

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN BY AMER- ICA'S TOP DIPLOMAT

HEARING BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN BY AMERICA'S TOP DIPLOMAT

Wednesday, December 11, 2024

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:14 a.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Michael T. McCaul (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Chairman MCCAUL. The Committee on Foreign Affairs will come to order. The purpose of today's hearing is to hear directly from Secretary Blinken, America's top diplomat, and get his assessment of his State Department's withdrawal from Afghanistan.

I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN MICHAEL T. MCCAUL

I want to say good morning to all the members. As most of you know, this will be my last hearing as chairman of this very important committee that I say is the committee of war and peace.

It goes back to the Continental Congress. Benjamin Franklin was the first chairman historically, and it has been an honor—it has probably been the honor of my entire congressional career of 20 years to serve as your chairman on both sides of the aisle—Republican and Democrat.

I am extremely proud of everything that we have accomplished, most of it on a bipartisan basis. We have been the most productive committee in the 118th Congress.

And I want to thank Mr. Meeks, my ranking member, but he is more than that. He is more than a colleague. He is my partner and friend. We have worked together on matters of foreign policy, national security.

Most of the time we agree, and when we don't, we agree to disagree civilly, and that is the way it should be.

And I would say I am going to miss you, but I will be around. I will still be known as Mr. Chairman, and I plan to be a voice of reason in the next Congress and also a voice—strong voice—on national security, sir, and foreign policy.

And, sir, I want to thank you for your service as well, and I know you are getting ready to go to the Middle East with the fall of Assad in Syria, which I believe brings great opportunities to the

United States but also our allies around the world for freedom and democracy.

I also want to congratulate the incoming chair of the subcommittee—chair of Oversight and Accountability, Chairman Brian Mast, who was selected as the next chair by the steering committee.

Mr. Mast, thank you for your service, not only to this committee—not only to this committee but to the Nation, your service in Afghanistan, your sacrifice that we all know every time we see you. I pledge my support to you, and I hope we are going to work hand in glove in the next Congress to do good things, and congratulations to you.

Finally, 5 o'clock will be a get-together to rename this committee hearing room as the Benjamin Franklin Committee Hearing Room, and we will also—it will also be a Christmas party and also my farewell address to the committee. So I hope to see all of you there.

And, with that, I would like to begin this hearing.

Mr. Secretary, I am pleased that you are here today, and over the last 4 years, we have enjoyed a, I think, cordial relationship. We have worked together on many, many issues of great importance.

However, today, your appearance here today, and I have to be honest with you, it comes after 6 months after I have requested your testimony following my comprehensive report into the catastrophic withdrawal from Afghanistan.

I have constitutional authority, and I have to—I have that constitutional authority that I, as chairman, am responsible for, and I also have a responsibility to the American people and to the 13 servicemen and—women who died, and all the many other servicemembers who died, and the Afghan allies left behind who died, and the women who were left behind.

This, under Article I of the Constitution, is Congress' greatest role of oversight and transparency.

I would have to say, I have been disappointed that you have ignored my requests for your testimony, forcing me to subpoena you, not once but twice. And, rather than accept my good-faith efforts to accommodate your schedule, you failed to show up for your September hearing.

And I don't like this probably even more than you do, but while your presence here is duly noted, you are showing up only after violating a congressional subpoena, triggering consideration of a resolution holding you in contempt of Congress.

I have been more than accommodating during the process, but you and your staff have fought this committee every step of the way. The fact you are here today, on one of the last weeks of the 118th Congress, clearly demonstrates my commitment to this critical issue, even in the face of persistent delays.

You insist you have appeared before Congress 14 times, but the truth be told, that number is really misleading. You have not appeared once during my chairmanship to testify about the disastrous Afghanistan withdrawal before this committee.

Twice you have appeared on the budget. And, as the head of the State Department, it was your duty to appear before this com-

mittee to inform us about legislative solutions to the issues outlined in my Afghanistan report so that this never happens again.

My only goal has been to work together with you, sir, to help prevent that such another catastrophic event, to prevent that from ever, ever happening again.

Instead, you prioritized this administration's political agenda, touting the failed withdrawal as a success.

On April 14, 2021, President Biden announced his decision to withdraw from Afghanistan no matter what the cost. "Go to zero" were his words.

As Secretary of State, you are entrusted with the protection of American interests and citizens overseas. You ignored the Taliban's violations of the Doha Agreement. You ignored objections by our NATO and Afghan allies.

You ignored the security risks in keeping the U.S. Embassy in Kabul open, despite warnings from our top military advisers.

You ignored the warnings of collapse by your own personnel as evidenced by the July 2021 Dissent Channel cable, one that I call a cry for help that was unanswered.

And now, tragically, more than 3 years after this administration's disastrous withdrawal, you are finally here to take responsibility.

Mr. Secretary, I have reviewed thousands of pages of documents produced in discovery by the State Department. I have conducted 18 transcribed interviews, led eight hearings on the Afghanistan withdrawal. I do not take the issue of subpoenas lightly, but today's hearing, and your Department, provided these only after the committee was forced to use its oversight powers.

My comprehensive investigation reveals that President Biden's unconstitutional surrender to the Taliban, that you had plenty of opportunity to plan for the inevitable collapse of Afghanistan.

Instead, even with the warning bells sounding loudly, ringing loudly, you denied the imminent and dangerous threats to American interests, American citizens, and our decade-long Afghan partners, all the while the Taliban captured province after province on their march to Kabul.

And, rather than step up, as America's chief diplomat, you delegated this responsibility. And, as the Taliban surrendered Kabul—was surrendered to the Taliban on August the 14th, 2021, you, sir, were vacationing in East Hampton, New York.

I do not say that with delight. I say that as a fact.

Mr. Secretary, to preserve optics, you sacrificed the safety and security of our servicemembers, diplomats, citizens, and allies. You treated terrorists as diplomatic partners and created an environment ripe for chaos.

And, on October 26, 2021, an ISIS-K terrorist detonated a suicide bomb at the Hamid Karzai International Airport, murdering 13 heroic U.S. servicemembers and over 170 Afghan civilians.

My heart goes out to the Gold Star Families, and I pray for them every day, every day I have been chairman of this committee.

It was the deadliest day for the United States' presence in Iraq—I mean, in Afghanistan, since 2012. And the saddest thing, sir, it did not have to happen.

Mr. Secretary, it is time that we, again, remember the fundamental principles of diplomats. Peace may only be obtained through strength. This catastrophic event was the beginning of a failed foreign policy that lit the world on fire.

I welcome your testimony, and I hope we take the opportunity for you first to take accountability but, second, for us to move forward so this never happens again.

As you are aware, we cannot fix a problem without first admitting that there is a problem. I have dedicated my tenure as chairman of this important committee on this very important issue, and your testimony here today will help guide the work of the next Congress and the incoming administration.

The American people, the U.S. servicemembers, the veterans, and, most importantly, our Gold Star Families who are present here today, deserve better. They deserve your candor, commitment, and transparency.

With that, the chair now recognizes the ranking member, Mr. Meeks.

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER GREGORY MEEKS

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and let me first say to you that it has been a distinct honor, privilege, and pleasure of working with you. We have worked together now for over 4 years, 2 years of which I was the chair and 2 years of which you were the chair, and really there has been no difference. Our relationship only intensified. We worked collective together on behalf the people of the United States of America.

You are a man of integrity. You are a friend. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve with you and to continue to serve with you because we know, as you have stated, you are not going anywhere. You will still be here as a Member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

I appreciate the fact that we have always, even when we disagree, as we will disagree on this hearing, but we have always been able to talk about it, be honest with one another. And that is what is really important.

You know, when you have honesty and truth and can talk, you can disagree, but it never becomes personal, because of you and the character that you have.

So I just have to say for the record that it has been an honor. You have been a fair chair, as well as when you were the ranking member, you have been a fair ranking member, because you are a fair individual. That is who you are at the essence.

And I want to also congratulate Mr. Mast, the incoming chair, and I look forward to working with you. There is no question in anyone's mind that you are loyal to the United States of America. You have done everything in the military and otherwise to represent this country, and I look forward to working with you come January 3d or 4th when this committee resumes, as the next chair of this committee, and look forward to working with you in the same manner that I have worked with Mr. McCaul.

Chairman MCCAUL. Thank you for those kind words.

Mr. MEEKS. Now I want to thank you, Secretary Blinken, for being here today, and I know we want to get you out. There is a lot that is going on in Syria and around the world, and you will be leaving here on a plane immediately post this here.

So, you know, your departure will take you straight to the Middle East where there is—dealing with the related situations of Syria, but thank you for being here.

And, for me, Mr. Secretary, this will be, if I recall correctly, your sixth time being—that you have joined us to provide testimony, including your appearance in September 2021.

You were the very first Cabinet official from the Biden administration to testify to Congress immediately after our withdrawal from Afghanistan, and I will—even before you testified before the Senate, you were right here in the House to testify about that.

And, despite insisting that they needed to hear answers from you and repeatedly accused of you stonewalling, my Republican colleagues nevertheless released what I see as a partisan and misleading report on the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in September that distorts the facts received in their own investigation from 16 State Department witnesses and thousands of pages of documents that you made available to us.

Sadly, on this brand, as I have pointed out at every term in every hearing, the Republicans so-called investigation has been nothing but a cudgel aimed at partisan politics in my opinion.

To claim now that it is aimed at a real and legislative purpose when I don't see a—they have not introduced a single bill. There has not been a bill at all introduced from this—in this investigation.

But there is perhaps no better example on how dishonest and—well, I would say politically motivated this exercise has been, than how the Republicans misled the public on the ISIS attack at Abbey Gate.

For months, Republicans publicly suggested the Abbey Gate bombing could have been prevented and that a marine had a bomber in his sights.

Privately, however, they received information from the Department of Defense's investigation dating back as far as February 2022, and again reinforced in April 2024, findings that the bomber and the person the marine identified were two different people and that the attack was not preventable.

Because the GOP had this information, you would think it would be logical to assume that the GOP's report would make those facts crystal clear.

So does their report do that? No.

Instead of being straightforward with the American people, or the Gold Star Families who have suffered so much and who we all keep deeply in our prayers, they continue to muddle the facts.

Notwithstanding DOD's clear evidence, the GOP report tries to sow doubt in the minds—doubt on the DOD's findings by asserting on page 27 that, quote, "Many who were on the ground that day still believe they were one and the same. The full report remains classified," end quote.

To my colleagues across the aisle, beliefs are not facts. Information that the Department of Defense publicly reported, for which I ask unanimous consent to submit for the record——

[The information referred to has not been submitted:]

Chairman MCCAUL. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. MEEKS [continuing]. Is not classified. The two men were not the same.

So changing or twisting the truth seems to me only happens for political gain, and that not only hurts the integrity of this committee, it hurts the families of the 13 servicemembers who lost their lives during the horrific terrorist attack who have been led to believe that there are some greater truths to unearth, that when in reality there just is not.

So I also ask unanimous consent to submit for the record the minority memorandum that I released in September of this year. That report summarizes the actual facts of the committee's investigation——

Chairman MCCAUL. Without objection, so ordered.

[The information referred to has not been submitted:]

Mr. MEEKS [continuing]. Which were remarkably consistent across 20 witnesses and found the following.

The full U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan was set into irreversible motion by President Donald Trump when he concluded the Doha deal with the Taliban and ordered the withdrawal of troops per that agreement, first from 14,000, to 8,600, and then all the way down to 2,500 by January 15th, 2020.

And, after the Trump administration failed to plan for the withdrawal they started, the Biden administration conducted a thorough policy review, acknowledged that we would again be at war with the Taliban if they abandoned the Doha deal, and finish the work his predecessor started by building a withdrawal and contingency plan from the ground up through 2021.

And, after President Ghani's decision to flee Afghanistan led to the rapid collapse of the Afghan Government and Security Forces, creating the chaos on the ground, the men and women of the State Department acted heroically alongside their military colleagues to conduct the largest airlift in U.S. history, relocating more than 124,000 people.

So I believe that President Biden ultimately made the right decision to end our 20-year war in Afghanistan and not ask another generation of Americans to make an ultimate sacrifice for a war that no longer had a purpose.

No one here has argued that our withdrawal was perfect. So I want to be clear. I am not saying that. I don't know any withdrawal that has been perfect, but we owe it to ourselves and our military and diplomatic personnel on the front lines to learn from it and from those 20 years—those 20 years of war in which they served—and to incorporate those lessons of 20 years in the future.

But we do them a disservice when we do not examine all of the facts. If we are to honor the 800,000 Americans who served in Afghanistan since 2001, including the 2,461 military personnel killed over the two decades of war, we should have conducted proper oversight of the policy decisions made across not one administra-

tion but four administrations, not only for the months in which President Biden was in office for the sole purpose of politics.

For the honest, bipartisan assessment, we will have to await the Afghanistan War Commission's report due in 2026, because what we have here today is not the true, complete fact-finding. In my estimation, it is politics.

And, finally, let me just say this though. I want to conclude by thanking Chairman McCaul for honoring a request that I made publicly. I asked that he publicly release all of the transcripts from closed-door interviews that were part of this Afghanistan investigation.

And I asked the chairman to do the same for all other remaining transcribed interviews conducted as part of the committee's oversight investigation.

And the American taxpayers paid for this work. I asked and you responded and you did cooperate and make them all public, and for that, I thank you. And with that, I yield back.

Chairman MCCAUL. I appreciate the ranking member's comments on that. I intend to release all this to the American people. We do—we are negotiating an interview with Jake Sullivan, the National Security Advisor. It may be in a classified setting. To the extent we can release that to the American people, we certainly will.

I also want to State that there are two pieces of legislation currently in the National Defense Authorization that deal with this withdrawal from Afghanistan, one from me on having one point of contact who is in charge, if you will, another one by Warren Davidson on evacuation.

So, with that, I would like to say to the members that opening statements may be submitted for the record. I want to welcome the 71st Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, someone I do have admiration for.

We disagree on this one strongly, but we have traveled abroad, and at the end of the day when we travel abroad, we are all Americans.

But, as you know, sir, I have issue with you over the handling of this matter, and I recognize you for your testimony here today.

Secretary BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Meeks, distinguished colleagues on this committee, first of all, let me just say, I have very much appreciated working with you these past 4 years, working with the ranking member. I think we have done good and important things together—

[Disturbance in hearing room.]

Chairman MCCAUL. I remind the audience members, disruption of committee proceedings is against the law. Holding up signs or making verbal outbursts during the proceedings is disruptive and will not be tolerated.

Any disruption will result in a suspension of the proceedings until the Capitol Police can restore order. This includes the raising of hands and other forms of disruption.

And, with that, I now recognize the Secretary.

**STATEMENT OF HON. ANTONY BLINKEN, SECRETARY OF
STATE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And just to say how much I have valued and appreciated working with you these past 4 years, the dialog that we have had, including with this committee, where we have agreed, where we have disagreed, including on Afghanistan.

I want to recognize everyone who served in Afghanistan, including on this committee. Our thoughts are with the Gold Star Families of the 2,461 American servicemembers, as well as State Department and USAID employees—

[Disturbance in the hearing room.]

Chairman MCCAUL. Order. The committee will suspend while the Capital Police restore order to this committee.

The gentleman will continue.

Secretary BLINKEN. As I said, our thoughts are with all of the Gold Star Families. They are with the State Department and USAID employees who lost their lives over the course of 20 years of our military involvement in Afghanistan.

And I think today especially of the 13 heroes that we lost at Abbey Gate, and I deeply regret that we did not do more and could not do more to protect them. To those families who are here with us today, you are in my thoughts and my prayers.

I wish that Nicole was here with us today. I am deeply sorry that she is not.

I am also deeply grateful to the dedicated professionals from the State Department, from the Defense Department, from across the Government, from civil society, other partners who did so much to support the people of Afghanistan over those two decades.

[disturbance in the hearing room.]

Chairman MCCAUL. The committee will come to order. The committee will suspend while the Capitol Police restore order. The committee will come to order.

The gentleman will continue.

Secretary BLINKEN. I am here today to continue the Department's extensive cooperation with this committee. As you know, Mr. Chairman, the Department has provided over 20,000 pages of documents to you. We conducted nine high-level briefings for Members. We facilitated transcribed interviews for more than 15 people.

I have personally testified before the House and Senate committees 14 times with questions on Afghanistan, including four times before this committee.

Now, I believe that any attempt to understand and learn from the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has to be put in the proper context of what preceded it, both in terms of the two decades following 9/11 and the decisions and events of 2020 to 2021, that culminated in the removal of our personnel.

When President Biden took office, he inherited an agreement the previous administration reached with the Taliban to remove all U.S. Forces from Afghanistan by May 1st of 2021.

At U.S. insistence, the Afghan Government had released 5,000 Taliban prisoners, including top war commanders.

The United States reduced our own troop levels from 14,000 to 2,500 in December 2020.

In return, the Taliban agreed to stop attacking U.S. and partner forces, to refrain from threatening Afghanistan's major cities, and to pursue inter-Afghan negotiations toward a cease-fire and a political settlement.

But it continued a relentless march in the countryside so that it controlled or actively contested territory containing three-quarters of Afghanistan's population by December 2020.

In January 2021, the Taliban was in the strongest military position it had been in since 9/11, and we had the smallest number of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan since 2001.

Despite the profound effects of the Doha Agreement, President Biden ultimately opted to implement the previous administration's decision to withdraw American troops and honor his pledge to end our Nation's longest war.

To the extent President Biden faced a choice, it was between ending the war or escalating it. Had he not followed through on his predecessor's commitment, attacks on our forces and allies would have resumed, and the Taliban's assault on the country's major cities would have commenced.

That would have required sending tens of thousands more U.S. Forces back into Afghanistan to defend ourselves and prevent a Taliban takeover, with, at best, the prospect of restoring a stalemate and remaining stuck in Afghanistan under fire indefinitely.

President Biden inherited a deadline but no plan to meet it. At his direction, beginning in the spring of 2021, the administration, and the State Department in particular, engaged in extensive planning for a whole range of outcomes.

We pursued a sustained campaign to urge any Americans in Afghanistan to leave. We restarted and dramatically increased resources to what had been a moribund Special Immigrant Visa program to bring Afghans who had worked by our side over 20 years to the United States.

Even the U.S. Government's most pessimistic assessments did not anticipate that the Afghan Government and security forces would collapse so rapidly in the face of Taliban advances.

Nevertheless, because of the administration's extensive inter-agency planning and coordination, one capital fell on August 15th. The United States was able to evacuate our Embassy and relocate our diplomats to the airport within 48 hours and then conduct the largest airlift in U.S. history, helping approximately 120,000 Americans, Afghans, and citizens of allied nations depart Afghanistan in just 2 weeks.

In the 3 years since the end of our country's longest war, all of us, including myself, have wrestled with what we could have done differently during that period and over the preceding two decades.

I asked retired Ambassador Dan Smith, one of our most senior diplomats, to lead an after-action review of the State Department's actions between January 2020 and August 2021.

In response to Ambassador Smith's report, the Department has taken more than 40 concrete initiatives and identified steps to guide our response to future crises. The actions we have taken have already made a difference in subsequent emergencies, including in Sudan, in Israel, in Lebanon.

Even as we work to address the places where we fell short, I firmly believe the President's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan was the right one.

American troops are no longer fighting and dying in Afghanistan. The American people are safer and more secure.

In fact, many of the most pessimistic predictions have been thoroughly disproven. We were told Afghanistan would once again become a haven for terrorists and that, as the majority report contends, we would be all but blind to the situation on the ground.

In fact, al-Qaeda, the group that attacked us on 9/11, has not regrouped in Afghanistan, and in August 2022, we launched a precision strike in downtown Kabul that took out its leader, Ayman al-Zawahiri with no American boots on the ground.

We were told that our allies would no longer trust us. Well, having just returned from more NATO meetings in Brussels and my 20th trip to the Indo-Pacific as Secretary of State, it is clear that our alliances, our partnerships, are stronger today than they have been in a generation.

You can see that in the more 50 countries that we brought together to defend Ukraine against Russia's ongoing aggression and in the unity of purpose and action that we built for contending with the challenges posed by China.

We were told hundreds of Americans and Afghan partners would be left behind. Yet today every U.S. citizen who told us that they wanted to leave during the evacuation has now had the opportunity to do so.

And, to those Americans who entered the country since August 2021 and have been detained by the Taliban, we will not rest until we bring you home.

Since September 2021, the administration has resettled more than 185,000 Afghans. We have approved or welcomed to the United States more than 68,000 Afghans under the Special Immigrant Visa program. That is nearly half of all of the SIVs issued since the program's inception in 2009.

