yes.

Dr. JACKSON. I think it's unfortunate that we're sucking the oxygen out with articles like this, as distinct from very good reporting in the same paper. I'd point to yesterday's article on ISIS–K by the Washington Post which was a model of good journalism: talking about a current problem, looking at what it might be in the future, in terms of ISIS–K's presence and threat. I just wish we could spend the mind-share that we have available on current and real problems, rather than disinterring things that aren't very relevant——

Chairman INHOFE. Yes.

Dr. JACKSON.—to the current discussion.

Chairman INHOFE. I agree with that, and that's an excellent statement.

General Keane, did you forget to introduce your friend today?

General KEANE. This is Angela McGlowan, who——

Senator REED. Turn your mic on, sir.

General KEANE. All right. Angela McGlowan, my wife, who I married on December 8 and who ran for congressional office in the State of Mississippi a number of years ago, and summarily lost, but she did it as a promise to her father. The first job she had in Washington, DC, was working for Senator Robert Dole.

Chairman INHOFE. Oh, my goodness.

General KEANE. She's been working for Rupert Murdoch for about 22 to 23 years. So, thank you.

Chairman INHOFE. Well, great introduction, thank you so much.

General Keane, when you talked about the reduction from 12,000—probably 12,000-plus—down to 8.6, I think that Secretary Mark T. Esper has said that these reductions would not necessarily be linked to a deal with Taliban. A lot of people were kind of surprised that he said that. What do you—how do you think——

General KEANE. Well, I think——

Chairman INHOFE.—that link should go?

General KEANE. Well, first of all, as I said in my opening statement, General Miller's been working on the force reduction for some time, based on his assessment that he had more forces than he needed to meet the mission requirement. I believe that, given the fact that negotiations were taking place, the administration made a logical decision not to unilaterally conduct that reduction, and use that as leverage in the negotiations. I think that's where we are. But, if there's not a settlement in those negotiations between the United States and the Taliban, I do think Secretary Esper is right, then we're likely to announce that reduction anyway, because General Miller wants to get on with it. He doesn't want anybody to be in that country, exposed unnecessarily to a risk, if he doesn't need them to accomplish the mission.

Chairman INHOFE. Yes. Good point.

Senator Reed.

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the witnesses for excellent testimony, and let me ask a question to all of you, and then I've got another question.

But, there seems to be a consensus that the greatest strategic threat that faces the United States in Afghanistan is the projection of terrorist power into the Homeland. It's diminished—going to General Fields—but, it's still there, and it could revive itself unless we get it right. That's the strategic issue. Then there are other equities, if you will. We have created a society in which women are given rights, et cetera. That could be endangered by a Taliban takeover.

But, the question I have is that, implicit in everything that you've said is, a continuing presence of U.S. Forces for this counterterrorism threat is important. Reading what the Taliban have demanded from Khalilzad, et cetera, is the firm commitment that we withdraw our forces. How do reconcile that? Is it reconcilable? An affiliated issue is, one of the presumptions is, they'll tell you, "You can take your forces out, because we'll suppress al Qaeda." What capability do they have, or inclination?

So, General Keane, briefly——

General KEANE. Sure.

Senator REED.—and then right down the panel.

General KEANE. Thank you. Yes, that's a great question, Senator.

I think what the administration is trying to do and reconcile in this issue—I'll be, just, frank with you, I did read the initial draft agreement, months ago, before negotiations were broken off, and I was quite alarmed by it, because, up front, we were making a statement that we—the United States is going to withdraw completely from Afghanistan. That, in of itself, would undermine the Afghan Government, the morale of the Afghan National Security Forces, be a huge propaganda victory for the Taliban, and they would sell it as a humiliating defeat for the United States. This is principally to shore up their own fighters. What's not well understood is how fractured the Taliban organization actually is, particularly at the tactical warfighting level, and how many of them are weary and really want some kind of a settlement and stop the fighting. Others continue to fight to the bitter end.

But, the point is, is that I think the reconciliation is, let's establish some conditions to work this through. Those are, specifically, reduction in violence. Well, that's a broad term, and I think there's argument over that right now, in terms of, what does that mean? The Taliban has two problems with this. It's why they don't want a cease-fire. One, they have people who will violate the cease-fire and continue to fight. Two, they will have people that will melt away if the cease-fire goes on for an extended period of time, because they're weary. So, I think that is an issue.

The second issue is to make a public break with the al Qaeda. I, personally, think that's meaningless, because I think they've already demonstrated their allegiance to the al Qaeda. They were willing to give up their regime and thousands of fighters to protect them, back when George Bush challenged them to give the al Qaeda up, and every indication we've had is the same.

The third thing is to begin negotiations with the Afghan Government. I can tell you for a fact, based on my sources, that the lead-

ership of the Taliban still is very committed to two things: one, to get the United States out of Afghanistan; and two, to physically, militarily, overthrow the government.

Senator REED. Thank you.

Dr. Jackson, please, and then General Field.

Dr. JACKSON. Yes. To pick up on General Keane's point, I couldn't agree more. I think the Taliban, from the body of evidence, historical, stretching back into the 1990s, has shown no inclination, even under the most severe strain, to break its real alliance with al Qaeda. This is the most disturbing aspect of the entire story. That is, when faced with a choice between the loss of the regime after 9/11 and taking any of a series of steps to hand over OBL—Osama bin Laden—that, essentially, Mullah Omar chose to lose power rather than break the alliance. I am deeply fearful that they will say all the right words and that they will very rapidly renege on those words. I don't, also, think that they have the capability—anywhere near the level of capability that we've built with our Afghan allies in the counterterrorism space. So, they cannot handle the residual threat, I think, over the near or medium term, and they will not break the alliance with al Qaeda.

Senator REED. General Field, please.

Brigadier General FIELD. Sir, you asked how to reconcile those two things. I think it's conditions-based. I know that sounds trite at this point. But, the issue really is, how do you start, from here? Like—what are we doing—what, exactly, are we thinking is the formula that's going to get the Taliban in Pakistan—for the most part, the Taliban in Pakistan—the Military Commission and the Quetta Shura is really in charge here—what is going to make them change their calculation? We have to add new injects. It's not just military pressure. That is not going to work. I really believe they can fight for a very long time. Yes, they're tired, and yes, they're reeling. But, what else are we going to do to convince them? They're absolutely right that the people want peace, its fighters are tired, so that means you have to work inside the country a little bit, in my opinion, and we have to have a stronger diplomatic effort. We've got to aim—we have got to engage more in the region, but more globally, to say, "This is what peace looks like. You own that." If—if we don't start moving there—this is going to take confidence-building measures. We're not doing that. We just keep doubling down on military pressure and thinking something's going to change. I don't know what that looks like.

Senator REED. Thank you.

I have other questions, but I just—a brief comment, if the Chairman, would allow, is that—it was touched upon by, I think, everyone's comments, the sustainability of the Afghan Government. At present, the Afghan Government funds only 55 percent of their budget, only 10 percent of their forces. The notion that we can draw down forces and money simultaneously probably is not realistic, and we have to think, all of us, are we going to be investing, long term, maybe indefinitely, billions of dollars a year just to keep, sort of, the lid on it, if you will? One of the other ironies—in a coalition government, that means we're sort of providing resources, indirectly at least, to Taliban elements, or at least representatives.

So, those are questions I—that I wanted to get, and I just want to make those points.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman INHOFE. Thank you.

Senator Purdue.