This is a profoundly difficult period for the Afghan people, especially Afghanistan's women and girls, but I believe the final chapter has not been written on Afghanistan.

Just last week, I had the chance to be with many partners who supported the evacuation effort, including Members of Congress. We were joined by a resilient and resourceful young woman who left Afghanistan in August 2021 and is now an aerospace engineering student at MIT. She aspires to be the first Afghan woman astronaut.

In part, because of our two decade commitment to Afghanistan, there are many more women who have the opportunity to go to school, to connect about the wider world, to imagine a different life for themselves. And these women, their experiences, their hopes, will, I know, 1 day help pave a path to an Afghanistan where all people can actually choose their own futures.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Blinken follows:]

**Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken
Opening Statement on Afghanistan
House Foreign Affairs Committee
December 11th, 2024**

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, distinguished Members of the Committee – I appreciate our dialogue and partnership over the past four years, including on Afghanistan.

I want to recognize everyone who served in Afghanistan, including on this Committee. Our thoughts are with the Gold Star families of the 2,461 American service members – as well as State Department and USAID employees – who lost their lives over the course of the 20 years of U.S. military involvement in Afghanistan.

I’m also deeply grateful to the dedicated professionals from the State Department, the Defense Department, and across government... from civil society... and other partners who did so much to support the people of Afghanistan over those two decades.

I'm here to continue the State Department's extensive cooperation with this Committee. The Department has provided more than 20,000 pages of documents, conducted 9 high-level briefings for Members, and facilitated transcribed interviews of 15 senior officials. I've personally testified before House and Senate Committees 14 times on Afghanistan, including 4 times before this Committee.

Any attempt to understand and learn from the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan must be put in the proper context of what preceded it, both in the two decades following 9/11 – and in the decisions and events of 2020 to 2021 that culminated in the removal of all U.S. personnel.

When President Biden took office, he inherited an agreement the previous administration had reached with the Taliban to remove all remaining U.S. forces from Afghanistan by May 1, 2021.

At U.S. insistence, the Afghan government had released 5,000 Taliban prisoners – including several top war commanders. The U.S. reduced our own troop levels from 14,000 to 2,500 in December, 2020.

In return, the Taliban agreed to stop attacking U.S. and partner forces, to refrain from threatening Afghanistan's major cities, and to pursue intra-Afghan negotiations toward a ceasefire and political settlement.

But it continued a relentless march in the countryside so that it controlled or actively contested territory containing three quarters of Afghanistan's population by the end of 2020.

In January 2021, the Taliban was in the strongest military position it had been in since 9/11 – and we had the smallest number of troops in Afghanistan since 2001.

Despite the profound defects of the Doha agreement, President Biden ultimately opted to implement the previous administration's decision to withdraw American troops and honor his pledge to end our nation's longest war.

To the extent President Biden faced a choice, it was between ending the war or escalating it. Had he not followed through on his predecessor's commitment, attacks on our forces and allies would have resumed and the Taliban's assault on the country's major cities would have commenced. That would have required sending tens of thousands more U.S. forces into Afghanistan to defend ourselves and prevent a Taliban takeover – with at best the prospect of restoring a stalemate and remaining stuck in Afghanistan, under fire, indefinitely.

President Biden inherited a deadline, but no plan to meet it. At his direction, beginning in spring 2021, the Administration – and the State Department in particular – engaged in extensive planning for a range of outcomes.

We pursued a sustained campaign to urge any Americans in Afghanistan to leave. We re-started and dramatically increased resources to a moribund Special Immigrant Visa program to bring Afghans who had worked by our side over 20 years to the United States.

Even the U.S. government's most pessimistic assessments did not anticipate that the Afghan government and security forces would collapse so rapidly in the face of Taliban advances.

Nevertheless – because of the Administration's extensive interagency planning and coordination – when Kabul fell on August 15th, the United States was able to evacuate our embassy and relocate our diplomats to the airport within 48 hours... and then conduct the largest airlift in U.S. history, helping approximately 120,000 Americans, Afghans, and citizens of allied nations depart Afghanistan in just two weeks.

In the three years since the end of our country's longest war, all us have wrestled with what could have been done differently during that period, and over the preceding two decades.

I asked retired Ambassador Dan Smith to lead an after-action review of the State Department's actions between January 2020 and August 2021.

In response to Ambassador Smith's report, the Department has taken more than 40 concrete initiatives and identified additional steps to guide our response to future crises. They've already made a difference in subsequent emergencies – including in Sudan, Israel, and Lebanon.

Even as we work to address the places where we fell short, I firmly believe the President's decision to withdraw from Afghanistan was the right one. American troops are no longer fighting and dying in Afghanistan. The American people are safer and more secure.

In fact, many of the most pessimistic predictions have been thoroughly disproven.

We were told Afghanistan would once again become a haven for terrorists – and that, as the Majority report contends, we would be “all but blind to the situation on the ground.” In fact, al Qaeda has not regrouped in Afghanistan, and, in August 2022, we launched a precision strike in downtown Kabul that took out its leader – Ayman al-Zawahiri – with no American boots on the ground.

We were told “our allies would no longer trust us.” Having just returned from NATO meetings in Brussels, and my 20th trip to the Indo-Pacific, it’s clear our alliances and partnerships are stronger today than they’ve been in a generation. You can see that in the more than 50 countries we brought together to defend Ukraine against Russia’s aggression and the unity of purpose and action we’ve built for contending with the challenges posed by China.

Indeed, there is nothing our strategic competitors like China and Russia – or adversaries like Iran and North Korea – would have liked more than for the United States to re-up a 20 year war and remain bogged down in Afghanistan for another decade.

We were told hundreds of Americans and Afghan partners would be left behind. Yet today, every U.S. citizen who told us they wished to leave during the evacuation has had the opportunity to do so. And to those Americans who entered the country since August 2021 and have been detained by the Taliban – we will not rest until we bring you home.

Since September 2021, this Administration has resettled more than 185,000 Afghans and approved or welcomed to the United States more than 68,000 Afghans under the Special Immigrant Visa program. That's nearly half of all SIVs issued since the program's inception in 2009. Due to our unprecedented rate of SIV processing, we have requested additional SIVs from Congress.

This is undoubtedly a profoundly difficult period for the Afghan people – particularly Afghan women and girls. But the final chapter has not been written on Afghanistan.

Last week, I had the chance to be with many partners who supported the evacuation effort, including members of Congress. We were joined by a resilient and resourceful young woman who left Afghanistan in August 2021 and is now an aerospace engineering student at MIT. She aspires to be the first Afghan woman astronaut.

In part because of America's two-decade commitment to Afghanistan, there are many more women who had the opportunity to go to school, to connect with the wider world, to imagine a different life for themselves. And these women – their experiences, their hopes – will one day help pave the path to an Afghanistan where all people can choose their own futures.

With that, I'll take your questions.

Chairman MCCAUL. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

I personally, and other Members, we got four busloads of girls at the American School of Music out after Abbey Gate, who are now in Portugal. They performed at Carnegie Hall and The Kennedy Center.

But there are many women, unfortunately, who are now enslaved under sharia law by the Taliban.

I now recognize myself for questions.

Mr. Secretary, in September of this year, your State Department's Inspector General revealed that Embassy Kabul, under your leadership, abandoned, quote, sensitive security assets, unquote, during the deadly Afghanistan evacuation.

Those lethal assets include firearms, armored vehicles, and other weapons. Your IG concluded the Embassy left them intact for the Taliban.

And if that wasn't bad enough, documents—classified documents—many that I subpoenaed, also revealed that you left behind droves of the Embassy's, again, classified documents to the Taliban.

Your own diplomats described desperate attempts to burn documents on the rooftops and in the Embassy while helicopters took off the embassy's roof, very reminiscent, in my younger life, of Saigon, all because the administration failed to prepare.

Finally, your chief of mission kicked out the Embassy's Afghan employees from HKIA, telling them to come back later, leaving them to the Taliban, who never made it back, who never survived, that we gave our trust to, that we would protect them.

You left weapons behind to the Taliban, classified documents to the Taliban, you left behind Embassy employees to the Taliban, and now 3 years later, your own IG, inspector general, concluded that your State Department has been unwilling and unable to learn from its mistakes.

My question is, have you read the IG report, and have you held your own State Department accountable?

Secretary BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, first, with regard to the documents, we have in place, at every embassy, including in Afghanistan, a process by which sensitive documents are destroyed in the event of an evacuation and shutting down the embassy.

We began that process on August the 1st, and then when we got to August the 12th, before the collapse of Kabul, we proceeded with the emergency destruction of all of the remaining sensitive documents. And that process was complete by the 14th, the day before Kabul fell.

That is a process that we engage in wherever we have an emergency, and that is exactly—

Chairman MCCAUL. Well, reclaiming my time. I mean, the fact is, they should have been evacuated long before. I mean, you were still negotiating as the Taliban entered Kabul. The Embassy should have been, as the military advised you to do, evacuate that Embassy.

Let me ask you this. When President Biden announced his unconditional surrender to the Taliban on April the 14th, 2021, you demanded that Embassy Kabul remain open no matter what the cost.

Your personnel opposed that. In fact, they did so in a cable dissent that we were able to get from you in your discovery process, a cry for help.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs to the CENTCOM Commander, Milley to McKenzie, said, this was a fundamental mistake, a fatal flaw, and their biggest regret is keeping the Embassy open, despite the advice of your own people on the ground and military advisers.

Why did you do that?

Secretary BLINKEN. Very simply, because no one anticipated that the government and the Afghan Armed Forces would collapse as quickly as they did. We anticipated and every intelligence assessment that we had anticipated that Kabul would remain in the hands of the government, in the hands of the Afghan Armed Forces through the balance of the year and—

Chairman MCCAUL. I am going to reclaim my time because what I want to say—

Secretary BLINKEN. Let me, please, let me finish.

Chairman MCCAUL. I will let you finish, but I strongly disagree.

Secretary BLINKEN. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Mark Milley, said, nothing I or anyone else saw indicated a collapse of the army or the government in 11 days.

The DNI, Avril Haines, said, in the days leading up to the Taliban takeover, intelligence agencies did not see collapse as imminent.

This unfolded more quickly than many anticipated, including in the intelligence community.

Chairman MCCAUL. Okay. Reclaiming my time. I hear what you are saying, that no one saw the collapse coming. However, I have read the Dissent Cable of your Embassy personnel that you provided to me, that they sent to you in July, before the collapse in 2021, warning of Afghanistan's imminent collapse, fearing for their safety.

You personally read this, sir, and cleared it. Your Deputy Secretary, Brian McKeon, testified before this committee that you took no step to answer the cries for help.

And, as you know, Secretary of State, you have a responsibility to protect Americans and diplomats.

Secretary BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, that is incorrect.

Chairman MCCAUL. Why did you ignore the cries for help, why did you leave this Embassy open, and finally, who was in charge? Was it you or Mr. Sullivan?

Because it seems to me you delegated all your responsibility on this, you had very little to do with it, and it was Jake Sullivan and the National Security Council at the White House calling all the shots.

However, under law, sir, you are the captain of the ship.

Secretary BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, that is incorrect on a number of accounts, as is the report that I have read. First, when it comes to a NEO, the evacuation, that is a decision that is reached by the entire interagency and ultimately by the President.

State Department initiates it by asking the Department of Defense to proceed with it, but the decision itself is reached as a result of interagency deliberations. And we did not as an inter-

agency—and that includes the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the National Security Advisor of the President——

Chairman MCCAUL. I asked who was in charge. This is going to help us——

Secretary BLINKEN. No, this is important.

Chairman MCCAUL [continuing]. Legislate, sir. Were you in charge of this evacuation?

Secretary BLINKEN. I was in charge of the State Department. The Government, the administration, was in charge of the evacuation. Specifically, the State Department and the Department of Defense together, on any NEO, work closely together with clearly assigned responsibilities, and that is exactly what we did and——

Chairman MCCAUL. And it is the statutory responsibility, sir——

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. Call for that NEO until it was actually——

Chairman MCCAUL [continuing]. For you to execute the plan, correct? The NEO, the plan.

Secretary BLINKEN. The NEO was executed by the State Department and the Defense Department.

Chairman MCCAUL. And I would have to say, sir, waiting until the last minute is not executing a plan at all, and it led to the deaths of many Americans——

Secretary BLINKEN. Again, Mr. Chairman——

Chairman MCCAUL [continuing]. And Afghan people and Afghan allies.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. Mr. Chairman, the record reflects that, again, this decision was reached collectively. No one urged initiating the NEO until we decided to do it on the 14th.

Chairman MCCAUL. I think, in my review of our investigation, there was so much confusion coming out of your embassy, coming from the top military advisers who told me, testified that they told you to close down that Embassy in advance, to protect Americans and American assets and classified documents.

Secretary BLINKEN. That is not correct.

Chairman MCCAUL. They were left to the Taliban. You were in charge by law. You may have delegated this, I don't know, but to legislate moving forward, I need to know who was in charge, and that is why it is so important that Mr. Sullivan, the National Security Advisor, come before this committee and give his testimony about what the hell was going on during this disastrous evacuation.

With that, I now recognize the ranking member.

Mr. MEEKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You know, I do recall a meeting here in the Capitol—bipartisan—downstairs, and we were meeting with President Ghani of Afghanistan. And we had talked to some folks, and President Ghani was very vehement that he was not going to leave Afghanistan. He was vehement that the Afghan troops were there, and he would stay there, to all these Members of Congress. And to everyone that I talked to from almost anywhere was clear that that was his position.

No one knew that 1 week later—not 1 month—1 week later, he would get on a plane and get out and all the troops were gone. Everybody at that moment in time was surprised. And that is a fact.

Let me ask some yes-or-no questions real quick because I believe that you got to look at this whole thing you talk about.

So, Mr. Secretary, President Trump's Doha deal explicitly committed to the United States to withdraw all U.S. and allied troops, as well as contractors, by May 2021, yes or no?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Mr. MEEKS. But the speed of that withdrawal, outside of an initial reduction to 8,600 troops, was not specified by the deal. Is that correct?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Mr. MEEKS. And, despite that, President Trump unilaterally reduced the U.S. presence twice beyond that, leaving just 2,500 troops when President Biden took office. Is that correct?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Mr. MEEKS. So—and we have seen that President Trump was prepared to go to zero. In fact, Ambassador Khalilzad testified to the committee that the messages coming out of the Trump White House led the Taliban to conclude that Trump was getting out regardless of what was agreed in the Doha deal.

So let's be clear about the conditions. If you are going to be factual about this, you have got to consider the conditions that Trump handed over to you and the Biden administration, a firm commitment for a total withdrawal with no allowance for a residual force or contractors, a limited number of troops on the ground, and no real prohibition or attacks on our Afghan—our allies.

We have heard testimony from General Milley, Ambassador Khalilzad, and others that, if we had tried to reopen the Doha deal, the Taliban would have resumed attacks against us.

Do you agree, Mr. Secretary, with that assessment, yes or no?

Secretary BLINKEN. I do.

Mr. MEEKS. So that was the fundamental choice facing President Biden, a complete—to complete the withdrawal that was initiated by President Trump or re-escalate the conflict. Is that correct?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Mr. MEEKS. So what do you think President Biden's decision to complete the withdrawal and end this so-called forever war gained us?

Secretary BLINKEN. It gained us an end to America's longest war. It gained us not having another generation of Americans going off to fight and die in Afghanistan.

It gained us the opportunity to refocus and rededicate our resources to the challenges of this moment from the Russian aggression against Ukraine to the many challenges posed by China to many other issues around the world where we were able to free up resources, free up focus, free up time.

Mr. MEEKS. You just hit something because, just months after the withdrawal from Afghanistan, we did face a new threat, and that was Putin's illegal and unjustified renewed invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

So, yes or no, do you see any connection between Putin's reinvasion of Ukraine and the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan?

Secretary BLINKEN. No. On the contrary, I think our adversaries, including Russia, would have been delighted if we doubled down and remained stuck in Afghanistan for another 20 years.

Now, in 2008, we had, between Afghanistan and Iraq, about 200,000 forces deployed. You will recall what else happened in 2008. Russia invaded Georgia.

In 2014, we still had about 12,000 forces in Afghanistan. You recall what else happened in 2014. Russia, for the first time, invaded Ukraine.

Because we were able to refocus our time, our resources, our efforts, we were able to build this coalition of more than 50 countries that has stood up to Russia's aggression, and I must say, the chairman has done a remarkable job over these last 3 years.

Mr. MEEKS. I agree. We worked very closely, the chairman and I, in making sure Ukraine had everything that it needs. In fact, you know, sometimes he was in front of me, and other times we went together, but he has been a champion on Ukraine.

But the issue that I am trying to make sure—and I think this is what you said—that the withdrawal from Afghanistan did not hinder our capacity or our credibility to lead our allies in a robust response to the invasion in Ukraine. That is correct?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Mr. MEEKS. As well as, the withdrawal did not inhibit our relationships with our allies?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Mr. MEEKS. In fact, just the opposite.

And, maybe my last question, your assessment of the strength of NATO and our alliances system today. Has the withdrawing from Afghanistan let us focus on the most urgent threats to global security, yes or no?

Secretary BLINKEN. It is stronger. It is bigger. It is better resourced. It is more focused than it has ever been.

Chairman MCCAUL. All right. The gentleman's time has expired. Let me just say, with the fall of Afghanistan, within months, Chairman Xi and Putin made an agreement at the Olympics in Beijing, and we saw satellite imagery of the Russian Federation moving toward Ukraine.

I don't think that was by accident. That was by design. Putin saw a weakness, and he was—took aggression, and he invaded Ukraine. And then the Ayatollah reared his ugly head in the Middle East, and Chairman Xi is on fire in a hot zone in the Indo-Pacific.

With that, the chairman now recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Smith.

Mr. SMITH. Okay. Thank you very much. Pardon me, Mr. Chairman, and welcome, Mr. Secretary.

You know, I have a number of questions, and I have asked some of those in the past, so I won't repeat those, but I chair the China Commission. I have chaired 105-plus hearings on human rights abuse in China, Xi Jinping's absolute malevolent behavior toward

the Uyghurs, and all the other atrocities that are committed each and every day.

But what concerned me with our, I believe, egregiously flawed exodus from Afghanistan was how dictators around the world, especially Xi Jinping, looked at that and his propaganda organs, like the Global Times, and said to the people of Taiwan—here is one editorial—why the U.S. will abandon Taiwan eventually.

Another one was Afghan abandonment is a lesson for Taiwan's DPP, and when you read it, they are telling the people over and over again in Taiwan that America's resolve was questioned—is questionable, that we will leave them too. And, you know, I won't read the editorial, but it—editorials, because they are very, very disturbing.

You know, dictators love weakness. They probe with bayonets, and if they can get away with something, they will.

And I think the chairman is right when he talks about Putin as well, and you had said before how you thought they would be happy if we were bogged down for, you know, the next 20 years.

But I look at it a different way. They look at how it was done—yes, we were going to get out of Afghanistan, but the way we did it led to the loss of American lives, which we have seen the pictures again shown here, and we have all met with those families of those loved ones, and countless numbers of Afghans.

So the impact of this, can you at least admit that to the dictatorships of the world, they saw that, and they saw it as weakness, and they go to avoid—if they think there is one.

Second, how many Americans are still in Afghanistan, and post exodus, how many were jailed, killed, tortured, left behind?

I know that there was a lot of talk that, you know, we encouraged people to leave, but we all remember that Reuters broke that story about how the President had, in a conversation with Ghani, had said very clearly that, even if we have to make it up, in terms of the situation, to project it as if it is better than it is—here is the way he put it, this is President Biden—and there is a need, whether it is true or not, there is a need to project a different picture.

And that was done on July 23d.

So, while we may admonish people to leave, they are listening to our own President who says there is a 300,000-man army, well trained, you know, but meanwhile in back channel, talking on the phone to Ghani, he is saying—project a different picture. Very, very disturbing. I mean, we got to be truthful.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. Two things on this. First, we engaged in a sustained campaign to get every American in Afghanistan who was still there, to leave. Nineteen messages to that community between February and August.

By the time the evacuation took place, there was still about 6,000 Americans left in Afghanistan.

Now, who are they? They are almost all dual citizens, most of whom, almost all of whom had lived, worked, had their families in Afghanistan for generations. And so you were still down to 6,000, despite every effort to get people to leave, including offering to pay for their travel. The airport remained open until August the 15th.

In the weeks of the evacuation, the 2 weeks of the evacuation, almost all of those 6,000 remaining we were able to get out. We were left with a few hundred on August, the 31st.