Senator PURDUE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, all of you, for your service.

Secretary Jackson, we've heard the same testimony, we've heard the same concerns. It's all—and it's all valid. I agree with General Field, we need a multidimensional formula. I believe it, personally, having had some experience over there during my career, the Pashtun problem is not just an Afghan problem or a Pakistan problem. It—you know, and the India/Pakistan relationship right now has great bearing in Afghanistan, I believe. The question I have for you, specifically—and I want to do it from a perspective of what General Field just mentioned, as broadening this formula, because the current one's not working, and, unless we're willing to invest billions of dollars indefinitely for a status quo until they get on their feet, the question I have is—I don't see an ultimate solution as long as the Haqqani family down there is different, as long as the people in the surrounding countries have the Pashtun problem and no national identity, we're going to always have this sort of issue in Afghanistan. So, the question is, what does the Pakistan relationship with India, right now, that relationship, have to do with Afghan peace process? How do we broaden the bigger dialogue to include the bigger Pashtun problem to get to a long-term, sustainable solution?

Dr. JACKSON. In my second stint in Afghanistan, in 2011, the biggest lesson I left with was the sense that we might have framed the problem wrong. At the time, we were talking about an Af-Pak problem—Afghanistan-Pakistan—and I came out thinking that if we considered Afghanistan a secondary theater in the competition between India and Pakistan, we would be closer to framing it the way the locals do. So, I think Pakistan's position on this has always been conditioned by—primarily by its competition with India, which is curious to us, but very real to them.

I think it points the direction towards potential—not easy potential, but potential—for other ways to attack this. I agree with General Field's argument. Let me put it slightly differently. It's hard to build a transmission belt between battlefield pressure inside Afghanistan and the decision making of the people we're trying to influence. That's the real problem, and so, the question is, what is that transmission belt? One way of getting at that is to get at—and I—the words are always going to be fraud sponsors, patrons, providers of sanctuary in Pakistan.

I do think there is potential, for the following reason. Pakistan is in a really bad place right now, and they know it. We've suspended security assistance, they're in a sort of a slow-motion economic crisis. They feel, genuinely, that the conventional military balance with India is moving away from them, and they're deeply worried. This explains, in many reasons, why they were willing to take important first steps to help convene the talks with the Taliban. I think the critical thing to tell them is, it isn't about the opening, it's about the ending, and, you know, if we tell Pakistan

that the only road back to a normal and balanced relationship with the United States is to secure a real settlement involving power-sharing inside Afghanistan. It's not about having a piece of paper pointing to it and then watching the Taliban take over Afghanistan—if that happens, fair or unfair, from Pakistan's point of view, they will be blamed, and they should be blamed.

Senator PURDUE. Thank you.

General Field, the ANSF attrition rate over the last few years is really not sustainable, by anybody's measure that I've seen, and yet, if we go to the drawdown that we're talking about now, what role do the NATO allies—what—how do you see that playing out in the short term? What role does NATO play in the longer term, in terms of trying to get to some sustainable solution, here, that avoids the military outcome that we're witnessing every day in Afghanistan today?

Brigadier General FIELD. Thank you, sir.

I think NATO is there as long as we're there. They're there because we're there. I'm not sure they feel the same threat to their homelands that we espouse. They're——

Senator PURDUE. So, you—I'm sorry, I don't mean—so, if you see a significant drawdown like we're making right now, does it—what impact does that have on the NATO allies in Afghanistan? What sense of responsibility do they have?

Brigadier General FIELD. Yes, I think we may see a small, commensurate drawdown. They'll skinny down as much as they can, too, but I don't think they'll go anywhere. Again, this first step—this first stair step—I think we can do it, and I think that we probably should, and I don't think we'll risk NATO. We'll still have our base in Mazar-eSharif and in the West, which we need right now in any kind of support to the government and stabilization. It has to be across the country, at least in the major urban centers.

Senator PURDUE. I see.

Brigadier General FIELD. I think we're okay.

Senator PURDUE. Great. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman INHOFE. Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all very much for being here.

Dr. Jackson, I certainly agree with your statement that what we need in Afghanistan is not a deal, it's a good deal. In my mind, part of that good deal means that women have to have—continue to have freedom of movement. They continue to need to have access to education, to all of the rights that they currently have under the new Afghan constitution.

I guess my question for each of you is, to what extent do you see women being involved in the Afghan peace talks, to date? Senators Reed and Jones and I were there in April, and we met with a group of women leaders who recognize that we need peace. They understood that Taliban had to be part of that. But, they were very concerned about what was going to happen to their rights under any peace negotiation and about the commitment of the United States to ensure that women are at the negotiating table. So, can I ask

each of you to give me your insights on what you think is happening there?

General Keane?

General KEANE. Yes, well, I totally agree with your concern here. I do know, from talking to administration officials, that going forward with the progress that we've made on women rights inside Afghanistan, which have been considerable, that that has got to be on the table, particularly when the Taliban is conducting negotiations with the Unity Government of Afghanistan. They have to be at that table, as well. That is the verbal commitment I've heard now. That remains to be seen if that is carried out. But, I don't know anybody in this administration or in a previous one who doesn't support women rights in Afghanistan and the progress we've made. There is no deal that we can participate in that would forfeit any part of that, in my judgment.

Senator SHAHEEN. Dr. Jackson?

Dr. JACKSON. What I would say is, one of the more dispiriting aspects of interacting with the current Taliban leadership in the talks is how little their ideological positions have changed. The policy positions, whether they're on withdrawal of U.S. troops or assurances on counterterrorism, are almost word-for-word unchanged from the mid-1990s—that is, pre-9/11. The same goes for women's rights. The line that they provide very frequently is that, "We will offer rights consistent with Islamic law." That was the same position they took under the Taliban version-1 regime, which was pretty hideously repressive.

I think what's at risk is not simply women's rights in Afghanistan, which is one of the towering achievements of our time——

Senator SHAHEEN. Right.

Dr. JACKSON.—but, really, all of modern Afghanistan. When you go to Kabul today, a city of 5 million people—this was something that was in ruins, with a population of 500,000 at the end of the Taliban period. Young Afghans have voted with their feet to come from dirt-poor areas of rural Afghanistan to buy into a modern, growing Afghanistan that looks a lot like the rest of South Asia. Whether it's women or young people of both genders, that's been an accomplishment that's easy to miss in the whole cloud of violence and frustration.

Senator SHAHEEN. I agree with you.

General Field, I'm going to ask you to respond a little differently to the question. That is, given what Dr. Jackson and General Keane have said, doesn't that mean that the on us to ensure that any deal with the Taliban includes protecting rights of women really falls on the United States and our NATO partners who are in Afghanistan? As well as the Afghans, of course.

Brigadier General FIELD. It does. It does. I think that the agreement has to, simply must, include those considerations. Now, in execution, I think we have to be realistic. The reason I say that is because there's a real divide between urban and rural, and yes, there has been an urbanization movement, for those——

Senator SHAHEEN. Right.

Brigadier General FIELD.—those rights. But, in much of the rural areas, there's a lot of Taliban ideology sympathizers. They don't want to use violence anymore, necessarily, but they—and some of

them are women—so, I don't think we can paint the whole country with the same brush. But, the peace agreement certainly has to secure the gains.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

I'm almost out of time, but I did want to raise one other issue, because last week a Federal judge ordered the Trump administration to end visa processing delays for hundreds of Afghan and Iraqi nationals who have worked for United States Forces. I have been very concerned that we have many people who are in danger in Afghanistan who have helped us, and yet we're not doing enough to ensure that they are protected. So, I wonder if anyone on the panel has worked with any of those Afghans who are trying to get here, and if you can talk about the importance of ensuring that we keep our promises that we made to those individuals who helped us.