There were a couple of hundred—and this is what I testified to—who had identified themselves to us—and keep in mind, as you know, when you travel to a foreign country or you leave a foreign country, as an American, you don't have to register, you don't have to make yourself known.

We made every effort to get in contact with everyone, but by the time of the end of the evacuation, there were still a couple of hundred American citizens left who had identified themselves to us and told us they wanted to leave and who couldn't get to the airport or get into the airport.

There were several hundred others who were there, and we knew of, who did not want to leave, either because they didn't want to leave extended family members behind or they just chose not to leave.

So, after August 31st, as I said and committed to this committee and to this country, there is no deadline on getting Americans out of Afghanistan who want to leave.

In the ensuing 3 months, till the end of the year, we got 500 American citizens out of Afghanistan who had identified themselves to us and said they wanted to leave.

To my knowledge, every American who identified themselves and said that they wanted to leave has been given an opportunity to do so, and we have carried that out every single day.

As to those who went back and some who got detained, we are working every day to get them out, to get them back, and we will not stop for the duration of this administration, and I know that the incoming Trump administration will carry that on if we are not successful in getting them back.

Mr. SMITH. I am out of time, but are any in jail today?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes.

Mr. SMITH. They are?

Secretary BLINKEN. They are. These are Americans who went after have the evacuation for a variety of reasons. We are talking about—

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman's time has expired.

I am going to keep to the 5-minute rule strictly because I want every member to be able to have time to ask questions.

The chair now recognizes Mr. Sherman.

Mr. SHERMAN. Mr. Secretary, thank you for your service to our country. You bring up the fact that Americans in a war zone don't have to register with the Embassy. I think we have talked in the past about requiring Americans in designated dangerous countries to register, and I look forward to working with your successor to do that, because you point out how difficult it is for the Embassy to deal with these situations.

Before I get to Afghanistan, back in May, you agreed that you would look at designating the Popular Resistance Committees, the third biggest terrorist group operating in Gaza, as a terrorist organization.

They are responsible for so many deaths, including three Americans.

This committee voted for my bill to so designate them. Do I have your commitment that in the next 2 weeks, your Department will make a decision as to whether to designate the Popular Resistance Committees a terrorist organization?

Secretary BLINKEN. If we can complete the work necessary to go into that, yes. I don't know if it will be completed in time.

Mr. SHERMAN. Well, I asked you to do it in May. How long—how many years does it take?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, as you know, there is a lot that goes into these designations—

Mr. SHERMAN. I do.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. To make sure that we meet the law, and if we can complete that work, we will.

Mr. SHERMAN. When you were here in the past, I think you correctly told us you inherited a deadline; you did not inherit a plan.

The gentleman from New Jersey argues that we should have stayed, but that is after Trump released 5,000 blood-thirsty terrorists. Had we stayed, would those terrorists, including the current head of Afghanistan, who was also released by Trump, been able to—would they have been willing to risk the lives, every one of those 5,000, risked their lives in order to kill as many Americans as possible.

Secretary BLINKEN. That seems highly likely. I can't speak to every one of the 5,000, but certainly many of them went back to the fight.

Mr. SHERMAN. So we stayed in—we went into Afghanistan. We drove al-Qaeda out. We accomplished something in the George W. Bush administration. In the Obama administration, we killed Bin Laden.

We stayed in Afghanistan for the whole Trump administration. Sixty-three of our best and—died. Fifty-seven came back without the President bothering to be at the ceremony with their return.

The question is, did we accomplish anything during the Trump administration? Did we get a better deal in 2020 than we could have gotten in 2017?

Now, the deal we got in 2017 was total surrender. The only requirement was that the Taliban not be a center for international terrorism. They have that obligation anyway.

They did not commit themselves to protecting our troops on the way out—or our Embassy on the way out.

And, moreover, the Taliban is not in violation of the Trump agreement when they hold 12-year-old girls as sex slaves, kill every LGBT person they can, kill any Afghan that converts to Christianity.

So the deal was the weakest ever, and it had no enforcement. So couldn't we have gotten that same deal in 2017, and would 63 more American soldiers be alive if we had done that then?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, in fairness, I think we have to ask ourselves about our ongoing presence in Afghanistan after we got bin Laden. We had dismantled al-Qaeda; we had removed it as a threat. We got the leader, the guy who—

Mr. SHERMAN. Right. So if we—

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. Attacked us on—

Mr. SHERMAN. So we got something—

Secretary BLINKEN. So I think we need to look back at——

Mr. SHERMAN. Right. But——

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. This entire period——

Mr. SHERMAN. But, clearly——

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. And the decisions that everyone made.

Mr. SHERMAN [continuing]. The Trump years, 4 years of death of American troops, and we accomplished absolutely nothing. We signed an agreement under which the Afghan Government is free to use 12-year-old girls as sex slaves and to kill those who convert to Christianity.

Some \$11 billion to \$13 billion of U.S. weapons were sent by Trump and scattered all over Afghanistan. And this committee has put forward the idea that we should have somehow collected those weapons from men who wanted to keep them and who were armed with those weapons.

Could we have accomplished that without any significant American casualties, all over Afghanistan, collecting the weapons?

Secretary BLINKEN. No, we could not.

Mr. SHERMAN. Would there have been hundreds of American casualties, in your estimation?

Secretary BLINKEN. I can't give you a number, but certainly there would have been casualties.

Mr. SHERMAN. I yield back.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields.

Let me announce also that Mr. Sullivan, the National Security Advisor, has agreed to testify before this committee on December the 17th at noon. And I insisted, on behalf of the Members, that all Members be able to participate in that briefing.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Wilson.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you very much, Chairman Mike McCaul, and thank you for your 4 years of leadership on this committee. It has just been so effective for the American people.

And then we all know that Chairman Brian Mast,—elect, will do an excellent job continuing the tradition of serving the American people. And what an exciting time in history, as we face such positive changes, with the removal of Dictator Assad from Damascus, what can occur and what needs to occur.

But, sadly, the Assad departure and anything that has been positive was despite the Biden administration. Because, hey, until last week, there was an effort to try to have some level of normalization with Assad, which is—but that is not why we are here today.

But it is a continuation, and that is, the Biden administration's surrender in Afghanistan has actually set the stage for foreign policy disasters around the world, with mass murder shamelessly being conducted around the world. Our allies who stood with us for decades watched as the American capitulated to terrorists, creating safe haven for terrorism, and abandoned allies. It was so incredible that this catastrophic decision of American—was the worst ever for American military and national security.

And, sadly, President Biden, on August 26, 2021, claimed that he had letters—quote, “had letters” from the military indicating they supported his decision. And, Mr. Secretary, I will be giving you cop-

ies. That evening, I sent a letter, respectfully, to the President asking for copies of the letters, and every couple of months, I have sent letters to the President respectfully asking for copies of the letters where the military, he alleged, supported his decision.

With the Doha Agreement, President Trump stated from day one that any withdrawal would be conditions-based and would actually maintain control of Bagram Airfield, which is so critical.

The disorder and chaos that led to the murder of 13 of our servicemembers at Kabul Airport just should not be forgotten. And then countless civilians, we understand, were the first domino to fall in the Biden-Harris appeasement policy.

And also this year, it should be remembered, we lost 13 at Kabul Airport, but we also had 3 reservists from Georgia who were killed on January 28th by the Hamas puppets—excuse me—Hezbollah puppets of Iran, and 60 were injured, and many with traumatic brain injury. It is just heartbreaking to think of the loss of life and the lifelong injuries that people will have.

Today in Afghanistan, women have effectively been banished from public life, unable to speak in public or hold any job, including nursing. And I still cherish seeing little girls—I visited Afghanistan very frequently—to see little girls going to school with their hijabs or whatever and then little guys going to school with something not indigenous to people of Afghanistan and it was baseball caps. And so that doesn't occur now.

Terrorists have free rein to regroup and work with their backers to coordinate additional attacks on American families. As we know, the FBI has said attacks are imminent.

History reminds us that when America withdraws from the world, our enemies fill the vacuums. We now face a war that we did not choose, of dictators with rule of gun invading democracies with rule of law. It began February 24, 2022, when war criminal Putin invaded Ukraine, and then on October 7, Iran, through its puppet, Hamas, invading Israel.

And we all see the risk that we have—and it is personal to me, Mr. Secretary, my appreciation of the people of Afghanistan. I was grateful to serve with the late Sheila Jackson Lee as co-chair of the Afghan Caucus, and we met with so many wonderful people who—it is bipartisan, our concerns.

And then I am grateful my former National Guard unit, the 218th Mechanized Infantry Brigade of the South Carolina Army Guard, served for a year under General Bob Livingston, and they have developed a real fondness for their Afghan brothers.

And, finally, I am really grateful my number-four son, Hunter, First Lieutenant Hunter Wilson, served for a year as an engineer in Afghanistan.

And so I would just really want to let you know that I am just so disappointed. Hey, we—I really get in trouble at home; I said I wanted Biden to succeed. But this has not occurred. And we just have to address this.

And, with that, I yield back my time.

Chairman McCAUL. The gentleman yields.

The chair recognizes Mr. Connolly.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for your tenure and for your friendship and decency serving as chairman of this prestigious committee.

I would like to put a picture up which seems to suggest, Mr. Secretary, that the Republican narrative is correct about you. There you are with a prominent Taliban negotiator.

Do our tech people have that picture?

Well, I have it here.

Isn't that you with a Taliban negotiator, Mr. Secretary?

Secretary BLINKEN. I am afraid I can't see the picture, but I am not aware of having spent any time with a Taliban negotiator.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Oh. I am sorry. That is Secretary Pompeo.

Was he your predecessor in the Biden administration as Secretary of State, in the Biden administration?

Secretary BLINKEN. No. He was my predecessor in the previous administration, the Trump administration.

Mr. CONNOLLY. The Trump administration. And there he is in Doha with the chief Taliban negotiator. Hmm. I guess I got that wrong.

Well, Mr. Secretary, all things seem to flow from Doha.

Secretary Pompeo and President Trump appointed a chief negotiator on behalf of the United States for the negotiations in Doha. What was his name?

Secretary BLINKEN. Zal Khalilzad.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Ambassador Khalilzad. And he, of course, testified before this committee, and I can remember an exchange with him in which I expressed deep concern about the direction of the U.S. posture and the ramifications with allied Afghans who had worked for us, or worked with us, and women. And he kind of brushed them off at the time.

Tell us about the details of the agreement he forged in Doha. What were the chief elements of that?

Secretary BLINKEN. So—

Mr. CONNOLLY. Precisely, if you would.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. In essence, the agreement provided for this: It provided that the Taliban would not use Afghan soil to attack us or our interests.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Right.

Secretary BLINKEN. It would start an intra-Afghan negotiation. And as part of that negotiation, there would be discussion of a cease-fire and a political roadmap for the future of Afghanistan.

And during the time between the agreement and the commitment that we made as part of the agreement to leave Afghanistan by May 31st—

Mr. CONNOLLY. So a firm date was set—

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes.

Mr. CONNOLLY [continuing]. For all U.S. Troops to get out. Is that correct.

Secretary BLINKEN. All U.S. troops were to be out by May 31st. In the meantime, 5,000 prisoners were released from Taliban prisons—

Mr. CONNOLLY. And, as Mr. Sherman points out, among those 5,000 were terrorists, fighters, and people who returned to the battlefield against the Afghan Government, which—

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Mr. CONNOLLY [continuing]. Allegedly we were supporting at the time.

Now, speaking of that Afghan Government, were they in Doha at the negotiating table as equal partners?

Secretary BLINKEN. They were not.

Mr. CONNOLLY. They were not?

Secretary BLINKEN. They were not.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Why were they excluded? That is the government we were supporting.

Secretary BLINKEN. I can't answer that. I wasn't there at the time. But they were not.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Well, if the government we are supporting is not allowed to have a voice at the peace negotiations where a deal was, in fact, agreed to by the United States, could that conceivably undermine confidence in that government and by that government in itself in terms of its future?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. And, indeed, I think General McKenzie has testified to exactly that point, that Doha created a tremendous crisis in confidence and about the future for the Afghan Government and, presumably, to some extent, for the Afghan Security Forces themselves.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Could it also have a morale effect on the Afghan military, that we were training and equipping to, in fact, fight the Taliban?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, it could.

Mr. CONNOLLY. So here we are cutting a deal with Taliban while at the same time asking the Afghan military and the Afghan Government to resist. Is that correct.

Secretary BLINKEN. Correct.

Mr. CONNOLLY. That sounds like a contradiction in diplomatic policy to me. That is kind of hard to follow.

And it seems to me that we—we—by agreeing to that in the Trump years with Secretary Pompeo, your predecessor, and Ambassador Khalilzad, we actually set in motion an untenable but probably irrevocable, kind of, you know, unfolding of events.

Is that a fair statement, do you think?

Secretary BLINKEN. Once the deadline was there—all troops out by May 31st of 2021—and, as part of that, an agreement from the signing of Doha to that date not to attack U.S. Forces, but with the obvious conclusion to be drawn from that that if that deadline was not respected, the Taliban would resume its attacks on U.S. Forces, on partner forces, and its attacks on the cities—

Mr. CONNOLLY. So, in other words, Mr. Secretary, we cut a deal to get out and cut our losses at the expense of the Afghan Government, the Afghan military, and ultimately the Afghan people.

And that was all set in motion before you took the oath of office or President Biden took the oath of office.

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, I think—

Mr. CONNOLLY. Is that a fair statement?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think that is where the Doha Agreement led.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank you.

And I yield back.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields.

Let me just State that the Taliban was not in compliance with the Doha Agreement when the evacuation was ordered.

And your own senior advisor, Ned Price, said that the Doha conditions were, quote/unquote, “immaterial”—“immaterial” to the evacuation. That speaks volumes.

I now recognize Mr. Perry.

Mr. PERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, thanks for being here.

This statement from you, in a 2024 Senate hearing, where you said, “No one has done more to support Israel than Joe Biden.”

Now, during the Obama term, Joe Biden was the Vice President, so I understand it is difficult—it was difficult to say something, but he didn’t say anything about the U.S. funding the campaign to oust Netanyahu. And I get it, while President Obama was the President, he was the Vice President, that is a difficult thing to do. But he was unburdened when he became President, so he could have said something then.

Immediately upon taking office, he redesignated the Houthis from a foreign terrorist organization. We see what they have done. That hasn’t been helpful to Israel.

He restored the sanctions waiver. I remind everybody that Iran exports are at a 5-year high, with 3.4 million barrels being sold every day, funding their terrorist activities all across the globe.

The President made a red line for Israel going into Rafah to defend itself. Withheld arms shipments to Israel so it couldn’t defend itself. Continually called and calls for Israel to lay down its defenses and demanding a cease-fire. Continues at this time to undermine Netanyahu, in this time of war. Again, I think I already said about the sanctions waiver.

But the President didn’t even go to greet the Prime Minister when he came to the United States. He didn’t even send the Vice President. He actually used Israel funding to get Ukraine funding—used Israel.

Again, oil exports are at a 5-year high, and that money goes directly to support Iran, Israel’s mortal enemy, and all their proxies, including the Houthis, Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Hezbollah—you name it.

Continues to support United Nations Relief and Works Agency and the activities of those within involved in the terrorist attack on Israel on October 7th.

That is just a few things that I quickly found, knowing that you would be here, Mr. Secretary.

And you said, “No one, starting with President Biden, has done more to make sure they have what they need to defend themselves from Hamas, to deal with the threat Hamas poses.” And that is also from a 2024 Senate hearing, Mr. Secretary. “No one has done more to support Israel than Joe Biden.” I am thanking the good Lord that he is not against Israel, Mr. Secretary.

I don’t know if you have anything to say. I am sure you are going to have a list of all the wonderful things that he has done to support Israel. But you can’t support Israel while you are at the same time supporting their mortal enemy. You can’t support Israel, at the same time demanding that Israel support Hamas. You can’t

support Israel when you are allowing Iran access to billions of dollars used to fund terrorism, not only in Israel but around the globe, threatening not only Israel, our greatest ally, but also the United States of America and its interests abroad.

So, if you want to defend all that, you are welcome to it, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

I will say simply this: When Israel was attacked on October the 7th, the President of the United States rushed there, the first President to go to Israel during a time of war.

When Iran mounted attacks, unprecedented attacks, on Israel, not once but twice, the first time we had seen direct attacks by Iran on Israel, the United States, for the first time ever, actively participated in Israel's defense and rallied other countries to do the same, making sure that those attacks couldn't succeed and enabling Israel to take the strikes that it took to debilitate Iran's air defenses.

If you want to go back more years than that, the Memorandum of Understanding, the 10-year Memorandum of Understanding that provides the money for Israel's defense, that was negotiated by President Obama, and Joe Biden was a lead in that effort to get it. And, as a result, the equipment, the munitions, the arms that Israel has had as a result of that agreement have enabled it to deal with Hezbollah, to deal with Hamas, to deal with——

Mr. PERRY. If I may, sir, in the remaining 10 seconds, if this President weren't on both sides of this war, providing Iran all that it has provided, maybe those people in Israel that died on October 7th would still be alive.

And I yield.

Secretary BLINKEN. And that—that is simply incorrect. And I——
Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields.

The chair recognizes Mr. Keating.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, to our Gold Star Families that are here, I appreciate your being here. I have everlasting gratitude for your sacrifice.

I come from a Gold Star Family, and my own family—even decades afterwards, members of my family went back through military records, in years-long, painstaking research, just to find out exactly what happened to him as he was killed serving our country. And I understand the need for that and hope that you take advantage of what the ranking member has submitted, take advantage of what is there publicly. And I hope there is further opportunity to declassify, because it is important, as it was to my own family, to get the facts, not just beliefs, about exactly what happened.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here in your last hearing. I want to thank you for your selfless public service, your integrity, your personal sacrifice.

I came across some—I was researching the Budapest agreements the other day, just trying to get more detailed information, including our obligation to Ukraine in those agreements to defend aggression that they had. And the name that kept cropping up through the whole research was your father. And I know your father would be very proud of your service.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Mr. KEATING. And I want to thank you for that.

I want to congratulate Mr. Mast.

And I want to thank my colleague, Chairman McCaul, for working together. When I first came into Congress, he was the chairman, I was the ranking member of a subcommittee. We worked together on investigating the Boston Marathon bombing, finding out what happened, what mistakes were made. And we saved lives as a result of that report. And it was comprehensive.

I dare say, though, that the particular report that he issued here had things in it but it was certainly not comprehensive. In fact, it was really—the report was painstaking in avoiding facts that are integral to seeing what happened here, why we got to the point we got to.

The involvement of President Trump—he had committed the United States to a full date-certain withdrawal in the deal he negotiated with the Taliban, as we have heard, without the Afghan Government even being part of that, without discussion of rights of women or children in Afghanistan, forcing the Afghan Government to release 5,000 Taliban fighters back onto the battlefield before a final withdrawal.

These are the things that should be looked at in a comprehensive report if we really want to get to the answers. And, sadly, it is lacking here.

In that timeframe, too, something we should draw attention to is, when President Trump unilaterally did this, he left out his own military people when he announced that, he left out senior officials in his own office, and he left out our allies who were fighting in this battle and communicating to them.

So I just would like you briefly to talk about the importance, for the first time, under Article 5, and the importance of NATO, our allies came—and the only time—came to our assistance in fighting this war. I visited them in Afghanistan, along with our own troops.

So could you talk to the importance of that NATO alliance, how important it was in this, how important it is in the future?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you very much, Congressman. And thank you for the reference to my father. I deeply appreciate it.

As you said, the first time—the only time—Article 5 has been invoked was in defense of the United States after 9/11, and NATO allies came from far and wide to join us in Afghanistan in dealing with al-Qaeda, in dealing with bin Laden, in dealing with the people who attacked us and attacked democracy on that day. And that is something we will forever be grateful for.

I am very proud of the fact that, as we leave office, that alliance is stronger, bigger, and better-resourced than it has ever been. When we took office, of the allies, only nine were meeting the pledge that had been made in 2014 to dedicate 2 percent of GDP to defense. Now, 23 allies are meeting that pledge, and the remainder are en route to do so. We have two new allies in Finland and Sweden, making the alliance stronger and more effective.

And I will just say this in conclusion. I think what the American people need to understand about the alliance—and I understand, it is easy to forget—is what makes it so unique and why it is so important going forward.

When countries came together to join NATO, they made this commitment, under Article 5, that an attack on one is an attack on all. And that means that any would-be aggressor thinking about attacking any one of these countries knows that if they attack one, they have to take them all on. That is the best way to prevent war in the first place. It is the best way to deter aggression. It is the best way to make sure that we don't have a world of conflict.