I guess, Dr. Jackson, you're nodding, I will ask you to respond to that.

Dr. JACKSON. Two observations. One, I think if we look to past involvements, one of the greatest stains on American honor at the end of the Vietnam War was our inability or unwillingness to take care of the people who had worked for us. They were the billpayers for our withdrawal in Southeast Asia.

I think we can do better. I think we can take care of people who have exposed themselves to enormous personal and familial risk. There's one individual who has worked at the ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] headquarters for every commander for the last 12 years, Abdullah——

Brigadier General FIELD. [Inaudible.]

Dr. JACKSON.—yes—has worked for every one of these commanders. To show the kind of risk that he's encountered, he was one of the casualties in the attack that almost injured General Miller last year. He was severely wounded. He went for medical treatment and returned to his job. In that same year, quite tragically, his sister was killed in a helicopter accident in Afghanistan—again, trying to do the right thing in this country. There are so many of these Afghans who have been stalwart allies. They deserve everything we can do to take care and protect them.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you all very much.

Mr. Chairman, I hope that you and Senator Reed and this Committee will weigh in with the administration on the importance of ensuring that these SIV [Special Immigrant Visa] applicants are given their due and we ensure that that process moves along.

Chairman INHOFE. Thank you.

Senator Sullivan.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank the witnesses for their decades of service to our country.

I was home in Alaska this past weekend, and, you know, we have a lot of military forces, a lot of veterans. It's a very pro-military State. But, in some of the meetings I had, there were questions on, "Hey, how long is this going to take?" General Keane, I'm a big fan of yours. A lot of what you testified to could have been a similar testimony, you know, 10 years ago, in terms of where we are. But, on the other hand, I think we need to think through what happens if we're not there.

What I'd like to ask all of you, first and foremost, is, let's assume we don't just drawn down to, you know, 8,600, or whatever. Let's assume, in the next year and a half, we leave Afghanistan. Militarily, we're gone. Then, a couple of years later, we drawn down aid to the government there dramatically. Very quickly, but each of you, what happens? What happens? We're gone. No military in Afghanistan. What happens to security in Afghanistan? What do you think is the risk to the Homeland? Following up on Senator Shaheen's question, what do you think happens to the rights of women in Afghanistan? What happens to the current government?

I'll just take that from each of you, if you can—I know you could probably write a book on that, but I'd like to keep it short, because I have a few more questions.

General KEANE. Sure. I'll take a poke at it.

Well, first of all, that would be a recipe for disaster, in my judgment. The Government of Afghanistan would be seriously undermined. Civil society——

Senator SULLIVAN. Would it collapse?

General KEANE. Eventually, yes. The Afghan Security Forces would have huge psychological, morale problems. They would feel a sense of betrayal that the United States is literally deserting them. I think civil war in Afghanistan would be on the horizon, you know, within 6 to 8 months as a result of it, and, certainly, ISIS and the al Qaeda will also be the beneficiaries of it; not the obvious ones, in terms of the Taliban. They will have gotten what they've always tried to achieve since they were permitted to reemerge, and that is the United States withdrawal, where the United States is humiliated, and they can use that as a propaganda weapon to solidify the fractured nature of the Taliban fighters, and shore them up. It would be, in my judgment, quite catastrophic.

Senator SULLIVAN. Threats to the Homeland and the——

General KEANE. Well, the safe havens are there, and ISIS would grow, al Qaeda would eventually grow. We'd—we can't—if we're out of there, we can't keep our covert bases.

Senator SULLIVAN. Okay.

General KEANE. So, we're not going to be able to keep a foot on the throat of the al Qaeda leadership that we've been doing for 20 years. That's gone. We'd have to find another place to do that from, for sure.

Senator SULLIVAN. Progress that has been made with regard to women and the rights of women?

General KEANE. I think the—the other thing is—look, it—we're all frustrated by the length of this. I'll tell you what, U.S. policy has more to do with why we're there 18 years; and most of that's failed U.S. policy, in my judgment. But, to look the Afghan people in the face and deal with that kind of catastrophic failure, and what that would mean to them after their sacrifice side-by-side with us, the casualties that they've had on the civilian side and also in their forces fighting this. They don't want the Taliban to rule them. As we've said, 80 percent of them, plus, reject them offhand because they know what this tyranny and barbarism truly is. So, yes, I think there's a moral issue there, as well.

Senator SULLIVAN. Others? Dr. Jackson? General Field? Very——

Dr. JACKSON. Yes, I——

Senator SULLIVAN. Very quickly. I'm kind of burning my time, but I think it's a very important question. Just to expand on what General Keane said. I would like—Senator Shaheen talked about—there's a lot of progress that we've made for—you know, our security is first and foremost, of course. That's why we're there. That's my view. That's what I certainly tell my constituents. But, there's progress, other areas. What happens? Quickly, the final two——

Dr. JACKSON. Yes.

Senator SULLIVAN.—witnesses. What happens? We pull out fully, militarily. We're gone, and we start cutting back on aid. What happens?

Dr. JACKSON. I——

Senator SULLIVAN. Build on what General Keane mentioned, don't repeat it.

Dr. JACKSON. I get it.

I agree with him in his basic estimate. I think you'd see a renewed civil war. I think you would see a splintering of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, particularly if we cut off funding. I think you would forfeit all the gains of a modern Afghanistan that we've paid for over 20 years. That's a huge number, and I think, and importantly, you would see the entry of foreign enemies of the United States in a big way. Iran would enter in a big way, covertly via militia groups. Pakistan would increase its involvement in an attempt to influence the political outcome, and Russia would likely become involved in a big way.

Senator SULLIVAN. General Field?

Brigadier General FIELD. Sir, again, this is a slightly different take, perhaps. I do think that there would be civil war. I think the Tajiks are arming—significantly arming. Having said that, I'm not necessarily sure that ISIS would thrive in the utter chaos of civil war. It's not typically, historically, statistically not true that violent extremists organizations thrive in utter chaos. They need some stability, some ability to move around. But, I think that the current government will collapse to the urban centers. They'll hang on a little while. I don't know how long. The warlords are also arming and are very armed, and we will lose a lot of the gains made for the—in the modern society. With regard to women, we have more women educated now than there were all of children educated in Afghanistan. That will probably stop in the rural areas, and in the urban when it collapses, potentially. But, it's not predetermined to me that the Taliban will win.

Senator SULLIVAN. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman INHOFE. Senator Heinrich.

Senator HEINRICH. In the last few days, I was dismayed to hear of the death of Sergeant First Class Antonio Rodriguez, of Las Cruces. Sergeant First Class Rodriguez died of injuries sustained when an individual in the Afghan National Security Force, in an NSF uniform, opened fire on both United States and Afghan forces in Nangarhar Province. That incident is still under investigation, but Sergeant First Class Rodriguez's death brings our continued presence in Afghanistan, the longest military operation in our country's history, into pretty sharp relief. I hope, as we have this

conversation today, that all of us, frankly, will keep his family in New Mexico, Texas, and North Carolina in our thoughts.