Americans don't want to be at war. NATO has been the best guarantor that we can have of making sure those wars don't happen in the first place but, if they do, that we are not fighting them alone.

Mr. KEATING. Thank you so much.

I yield back.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman's time has expired.

I will agree—and Mr. Meeks and I—that NATO has never been more united or stronger, and I do think Mr. Putin had a strong role.

The chair now recognizes Mr. Mast.

Mr. MAST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Sometimes we speak about decorum in here, and I would say that it doesn't take a four-letter word to violate decorum. We insult every single person that served when we come in here and we say words like "we are sorry that the Afghanistan withdrawal was not exactly perfect, you know, but—you know, maybe we could have done a few things." That is a violation of decorum against every person that put on a uniform.

And this place absolutely lives up to being a swamp when we try to cover up the fact that 26 of your diplomats told you directly that if you continued down the path that you were going, that it was going to be a disaster. And we should not be covering that up.

I want to talk about a couple of things today.

You are our top diplomat. That is not in dispute. Have you been in Afghanistan since 13 American servicemembers were murdered?

Secretary BLINKEN. No, I have not.

Mr. MAST. Have any of your staff visited the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan since that day?

Secretary BLINKEN. We have had people in Afghanistan. I do not believe they have visited the Embassy.

Mr. MAST. Do you know who is currently residing in our embassy?

Secretary BLINKEN. The Embassy is not under our—obviously not under our control. We don't have the ability, not being in Afghanistan, to control it.

Mr. MAST. Do you have any information on anybody that has spent any time residing in our embassy since our departure?

Secretary BLINKEN. No doubt we do or, in any event, the intelligence community does. And I am happy to share that, as appropriate.

Mr. MAST. Yet we are still giving the Taliban tens of billions of dollars. There is an American citizen out there, literally woke up this morning losing 30 percent of their paycheck, and a good percentage of that is going to the Taliban or other programs abroad. And this is something that we all need to think about and we will be thinking about deeply for the next 2 years.

There is a joke that is made often out there about kids going to college to learn basket-weaving and what a joke that would be. But the United States right now is literally sending tens of millions of dollars to the Taliban, \$14.9 million to be exact, to teach Afghans how to do carpet-weaving. Let's think about that.

We are giving \$280 million to the United Nations to do cash transfers for food in Afghanistan, yet we are not sending an ear of corn from Iowa, a sack of potatoes from Idaho, or a cucumber or an orange from Florida. And that discounts the fact that there is no American tonnage going through our ports to send those things out of here either; it is just cash transfers.

Another line item—these are directly from SIGAR reports—\$75 million to teach Afghan women to be farmers. I don't believe that we spend \$30 million in the United States of America to teach women to be farmers. My colleague, Mr. Wilson, brought up that they can't even dance in the streets or speak to one another or go to school. I am not sure that we can trust that that \$75 million is being used to teach them agriculture. And, as you pointed out, we don't have any diplomats on the ground to confirm the validity of these programs.

Here is one that I was entirely curious about, and maybe you could explain it to me: \$3.5 billion transferred to the Afghan fund that is intended to protect the macro financial stability on behalf of the Afghan people. What the hell does that mean? Can you tell me? I don't know. That is a bunch of gibberish to me.

Secretary BLINKEN. Happy to address all of this, Congressman. Thank you. And——

Mr. MAST. I will give you one more——

Secretary BLINKEN. Okay.

Mr. MAST [continuing]. Before you address it.

Secretary BLINKEN. Please.

Mr. MAST. Even worse, by the numbers, we have spent \$9 billion to resettle 90,000, roughly, Afghan refugees here since the fall of Afghanistan. My simple Army math tells me that is about \$100,000 a person. That is absurd.

So my question for you: We do not even have an embassy in Afghanistan; we have no diplomats there. What are we doing giving them one dollar?

Secretary BLINKEN. So, Congressman, as I believe you know, the money that we provide and the international community provides is done through partners, implementing partners—U.N. agencies, NGO's. They have——

Mr. MAST. Yes. We could say that about all the State Department dollars—foreign NGO's, foreign countries, foreign companies, and, in this case, foreign adversaries.

Secretary BLINKEN. So each of these institutions, as verified by the Department, has in place processes to make sure that the money that we provide and others provide is spent appropriately.

And the money that has been spent in Afghanistan—and I think, internationally, it is about \$8 billion since the evacuation—has helped divert famine. It has helped prevent the collapse of the health system. It has helped prevent the collapse of the entire economy. It has helped avoid bringing even more disaster——

Mr. MAST. Mr. Secretary——

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. On people who are suffering.

Mr. MAST [continuing]. You know for a fact that people, literally, especially outside of this country, they directly lied to us. Your people had to come back and correct, "Hey, it turns out we were, in fact, spending half a million dollars to expand atheism in Nepal through the third-party implementer of Humanists International. They were lying to us. They didn't show us the exact slideshow that they put together for half a million dollars," and all this. They lied to us. We have no eyes on the ground.

And I would simply close with this: Again, we do not even have an embassy there. We have no business putting one dollar into that place.

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, I respectfully—

Mr. MAST. I yield back.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. And I respectfully disagree. I think that the work that we have done through these partners, and many other countries have done, has saved many, many lives in an incredibly difficult situation.

And of the money—

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman's time has expired.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. That has been provided—

Chairman MCCAUL. The chair now recognizes Mr. Castro.

Mr. CASTRO. Thank you, Chairman.

Secretary Blinken, welcome. And thank you for being here today, and thank you so much for your testimony and for your years of service as Secretary of State to our country.

And, speaking of refugees, before I get to the question, I want to note that my city of San Antonio, my hometown and the place I represent, is home to a growing and vibrant community of Afghan-Americans, many of whom are from the Khost Province and fled Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover of the country. I appreciate the work the State Department and other government agencies and nonprofits have done to help them adapt to their new lives in the United States.

I wanted to ask you a question about the 2001 AUMF.

Secretary Blinken, one of the legacies of the Afghan war is the 2001 Authorization for the Use of Military Force, which authorizes military force against al-Qaeda. This law continues to be in force 23 years after it was first enacted and has been used by this administration for military action across the world.

In a sense, the war that began on 9/11 will not end as long as this authority continues to be in use, and our Nation remains at war across the world, with little transparency for the American people. While much of this is reported to the Congress, too much remains classified and unavailable to the American people.

The Obama administration, in which you served, released in its final days a comprehensive legal and policy framework on the use of military force. Will the Biden administration do the same and release a report so the American people know where we are still at war?

Secretary BLINKEN. I appreciate what you are saying and the point that you are making. I can't speak to what we will do in the remaining weeks of this administration on something like that—

Mr. CASTRO. Do you think that it is a good idea in the same way that the Obama administration did?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think we should, in any event, as we have been very open to doing, revisit various authorizations and authorities to make sure that they are right for the moment we are in, not the moment we were in 20 years ago.

Mr. CASTRO. I want to speak also to a very important issue—it was mentioned that you are headed to the Middle East perhaps right after this committee meeting—and that is the war in Israel and Gaza.

And I have—and I think you know; I have said it both publicly and privately—I have great respect, obviously, for our President, for your service, for the work that others, like Bill Burns, have done in trying to reach a cease-fire agreement. At the same time, this will be one of the defining foreign policy legacies of this time, and I am profoundly disappointed in how it has been handled.

All of us on this dais have supported Iron Dome to protect the Israeli people over the years. We have supported the money in the Memorandum of Understanding that goes for 10 years. We have condemned in the harshest terms October 7th. We have sanctioned Hamas and other terrorist groups and warned anybody about associating with them around the world.

And, at the same time, what we have seen by the Israeli Government, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, has been inhumane. In fact, it has amounted to war crimes. When an army targets civilians in refugee camps, in hospitals, in schools, in churches, in religious institutions, and does it repeatedly, over and over again, those are war crimes. And the people of Israel, many people in Israel, have said so. Former ministers in the Israeli Government have said so.

And I wish that this had turned out differently. I wish you all had been successful in getting the cease-fire. But when you weren't, I wish that we had used more leverage with the far-right Netanyahu government, the same way that Ronald Reagan did years ago, the leverage of withholding offensive weapons to get them to change what they are doing. Because what they are doing has been inhumane, and the world has seen it.

We live in a different world now. This is no longer the world of the Vietnam War, certainly not World War II, not even the world of the Gulf War in the early 1990's. The world is much more transparent now. People can—all of us are essentially social demographers and documentarians who can record the world around us and then send that out to everybody else around the world. And that is why the world has become more transparent.

And people can see the inhumanity on both sides. But, again, we have taken action to go after Hamas, to label them as terrorists, to sanction them, to do what we can to stop them. We have not done enough to stop Benjamin Netanyahu and what he is doing to the Palestinians.

And my question is whether you believe we should have done anything differently.

Secretary BLINKEN. And I see I am about to be out of time. I am happy to take that up, I am happy to respond if you want to give me more time, but—

Mr. CASTRO. Chairman, can I can get a few seconds on a response?

Chairman MCCAUL. Yes.

Secretary BLINKEN. For us, for me, there will be a lot of time to look back and ask ourselves whether we could and should have done things differently.

From day one, we have sought to accomplish several things:

One, to make sure, to the best of our ability, that we helped Israel ensure that October 7th would never happen again.

Two, to try to prevent a wider war from taking place that would result in more death, more suffering, and likely prolong the war in Gaza, including a potential war with Lebanon and Hezbollah, with Iran, with Iranian-aligned militia groups, and with others. And we have actually successfully done that.

Third, to do our best to make sure that civilians caught in a crossfire of Hamas's initiation, who didn't start this and can do nothing to stop it, are protected. And we have worked every single day to do that.

I have also been to the region 12 times since October 7th—I am heading back in an hour or two—to continue the efforts to get a cease-fire and hostage agreement, to get the hostages home, to get the guns to stop firing, to put Gaza on a better path, and, meanwhile, to try to make sure that people have the assistance they so desperately need—

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman's time has expired, and we wish you well on that trip, sir.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. Is with us every single day.

Chairman MCCAUL. The chair now recognizes Mr. Burchett.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will miss your leadership. Appreciate your friendship, brother.

Mr. Secretary, 13 brave Americans lost their lives. One of them, his people live in my area, and I live on the street named after him, Staff Sergeant Ryan Knauss.

And I remind folks that 13 brave Americans lost their lives, and there are a lot of moms and dads that lost their kids because of this. And the blood is on you all's hands, and that needs to be acknowledged.

But, Mr. Secretary, in your opening remarks, you stated that al-Qaeda has not regrouped in Afghanistan.

A friend of mine who just returned from there wants you to know that al-Qaeda, in fact, has thousands of fighters in Afghanistan and eight new bases there. One of those bases is in the Panjshir Valley, which is the home to Afghan resistance.

In July 2024, a call was issued to foreign fighters around the world to migrate to Afghanistan and join the ranks of the jihad. This was widely covered by the media, and, in fact, there is video evidence of al-Qaeda fighting alongside the Taliban.

Knowing all that, is Hamza bin Laden still alive?

Secretary BLINKEN. I couldn't tell you definitively.

Mr. BURCHETT. Well, he was—if people don't know, he was the leader of al-Qaeda, and his father, Osama bin Laden, was killed. Hamza was thought to be dead sometime in 2019, but new reports suggest that he is alive and still in charge of al-Qaeda.

What is the relationship between Taliban, al-Qaeda, and ISIS?

Secretary BLINKEN. When it comes to ISIS, which is the group that is of greatest concern in Afghanistan, the relationship between the Taliban and ISIS is deeply adversarial.

Mr. BURCHETT. Okay.

Secretary BLINKEN. The Taliban sees ISIS as its number-one enemy. And it has the will but not necessarily the capacity to deal effectively with it.

Mr. BURCHETT. Okay.

Secretary BLINKEN. Al-Qaeda is a different story. This is obviously a group that the Taliban in the past has collaborated with, given shelter to, and otherwise acquiesced to.

Mr. BURCHETT. Okay.

What has the State Department done, briefly, to unify the Afghan resistance groups who want to drive out the Taliban?

Secretary BLINKEN. There is not much of a resistance active in trying to do that.

Mr. BURCHETT. All right.

Well, my friend alleged that an Afghan-American and former U.S. Army noncommissioned officers traveled to Afghanistan after the collapse. And, of course, the Taliban has been benefiting from U.S. cash shipments sent to the Afghan central bank—this is American funds—and that sanctioned terrorists are diverting U.S. aid meant for the Afghan people.

Why are we giving the Taliban millions in taxpayers' dollars while they hold Americans hostage and are killing the Afghan people? And, in my opinion, sir, they will hate us for free; we don't need to be giving them money.

Secretary BLINKEN. We are not giving the Taliban anything, as I discussed with Congressman Mast. We are providing money, as many other countries are, to U.N. agencies, NGO's, to help the Afghan people, who desperately need it.

Mr. BURCHETT. And these agencies are funding the Taliban. Reports are saying—

Secretary BLINKEN. So, of the money—

Mr. BURCHETT. Sir, reports are saying—

Secretary BLINKEN. Under the—

Mr. BURCHETT [continuing]. Between 40 and 80 million U.S. tax dollars are given to the Taliban every dadgum week. I mean, is that acceptable?

Secretary BLINKEN. According to the report that I read and that the Congressman referred to, the SIGAR's report, of the approximately \$8 billion that the international community, including the United States, has dedicated to Afghanistan, about \$10 million of that—that is, 0.1 percent—has no doubt gotten to the Taliban in terms of fees—

Mr. BURCHETT. I don't care if it is a dadgum penny.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. Utilities—

Mr. BURCHETT. I don't care if it is a penny. I mean, for you to sit up here and admit that our enemies—I mean, these people swear to hate Christians and Jews, and that takes care of about everybody in this dadgum room—and we are sending them—I don't care if it is 1 percent. You can—but let me tell you, \$10 million is a hell of a lot of money to the people I represent, sir. And it needs

be to something that you all—let me get all my questions. I am running out.

I have invited President Saleh and Commander Massoud of the Afghan resistance to the U.S. to meet with myself and colleagues. Will the State Department work to facilitate their entry into the country to meet with Congress.

Secretary BLINKEN. I will be happy to followup with your office on that.

Mr. BURCHETT. All right.

Just for the record, this State Department has funded our enemies and they have turned a blind eye to our open southern border. U.S. Border Patrol has caught known terrorists sneaking into our country, likely using our tax dollars to do so. And this disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan was not a solution; it was the beginning of a much bigger problem waiting to happen.

Let me ask you one more question.

Mr. Secretary, according to Ambassador Khalilzad—I am not sure how you say that—do you believe the Taliban violated the Doha Agreement? And you reportedly advised President Biden during the interagency review to endorse the agreement conditions and not withdraw until the Taliban complied.

Secretary BLINKEN. The Taliban was in violation of the Doha Agreement in a number of ways. It was in violation when the previous administration drew down forces repeatedly. It was in violation during the time that we were in office before the evacuation—

Mr. BURCHETT. But why did you advise condition—conditionally?

Secretary BLINKEN. When it comes to the agreement, what we tried to do was to get them to abide by the conditions—notably, to engage in a negotiation with the Afghan Government to produce a new government that would bring everyone together.

They didn't do that. But because we had the deadline and because we had the prospect of the Taliban resuming attacks on U.S. Forces, which would have required us to put tens of thousands of Americans back into Afghanistan, we followed through with pulling them out.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, it is clear to me that this group is clearly out of their league, and the new administration couldn't get here fast enough.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields.

The chair recognizes Ms. Titus.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Just to bring things back to a little bit to the realm of reality, throughout this do-nothing Congress, which has been led by the Republicans, we have seen time and time again the majority's lack of interest in actually solving problems.

On this committee, the Republicans have blown a lot of smoke about the process, they have tried to hold you in contempt, and they have ignored our, kind of, foreign-policymaking responsibilities by just not paying any attention to democratic backsliding in

Georgia, what has just happened with the toppling of Assad in Syria, just to do nothing but yammer about who is qualified and who is not to make these kind of decisions.

You know, Democrats, on the other hand, have been focused on real solutions. We took the after-action report and introduced legislation codifying some of these recommendations in an effort to support the State Department's crisis response, to protect our Afghan allies, which they claim they want to do, and to position our national security apparatus to address the landscape on this, kind of, new Afghanistan situation.

Many of those proposals, in fact, made it into the NDAA that just came out over the weekend. I was glad to see some of those proposals in the State Department's appropriation, or authorization, and one of those that I was especially pleased with was my CARE Authorization Act. This would codify the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts at the State Department for the next 3 years.

I wonder, Mr. Secretary, if you could talk about the importance of the CARE program, this measure to codify it, and how it can impact the work that you are doing in the new landscape.

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, thank you very much. And I deeply appreciate the support that you have shown and other Members have shown for these efforts.

We have an obligation that I believe is a strong, bipartisan obligation and sense of responsibility to the many Afghans who stood beside us for 20 years in Afghanistan. And we have worked very hard, as I said, to revitalize the SIV, Special Immigrant Visa, program. We have brought in more people, more visas, in the last 3 years, almost as many as in the entirety of the program, going back to 2009.

But part of that, of course, as well as refugees who come in under other parts of the law, need a tremendous amount of support when it comes to relocating them, resettling them here in the United States.

And the Department established this effort and this office to do just that: to work to make sure that we could bring Afghans out, get them to so-called lily pad countries where we could finish processing them, then to bring them to the United States, and then to work with resettlement agencies to make sure that they could be resettled and integrated into communities.

And we have also seen an incredible outpouring from Americans all across this country through a sponsorship program we set up so that private individuals and groups could also welcome Afghans to this country. And we have seen tens of thousands of people stand up to do that.

But we do need the, I think, ongoing support from the Department to make sure that we have the people in place to continue this effort, and so we welcome congressional efforts to support that.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

I would like to followup about the SIVs.

You know, the report from the majority said that—or alleged that President Biden abandoned our allies, but the numbers tell an entirely different story. As you referenced, during Trump's time in office, the SIV coordinator role was vacant for the entire time.

Just to give the numbers to the point you make, Trump only issued 7,116 SIVs in a 3-year period, and processing time increased from 480 days in January 2017 to 996 days in January 2021.

When you were here in 2021, you spoke to us about this immense backlog that the administration had inherited of more than 17,000 applications of SIVs. Ambassador Smith affirmed that the Trump administration had taken—this is a quote—taken no steps to reduce the backlog.

In just his first 8 months of the administration, however, President Biden issued 8,760 Afghan SIVs and halved the processing time.

So, you know, the success is in those numbers, and it is very clear what the emphasis has been under the previous administration, not what has been alleged.

And can you just talk a little bit about how you were able to accomplish this?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, I think you covered it very well, but simply to say that, yes, we inherited a program that was basically stuck. Nothing was happening. There hadn't been an interview for someone to get their visa going back to March 2020. We had a backlog of about 17,000, 18,000 people.

And as soon as we came in, we restarted the interviews. The President issued an executive order—one of the very first—instructing us to look at what we could do to cut the delays, to beef up the staffing.

We cut the time in half for processing SIVs. I quintupled the resources at the State Department going to look at the applications so that we could get people through the system.

And, as a result—I won't repeat the numbers that you cited—we rebooted a program that had been moribund and we brought many, many, many Afghans here.

But that didn't stop after the evacuation. And as I noted, since then, almost 70,000 Afghan SIVs. And that was as many in 3 years as—

Chairman MCCAUL. With all due respect, Secretary—
[Crosstalk.]

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. The entirety of the program.

Chairman MCCAUL [continuing]. The gentleman's time has expired.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you very much. Thank you for doing that.

Chairman MCCAUL. The chair recognizes Mr. Baird.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I would like to start my comments—I appreciate you being here, Mr. Secretary, but I want to express my appreciation to the Gold Star Families that are here today, and I also want to express my sorrow for your loss. And one of those was Corporal Humberto Sanchez from my area, Logansport, Indiana. So I just want to make that on the record because of their sacrifice.

But, Mr. Secretary, I have questions about whether or not you have expressed opposition to the unconditional withdrawal to the President or Mr. Sullivan or to NATO. Because on April 21st you made a visit to Brussels to talk with NATO, and after your visit you made an unannounced visit to Afghanistan on April 15th, 2021.

Could you give us some idea of what the purpose of that visit was? And then what information did you bring back and share with the President from this unannounced visit?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

The purpose of the visit was to see for myself the situation on the ground in Afghanistan, to hear directly from our embassy how they were pursuing the mission—our diplomatic mission, our mission to bring more SIVs out—and also to talk to Afghans, not just from the government but from across society, which I did on that trip, to hear from them how they saw the situation as it was evolving.