These sorts of incidents are not new. We are all familiar with the extensive reporting in the Washington Post. Building an ANSF that can stand and fight the Taliban is—and, frankly, other military groups—is still a core pillar of the American and coalition strategy. I want to ask, how viable is that portion of the strategy? Given 20 years of really halting progress within that organization, why and how is that still a viable piece of this? If it is a viable piece, what are we going to be doing different to ensure that this is a sustainable operation?

Maybe we can start with General Field and go all the way across.

Brigadier General FIELD. Thank you, sir.

Progress on the conventional forces, the conventional part of the ANDSF [Afghan National Defense and Security Forces], has not been great. You're absolutely right. Is it sort of our theory of change? Is—does it—must it stay our theory of change, we have to have a vibrant security force in order to achieve our objectives? Yes, that's probably right. We have made progress in certain capabilities. The ASSF [Afghanistan Security Forces Fund], the Special Forces——

Senator HEINRICH. Yes.

Brigadier General FIELD.—made a lot of progress. We do have good leaders at the top of these organizations now. They are reliable partners to General Miller. How much of that is permeating down through the ranks is the issue. That's the problem. Rampant—there's rampant corruption. There's just a lack of good leaders. Why can't we change that? I don't know. In part—and I could be wrong about this—I think we have asked them to fight in a way that isn't necessarily organic to them. We have made them reliant on our capabilities, the ones we use, not necessarily what they would use. So—but, we can't start over. You know? That's the problem. We are where we are. So, what do we do? I say we have to devolve more and more authority to them to do things their way, and support them, and watch our money.

Dr. JACKSON. I would very much echo that. I think the larger Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police have been a frustration for a number of years. Very large organizations that have varied wildly, in terms of efficacy on the ground. It's not that they're all broken or they're all perfect. It's a very uneven mix, region by region, unit by unit. But, the success of the high-end forces in Afghanistan should not be forgotten. The Afghan Commandos are terrific. Working with our Green Berets in-country, they have been the striking force that has beaten back ISIS–K. They are the guys who get sent around as fire brigades to various crises across the country. The Commandos are terrific, and they're proof that if you partner over a very long term with small numbers of U.S. Forces, these guys are great. They want to fight, they're effective. This is true with——

Senator HEINRICH. That bright spot within the overall——

Dr. JACKSON. Yes.

Senator HEINRICH.—structure, is it sustainable over the—like——

Dr. JACKSON. Yes.

Senator HEINRICH.—at—it is sustainable and self-sustaining?

Dr. JACKSON. Yes. So, to answer your narrow question—and I think it's a perfect question—is, you know, how would we change this? We can't change where we started, but I think a smaller Afghan Army, more heavily focused on these special capabilities, is probably the right answer in many instances. There have been, you know, observations at the command level. How do we do the hold mission better and more cheaply, and, on the other hand, how do we focus more resources and attention on the things that are going well, which is Afghan Special Security Forces?

General KEANE. Yes, I would agree with that assessment, that the Afghan counterterrorism forces has had significant success. A couple of things are driving that: leadership selection and development, vetting the people who are in that force, very similar to what we do with our forces. So, you have a higher quality in that force, to begin with, as a product to work with. We've been operating, now, side by side for a number of years, where we do our operations together. When they're looking at our guys and seeing what they do, they just—it's easier to copy exactly what they're doing. It's much better than any classroom instruction that you can possibly have. We've seen that when we were able to operate with the conventional forces and we had some number of U.S. Forces there when we were conducting combat operations. The best success we had was when we operated together and they could see it. But, we're not going back to those numbers of forces. That's a fact.

Chairman INHOFE. Senator Blackburn.

Senator BLACKBURN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for being here.

General Keane, thank you very much for taking the extra minute and a half. We appreciate that.

I want to ask just a couple of questions about great-power competition. Fort Campbell is actually primarily in Tennessee, and we represent and interact with many of the men and women in uniform who are there. We also have the 118th Wing in Nashville, the National Guard unit that is a full-time Intel unit, and they've very involved with ISR [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance] and the drones. There's a good bit of conversation around the issue of great-power competition and Russia and China and the impact that they are seeking to have in the Middle East.

General Keane, I'll come to you first. I would just like to hear a little bit about what you see with Russia and China and Afghanistan and where you feel or think or have observed that that stands.

General KEANE. Yes, thank you.

Well, I'm a little partial to Fort Campbell, myself, having had multiple assignments there.

Senator BLACKBURN. We appreciate that you are, and hope that you——

General KEANE. Yes.

Senator BLACKBURN.—continue to be.

General KEANE. Yes. Love the place, frankly.

Yes, big-power competition is something I think the National Security Strategy of this administration got right. It established a new strategic framework in dealing with the world as it really is.

It also, in the congressional commission that I was on, underscored rather dramatically some of the challenges that we're facing with having adequate deterrence for China and for Russia, and how we've got to seriously accelerate the development of our capabilities, and not just in terms of the hardware themselves, but also in terms of new organizations and new doctrine to cope with an evolving threat.

One of the things that may be interesting to you, Senator, we disagreed with the National Defense Strategy that was espousing that we could accept risk by pivoting out of the Middle East to deal with the big-power competition. In our judgment, we fundamentally disagreed with that because of the evolving nature of the threat in the Middle East. The administration, I think, has rightfully changed its policy with Iran to contain it and be willing to confront it. It is an evolving threat that we need to work against in cooperation with our allies. Secondly—and that actually has forced us to increase troops to the region as a result of the activities of Iran, particularly this last year. As we have noted, the radical Islamic terrorist threat is thriving, despite all of our efforts with our multinational nations in pushing against this. Because it is an ideology, and they're still young people who are drawn to it, that want to be a part of it, and so, our presence, I think, there, is very important.

Russia is really about a strategic issue, and that is: attempting to replace the United States as the most influential country that's outside the region. That gives us great concern. They've got arms deals going with every country, every Arab nation. They're building nuclear power plants in the region. In full disclosure, I'm involved in a commercial effort to help secure those power plants. But, nonetheless—and China, itself, is aligning with the Iranians, as is Russia, despite the fact that China depends on oil out of the Middle East, to the tune of 62 percent.

So, yes, big-power competition is certainly central to the United States National Security Strategy.

Senator BLACKBURN. Dr. Jackson?

Dr. JACKSON. I think, on the point of great-power competition, I would agree with General Keane. This is an overdue adjustment. I actually see it as a very bipartisan agreement. The challenge is that China and Russia deserve greater attention in the priorities. But, I also agree with General Keane, just pulling the plug in the Middle East tends to end not in happy endings but essentially in whiplash. We've seen, as we try to draw down two foreign places like Iraq and Syria, we end up getting drawn back in. I think the name of the game is, go as small as you can in places like Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq. Go long. Wait for a good deal to come to you. Do not face bad deals, and, at the same time, use some of those savings, both in mind-share and in resources, to focus on what are genuinely larger long-term problems, like competition with China, like competition with Russia.

Senator BLACKBURN. I yield back.

Chairman INHOFE. We will continue on without our sound system working.

Senator Manchin.

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for your service, and also for being here.

I come from a State, West Virginia—a very patriotic State. We love fighting. We have no problem dogfighting. The thing I want to say is—I always said—explain things, and they ask questions. So, I'm going to ask an overall question of where we are. I've always said, "If you don't pay attention to history, it has a tendency to repeat itself." So, I have people that, basically, fought in the Korean War. We're still present in South Korea. We have over 28,000 troops in South Korea, but they have a thriving economy, and they offset a lot of their cost for us being there and having that presence in the world. We're in Afghanistan for 18 years, going on two decades. We've spent over $2 trillion, and there's no resemblance of any economy whatsoever. We've left Syria and left the Kurds, the only people we had fought like the devil with us and never turned their guns on us, but we're still in the country that has no problems turning the guns we've given them and teach them how to use on us. The people in West Virginia are having a hard time. I know what you're saying, and I respect that and all of your wisdom, but, for us to still be there with a presence and no sign of us ever leaving, thinking we're going to leave it a barren waste hole, if you will—it's going to be filled up with all this resentment against us. Is it really a threat? Is there really a presence of threat that we can't control? Have we not built up enough?

I would say this—enough intelligence in that area that we would not monitor their buildup if they're going to—we're back on.

So, I go home to the good people in West Virginia. I'm trying to explain to them. I said, "I really can't. I don't know what the plan is." We've got people that want out immediately. Everyone has—anybody that runs for higher office says, "Let's get out of there. We've been there long enough." Then the people that really know—the military—says, "We can't abandon them. Look what happened in Iraq. Look what's happening in Syria." I don't know why in the heck we left the Kurds. Can't figure that one out at all.

So, this whole thing that we have, and they said, "Well, look at South Korea, the presence we have there, but look at North Korea, what's going on now." Everything seems to be in a jumble, and we have fewer of our allies with us, supporting us, than ever before. If somebody can put any rationale that I can go home to West Virginia and says, "We've got to keep spending and keep keeping the faith."

General KEANE. Well, I agree with you. I mean, the global security challenges the United States is facing today, you know, are on a scale that we haven't seen in 40 years, with the big-power competition we just talked about, Iranians' attempt to seek dominance and control of the Middle East and the flow of oil, and certainly the spread of radical Islam, despite some of our best efforts to deal with this ideology.

When it comes to the radical Islam issues, I think we've learned to make better choices, and I don't want to relitigate, you know, the war in Iraq——

Senator MANCHIN. Yes——

General KEANE.—and what our early policies were in Afghanistan.

Senator MANCHIN. Let me——

General KEANE. We're past all of——

Senator MANCHIN. If I can interrupt you one second, because I forgot to make this, and, like I say, we've—we probably have more veterans per capita than any other State. We've fought in everything. You name a war, we'll go to it. But, with that being said—with that being said, they bring back to me what Eisenhower said, "Beware of the industrial military complex. Beware of that." So, they're thinking that we're staying engaged because of this military complex, industrial military that benefits from the wars that we stay at. You have all this right now, at a horrible time, in the most strategic time, that we've got to make some decisions in the long run. So, just wanted to throw——

General KEANE. Well, I will tell you, from my own knowledge of the leaders in the Pentagon, both military and civilian—and they would like to be able to get out of this, certainly—but, also, at the same time, they are—they've taken an oath to protect the American people, and that's what's driving this.

Listen, we have made some—I think, some very good choices. I describe Syria, Iraq, both ISIS, "Modest investment, big payoff, keep ISIS down, don't let them get back." Afghanistan, we're doing the same thing with al Qaeda, ISIS, and the Taliban, who want to be their host. That is a modest investment, big payoff, protect the American people. Three other places that we've decided to make an investment, very modest. We go into Yemen to take down al Qaeda when we have opportunities to do so. Couple of hundred people are committed to that. We go into Libya, we stopped ISIS from establishing a safe haven in Libya. That was their choice, and we put our Special Ops guys in there and hit them hard, and kept hitting——

Senator MANCHIN. I think that's all great.

General KEANE. A couple of hundred guys involved in that, and——

Senator MANCHIN. But, here's the thing——

General KEANE. Now, why are we—why do we go to those places? Because just radical Islamists are there? No. We're there because both of those organizations have aspirations to hurt America.

Senator MANCHIN. If I could——

General KEANE. The third place is in eastern Africa. We've got a Maritime Task Force that, every once in a while, goes into Somalia and Kenya and goes after al-Shabaab because they have aspirations outside of the region. Six places we're involved. Forty plus places where radical Islam is in the world, we are not involved, but we are involved in this place because of the security of the American people. That is what you can tell them, Senator.

Senator MANCHIN. Well, I do tell them that, but I—and I'll just follow up with this. They come back to me immediately and they said, "You know what? We don't want all $2 trillion. A little bit of investment in West Virginia—build us a road and a bridge and a school—we won't burn it down, and we won't blow it up." They cannot understand why we're doing—trying to do nation-building there. There's no nation to build. The people don't even know what-in-the-heck-country they live in. They know they live in a province,

but not the country. It just seems like we're trying to establish something, and money won't do it.

General KEANE. Well, we have stopped that, Senator, for the last 4 to 5 years. We are not involved in nation-building. We went down that rabbit hole, and we paid a horrible price for it, and we squandered an awful lot of American taxpayers' dollars. I totally agree with you.

Chairman INHOFE. Senator Hawley.

Senator HAWLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks, to all of our witnesses, for being here today, and thanks for what you've said.

Look, I mean, this is a—our—the situation in Afghanistan is—obviously, it's a huge problem. It's—in many ways, seems like an intractable problem. But, I disagree with Senator Manchin. I think that the people of my State—Missouri is the State that I represent—and the American people have been really patient. I hear you counseling patience this morning, as if—as if, you know, we're just a year or 2 into this thing. We're almost 20 years into this thing. We've spent—you know, a modest investment? We've spent almost a trillion dollars in Afghanistan. We have lost many, many lives in Afghanistan. We have been there—it's the longest conflict in our history, and I, for one, still can't figure out what in the world our strategy is there. I don't think we have a coherent strategy. I'll just be honest with you. We've had a succession of American presidents who have promised to end this war. It's not over. I don't see any particular clear strategy there. I don't know what we're doing in Afghanistan. I don't see any reasonable prospect that we're soon going to change course, and I can tell you, the people of my State don't, either, and they're out of patience, and they're right to be out of patience, and I'm out of patience. So, let me just ask some questions in that vein.

General Field, let me ask you this. You alluded to this earlier. What if we reduced our troop presence below 8,600? What's the effect on our ability to conduct direct action against al Qaeda and ISIS? I mean, give me your assessment of that.

Brigadier General FIELD. This is a great question, and sort of dangerous ground, because, once we start this thing, it might snowball, and all of a sudden we're somewhere we didn't necessarily want to be.

Having said that, I think it's a question for General Miller. I think he would probably say he can go lower and still conduct the counterterrorism (CT) mission. That's my guess. I don't want to put words in his mouth. I think he would say that.

The question, really becomes, then—it's the CT-plus, right? What do you need to maintain access to human intelligence, to special—the Afghan special operators? What price is the Aghan Government going to extract from us to be able to stay there and pursue our own interests? Right? It's the "plus" part of CT. As far as military capabilities, we could come way down. Right? It's just a little trickier than that.

But, I would just say, if I may, sir, your constituents are not wrong. They're not. But, I guess the question I would ask back to them is, does the object of Afghanistan have any value whatsoever? Is it worth a certain amount of money and a certain amount of

lives? I guess that's really the question, and that is the question you just asked me.