And that was a very informative trip, as were my many discussions at NATO with our allies and partners throughout that period.

Now, I am not going to share the advice or counsel that I gave to the President. That is between me and him. And having said that, I think what we were looking to do was to see if we could get the Taliban to meet its requirements under the agreement, particularly to engage in a negotiation with the Afghan Government to have not only an enduring cease-fire but also to have a political transition in Afghanistan.

We worked on that until the day that the Afghan President, Ghani, fled. In fact, I was on the phone to him the night before he fled on August the 14th, in which he told me that he wanted to continue working on getting an agreement with the Taliban but, if he couldn't, he would stay and fight to the death. And he left the next day.

So my trip back then helped to inform our diplomacy, our approach to what we were trying to do. And I wish we could have gotten, obviously, the Taliban to agree to meet its commitments, but we didn't.

Mr. BAIRD. So thank you.

The thing that I am also interested in: Do you feel that the President acted on any of the information that you brought back to him from that meeting? And was it any coincidence that the President announced an unconditional withdrawal just 6 days after you had that meeting with him?

Secretary BLINKEN. The President absolutely factors in—and I know firsthand—the information, the ideas, the recommendations that I bring to him, that many others in the administration bring to him.

And we have a very deliberate process for working through all of these issues. And he has insisted from day one on hearing from everyone, on making sure that we are all questioning our assumptions, our biases going in. That is the way he operates. But, ultimately, he has to make the decisions. We can all give our recommendations and advice. He is the one who has to make the judgments; he is the one that makes the final call.

Again, it was our effort and our policy to see the Taliban meet its obligations. It didn't. But I remind again that we had a deadline that was bequeathed to us. And during that period from the Doha Agreement to the evacuation, the Taliban agreed that it would not attack our forces or partner forces, it would stay away from the cities. Had we not fulfilled the Doha Agreement in terms of removing our forces from Afghanistan, those attacks would have resumed on

us, on our partners, on the cities. And, as I said, it would have required sending in thousands more Americans to defend against those attacks and to try to hold on to Afghanistan.

Mr. BAIRD. Thank you.

I yield back.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields.

The chair recognizes Ms. Jacobs.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being here.

Thank you to the Gold Star Families who are here for your sacrifice and for representing the Gold Star Families that we know have sacrificed so much over the last 20 years. I represent San Diego, the largest military community in the country, and my community has borne the cost of this 20-year war.

And so, Secretary Blinken, rather than repeatedly, you know, revisiting the events of 3 years ago, I would really like to look ahead and consider what we actually learned from America's two-decade, \$2.3-trillion investment in Afghanistan, an investment which was intended to foster democratic governance and State capacity but which ultimately fell short, as evidenced by the fact that the government instantly collapsed after our departure and is longstandingly ranked as one of the most corrupt states in the world.

So the Global Fragility Act, a law which was signed by President Trump, was designed to incorporate some of these lessons from Afghanistan and to pilot a more integrated strategic approach to how we deal with fragile and conflict-afflicted regions.

Reflecting on the shortcomings of our 20-year war and the withdrawal's aftermath, what key insights have guided the Department's evolving approach to conflict prevention and stabilization? And how have these lessons shaped the implementation of the Global Fragility Act to ensure that future engagements emphasize building resilient, accountable institutions rather than just propping up hollow, corrupt ones?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, I think you said it very well.

I think one of the lessons that I, at least, take away from the 20 years is that, while very well-intentioned and noble in aspiration, the idea of nation-building and trying to impose a democracy on a country, in effect, by military means alone is simply not going to work, and that while security is necessary, it is not sufficient to getting the job done.

And unless you have a whole-of-government and really a whole-of-society approach that looks at the various things that are likely to drive people apart and create conflict within a society, you are unlikely to stop it and you are unlikely to see the emergence of a stable—never mind democratic—government.

And I think what you and others have done in your work in support for the Global Fragility Act very well reflects that insight. Because if we are not operating across society and across the government—and not only us; NGO's, the private sector, and others—again, we are unlikely to actually prevent these countries from failing, never mind building something successful.

So we have now had some beginnings of experience with the Global Fragility Act, but, as you know very well, the other insight

is that this doesn't happen overnight, it doesn't happen by flipping a light switch. These are engagements and investments that we have to sustain over a decade.

So we are in the early years of this, but I think this is a much better approach to trying to get the results that, again, are extremely well-intentioned but, I think, Afghanistan and, in different ways, Iraq shows us are unlikely to be achieved just by focusing on security and the military.

Ms. JACOBS. Well, I couldn't agree with you more.

And, you know, I know one of the other things that the Afghanistan withdrawal revealed was a sort of systemic vulnerability in the Department's ability to manage urgent, high-risk situations.

So I was also wondering if you could talk about what sort of organizational measures you have implemented to streamline decisionmaking authority, improve interagency coordination, ensure rapid, accurate communication during future emergencies, and how have these reforms addressed some of the issues identified in the After Action Review?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. Thank you very much. This is something we have taken very seriously, and as you know and I think as the chairman knows very well, members of the committee know, we undertook an After Action Review.

I brought back a very senior retired member of the Department, Ambassador Dan Smith. He conducted interviews of 150 current and former State Department officials, myself included, on this period basically from January 2020 through the evacuation to look at the State Department and what we did right, what we did wrong.

And as I mentioned earlier, a number of important recommendations came out of that to strengthen us going forward. We had 34 recommendations in 11 categories. We have taken 40 actions since then.

And just very quickly, one was the need to strengthen our overall crisis preparedness and our response capabilities. We didn't have, before this, a common operating picture of what was going on in a given emergency situation. We stood up something called the Orion platform. We would bring together everything in one place—cable traffic, news sources, intelligence, risk indicators, accountability for our engagement with U.S. citizens, all in one place.

Before, we had a dispersed staff; we didn't have the proper capacity to surge our people during a crisis. We opened a new, modernized operations center with that capacity, with the flexible spaces to have task forces develop overnight.

We had, before, no comprehensive system for tracking or deconflicting the status of American citizens who are caught in the middle of a conflict. So we stood up a streamlined and cloud-based system to track, to communicate with American citizens in real-time to avoid duplication, overlap.

There are a number of things. I would really commend to you—

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentlelady's time has expired.

The chair now recognizes Mr. Barr.

Mr. BARR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your service as chairman of this committee, and thanks for the great job you have done for us as chairman.

Secretary Blinken, thank you for your service.

In this, your last appearance before this committee as Secretary of State, I do want to ask you some tough questions, though, about what I see as not only a chaotic retreat from Afghanistan but probably the biggest foreign-policy blunder of the administration over the last 4 years but, I would argue, maybe even the last generation.

The failure was not the 20-year fight against terrorism in Afghanistan. That was not the failure. In fact, that was a success, where the brave men and women of this country who wear our uniform kept the homeland safe because they took the fight to the terrorists. And, in fact, we eliminated terrorists like Osama bin Laden because of their valor and their bravery.

That was not the failure. The failure that dishonored their 20-year service was the chaotic and disastrous retreat.

And so, from your opening statement, you said it is important to put it in context, the events of August 2021. Important, I agree. So let's talk about the Doha Agreement, Mr. Secretary.

According to Ambassador Khalilzad, you believed the Taliban violated the Doha Agreement, and you purportedly advised President Biden during the interagency review to enforce the agreement's conditions that Secretary Pompeo, your predecessor, and President Trump had entered into and not withdraw until the Taliban complied.

Why did you advise on this conditionality?

Secretary BLINKEN. To be very clear, what—and, again, I am not going to get into my advice to the President. I can tell you what our policy was.

The policy was to seek compliance with the agreement and to get the Taliban to live up to what it had promised to do, which was——

Mr. BARR. Right. And I am going to reclaim my time. Yes, I agree with that. But the Taliban failed to live up to the agreement. The Taliban failed to engage in intra-Afghan negotiations, correct?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Mr. BARR. The Taliban was inflicting violence on Afghan forces, correct?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Mr. BARR. And the Taliban conducted indirect-fire attacks against American forces. Is that correct.

Secretary BLINKEN. Prior to the evacuation, that may have been incidental. But everything else you said is certainly correct.

Mr. BARR. Well, I don't think President Biden listened to you, and I don't think he was implementing the Doha Agreement. It was not that he was bound by the Doha Agreement. He disregarded the Doha Agreement. And he said we are going to retreat regardless of the Doha Agreement, and that is what happened here.

Let me talk about NATO, because——

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, just to be clear, the Doha Agreement said we would be out by May 31, 2021. That is what we inherited.

Mr. BARR. Yes, based on conditions, Mr. Secretary, and you know that. In fact, you acknowledged that the Taliban was failing to live

up to the conditions. And so Doha did not bind your administration to retreat the way you did.

Secretary BLINKEN. What would have happened if we had not—what would have happened had we not—

Mr. BARR. Certainly not the way you did.

Now, Mr. Secretary, I want to talk about NATO, because you all talk about and tout this great strengthened NATO alliance.

I was just in Europe in October. I agree, NATO's strong, but it is not because of your retreat from Afghanistan. It is because of Vladimir Putin invading Ukraine that required NATO to get stronger, despite the invitation to aggression that the retreat from Afghanistan gave to Putin.

Let me ask you about NATO and how NATO felt about the policy of this administration back in 2021.

According to the State Department documents—documents that we subpoenaed—our NATO allies wanted the Biden-Harris administration to enforce the conditions of the Doha Agreement.

You met with former NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg in March 2021 at the NATO ministerial meeting, correct?

Secretary BLINKEN. Uh-huh. That is correct.

Mr. BARR. Yes. And according to State Department documents, Mr. Stoltenberg opposed an unconditional withdrawal, and you, in response, stated, quote, “I share your view that it would be preferable to reach a political settlement before foreign troops depart.”

We have also learned that you were jolted by how strongly NATO officials argued against a complete withdrawal.

Did you share NATO's concerns with the White House?

Secretary BLINKEN. I shared everything I heard from NATO allies and partners with the White House, with my colleagues, with the President. That is my job.

Mr. BARR. General Miller testified that NATO leaders were, quote, “unhappy,” unquote, with the President's unconditional withdrawal, and they, quote, “voiced that unhappiness in different publications.”

Then your No. 2, Mr. Chollet, lied to this committee, stating NATO itself didn't take a position.

We are told by public sources that NATO Secretary-General Stoltenberg was, quote, “livid,” informing Secretary Austin and yourself that he, quote, “strongly disagreed with the decision and felt that NATO's collective position hadn't been taken into account,” unquote.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. I will let Mr. Stoltenberg speak for himself, someone I have great respect for. But that is not the—

Mr. BARR. Yes. So here is the bottom line. NATO is stronger today, but not because of you all. NATO is stronger because your weakness invited Putin to move against Ukraine.

You signaled you weren't going to stand with our NATO allies. You didn't care. President Biden didn't care about our NATO allies and what they thought about a retreat from Afghanistan. Instead, what it did is it signaled weakness, and Putin took advantage of it.

The reason NATO is stronger today is because of the invasion. It is not because of U.S. policy.

Secretary BLINKEN. No, that is incorrect.

Mr. BARR. I yield.

Secretary BLINKEN. The reason NATO is stronger today is because of President Biden's leadership. This alliance is bigger, it is better resourced, it has got more members because of his leadership. And if you ask any NATO ally, that is exactly what they will tell you.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman's time is expired.

The chair now recognizes Ms. Manning.

Also, I would like to ask unanimous consent that the gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Van Orden, be allowed to sit on the dais and participate in today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

Ms. MANNING. And we will certainly miss you, and thank you for your service.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you very much. Thank you, Chairman McCaul.

Thank you Ranking Member Meeks.

Thank you, Secretary Blinken, for your service and for your answer to that last question.

I want to express my appreciation for the Gold Star families in the room today. I have a Gold Star mother on my staff, and I do understand the terrible sacrifices those families make.

I must say, I am disappointed that we are having yet another hearing on the now 3-year-old withdrawal from Afghanistan. It seems to me that the fall of the Assad regime in Syria and what happens next, including the potential resurgence of ISIS or other terrorist groups, has major consequences for our security and the future of the region, and it would be a much better use of our time to talk about that topic today.

So, Mr. Chairman, I would respectfully suggest that the committee hold a hearing and a classified briefing on this critical situation, the situation in Syria, next week.

Chairman MCCAUL. [inaudible.]

Ms. MANNING. Thank you very much. I look forward to that meeting before I am no longer on this committee.

Mr. Secretary, in your view, what are our core interests that are at stake in Syria?

Secretary BLINKEN. A number of them. First and foremost, of course, is protecting our forces that are there, that remain there. Second is making sure to the best of our ability that ISIS does not reconstitute.

Through the Obama administration, then the Trump administration, we were successful in eliminating the territorial caliphate that ISIS had developed in Syria. We don't want to see that revive.

And in particular, there are thousands of foreign terrorist fighters who are detained in a detention center that is being policed by our Kurdish partners in Syria. We want to make sure that that is preserved.

Third, there may be, and I very much hope there is, an opportunity to move Syria away from the disaster of recent decades toward a country that is unified, that reflects all of the different communities that make up Syria, and so that we get a political transition that is inclusive and that brings everyone together.

We have an interest in seeing that because if Syria goes the other way, if it fragments, then we are likely to see more mass migrations, we are likely to see more places in Syria that become centers for terrorism and extremism, none of which is in our interest.

Ms. MANNING. Mr. Secretary, the President-elect has suggested that we have nothing, no interest in Syria, that he doesn't want to get involved there when he takes over.

What impact would that have if the United States were simply to step aside and wash our hands of what is going on in Syria?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, again, as I just said, in fact there was a, I think, very important success through the Obama administration, that was completed by the first Trump administration, in eliminating this territorial caliphate that ISIS had established in Syria.

That was a job very well done over two administrations, and I believe that the incoming administration will have an interest in preserving the gains that it helped achieve.

Ms. MANNING. To what do you attribute the resurgence of the rebels in Syria and the fall of the Assad regime?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think what we are seeing is a result of a number of factors.

But, first, all of the outside patrons of the regime—Hezbollah, Iran, Russia—were at the very least distracted and in some cases on the ropes because of problems of their own making and problems that we helped exacerbate for them.

Second, Assad's utter refusal to engage in any kind of political process to try to bring the country together, despite everything he had inflicted on the country, I think that sowed the seeds of his downfall.

Ms. MANNING. I do want to address one thing that we are seeing happen in Afghanistan.

Since the fall of Kabul in 2021, we have witnessed the tragic consequences of the takeover of the Taliban, particularly on the Afghan women and girls.

Women who had high-ranking positions, who had good, productive jobs, are no longer able to work. Girls who were attending school are no longer able to attend school.

When I read the Trump Doha Agreement, I was shocked by how few conditions there were in there for the Taliban. There were no protections requested for Afghan women and girls.

Since the withdrawal we have seen the Taliban issue more than 100 edicts targeting women and girls, restricting not just their education and their ability to work, but also their ability to leave their homes, their ability to seek healthcare services from male providers.

And just recently, the Taliban issued an edict suspending medical education for women. We know what this means. Afghan women will eventually be unable to get medical care that they need. This will be a disaster not just for the women of Afghanistan but for the country.

What steps have you taken to push back on those edicts and help the vulnerable Afghan women and girls.

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, these edicts are abhorrent, and they would take Afghanistan back to the Dark Ages.

From day one, we have worked to do everything we can to defend, support, and, where we can, empower women and girls in Afghanistan, including having senior officials whose mission is to do just that, including setting up different mechanisms so that their voices can be heard in our policy deliberations and in the international policy deliberations, including when it comes, for example, to recognizing the Taliban. We have sanctioned many members of the Taliban.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentlelady's time is expired.

Secretary BLINKEN. I am happy to followup.

Chairman MCCAUL. The chair recognizes Ms. Salazar.

Ms. MANNING. Thank you.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Mr. Blinken, for being here with us.

As you know, the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan had ramifications around the world, not only in the Middle East, and not only including the messages to dictators just like the Taliban, but to other people, specifically the Western Hemisphere.

And I just want to concentrate my time on three countries that are highly important for my constituents, starting with Venezuela.

Sir, I hear that you are planning to cancel the oil licenses to actors like Chevron and Repsol and others. And my question is, are you planning to cancel those oil contracts before or after January 10, which is when Maduro is supposed to be assuming the Presidency?

Secretary BLINKEN. I can't speak to the actions that we will take in terms of when we will take them. I am happy to followup with your office.

Ms. SALAZAR. You know, you can take this opportunity to announce, sir, that we are not going to be doing business with the dictators anymore. And the whole world is looking at you. So why don't you send the right message to Maduro in saying, "If you steal the elections, you are not going to make any money off of it"?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, I think we have been sending very clearly the message about how we see the election, how we see the abuse of the system by Maduro, with the work that we have done to support Mr. Gonzalez and others going forth.

Ms. SALAZAR. I know, sir, but the problem is that if the Maduro regime has money from Chevron, that goes to PVDISA, it goes to the treasury, and then they have more money for their oppressive apparatus. You know that.

Secretary BLINKEN. And as you know, the opposition supported all the efforts that we took to see if we could get an election that would reflect the will of the people.

We got them an election. We saw the will of the people. Unfortunately, it has not been recognized.

Ms. SALAZAR. And they stole it.

Secretary BLINKEN. Right. And so now—

Ms. SALAZAR. And now he is going to be sworn in on January the 10th. But you can send a message to Chevron, saying: No more oil for now.

Secretary BLINKEN. We will take the necessary steps to make clear—

Ms. SALAZAR. But I hear that you are thinking about doing that. Is that correct?

Secretary BLINKEN. Again, everything is on the table right now, including in terms of the licenses.

Ms. SALAZAR. Good.

Now let's go to Colombia, sir. President Petro from Colombia has asked President Biden to pardon a guy, but most people here won't know who he is. His name is Simon Trinidad. He is a terrorist. He is serving 60 years in prison at a Federal prison for kidnapping three American contractors.

What was your recommendation to the President? To pardon Simon Trinidad?

Secretary BLINKEN. I am not aware of that request, but I am happy to followup. I am not aware—

Ms. SALAZAR. You are not aware?

Secretary BLINKEN. I am not aware of that person.

Ms. SALAZAR. But you know, if that request should go through the State Department, that is you.

Secretary BLINKEN. I imagine it would.

Ms. SALAZAR. So you have not heard about that.

Secretary BLINKEN. I have not heard.

Ms. SALAZAR. But if that were to be the case within the next hours, what recommendation would you give the President?

Secretary BLINKEN. I would have to make sure that I am fully informed.

Ms. SALAZAR. Well, he is a terrorist.

Secretary BLINKEN. Again, I want to see—if there is something, I want to see it, understand it, and read it. But certainly his record speaks for itself.

Ms. SALAZAR. Understand. But you understand that if you were to pardon Simon Trinidad, you will make every single Colombian living in the United States a Republican, right? And we don't want to do that.

I mean, we are happy about that, but that is not the honorable thing to do.

So make sure that President Biden doesn't make a mistake. Just it is a humble opinion.

Let's go to Cuba. Is Cuba under review to be removed from the list of countries sponsors of terrorism? Is it under review, sir?

Secretary BLINKEN. I don't anticipate any changes in our policy toward Cuba during the pendency of this administration.

Ms. SALAZAR. All right. I am happy you are saying that, laudable to hear that. But specifically is it under review right now?

Because if you are going to remove a country from a list of terrorists, of the countries sponsors of terrorism, you need to start a review. And my question is, is it a yes or a no, is Cuba under review?

Secretary BLINKEN. Under the law, depending on the different authorities of this kind, some mandate a regular review, others don't. All I can tell you right now, sitting here today, is I don't anticipate any changes in our policy.

Ms. SALAZAR. So you are telling me that between now and January 20, the President of the United States is not planning to re-

move those bastards, the Cuban regime, off the list of countries that sponsor terrorism?

Secretary BLINKEN. As I said, I don't anticipate any changes in our policy.

Ms. SALAZAR. You don't anticipate?

Secretary BLINKEN. Right.

Ms. SALAZAR. So how can I interpret "anticipate"? Can you commit right now that that is not going to happen? You know why, because all I am doing is trying to prevent to give money to the repressive apparatus that has been taking everything away from the Cubans.

You are aware of that, right? So I just need to make sure that you understand the message from my community.

Secretary BLINKEN. I—

Ms. SALAZAR. Do not do that. Don't give them the oxygen that they want to continue greasing the repressive apparatus. Tell me. You have 20 seconds.