Senator HAWLEY. Yes, indeed. Well, I think our investment in Afghanistan—I mean, surely we've answered that question, haven't we? A trillion dollars is a lot of money, and lives lost, we've spent a lot there. My question is, how are we actually going to adopt a strategy in Afghanistan that will see to our national interests? My fear is, we're not yet focused enough on what our interests actually are. I'm not interested in being in Afghanistan just to be in Afghanistan. I'm not interested in pursuing policies that haven't worked. We've had a succession of administrations over years who have said, "This time, it's going to work. This time, we're actually going to refocus. This time"—meanwhile, China—China, which is a pressing national security threat to us, growing stronger, militarily, by the day—China continues to grow in the Indo-Pacific, poses direct threats—we are not postured correctly in the Indo-Pacific. We are not ready to meet that challenge. We are behind the curve. We've got to get ahead of the curve, and the question is, what are we going to do about that?—I think, and I hope that you're sensing—I mean, it's—none of you are, any longer, stakeholders in this. I—again, I want to emphasize how much I appreciate your service. This is a tough problem, obviously. I mean, clearly. But, I just think that it's time that we communicated that we need a change.

General Field, I just wanted to stay with you for a second because of what your—your testimony has been very interesting. Can I just ask you a further hypothetical? Can you just—let's imagine a worst-case scenario. You mentioned the Afghan Government, so let's imagine a worst-case scenario. Let's say there's no settlement, and let's say that we do reduce our troop presence below 8,600, just hypothetically. Let's say that the Taliban does expand its territorial control. What would that do to our ability to carry out any direct action against al Qaeda and ISIS, our CT strategy? If the Taliban expands their control, we reduce our troop presence, but we don't have a deal.

Brigadier General FIELD. The question then becomes, do we have any secure ground from which to take direct action? The neighborhood is tough. Can we work with Pakistan? Everybody says, "No way." I don't know. Maybe we could. We have a lot of leverage, as Dr. Jackson was saying. Right now, we have more leverage than we did before because of the situation they're in. Could we do it outside the country? I'm not sure. But, I'm throwing out that it should be explored. Do we have—would there be any—could we—would there be any of Afghanistan still under the control of the government that we could guarantee? Needs to be explored.

Senator HAWLEY. Yes. Thank you very much.

Thank you, again, to all of you, for your service to our country, and for being here today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman INHOFE. Thank you.

Senator Jones.

Senator JONES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, to the witnesses, for being here today.

I want to go at this a little bit different way, and it is really a follow-up, to some extent, from Senator Hawley and Senator Manchin.

General Field, you mentioned, in your prepared remarks, your testimony initially—you talked about the need to be clear-eyed about our threats, but you also mentioned victory. I think one of the frustrations is, what does a "victory" look like? There is a difference between a victory, in the traditional sense of the word, versus achieving objectives, I think, and I know Secretary of the Army Ryan D. McCarthy has talked about a book that was published recently called "Infinite Games." That's my concern, that we are in a position now where conflicts are not the same, they're—we don't have—they're—there is no—when we talk about "declaring war on X," it implies that there's going to be an ultimate winner and an ultimate loser. That just doesn't seem to be the case, these days, in anything we're doing, whether it's drugs, poverty, or terrorism.

I'd like for each of you, if you can, a minute, to talk about that and the difference between victory—because a lot of this may be just trying to reorient the American people a little bit about what we're facing in the long term.

I'll start with you, General Field, and feel free to tell me I'm wrong or misguided. I have no qualms about that, either.

Brigadier General FIELD. You know, it's a tough question for military officers to say that victory isn't—and winning isn't what we're all about.

Senator JONES. Right.

Brigadier General FIELD. Having said that, your question, I think, sir, is right. In this case, I did use "theory of victory," and I struggled with that—should I use "victory"?—just for the reason that you said.

I think, really, in this case, victory is a negotiated settlement. How do we get that? I already gave you my prescription, my——

Senator JONES. Right.

Brigadier General FIELD.—prescription for getting there. But, to your larger point about whether these conflicts just need to be managed now—and we need more expertise in managing them, not simply having a mindset of military victory. That comes back to what Senator Reed said initially is, what are our other instruments that we have to strengthen? Diplomacy. Or economic development. What are the other things that we need to do? You know, we point, always, to the National Defense Strategy, but that nests in the National Security Strategy, which talks about many other things than just whacking people with our military——

Senator JONES. Right.

Brigadier General FIELD.—to be crude.

Senator JONES. Yes, sir.

Dr. JACKSON. I think you're exactly right to point out, you know, sort of, what does "victory" mean? I would tell you that, in the vein of Clausewitz, "War is politics by other means," we're seeking something political, here; and largely, we have achieved it, albeit at an enormous cost. That is, preventing additional attacks on the American Homeland. Victory does not mean we want to administer

Afghanistan. Victory does not mean we want to stay there just because we've been there. It is to prevent attacks.

I think the operative question—and getting back to the earlier Senator's question—why are we there? I think we're there to buy an insurance policy for your constituents against the possibility, which is hard to estimate, of future external attacks from the region. The operative question is, do you want to self-insure? Do you want to wear that risk? Personally, my opinion, I would not. If I'm going to take out an insurance policy—and that's what we're doing right now in this region; it's very focused, but it could get, potentially, cheaper—the question is, are we overpaying for that insurance policy? That is a legitimate question. That's why General Miller is so focused on saying, "How skinny can we get while still accomplishing the things we seek politically?" But, I think that's the way I would frame it, and I know it's a tough sell, and I know that this has been exhausting. You know, most so for a lot of the folks who have been involved with it on the ground. This has not been a fun campaign, or a deeply satisfying one.

Senator JONES. Right.

General, if——

General KEANE. Yes. I mean——

Senator JONES.—if you would—you mentioned the National Defense Strategy, as well—if you would, maybe, incorporate, "Do we need to make some changes to that?"—as part of your answer on this.

General KEANE. Well, the National Defense Strategy—we looked at it for a year as part of the Congressional Commission, and we were alarmed by the fact that we were not truly ready to provide adequate deterrence for China and Russia. There's much needed to be done, and we outlined that very specifically in our report, and we were trying to send a clarion call to that effect.

In dealing with warfare, itself—I mean, fundamentally, you're trying to change an adversary's behavior—initially, politically, if you can, and diplomatically—and, if not, then it may lead to confrontation. But, the objective is also to change their behavior, which will result in either unconditional surrender or some kind of political settlement.

The problem we have, when you're dealing with radical Islamists or extremist terrorism who are conducting a different kind of unconventional war, they will always test the will of democracies, because the nature of these wars, by definition, are protracted. My problem with three administrations now is their absolute failure to come to grips with that in terms of the public education of the body politic in America, to explain why we're in these wars, to give the American people periodic assessments, to don't run from setbacks that take place, to explain that it's not just military that's involved here, there is a whole-of-government approach. I'm not talking about nation-building—that's involved here, and look at what the—President Bush wanted us to go back and watch the Yankees, which is a good thing after 9/11. I got it. But, never was the progress being made in Iraq or in Afghanistan addressed periodically, or the lack of progress, and that's how you keep an American population engaged. They have a right to know.

The same thing in Afghanistan. We made horrible policy decisions in Afghanistan that should have been some rendering to the American people about, which protracted the war. The Taliban didn't protract the war. We protracted the war, and we tolerate Pakistan to keep the safe havens in—for the Afghan Taliban in that country. Do we address any of that to the American people? Have any of the administrations, to include this one, gone before the American people and talked to them about this, and be straight up about what's happening, what's our assessment, what's our plans to deal with it? That's what keeps the American people engaged, and so, your constituents are poking you in the chest every time you're home, "What's going on there? Why are we still there? It seems like we're not making any progress." You shouldn't have to explain that to the American people. The executive branch should be doing that, and we've failed at that miserably through three administrations, in my judgment.

Senator JONES. Thank you.

Thank you all.

I appreciate it, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman INHOFE. Senator KING.

Senator KING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, I want to thank you for—and Senator Reed—for calling this important hearing. I think it's an important discussion.

I do have a suggestion, however. I'm, as you may know, a Member of the Intelligence Committee, and, for 7 years, we've been having hearings, in the Intelligence Committee, on Afghanistan, and hearings here. There were times when I weren't sure we were talking about the same country. So, I think it would be very helpful, if this Committee wants to take an active role, that we have a classified hearing with the intelligence community about what their perceptions are in Afghanistan, what the chances are, what would happen if we left, if we stayed. I just think that would give us a more fulsome picture, because, as I say, they have, over the years, had a very different view than the witnesses that we've had at this Committee.

Chairman INHOFE. Well, which one's better?

Senator KING. I would say that the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] is running slightly ahead right now.

[Laughter.]

Chairman INHOFE. Okay.

Senator KING. In terms of their assessment. That's all I can tell you, Mr. Chairman. But, I just think it's important. If we're going to tackle this subject, we ought to have the most complete picture that we can, and these witnesses have added a great deal to our understanding today.

Let me talk about the haven-for-terrorism argument, because that's really the fundamental justification. Is that a realistic justification now? Because there are other places that can be havens: Yemen, Libya, Somalia, Mali, Sudan. Is it, sort of, geopolitical whack-a-mole: We're going to focus in one place, and our adversaries are going to rise up somewhere else?

Dr. Jackson? Do you see what I'm saying?

Dr. JACKSON. I—absolutely.

Senator KING. I mean, haven-for-terrorism arguing is sort of—it reminds me of the domino theory of the 1970s or the 1960s——

Dr. JACKSON. Yes.

Senator KING.—as a kind of all-purpose justification.

Dr. JACKSON. Absolutely. I think it's an infinitely expansible argument, and you're right to ask, what makes Afghanistan different? I think at least three different things make this particularly difficult and important to us:

One is, sort of, geography. This turns out to be a sanctuary that's hard for us to be at if we're not actually physically located there. This is a war being waged in a landlocked country surrounded either by enemies or frenemies. This is an incredibly hard place to wage a war if you're not there. So, the consequences of leaving there, leaving our counterterrorism footprint and trying to exert influence from outside, is much, much, much more difficult.

Senator KING. So, it would really become a haven——

Dr. JACKSON. Yes, absolutely.

Senator KING.—because of its geography and location.

Dr. JACKSON. We've run this experiment before, in the 1990s. In other words, the Clinton administration got very worried about——

Senator KING. But, we're doing counterterrorism in other countries without a military presence.

Dr. JACKSON. Absolutely.

Senator KING. Would that be——

Dr. JACKSON. Yes.

Senator KING.—possible in Afghanistan?

Dr. JACKSON. Not in the same way. In other words, it's much easier for us, geographically and politically, to operate in a place like Yemen from offshore than it is for us to operate offshore into Afghanistan. It has to do with distances, it has to do with agreements with neighboring countries, that type of thing.

Second thing I would point out is sponsors. This neighborhood is full of people fueling extremist behavior, or backing various horses in this race. Iran is a consistent backer of various—not just Shite, but Sunni groups. Pakistan has had a finger in multiple different proxies.

Senator KING. Could I ask you to accelerate? Because I've got a——

Dr. JACKSON. Yep.

Senator KING.—digital timer going down.

Dr. JACKSON. I'll leave it there.

Senator KING. Thank you.

General KEANE. My addition——

Senator KING. Go ahead.

General KEANE.—to that is, we are interested in Yemen, Libya, and Somalia and Kenya, and we operate offshore to do that. We don't have a physical presence in the country. We use direct-action forces to do that.

Senator KING. Right.

General KEANE. As I explained earlier, the reason is, all three have aspirations to attack the United States or our European allies. In Central and South Asia, much more challenging, to be sure, for the reasons we just discussed, and I think a physical presence

is essential. Half of the world's terrorist organizations are in that region; in Pakistan and in Afghanistan, in particular.

Senator KING. Well, we've maintained a troop presence in Japan, South Korea, Germany, other parts of Europe for 70 years.

General KEANE. Right.

Senator KING. Is this a case, would you make to the American people, that this is a place where we need an indefinite presence, not at a terribly high level, but at a level that will enable us to keep, as I think you used the term——

General KEANE. The—I totally agree——

Senator KING.—"keep our foot on the throat of the terrorists"?

General KEANE. I totally agree with that assessment. I think it's a political apple that leaders are not willing to swallow and talk to the American people honestly about. This is a multigenerational problem that we've got. We are being selective about which radical Islamist groups are threatening the American people, and you can make a case that we could possibly have to have a counterterrorism force someplace in Central/South Asia—best place is Afghanistan—as long as that threat is there, indefinitely.

Senator KING. It will require a military presence to support the counterterrorism function. Isn't that——

General KEANE. Yes.

Senator KING.—what you're saying?

General KEANE. I think we will eventually, frankly, get down below 8,600 at some point, and we'll narrow that down to intelligence, counterterrorism, and airpower that's outside the country to be able to support our activities. But, it could possibly lead to an indefinite commitment of a small number of forces in that country, much like we have less than 1,000 now trying to keep our foot on ISIS—keep our foot on their throat in Syria to make sure that——

Senator KING. But, I——

General KEANE.—they don't reemerge.

Senator KING.—I think you would agree—and I'm out of time, but I think you would agree that, if that's going to be the case, somebody's got to tell the American people that.

General KEANE. I totally agree with that, Senator.

Senator KING. Thank you.

General KEANE. Totally agree with that.

Senator KING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman INHOFE. You know, we were just visiting, here. I think there's merit in having a closed hearing of this Committee.

Senator REED. Intelligence.

Chairman INHOFE. Well, not necessarily. We can do it ourselves. Good thought. We'll follow through.

Senator Duckworth?

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to chat a little bit about the AUMF [Authorization for use of Military Force] and the role of Congress and what we can do to assist in the efforts in Afghanistan.

The Constitution grants Congress with the sole power to declare war. With this authority comes a solemn responsibility to make sure our forces are properly resourced and a commitment to making sure our Nation actually brings the wars that we authorize to

an end. As has been referenced today, military operations in Afghanistan are conducted pursuant to a broad AUMF that Congress enacted in 2001 to authorize the use of all necessary and appropriate force against the perpetrators of 9/11, to prevent those terrorists and their enablers from conducting a future attack. While the 107th Congress clearly passed the 2001 AUMF to respond to the 9/11 attacks, subsequent Congresses and Presidents have done little to prevent multiple administrations from interpreting this 2001 law to justify nearly any military operation in the region. Whether one supports or opposes the current United States military strategy in Afghanistan, there should be some consensus—and, more importantly, acceptance—that, ultimately, it's the responsibility of the 116th Congress to debate and vote on the path forward in Afghanistan.

Building on the issue of democratic accountability, I would like each witness to address whether you support the current Congress holding votes on whether to repeal the 2001 AUMF and whether to pass a new authorization that accurately reflects what United States troops are doing on the ground in Afghanistan today.