Secretary BLINKEN. Again, I can't—I do not make decisions for the President. The President—

Ms. SALAZAR. Sure you do. Come on, sure you do. You are the State Department.

Secretary BLINKEN. I do not make decisions for the President. The President makes decisions. All I can tell you is—

Ms. SALAZAR. You give the recommendation whether to take them or—tell me. I am sorry.

Secretary BLINKEN. All I can tell you is—

Ms. SALAZAR. Tell me.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. I don't anticipate any changes in our policy toward Cuba between now and the end of this administration.

Ms. SALAZAR. Thank you. I am going to take your word as your bond. Let's keep it that way. Appreciate, sir.

Thank you.

Chairman MCCAUL. The time of the gentlelady is expired.

The chair recognizes Mr. Stanton.

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

Secretary Blinken, I would like to focus my questions on a topic of great importance to my home State of Arizona: the U.S.-Mexico relationship.

I believe we are at a make-or-break moment for the region. Our two countries face significant shared challenges, and there remains a lot of work to do to address migration, securing our borders against illicit drugs trafficked north and arms trafficked south, and to fight pervasive organized crime.

But the U.S.-Mexico relationship is more than just migration and security. Our economies are fundamentally intertwined. Mexico recently surpassed China to become the U.S.' largest trading partner, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs in my home State of Arizona.

And I am particularly excited about the vast economic potential of near-shoring. Moving supply chains closer to the United States market as hundreds of businesses, including the semiconductor supply chain enterprise, is critical to our national security, move

from Asia back to America or to North America or even Latin America.

Meanwhile, the upcoming World Cup gives us an opportunity to forge a durable security relationship to address international threats.

There is a choice in front of us now: Do we choose to forge a strategic path forward together, rooted in mutual respect and cooperation, or do we each go it alone?

The Mexican Government recently passed a series of sweeping constitutional reforms that will harm the U.S.-Mexico relationship—overhauling its independent judiciary, eliminating independent regulatory agencies, and closing access to its energy markets.

These changes could undermine Mexico's obligation under the USMCA, and I have heard from business leaders in Arizona and around the country who are anxious that these reforms will hurt investor confidence and their ability to do business in Mexico.

Secretary Blinken, how do you see these constitutional changes impacting our economic relationship with Mexico?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, first, you are exactly right about the importance of that economic relationship. It is vital to this country, it is vital to Mexico, and our citizens benefit from it every single day.

Second, the Mexicans, of course, have the sovereign right to make their own laws, amend their own Constitution. That is not for us to say.

As their friend and partner, and as countries that are bound together by the USMCA though, we do have opinions on some of the steps they are taking.

And we have raised concerns about certain aspects of the constitutional reform, the judicial reform in particular, and we have shared those very clearly and very directly with the Mexican Government, both with former President Lopez Obrador and with President Sheinbaum.

But the Mexicans will make their own decisions about this. But the concerns that we have underscored are exactly what you have just cited, which is what effect does this actually have on the private sector and investment that is so critical to actually meeting the full potential of this relationship, including things like near-shoring, including having a supply chain where Mexico and the United States are joined in the most critical things necessary to our economies and even to our security.

Mr. STANTON. And I want to commend Ambassador Ken Salazar for speaking with such clarity on this most important issue.

There was a recent discussion about sweeping 25 percent tariffs on all imports from Mexico and Canada by the President-elect.

Secretary Blinken, in your opinion, how would these proposed tariffs impact U.S. and diplomatic interests in Mexico?

Secretary BLINKEN. Look, I don't want to speculate on what the incoming administration will do or not do. That is really not my place. I think what I can say is just to underscore what you said a few minutes ago, which is this economic partnership is so vital, and we want to maximize it, not minimize it.

Mexico is now the U.S.'—it is our top trade partner for goods. We have got \$800 billion traded in the last year we have accounting for, 2023. That is more than a million dollars every single minute of every single day.

So I think we just want to make sure whatever we do, and whatever the incoming administration does, how do we strengthen that, how do we build on that, because it is good for both of our countries.

Mr. STANTON. I mentioned the upcoming World Cup as a unique opportunity, North American World Cup, for U.S., Mexico, Canada to work together to build obviously an incredibly important security partnership to make sure the World Cup is as safe as possible, but then make that a durable security partnership and relationship.

How should the United States work with the Sheinbaum administration on a security partnership to counter the drug cartels' violent crime?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, we have been working incredibly closely together over the last almost 4 years now on exactly that, and I think that work is continuing with the new Sheinbaum administration.

You saw one of the results just the other day. The Mexicans seized, with our help, 20 million fentanyl pills. Each one could have killed an American citizen.

They have seized more fentanyl at the border over the last 2 years than in the previous 5 combined.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman's time is expired.

The chair recognizes Mrs. Kim.

Secretary BLINKEN. This is a product of the work that we are doing together. Thank you.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you, Secretary. Good luck.

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. Thank you, Chairman McCaul and Ranking Member, for holding today's hearing.

The American people and the families of our 13 fallen servicemembers and the Afghan allies are demanding answers.

Secretary Blinken, your appearance before our committee today is long overdue as we seek to understand the role that you played in the Biden-Harris administration's failed and disastrous Afghanistan withdrawal in August 2021.

In your previous conversation with my colleagues before me, you claimed that you have done everything you can to support Afghan women and girls. Yet you excluded them and Afghan civil society from Taliban talks with the U.N. in Doha.

So why do you continue to deprioritize Afghan women and girls?

Secretary BLINKEN. Just the contrary. We have done everything we can to integrate them, their voices, their views, into everything we do, including any engagements that we have had with the Taliban, including in the engagements that we have with partners around the world, particularly when it comes to decisions being made about recognizing or otherwise engaging with the Taliban.

So it is exactly the opposite. We have made every effort to engage women and girls.

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. We are continuing to hear from those families, and also this committee has heard gravely concerning stories of what it was like trying to get through HKIA as an evacuee.

Your own personnel testified that there was little to no guidance from you on who qualified to be evacuated from Afghanistan.

So based on documents we received and witnesses we interviewed, at no point did you identify who the U.S. would be responsible for getting out during the non-combat evacuation operation.

So did you ever determine which populations were eligible to be evacuated?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, absolutely, and that was very clear. They were very discrete populations.

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. Who were they then?

Secretary BLINKEN. American citizens, legal permanent residents, and Afghan allies and partners, particularly those who had stood with us.

But what happens is—

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. How did your Department determine which populations were eligible for evacuation? Who was responsible for making those decisions?

Secretary BLINKEN. These are determinations that are made by the administration, by the State Department.

And when it comes to Afghans at risk, there were many Afghans at risk that we were seeking to get out. And because this was such a dynamic situation, with conditions changing by the hour, at different moments during the evacuation, we had greater access to certain parts of that population than others.

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. Let's talk about some documents that were required then.

Secretary BLINKEN. So we focused where we could.

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. Secretary, what documents did those evacuees have to provide to prove their eligibility?

Are you aware of a hall pass that your Department provided instead of legal identification documentation?

Secretary BLINKEN. We sought to do everything possible to get them the documents or identification that they needed in order, as necessary, to get through the Taliban, which had control of the area around the airport, and, of course, documentation as necessary for our own people.

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. And that hall pass that we are talking about was reprinted in droves. That was then sold to people outside of HKIA. So did you direct them to replace legal identification documents with a forgeable Word document?

Secretary BLINKEN. No. We provided, as best we could, legal and enforceable documents.

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. Then who did? Because apparently they were shared.

Secretary BLINKEN. I have not seen that, but I am happy to look at whatever information you have about that.

Mrs. KIM OF CALIFORNIA. Okay. You know, during the evacuation over 80 Afghans who risked their lives to work with the U.S. Government contacted my office for assistance. So when you include their families, that is more than 526 Afghans who claimed they faced a direct or personalized threat.

But despite the referral to the SIV program, my office is only aware of only, like, 80 applicants who were able to complete the re-

quirements and file. And of those three, none have been approved and are still awaiting processing.

Hearing from those Afghans, the SIV verification process has been difficult and tedious, and according to your deputy, one of the biggest obstacles to the verification process came from SIV applicants who had been employed by the DOD contractors.

And that was well documented, yet you did not ask the DOD for support until the end of July 2021. So why did you wait until just weeks before the Afghanistan withdrawal to fix that obvious issue?

Secretary BLINKEN. No. These were longstanding issues and problems with the SIV program going back many years. And as I said earlier, we inherited a program that was totally moribund. There hadn't been a single interview for an SIV going back to March 2020 when we came to office.

We immediately reinstituted the interviews. I immediately surged resources to go through the SIV applications. We cut the time in half to process the applications. We went from issuing a hundred visas a week on SIVs to a thousand a week.

All of that happened in the space of just 5 or 6 months because of our dedication to the program. But we inherited a program not only moribund, but that had 14 different steps required—by Congress—to make sure that the SIV was issued in the appropriate way.

And, of course, security usually important. We want to make sure that we are not bringing threats into the country. That is important. Being able to document effectively, yes, that they had been working with us.

And the challenge, as you rightly point out, was that, because it was with DOD, it was contractors, many of whom were out of business.

Chairman MCCAUL. All right. The gentlelady's time is expired. I agree this is a very important issue.

Secretary BLINKEN. But we can followup on that.

Chairman MCCAUL. And we would like to talk with you, Mr. Secretary.

The chair recognizes Ms. Madeleine Dean.

Ms. DEAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, Mr. Chairman, I want to echo the words of many others on both sides of the aisle. I feel lucky to have had the chance to serve with you on this committee as you were our chairman, you are our chairman. Look forward to the renaming of this room.

I thank Mr. Meeks as well. It has been a pleasure.

I do acknowledge the attendance of Gold Star Families and other military families and veterans. Thank you for your extraordinary sacrifice and service.

And thank you, Secretary Blinken, for being here, for being in front of us and being available to tell us sometimes harsh truths, and also to just reveal the thoughtfulness that your Department has taken over the course of these years. So I thank you for that.

And it is important to understand what happened with the withdrawal of Afghanistan. It is important to understand what happened before, after, during, after. And my only problem with this report and this set of hearings and this set of questions that you

are facing is that, sadly, this became a partisan investigation and never should have.

This committee, sadly, came up with a report digging into evidence that would only focus on the Biden administration. A 20-year war, a withdrawal set in place by the previous administration.

The cherry-picking was clear. The report's own methodology says, quote, "The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan is understood to encompass the U.S. military retrograde, beginning with the 'Go to Zero' order officially announced by President Biden on April 14, 2021."

That is a strange, very narrow window, if we really want to understand what happened, what went wrong, what went right.

So, Secretary Blinken, just to set the record straight, the Doha Agreement was entered into under the Trump administration. Is that correct?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Ms. DEAN. Signed on February 29, 2020.

The agreement included a commitment to reduce U.S. Forces in Afghanistan to 8,600 troops in 135 days. Is that correct?

Secretary BLINKEN. It is, yes.

Ms. DEAN. The only other force reduction commitment in the agreement was complete withdrawal of U.S. Forces within 14 months. Is that correct?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Ms. DEAN. Then-President Trump, despite not being required by the agreement, ordered more troop drawdowns, as he was eligible to do as President of the United States, those being in September 2020, reduction to 4,500 troops. Am I right?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Ms. DEAN. And then strangely to me, in January 2021, on the administration's way out the door, a reduction to 2,500 troops. Is that correct?

Secretary BLINKEN. It is.

Ms. DEAN. Puzzling. Absolutely puzzling.

So those were all actions taken before Mr. Biden was even sworn into office in January 2021.

What effect did the significant reductions have on the administration and on the withdrawal?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, I think the combination of the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners under the agreement and the reduction in U.S. Forces to 2,500 put the Taliban in the strongest position it had been in since 9/11, and the United States in arguably the weakest position we have been in, because we had the fewest number of forces on the ground that we had had since 2001.

Ms. DEAN. What a terrible, deadly combination of factors. And also, again, so much good was able to be done under those horrifying circumstances. But nothing can take away the tragedy of Abbey Gate.

I would like to move, just as Ms. Manning did, to other issues of the day, very critical issues of the day.

Ukraine. I have always believed that the United States must do everything in our power to be sure that Ukraine has everything it needs to win.

What is going on in these last few weeks of the administration, lifting of any more restrictions, imposing any more sanctions on Russia or Russian banks? What is the administration able to do?

Secretary BLINKEN. We are determined, in the time that we have left, to make sure that, to the best of our ability, Ukraine has everything it needs to be as successful as possible and continue to push back on the Russian aggression, to make sure that it has what it needs, if it chooses, by necessity, to fight through 2025, or, if there is to be a negotiation, that it can negotiate from a position of strength.

And so that means making sure that it has the weapons, the munitions, et cetera, that it has the resources, the money, and also that it has mobilized forces to deal with the aggression.

Ms. DEAN. I appreciate all that.

My time is limited.

Israel-Gaza. Where are we on a cease-fire? It has been 431 days since the horrific Hamas attack, 431 days, hostages still held. Where are we? When will we get them home?

Secretary BLINKEN. We want to get them home now.

Ms. DEAN. Yes.

Secretary BLINKEN. As we speak, there are intense efforts underway to see if we can reach finally a hostage cease-fire deal. Again, it is ongoing. That is as much as I can say right now.

Ms. DEAN. And I hope that humanitarian aid is flowing more fully.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes.

Ms. DEAN. I appreciate your letter. Pleased to see our letter to you.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes.

Ms. DEAN. Again, thank you for your service.

And I yield back.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentlelady yields back.

The chair recognizes Mr. Davidson.

Mr. DAVIDSON. Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, I want to review a couple dates.

First, on February 29, 2020, the Trump administration signed the Doha Agreement with the Taliban. The agreement promised a conditions-based, incremental withdrawal, and the Trump administration delayed that withdrawal precisely because those conditions were not being met.

On April 11, 2021, the Go-to-Zero presence in Afghanistan was given by the Biden administration, and that was given freely by the administration despite not being in compliance with the Doha Agreement.

Your own Deputy Assistant Secretary, Mark Evans, testified before this committee that the decision to go to zero was not contingent upon the Doha Agreement.

Secretary, one of the dates I really want to focus on is July 8, 2024. That is the date that the total withdrawal was finalized by the administration, and the date certain, it shifted from a conditions-based to a date certain. Is that correct?

Secretary BLINKEN. The date certain was there, I believe, starting in April when the President said we would follow through on

the withdrawal that the previous administration had agreed to, except it was extended from May 31 to September.

Mr. DAVIDSON. So it was always going to be date certain, not conditions-based?

Secretary BLINKEN. Well, that was what the Doha Agreement—

Mr. DAVIDSON. So that is what you—look, that is what you said.

So when you made that decision, did the State Department block American citizens from departing from the airfield in Mazar-i-Sharif, Afghanistan?

Secretary BLINKEN. Absolutely not.

Mr. DAVIDSON. They didn't? Who did then? Who blocked them?

Secretary BLINKEN. I am not aware of blocking any U.S. citizens. On the contrary, we were doing everything possible to get citizens out.

Mr. DAVIDSON. You know they were blocked. You know they were blocked.

Secretary BLINKEN. I would be happy to look at any information you have on that. I am not aware of any American citizens who were blocked. And, in fact, we were doing everything possible.

And by the way, I want to thank you and thank every Member who has been involved in this and the work that they did to get Americans out.

Mr. DAVIDSON. Mr. Secretary, your State Department blocked American citizens and Afghan allies from leaving there.

I personally worked with your State Department during those days. I have the emails. I have the photographs of American—blue passport-holding American citizens who were on the airfield awaiting departure, that got clearance for safe third countries to depart to, and the order came down from the U.S. Government.

Was it the State Department?

Secretary BLINKEN. I am not aware of any such orders. I am happy to follow up and look at that. I am certainly not aware of it. We were doing everything possible to get Americans out.

Mr. DAVIDSON. Last year, Colonel Francis Hoang, my classmate, testified before this committee that due to the fiasco in Kabul, many Americans and allies were forced to conduct a dangerous 400-mile journey to Mazar-i-Sharif air base where they were delayed for weeks.

Colonel Hoang testified, quote, that, "We spent 3 weeks hiding these nearly 400 people from the Taliban, keeping them alive and fed, using funds from American donors, all this while the State Department delayed and, frankly, blocked American citizens from leaving."

Secretary Blinken, I have communications, as I said, that show this happened, and you are saying that didn't happen?

Secretary BLINKEN. Why would we block Americans from leaving Afghanistan? Why?

Mr. DAVIDSON. That is the problem I have. I had it at the time. Why?

Secretary BLINKEN. We were doing everything possible to get them out. But I am happy to look at the information.

Mr. DAVIDSON. And here is the thing, Mr. Secretary. As I was working with your State Department while you were Secretary of

State and relaying this information, someone said to me, “Which tail number?”

“Which tail number? You mean, there is more than one plane you guys are blocking? Are you freaking kidding me.”

And then your State Department wanted to deny it, and here today you won’t even acknowledge the truth of that.

It is disgusting to try to blame this on Donald Trump when we all know there is no way that anyone forced you guys to do the dumbest thing possible.

You don’t have to have worn our Nation’s uniform, like I and other people did, to know that first you get the civilians out, then the military, not the other way around.

This has to be one of the dumbest, most poorly executed paths to depart any country possible.

My only hope is that in the 11 embassy evacuations that have happened on your watch—an unprecedented number—you have somehow gotten better at it.

Secretary BLINKEN. Congressman—

Mr. DAVIDSON. It is appalling to see you sit here and say, “Oh, I express sympathy,” and yet have never acknowledged the failures or owned the consequences of it.

In fact, to this date, the only person that has been fired was a lieutenant colonel in the Marine Corps who spoke out.

None of you have been held accountable. None of you even expressed shame or embarrassment. Have you learned anything? Have you learned anything from this?

Secretary BLINKEN. First of all, on the planes, just to come back to it, the Taliban was blocking planes. We worked to clear them. And I am happy to go over that with you, with your office, and also to see any information you have to make sure that we get to the bottom of what you are saying.

But we were certainly not in the business of blocking Americans. We were in the business of getting them out and continuing to do that.

Mr. DAVIDSON. Well, I appreciate you did create a position after that to address the problem. So you clearly had to be aware of it. You created a position to facilitate the coordination after you left them behind.

Secretary BLINKEN. Of course. We were determined to get every American who wanted to get out out. And that didn’t stop on August 31.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields.

Secretary BLINKEN. We got 500 Americans out between then and the end of the year because of that ongoing commitment.

Chairman MCCAUL. The chair recognizes Mr. Crow.

Mr. CROW. Thank you, Chairman.

And thank you, Secretary Blinken, for coming before the committee voluntarily and providing your perspective and helping address the questions of the committee.

As you know, I served multiple combat tours in Afghanistan, and like the tens of thousands of Americans that did, we left pieces of our heart behind in that country.

And even though the military chapter and the diplomatic chapter are largely closed—although there are still issues that are in Amer-

ica's interest—those of us who served in combat roles with the Afghans feel a special obligation to make sure that we are protecting those friends and those folks who, in many cases, saved our lives.

I mean, there are a lot of Americans. And I know you know this well, Secretary. We have had these conversations, and I know this is a sentiment that you share very deeply as well.

I mean, these are people who, at great personal risk to them and their families, took on jobs that helped bring Americans home. And the story of that is not a finished story.

So with that in mind, I would love to hear from you, can you speak to the number of currently eligible SIV Afghans who are in that country? How many do we think are still there? And what are we doing to help get them out? What does the pipeline look like? And what more do we need to do?

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you very much, and thank you for your enduring commitment to this.

So we have right now about 63,000 SIV applicants who are in the so-called pre-chief of mission phase. That is, they have expressed interest, they have started to compile the necessary documentation.

We believe, based on experience, that roughly 20 percent will become fully documented. That is 20 percent of 63,000.

There are 54,000 who are actually at the chief of mission phase right now. Again, based on our analysis, we believe roughly 35 percent of those will likely be approved, because, as you know, unfortunately, many people wash out, either because they simply don't qualify or because of documentation issues, which we have tried to remedy over the last couple of years.

Finally, we have right now 10,000 who have chief of mission approval. The only thing they are waiting for is their interview, which they need to do out of country.

Of those 10,000, about 9,000 are in Afghanistan. We have six flights a week now that are going out of Afghanistan to different places. And so we are working expeditiously to move people out, to finish the process with an interview, and then get them on to the United States.

That is roughly the current population.

Mr. CROW. And I know these averages change, but can you give me a snapshot of a typical month, how many folks are we getting out of Afghanistan in a particular month?