General KEANE. Well, I'll bite on it. I absolutely think it's essential that we get a new Authorization for the Use of Military Force. President Obama, I think, was stretching it when we went back into Iraq. I mean, there is—you can make the connection. The current administration is stretching it, you know, to deal with our operations in Syria and continuing our operations in Iraq.

When I watch the Congress try to deal with it, I get frustrated with it, because we seem to come to an impasse. Part of the impasse that concerns me is, you've got to give the executive branch—you're giving them authority to use military force, but you should not get into the details of what the strategy is and start to limit how that force would be used. That, it seems to me, is the tension point that I've noticed in your deliberations. When we begin to impose that, then this body is not going to be able to agree.

But, I agree with the basic premise. I want the Congress to come together and authorize the use of military force, and stop using that old authorization document—I don't believe which is sufficient for what we're doing today.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

Dr. Jackson?

Dr. JACKSON. I'm very sympathetic, philosophically, to cleaning up the sort of authority situation. However, I will say, from the seat I used to sit in, the act of creating the detail that hangs on those authorities actually takes time and is really necessary. I will say that I think the Commander, General Miller, today has the authorities he needs to prosecute the war, both against the Taliban and against ISIS–K and al Qaeda. It took years to get the right detailed authorities there so that he could use a small number of forces to go after these very large problems.

My fear would be, first, do no harm. That is, be careful, when we reopen this, that we don't disrupt a series of authorities that are necessary to an increasingly skinny force waging a war in Afghanistan.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

General Field?

Brigadier General FIELD. So, yes, I think that we certainly need another conversation about AUMF, but not necessarily to expand the authorities, but to actually limit the authorities of the executive branch to keep us—to engage in and then keep us in sustained conflict.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

Very briefly, speaking of renewed congressional oversight of this war, I recently joined my colleagues in supporting the Ensuring a Durable Afghanistan Peace Act. Our bipartisan bill seeks to ensure transparency and oversight of any peace effort in the region. I'd love the entire panel, if you could—we're—I'm out of time; perhaps you could do it in writing—to address a constructive role that Congress should play in promoting a durable peace process.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman INHOFE. Yes. Senator Peters. Sorry.

Senator PETERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, to our witnesses, for some very thought-provoking testimony. I appreciate it.

General Field, I'm interested in your views on whether a, quote, "conditions-based strategy" remains a credible option, given United States policy and rhetoric that we hear on Afghanistan. President Trump's rhetoric on Afghanistan has included referencing nuclear weapons, and that, if he "wanted to win that war, Afghanistan would we—would be wiped off the face of the Earth," end of quote from the President. The administration has pulled back or withheld aid funding for unspecified concerns about corruption. I know that has been creating confusion among our Afghan partners. The President has made conflicting comments on his policy for the number and role of United States troops in Afghanistan. I could go on.

But, General Field, based on your experience, what has this done to U.S. credibility in the region? How has it impacted our ability to rely on a condition-based strategy?

Brigadier General FIELD. I think we have credibility in the region, but there's a lot of uncertainty. There's a lot of uncertainty, and even fear, I think, on the part of certain segments of the Afghan society.

The—it would be helpful if we were to determine—once we have determined our strategy and the way forward, and that we are committed to trying our very best with a negotiated settlement, it would be helpful to say that, "We're here until we do it." That would be helpful. It would send a very strong message to the Taliban, mostly the Taliban in Pakistan.

Senator PETERS. Well, I find it interesting you used the term "once we have determined a strategy." We've been there 20 years. That's quite a long time.

At the time the administration's South Asia Strategy was released, which was the most recent strategy, General Nicholson briefed us on a campaign plan that emphasized ensuring the Afghan Government controlled the vast majority of the population. He had three lines of effort: provide additional United States troops as advisor at lower levels within the Afghan military; modernize the Afghan air force and double the size of Afghan Special Forces so that they can go on the offensive; and attack Taliban sources of

financing, particularly through airstrikes against narcotics and sources across the country. It's my understanding that our current strategy, the shifting strategies, has shifted away, now, from these lines of effort and other than focus on increasing the size of the Afghan Special Forces. So, I know that General Miller has ended the practice of tracking population control and has argued that it's not a useful metric anymore.

General Field, you were an advisor to General Miller on these changes when they took place. Can you place them into context for us? Were the military lines of effort that General Nicholson prioritized failing? If so, why?

Brigadier General FIELD. I wouldn't necessarily say they were failing, but we did not have the metrics to say that they were succeeding. Now, I know that sounds like a dodge, right?

Senator PETERS. It sounds like more than that.

Brigadier General FIELD. But, part of the issue really is that we have different sort of lines of effort and metrics each time we change our command. Right? So, any strategy depends on an alignment of ends, ways, and means. We didn't necessarily feel like we had enough resources to execute those lines that General Nicholson laid out, particularly the counter-threat financing. We didn't have the metrics that they were working, at striking drug labs. It was just not—it wasn't—we weren't seeing any effect, and we needed all of the resources we had for—to pressure the Taliban, certain nodes, and to prosecute the fight against ISIS.

Senator PETERS. General Keane, in 2009, over 10 years ago, you made clear that you believed that, "this war is winnable"—2009—"and that we should not run", "run from the term 'victory.'" Is that still your opinion? What's that victory going to look like?

General KEANE. No. That's not my opinion today. I mean, what was taking place in 2009, the Bush administration was departing, they left a review on Afghanistan that we had to change the strategy to counterinsurgency, much as we had done in Iraq and achieved a positive military outcome. The Obama administration did their own review—two reviews—and made the same conclusion. Then they asked for military options from General Petraeus, the CENTCOM [Central Command] Commander, and General McChrystal, the Commander in Afghanistan. They wanted options. McChrystal and Petraeus gave them a force level of 80,000. This is a surge, now, an escalation of our forces to be able to apply a counterinsurgency strategy, but was—by definition, requires more forces. At 80,000, there's no risk. At 60,000, there is some risk, and at 40,000, it's the least amount of force necessary to win. By "winning," mean we have a stable military outcome and the Taliban is not in the position to overthrow the government.

The Obama administration made a decision to cut that by 25 percent. General Petraeus allegedly said, "I'm not arguing over a transportation bill, here. I'm arguing over the basic needs to conduct a successful campaign." Then the—so, we went in there with 25 percent less, which meant we could not work against the Haqqani Network and——

Senator PETERS. General——

General KEANE.—the Quetta Shura in the south, and we pulled the forces out 15 months later.

Senator PETERS. General——

General KEANE. That doomed us to where we are today.

Senator PETERS. I'm out of time. I don't mean to cut that off. That's part of why we're still here. All these things——

General KEANE. That's part of why we're here today.

Senator PETERS. So, my question is just, is this war winnable, like you said in 2009? Is it winnable?

General KEANE. What we need to do today—we're not going to summarily defeat the Taliban. What we have to do—we're at a stalemate with them. I don't see them being defeated in the near term. What I do see is preventing the American people from being attacked by the al Qaeda or by ISIS groups. That is our focus, and we've been succeeding at that, fortunately, for 18 years.

Chairman INHOFE. Okay.

Well, thank our witnesses. We appreciate it very much. That was very blunt and very enlightening, and I appreciate your willingness to be here.

Any further comments?

Senator REED. I, too, want to join the Chairman in thanking the witnesses for their excellent testimony. I think this issue deserves even further scrutiny both in a closed session and in further open sessions. But, thank you very, very much for your insights today. I appreciate it.

Thank you.

Chairman INHOFE. We are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:21 a.m., the Committee adjourned.]

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