Secretary BLINKEN. We are working to get roughly a thousand a week.

Mr. CROW. Okay. And at the current rate—I worked with House leadership to get 12,000 additional visas authorized earlier this year—at the current burn rate, when do we run out of authorization?

And I obviously will make a pitch to my colleagues here to join our effort to push for 20,000 additional visas in the next appropriation which we are advocating for that.

Secretary BLINKEN. We need that. We need that. We will run out of our—of the allotment we have. That is the basis for our support for getting another 20,000 SIV—

Mr. CROW. When you do think we are going to run out?

Secretary BLINKEN. Let me come back to you with the exact time based on our most recent analysis.

Mr. CROW. Okay. The last piece is, the State Department did a pretty extensive and thorough after-action review. There was a classified version of that, a public version of that.

I spent a lot of time reviewing both documents, and as a result of that, I have introduced legislation, the CRISIS Act, to help codify some of the changes.

Can you just tell us very briefly, what are some of the reforms and changes you have made within the Department to ensure that the problems and the shortfalls that we experienced in the withdrawal, we are learning from those lessons and we are ensuring that we are fixing things going forward?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. And very briefly, and much of this is in the report, including the unclassified version.

We now have a common operating picture that we didn't have before, where we are fusing all of the information that we need in a crisis. Whether it is cables, whether it is open source, whether it is intelligence, we now have what we didn't have before, which is a modern operation center so that we can surge resources, stand up a task force immediately, bring in the other agencies to do that.

We now have what we didn't have before, which is a streamlined, cloud-based system to track all of our engagements with American citizens to make sure we are not duplicating, to make sure that we are in near real-time communication with them.

We are working to better utilize our own personnel. We stood up a 100-person roster of a Rapid Response Corps. People sign up for 6 months.

That means that they are ready on a moment's notice to become part of a task force. They get training throughout that period on what they will need to know if there is an emergency. We stood that up.

I see my time is up. I am happy to go over—

Chairman MCCAUL. Yes, I am just trying to make sure you stay on schedule for your flight, your flight to the Middle East.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, yes.

Chairman MCCAUL. I don't want you to miss that.

Mr. CROW. I appreciate that.

Secretary, thank you.

Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman's time is expired.

Mr. Green is recognized.

Mr. GREEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your leadership on investigating this catastrophic withdrawal.

I am over here, Secretary.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you.

Mr. GREEN. And I want to thank you, Secretary Blinken, for attending today.

I am going to preface my comments with something very similar to what the chairman prefaced his comments with. We have worked well together on near-shoring and stuff like that, getting the Tennessean out of Venezuela. Roger Carstens is my classmate. Did a fantastic job with that.

But today my comments are going to be, as a Global War on Terror veteran who served in Afghanistan, I want to once again recog-

nize the sacrifice of all the Americans that fought for our country in Afghanistan. I lost friends there.

But those of you who came home, your service was not in vain. Those of you who died there, your service was not in vain. You helped keep our country safe for two decades. And I am grateful for your sacrifice and the sacrifices of your families.

As a Night Stalker flight surgeon and an Army ranger infantry officer, I remember our most sacred creed: Leave no man behind.

Secretary Blinken, you and our Commander in Chief left people behind. You left those in your care behind. You left Americans and our allies behind.

Your delayed appearance before this committee, I think, is a disgrace to those Americans who did die in Afghanistan, and your decisions, or the absence of leadership on this issue during the withdrawal of 2021, are directly responsible for the disaster.

Prior to President Biden's Go-to-Zero approach, the Taliban had ignored U.S. attempts for a smooth exit and shown themselves totally ignoble negotiators.

We knew the dangers, and yet, as the military withdrew, you told U.S. Embassy Kabul to remain.

Furthermore, you actually increased personnel. When senior security advisers and leaders at DOD and embassy staff said it was time to make a non-combatant evacuation operation plan, a NEO plan, you said no.

Instead, when the day came for the Embassy to evacuate, there was no plan. You left your personnel high and dry to figure it out on their own.

In fact, you never even issued the NEO. As Secretary of State, that is your responsibility, but instead the NSC had to make that call.

Did you step in? No. The NSC continued to lead the initial response, including decisionmaking regarding Afghan population eligible for evacuation, which should have been State's responsibility.

Because you weren't at the helm, there was little documentation or communication. State personnel had to rely on spur-of-the-moment decisionmaking just to get to the airport, and thousands of evacuees were left in limbo.

Now, I also want to share a story, a conversation I had with the leader of one of our greatest allies, Britain. I had a conversation with Boris Johnson 6, 8 months ago.

I was at dinner with him, and I asked him, I said, "Hey, could you confirm a rumor, Mr. Prime Minister? Could you confirm the rumor that the Commander in Chief of the United States, Joe Biden, you called him and asked him to stay an extra 5 days, just 5 days, so that all the Brits could get out."

And Boris Johnson told me, "Chairman Green, I remember exactly where I was when I made the phone call. I asked for 5 more days, and President Biden told me 'no.'"

This is our greatest ally on the planet, participating in the Red Sea with us against the Houthis when few others would.

I pulled wounded British SAS guys off a target in Iraq. Their blood was on my hands.

And I am going to tell you, that relationship is—I mean, it is one of our greatest, if not our greatest. And yet we slapped them in the

face and said, “No, you don’t get 5 extra days to get your people out,” this according to the Prime Minister of England at the time. I just—I find that unconscionable.

And senior leaders at DOD have come here and testified, senior leaders at DOD have testified on the HASC and told us, “We were telling the State Department 4, 5 months in this drawdown period, ‘Get your stuff together,’ and they didn’t.”

Why?

Secretary BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, I hope you will give me time to respond, because I dispute virtually everything that was said, with great respect though for the Member and particularly for his extraordinary service to our country.

First, did we leave people behind? No, we got them out, including after the deadline of our evacuation.

By the time we got to August 31, we had, as I said, several hundred Americans who were left, who had identified themselves to us as wanting to leave but could not get to, or into, the airport.

I committed to make sure we got them out. And between the end of the evacuation and the end of the year, we got the 500 remaining Americans out who either then, or after August 31, identified themselves as wanting to leave. We made good on that commitment.

Telling the Embassy to remain open, yes, we all wanted the Embassy to remain open. It was fully our expectation that the Afghan Government and the Afghan military would not collapse.

It was the desire of Congress to make sure that we remained engaged in Afghanistan, including to look out for our own citizens, including to make sure we were doing right by the SIVs. And it was fully our intention to continue to bring them out by keeping the Embassy open.

And as I have said earlier, and as many others have testified, no one anticipated the collapse of the forces. No one anticipated the collapse of the government.

When it comes to the NEO, again, let me be very clear. The State Department initiated the NEO. We did. That is what the record reflects.

But this is a collective decision. As an instrumental matter, the State Department initiates it by requesting the DOD. The decision to initiate it was a decision taken by the NSC and ultimately by the President.

Not once before we initiated the NEO did anyone say, “You need to do this,” among the principals in the administration. It was a collective decision on the 14th of August.

Those capitals, provincial capitals, started to fall on the 6th, and by the 14th, we decided that the NEO was imperative.

Now, there is a reason, Congressman, that it was so important that we focus on this. The Ghani government was pleading with us throughout the summer: Don’t engage in an evacuation. That will actually precipitate exactly what we are trying to prevent, which is a collapse of the government, a collapse of confidence, people fleeing the country in uncontrolled ways. So that was also part of our thinking.

But in terms of preparing, yes, we started preparing intensely, going back to April, multiple exercises with different agencies, ta-

bletop and otherwise, planning through different scenarios. We had tripwires, we had indicators, all of which came into effect.

We moved the Embassy in 48 hours to the airport. That wouldn't have happened without a plan. We got control of the airport because we had prepositioned forces. We were able to start moving people out in 72 hours. We moved 120,000 people out, the largest evacuation in the history of this country.

Mr. GREEN. Mr. Secretary, I will tell you that your DOD colleagues don't remember it that way. And I remember your face when we got that secret briefing during the midst of this. During the height of it, we all gathered in HVC, and I am going to tell you, I just, I think our memory here isn't as accurate as it could be.

And I will just leave it at that, Mr. Chairman.

I just—I will never forget the fear in your face and the—I just—I don't have anything else to say.

Chairman MCCAUL. Will the gentleman yield?

Let me just add, I think this is a very important issue the gentleman raised from Tennessee.

And I appreciate your perspective, Mr. Secretary. I will tell you what our investigation revealed: that Ambassador Wilson did not want a NEO. In fact, he punished his staff for even mentioning the word NEO.

And it wasn't—we got from the DOD, as you indicated, on August 6, 2021, that the NSC said, the National Security Council said, "A NEO equates to failure," quote/unquote. That is what was going on. "A NEO equates to failure."

Maybe that is because of President Ghani, as you said, Mr. Secretary. But that—those are really the facts. And only until August 15, the day that Kabul fell, think about that, the day that Kabul falls is the first time that Ambassador Wilson requests a NEO, and by that time, sir, it was too late.

With that, I will recognize Ms. Kamlager-Dove.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you, Secretary Blinken, for gracing us with your presence again.

I have actually some questions about the Sudan, but because we have continued to talk about NEO, I will also ask a question on this.

So Ambassador Wilson testified to the committee during a transcribed interview about the specified reasoning for why he called the NEO on August 15, describing the situation that included thousands of Talib fighters streaming directly into Kabul "a flow that contradicted orders that we—assurances that we had received from the Talibs and orders that we believed had been given for them to stop, by Taliban senior leadership, the expected seizure of two prisons later that day, and the release of thousands of inmates—Talib fighters, ISIS fighters, common criminals—and the abandonment overnight of checkpoints into and within Kabul's Green Zone that were vital to our security.

"We had been striving to maintain embassy operations in accord with the direction given to us. This was no longer possible. And at that point, I recommended to Secretary Blinken our immediate evacuation. He agreed, and the White House subsequently approved a noncombatant evacuation."

The majority has repeatedly pointed to the testimony of military leaders to argue that the State Department waited too long to initiate the NEO.

But Ambassador Wilson had a clear rationale for his timing, and that calling for the NEO too soon would have complicated our ability to get out.

“If we had left earlier, several thousand SIV applicants that we got out, in whatever the number of days that you want to talk about, would not have been able to leave the country.

“We would not have been able to provide support to American citizens trying to get out. Our eyes and ears about what was happening around us would have been drastically degraded.”

Secretary Blinken, would you agree that Ambassador Wilson’s testimony reflects a detailed and realistic understanding of the conditions on the ground.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, I would.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you.

What would have been the repercussions if the State Department had called a NEO before conditions on the ground warranted one?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, it would have actually precipitated those very conditions, and it would have made it more difficult for us to get people out, including American citizens.

The airport was open until August the 15th. We were trying to avail ourselves and push people out to take commercial flights. It would have made it much more difficult to get SIV-eligible people out of the country, other Afghans at risk.

All of that would have been made more difficult by precipitating the very kind of crisis we ultimately solved.

And, again, I come back to a fundamental proposition, which is that no one—and I say this collectively, this is the State Department, this is the intelligence community, it is the DOD—in terms of the consensus view on where this was going, there was no consensus view that the government, the Afghan forces, were going to collapse.

Our military, having worked with them for 20 years, believed that they would stay and fight. They needed to have the sustained support to do that—General McKenzie has said that—including financial and logistic support.

We had no indication that the government would fall. The intelligence community didn’t see that.

We have very remarkable people at the State Department, including those who wrote the so-called Dissent Channel cable, who were very concerned about what would happen after we left in terms of the durability of the government.

I read that cable immediately, I responded to it almost immediately, and many of the measures that they called for in the cable were already in train, because what they were focused on was trying to make sure that we got people out of the country, especially the SIVs.

And as I have talked about earlier, that is exactly what we were doing, having taken a program that was dead in the water, revived it, and accelerated it dramatically.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Thank you also for just even mentioning the dissent cable and the fact that, regardless of if you agree with

them or not, there is still a space for folks within the State Department to register discontent. I certainly hope that that is a practice that will continue in this next administration.

I would now like to ask in the few moments that I have left about the war in the Sudan, which is a catastrophic humanitarian crisis impacting innocent civilians. I think it is a moral outrage.

Over 150,000 have been killed, 11 million have been displaced. The evidence of genocide in Darfur is significant, and I believe an official genocide determination against the RSF and allied militia is long overdue.

Why has the administration refrained from making a genocide determination? And do you intend to come to a decision about a determination before the end of this year?

Secretary BLINKEN. First and very quickly, you are right to put a spotlight on Sudan. It is the worst humanitarian situation in the world by far, by orders of magnitude.

We are working intensely to try, of course, to bring an end to it, but in the first instance, to get assistance to people who desperately need it. We have made some progress on that in the last few weeks with both the SAF and to a lesser extent with the RSF.

But in terms of atrocities, war crimes, genocide, we have been making determinations already about atrocities and war crimes. We are looking at the question of genocide. Whether we complete that review in the time that we have, I can't—

Chairman MCCAUL. I am trying to be respectful. The gentlelady's time is expired.

Let me just, if I could comment. I mean, you did not see it coming. I have heard that over and over.

Perhaps we were getting different intelligence briefings, but I certainly saw it coming, and your own employees in the Embassy saw it coming when they sent the dissent cable to you, a cry for help that Kabul is falling and the Embassy will fall soon. And I don't know how you can say that honestly, sir, with a straight face.

The chair recognizes Mr. Huizenga.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate your work at leading this committee.

Secretary Blinken, how many U.S. citizens are still in Afghanistan?

Secretary BLINKEN. I can't give you an exact number because we never know for sure. There are several—

Mr. HUIZENGA. Do you believe they are all there voluntary? You were going to start to say there are several thousand.

Secretary BLINKEN. No, I believe that the—any American citizens who are left there, several, as have been noted before, who have actually been detained. These are people who went there after the evacuation for one reason or another, have been detained by the Taliban. We are working every day to get them out.

Mr. HUIZENGA. But are you—hold on a second—are you saying that the only people detained are those who went after the evacuation?

Secretary BLINKEN. I am saying the ones that we know of who are detained, we are actively working—

Mr. HUIZENGA. Okay. We can clue you in. I got to give you credit. You were successful in doing this. You have completely pulled me

off of what I was going to ask you about, much to my staff and everybody else's chagrin.

But the crap that you are throwing out here about this is unbelievable. I will tell you, I was in that same briefing when you said that you thought there was, quote, several hundred citizens who were staying in Afghanistan voluntarily.

My caseworker had 185 individuals alone, in my district, the Fourth District of Michigan, that were asking us for help to get out, including those who did make it to HKIA and were beaten by the Taliban, and were known by the U.S. troops. And the troops that are being shown up here, including one of my constituents, who I have referred to as Jose and Carlos and Juan and various things because I haven't wanted to use his real name at his request, who was blown up and injured, and knew every single one of those marines and those Navy corpsmen up there on that screen right now, they have not gotten satisfactory answers.

And I will tell you, Secretary Blinken, that we have citizens there who are not there voluntarily and they want to get out, and the State Department has utterly failed them. Failed them.

Secretary BLINKEN. Congressman, if there are citizens that you have identified that have been in communication with you and that want to get out, please, if you haven't already, share that information with us.

Mr. HUIZENGA. We have shared it. We will share it again, and we will keep asking.

Secretary BLINKEN. And we are happy to sit down and go through it—

Mr. HUIZENGA [continuing]. At some point, the exercise in futility gets a little frustrating as a Member, Secretary Blinken, when it does not feel like you are answering Mr. Green's questions or Mr. Warren's questions, or you are going to have a couple of other military folks who were there, had friends there.

Well, I had a friend who was in Doha, and he is telling me that there was no damn plan to have all of those planes divert to Doha. So they got caught flatfooted. There was no place for them to go. It was a bungled, bungled, bungled exit. So I have to hit on a couple of the things that I have here, and I am going to try to truncate this.

A recent report by Inspector General of Afghan Reconstruction, John Sopko, found, since August 2021, implementing partners of yours from the State Department have paid at least \$10.9 million in U.S. taxpayer funds to the Taliban in form of taxes, fees, and duties. In fact, the SIGAR noted that, while conducting its investigation, your State Department repeatedly refused to cooperate. They then requested that the State Department attest to that it had distributed a questionnaire to all the relevant implementing partners, that responses were not altered, and that no attempts were made to influence the implementers' responses. However, at the time the report was published, your Department refused to sign the attestation.

Mr. Secretary, did you instruct your employees to obstruct the SIGAR investigation of U.S. tax dollars going to the Taliban? And then, since then, has that changed?

Secretary BLINKEN. To the contrary. We have done everything possible to cooperate with SIGAR, 13,000 staff hours dedicated to the SIGAR——

Mr. HUIZENGA. Why would the inspector general say? Is the inspector general lying——

Secretary BLINKEN. SIGAR in his report of, I believe, in 2023 said that the Department was cooperating with SIGAR. So——

Mr. Huizenga. So, while I—so I got to skip all kinds—a whole bunch of stuff. I just will say, Mr. Chairman, I have got a bill, H.R. 9503, Protecting Taxpayer Dollars from Taliban Theft Act, which makes U.S. policy that tax dollars, U.S. taxpayer dollars, do not be paid to the Taliban in the form of taxes, duties, and fees.

I wish I had a few more moments. I have a couple of seconds here. I have got to hit on this. This is about Iran.

Thanks to congressional notification, we know that, on November 8, just days following the Democrats' election loss, you signed off on a sanction waiver providing the Tehran access to \$10 billion in funds of Iraqi electricity payments.

Last dated December 2023, Congress is aware of two releases of funds for humanitarian purposes to Iran. Have there been any other additional transactions since that period?

So you have been allowing them access to the dollars. We know that there was two that had—we got testimony—had problems. They asked for the explanation to be behind closed doors. There was nothing that was top secret about that. It was just that egg was on their face. Have there been any more withdrawals?

Secretary BLINKEN. I assume you have asked the previous administration about the waivers that it issued.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Oh, Okay, Okay, Okay. I guess, actually, we did. Actually, we did. The explanation of why this administration allowed Korean funds, the funds that were used that were shipped to Korea, that were supposed to stay in Korea, why were they shipped to Oman? Why were they allowed to be given a Treasury license——

Secretary BLINKEN. You are confusing two things.

Mr. HUIZENGA [continuing]. And a State Department license.

Secretary BLINKEN. Those are two different things.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Oh, now, you are conflating what had been going on.

Secretary BLINKEN. No, I am saying that the waivers that we issued were the same waivers issued——

Mr. HUIZENGA. They were not. Absolutely one hundred percent not. See, this is the thing. A group of us are actually on the Financial Services Committee; I am one of them. You can't throw this crap out because we actually write the sanctions. We actually know what the law is. And, when you and Treasury come in here and say, "Oh, don't worry your pretty little head about all of these confusing sanctions things," guess what? We wrote the damn things. We understand. And here you are throwing these load of—I wish I could curse more, Mr. Chairman, but I won't. This is so unbelievable.

I am so glad to see this administration and you leaving because you have failed the American people with this.

With that, I am out of time.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman's time has expired.

And, for the record, let me say that I personally, in the Emergency Wartime Supplemental that dealt with Israel, that dealt with Indo-Pacific, and Ukraine, put the sanctions that was waived or not enforced back into law. That would be on energy and on missiles and drones coming out of Iran, funding their terror operations, killing Israelis, and killing Ukrainians.

And, sir, I have to say I agree with my friend here that it is very disappointing that it that has not been—

Mr. HUIZENGA. And, Mr. Chairman, the last administration did not authorize any releases of those funds. This administration did. That is the problem.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields back.

Mr. Schneider is recognized.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Before I start, if the Secretary wants to address the previous thing at all, I would be interested in hearing it.

Secretary BLINKEN. I am happy to share with the Congressman everything we have done. We can go over this. We don't have time to do it now. I am happy to do that. I am happy to show you exactly what we have done, what we haven't done. Happy to get any information that you have to the contrary and work through this.

Mr. HUIZENGA. Great. I look forward to it.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you.

And let me thank the chairman, Chairman McCaul, and Ranking Member Meeks, having had the privilege to again waive on this committee for this term. It has been an honor working with you, and I appreciate that.

I want to thank the outgoing Biden-Harris administration and directly you, Secretary Blinken, for your tireless efforts navigating some of the most critical challenges in recent history.

I looked up the definition of the Great Passage, why it is so treacherous, and its unimpeded currents, large waves, strong waters, frequent storms, rough and unpredictable seas. You have navigated, I think, exactly that, rough and unpredictable seas. And, as has been said, even by the chairman, our relationship with NATO, our relationships in many places around the world are stronger.

I also—earlier, there was talk about President Biden's legacy vis—vis—vis—vis Israel. And I think it is a defining element. The fact of the matter is, since the invasion by Hamas on October 7 last year, President Biden has stood with Israel longer than any President in United States history, ensuring Israel's security and strengthening its position in a very dangerous neighborhood.

As you noted, he was the only President to visit Israel during a time of war—not just the first but the only. He supported Israel in immeasurable ways, including sending an aircraft carrier, thwarting not one but two attacks from Iran. And, today, as we sit here, there are still talks—as the chair of the Abraham Accords, there are talks of bringing peace to the region, putting it on a better course.

No one has worked harder than I in trying to make sure we get aid into and throughout Gaza. I hope we can find a path to continue to move it in a better direction.

Turning to the topic at hand, the majority's partisan report recommended Congress pass legislation to require that certain Dissent Channel messages be shared with the Secretary of Defense, the intelligence community, other relevant agencies, and the chairs and ranking Members of Congressional committees.

Salman Ahmed, the Director of Policy Planning testified that you personally read every dissent cable that comes and personally clear the response. Is that correct?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, it is.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Director Ahmed also testified about the reaction to the dissent cable. Quote, "What I can say is that I think that those who read it at the time, their immediate reaction was there is a lot here I agree with. There are a lot of things they are raising in here that in fact we are already working on doing. They have added some details that are very helpful. So I think it was more a question of like having information that the drafters didn't have, in some cases, and, other cases, getting information from the drafters that was helpful," end quote.

Does that testimony comport with your own reaction, namely that the Dissent Channel cable pointed to issues that were already under discussion with the Department?

Secretary BLINKEN. It does. But I want to underscore how valuable it was both in reinforcing some of the things we are doing as well as appointing some things that we then subsequently pursued.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. And, if the cable had been more widely shared, do you think it would have changed the outcome?

Secretary BLINKEN. No.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Thank you. So, although you made a single dissent cable available to us on this committee as part of a truly extraordinary—I want to emphasize—again truly extraordinary accommodation to the committee's investigation, do you think an expectation that dissent cable messages, Dissent Channel messages would be shared widely outside the Department? What impact do you think that will have on the willingness of Department personnel to utilize the Dissent Channel in the first place?

Secretary BLINKEN. I am very concerned it would have a chilling effect, and it would cause people not to engage in the Dissent Channel, which is a deeply honored tradition of the Department going back to the Vietnam War, one I take very seriously. I read every single Dissent Channel cable. I respond to every Dissent Channel cable. It informs my views. But people need to know that they can come forward without fear or without favor. And knowing that this will be shared beyond the Secretary and my immediate office is something that I fear would have a chilling effect.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. Not only would it possibly chill or make people more reluctant to share that, if you don't get that information, what are the implications to what you are trying to achieve?

Secretary BLINKEN. The implications are we will not be as well-informed as we need to be, and it will make our decisions less effective than they otherwise would be.

Mr. SCHNEIDER. All right. Thank you.

And, you know, if I expand, this hearing addresses one of the most significant and complex issues in recent memory. And I do want to recognize the families, the Gold Star families that are here,

and all the Gold Star families of great Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan and other conflicts defending our Nation.

The withdrawal was in no small part shaped by the 2020 Doha Agreement. That, as we discussed, was negotiated not by this administration but the preceding administration and handed over. By the time you received it, the administration, the Biden administration received it, the Taliban had gained significant ground, options were limited, to recommit to a conflict without clear goals or complete to withdrawal—commit to a complete withdrawal——

It was an extraordinary achievement. More than 124,000 people were airlifted in just 17 days.

Chairman McCAUL. Keeping in time with the other members, the gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. Mills is recognized.

Mr. MILLS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to thank you for your continued leadership throughout this entire time. It has been an honor to serve in this committee, so I want to continue to thank you for that.

Secretary Blinken, are you familiar with U.S.C. 22, section 4802? Secretary BLINKEN. Please tell me.

Mr. MILLS. It is basically your obligation to try and protect and provide security and safety for American citizens.

Now, in one of your statements, you said, "We did not leave Americans behind." Well, see, unlike other members on this, I actually went overseas and was conducting rescues of Americans left behind in Afghanistan. I actually conducted the very first successful overland rescue of Americans that were left behind, which was Mary and her three children. These are Amarillo, Texas, American-born natives, who was at the front gate, waving their passport, trying to get inside while we were on the phone, myself and Senator Markwayne Mullin, trying to get your State Department task force to let them inside.

You are telling me you didn't leave them behind?

Secretary BLINKEN. I am telling you, Congressman, that we got every American out that we could. And, when we completed the evacuation, I said, "We are not leaving anyone behind. We are going to keep doing this until we get every American who says they want to leave and identify themselves to us out." And as I mentioned——

Mr. MILLS. You also said, though—I am reclaiming my time. You also told Congressman Davidson that the U.S. Government was not blocking aircraft. Is that correct?

Secretary BLINKEN. I have no knowledge of U.S. Government——

Mr. MILLS. Yet, my aircraft, who had five approved PPRs, which are Prior Permission Required Landings, to HKIA to rescue 28 Americans was denied five times, saying that it was at the behest of the Department of Defense and the Department of State to prevent us from coming in to rescue Americans. That was what was told to us over the radio from the ATC towers. But, yet, to your knowledge, no one was being blocked. Let me tell you, that is a farce, and it is a complete lie.

I will also tell you that, in a NEO, State Department does not take ultimate control once it is declared. It is the Department of

Defense, who is actually is supposed to—yet your task force still tried to hold operational control, which led to a lot of disruption. And that has been reported multiple times by commanders on the ground.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, that is—

Mr. MILLS. I am going to finish, sir. The other thing is, is that, in Israel, a horrible incident occurred where over 1,200 people lost their lives. And yet the State Department had done nothing to come in and actually rescue Americans who had been left behind. How do I know that? Because the very first rescues conducted—it was on October 11 from Nazareth, Tiberias, and Haifa. How do I know it? Because I was the one who conducted them. Thirty-two Americans that day. Then into the West Bank, then into Jerusalem, then out toward Gaza. I got 255 Americans out by myself before the State Department lifted a finger and did anything to bring a plane in. Meanwhile, other nations were already flying aircraft in and out rescuing their citizens. Again, another failure of 22 U.S.C. 4802.

Secretary BLINKEN. That is not correct.

Mr. MILLS. It is correct. And the reason I know it is because I was there. Were you there, sir?

Secretary BLINKEN. No. I had a—

Mr. MILLS. You were not. Let's go ahead and start with that.

Secretary BLINKEN. I have been there 12 times.

Mr. MILLS. How many Americans did you rescue, sir?

Secretary BLINKEN. We have gotten many Americans out.

Mr. MILLS. How many have you personally rescued, sir? None. Correct? Do don't try and talk to me about ground truth. You couldn't even control what was happening in Afghanistan. Let's start there.

The next thing I want to talk about is, under your leadership, we have allowed Iran, the regime, to grow stronger than it has ever in its life.

I will give you some facts here. The Energy Information Agency said that Iran petroleum exports in Iran sold \$144 billion in the first 3 years of your administration. Now, why is that number important? Well, because that is a hundred billion dollars more than what was permitted in the full 2 years of the Trump administration.

You talked about we had to go forward with the Doha Agreement. But that was part of the—even though it was a conditions-based agreement, you couldn't prevent from pulling out of that. But you had no problem pulling out a Remain in Mexico that has led to an increase in sex trafficking, fentanyl deaths, and illegal migrants. More angel families than ever.

You had no problem, but again, you can't pull out of it, in trying to delist the Houthi rebels from a terrorist organization that now has resulted in 12 percent of global trade to the Red Sea being disrupted.

Do you agree that delisting the Houthis as a terrorist organization was a good play?

Secretary BLINKEN. In terms of making sure the humanitarian assistance can get to the people of Yemen and that the Houthis were designated under multiple other authorities—

Mr. MILLS. So endangering American citizens while now they are getting an increase in tax is a result of your actual failures——

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. They were being sanctioned at——

Mr. MILLS. Reclaiming my time. I can tell you with absolute clarity, sir, that Hezbollah got stronger while you were in office. Hamas was funded because of your failures to go impose necessary sanctions so that Iranian regime couldn't——

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. Right now——

Mr. MILLS. I am still talking, Mr. Secretary. You have had your time. You have had 4 years to destroy this Nation. You and this administration.

I will tell you with absolute certainty, sir, that America is better off with you not in office, that the Iranian regime will now finally start to weaken with stronger sanctions and with us being able to do our jobs for the Iranian people who are actually trying to lead a free democracy.

I can tell you that Hezbollah, Hamas—Hamas' leadership under Sinwar would not have been eliminated if they would have listened to Israel to what Biden had advised to cease-fire and stop. Hassan of Hezbollah would not have been eliminated if they would have listened to your leadership.

And I can tell you right now that we are better off as a Nation, we are safer as a Nation, and our American citizens will be safer with you not sitting in that seat.

With that, I yield back.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. Costa is recognized.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you for your judgment. I wish you very good luck.

Chairman MCCAUL. Mr. Costa is recognized.

Mr. COSTA. First of all, like others, I want to acknowledge the Gold Star mothers and families that are here. My grandmother was a Gold Star mother. And I have a bit of an understanding of the difficult, difficult situation that you have been through.

And, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for your tenure as the chair here. I have enjoyed serving with you and working with you.

Mr. Secretary, you have done a good job, in my opinion, in the 4 years that you have been here under difficult challenges. We can all have different perspectives, but we are in a seminal moment in America and world history, I believe. And I am want to talk about that as it relates to our efforts with Ukraine, clear and present.

I know you are doing a lot of things, but I think that I want to have some assurance that, in the remaining weeks allowed, that we do everything possible to move the necessary military equipment, material, and authorizations that Ukraine needs to win this war.

With that in mind, there is a transfer currently, and I think you have the information, your staff does, of a dozen Black Hawk helicopters from the United States. They are awaiting approval from the State Department to complete this transfer. I am going to head up a letter, but can comment on that quickly?

Secretary BLINKEN. Congressman, I can't speak to a specific transfer. I can just tell you that we were trying to push out the

door everything we possibly can to make sure the Ukrainians have everything they need to deal with the ongoing aggression. We continue to do drawdowns. And I signed off on another one as recently as a day ago. I can't speak to the specifics, but I can tell you we are making sure that every dollar that has been authorized and appropriated, we are using.

Mr. COSTA. Will you get back to us as it relates to these 12 Black Hawk helicopters that you have the information.

Secretary BLINKEN. I am happy to come back to you on that.

Mr. COSTA. And please do. How about with other efforts in terms of the money that has been appropriated that we ensure that Ukraine is in the strongest possible position?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes.

Mr. COSTA. It is not clear to me what this next administration is going to do. And I think that it is incumbent upon us to set—to keep our promises and also to maintain that leadership with our NATO allies.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes. We are determined to do everything we can. And it is fully our intent. As I said, every dollar that has been appropriated we want to see get out the door.

Mr. COSTA. As it relates to Afghanistan—and I was there numerous times—what would you say the lessons have been learned? I mean, it is easy to Monday-morning quarterback this, I think. And obviously we have people with strong opinions. But you inherited a treaty that had already been signed by the previous administration. You talked in your opening comments about your efforts to try to implement it. It clearly didn't go the way all of us wanted it do.

What are the lessons that have been learned? And, most important, what changes would you make, and why?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think there are lessons to be learned over the 20 years. There are lessons to be learned over the year preceding the evacuation. There are lessons to be learned from the evacuation itself.

As to the latter, and actually the year preceding it, the report that I commissioned, the after-action review that I commissioned, looks at least at what the State Department could and should have done differently and how it could set itself better up for—

Mr. COSTA. Is the Department aware of any Americans in Afghanistan after August 31 who asked for assistance to depart the country, but not—

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes.

Mr. COSTA [continuing]. Had not been previously—did so.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, we had about—as I said at the time, at that time, there were about 200 or so Americans who had identified themselves to us and wanted to leave but who either couldn't get to the airport or couldn't get into the airport. There were several hundred others who we knew of who did not at that point want to leave because either they couldn't bring extended family with them, or they decided that they wanted to stay.

After August 31, the 200 or so who couldn't get to the airport, we were able to get out. Several hundred others came forward, seeing the success of our ongoing efforts to get Americans out and said, "Actually, now, we want to leave."

And, between August 31 and December 31, we got another 500—495, I believe, American citizens out of Afghanistan because of that enduring commitment to leave no one behind.

Mr. COSTA. Does it make sense that all Americans you may have heard of subsequent to August 31—2021—were ever in Afghanistan and then assumed that you had been there, and that the Department have known waiting for your help to get them out prior to date.

Secretary BLINKEN. I am sorry. Can you repeat the question? I missed the question.

Mr. COSTA. I said, does it make sense just to add up all the Americans you may have heard subsequently prior to the August 31st date were ever in Afghanistan and then assume that you knew that they were there and that they were going to have an option.

Secretary BLINKEN. The challenge that we have had, as you know, is that our citizens in any country around the world don't have to tell the government that they are there. They don't have to register with us when they leave the country. They don't have to deregister. And, in Afghanistan, we had many thousands of people who are, in effect, dual nationals who had made their lives in Afghanistan.

Mr. COSTA. Thank you for your service, and thank you.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman's time has expired. I am telling members I am going to keep a very strict 5-minute rule.

And, Secretary, I know you have a plane to catch to go to the Middle East.

The chair recognizes Mr. Kean.

Mr. KEAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I also wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for your leadership in this Congress as well as of this committee.

Mr. Secretary, you are here with us today to discuss the Biden administration's failure in the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 and your role in the sad chapter that our country witnessed.

During President Biden's time in office and your tenure as Secretary of State, our country has seen many international crises that have become more inflamed. This administration has slow-walked critical arms and the capabilities to Ukraine and has prolonged this war into what will be soon its third year. This administration has also intentionally delayed vital assistance to Israel and has eroded confidence around the world about America's continued support for our strongest ally in the Middle East.

And, in addition, you and your President's lack of accountability and ownership for withdrawal from Afghanistan is inexcusable.

Mr. Secretary, why did you believe that the Taliban would negotiate with the Afghan Government despite President Biden's unconditional surrender on April 14, 2021?

Secretary BLINKEN. As I said earlier, the Taliban had made commitments under Doha. We wanted to see them fulfill those commitments, including negotiating with the government on the transition. We made every effort diplomatically throughout that period to hold them to that, but it became clear that they wouldn't. And it also became clear that, when the deadline expired, the deadline ne-

gotiated by the previous administration, they would go back to attacking our forces, attacking our partners, attacking the cities. It would have required us to send tens of thousands of Americans back to Afghanistan. That is not a decision the President—

Mr. KEAN [continuing]. Especially during that entire time, what leverage did the United States have over the Taliban once President Biden announced that he would abandon our allies no matter what the Taliban's violations of the Doha Agreement would be?

Secretary BLINKEN. Again, we had a deadline negotiated by the previous administration. And the choice was not between the status quo and ending the war. The choice was between ending the war and escalating it because, again, they would have gone back to attacking us. We had only 2,500 forces in Afghanistan. At that point, we would have had to reinforce them dramatically had the Taliban gone back to directly attacking our forces, directly attacking our partners, going at Afghanistan cities. That was the choice before the President.

Mr. KEAN. Do you agree that your power-sharing agreement further destabilized and delegitimized the Afghan Government.

Secretary BLINKEN. I am sorry, Congressman. Could you repeat that? The power-sharing agreement?

Mr. KEAN. Do you agree that your power-sharing agreement further destabilized and delegitimized the Afghan Government?

Secretary BLINKEN. There wasn't a power-sharing agreement. It was the intent of the Doha Agreement that the Taliban negotiate with the government a cease-fire and a political transition—something that they didn't do. But that was what was in the Doha Agreement. That was the objective. It didn't happen.

Mr. KEAN. It was clear that the Taliban was going to violate, and they did. On May 8, 2021, your State Department held a rehearsal, a concept drill, with the Defense Department to plan for the withdrawal from Afghanistan.

And, during that meeting, the military warned against keeping Embassy Kabul open. Your deputy, Brian McKeon, responded, quote, "We at the State Department have a much higher risk tolerance than you guys."

Mr. Secretary, it was you who tasked Mr. McKeon with purportedly leading the State Department's NEO planning. Is that correct.

Secretary BLINKEN. I am sorry; I had trouble hearing that. Please repeat that.

Mr. KEAN. During this meeting, where you were warned not to keep Embassy Kabul open, your deputy, Brian McKeon, responded, quote, "We at the State Department have a much higher risk tolerance than you guys."

Mr. Secretary, you are who tasked Mr. McKeon with purportedly leading the State Department's NEO planning. Is that correct? And do you agree with his assessment.

Secretary BLINKEN. I can't speak to that conversation or to that meeting. What I can speak to is the fact that, starting in April, we worked on ever scenario with our colleagues from DOD. We did multiple exercises. We planned out what we would need to do, including in the event of a NEO. And, as I said before, the decision to actually initiate the NEO is a collective decision made through the interagency process by all of the Cabinet-level members and ul-

timately by the President. The State Department technically initiates it. And it was on August 14 that everyone agreed that we should initiate the NEO. And, for reasons that we have discussed before, we didn't want to precipitate a panic. No one believed that the government and military would collapse. We wanted to sustain our diplomatic efforts in Afghanistan.

Mr. KEAN. Respectfully, your decision to keep U.S. Embassy Kabul open, against military advice, put people's lives at risk, and people were killed. And I want to also express my sympathy—

Secretary BLINKEN. It was a collective decision. Congressman, it was a collective decision of the administration—

Mr. KEAN [continuing]. the families of the 13 servicemembers who were killed at Abbey Gate—I know many of the Gold Star families that are here today.

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

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields.

The chair recognizes Mr. Amo.

Mr. AMO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I certainly want to thank you for your leadership as I started my time in Congress on this committee, and I certainly look forward to working with you in other ways in the future.

I certainly also want to recognize the Gold Star families, adding to the comments of my colleagues: We are grateful to you.

Thank you, Secretary Blinken, for being here today. And thank you for your extensive cooperation with our committee's oversight of the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Over the past 3 years, your State Department provided thousands of pages of documents and facilitated countless interviews with many career and political officials. I understand this is one of many appearances that you have had on this topic before our committee, and, you know, I can relate. Despite only being in Congress for just over a year, this is my third hearing on Afghanistan in this committee.

Unfortunately, for my friends on the other side of the aisle, the quantity of these hearings is not really correlated with the quality of them. Their so-called investigation selectively airbrushed the full picture of what happened in Afghanistan. Their report ignores any of the actions that Donald Trump took to negotiate the withdrawal.

The report claims we abandoned our allies but fails to mention how Trump folks left behind a backlog of more than 17,000 applications made by our Afghan allies for special immigrant visas—a backlog that forced President Biden's administration to speed up visa processing, bring in temporary help, and work around the clock to protect our allies during the withdrawal.

Of all the errors in this flawed report, its worst sin is that it refuses to let facts get in the way of a good story. The report repeatedly claims the State Department waited too long to initiate the U.S. noncombatant evacuation operation. But the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan at the time, Ross Wilson, has testified that in initiating this evacuation operation too soon, quote, “would have complicated our ability to get out. If we had left earlier, several thousand SIV applicants that we got out would not have been able to leave the country. We would have not been able to provide support to American citizens trying to get out. Our eyes and ears about

what was happening around us would have been drastically degraded,” unquote.

Secretary Blinken, do you agree that Ambassador Wilson’s testimony reflects the conditions on the ground at the time, and after you initiated the noncombatant evacuation operation, were there any additional steps that you personally took to ensure that our personnel and allies had the help and resources they needed.

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, thank you. I agree with Ambassador Wilson’s assessment. And, once the evacuation was underway, the NEO was underway, we surged resources to the Embassy, including dozens of consular officers to make sure that we could process anyone getting to and into the airport, American citizens and others eligible to come to the United States.

And I have to tell you, Congressman, I have immense pride in the people of my any Department. I had hundreds raise their hand and volunteer, including dozens who ran into the burning building of HKIA airport during the evacuation to look out for their fellow citizens, to look out for our Afghan partners, and to do everything possible to bring them out of harm’s way.

Mr. AMO. Well, Secretary, I am grateful for your leadership. And I frankly just wanted to give you an opportunity to correct the record on any claims that we have heard today and really just, you know, communicate some lasting thoughts about this as you depart the State Department.

Secretary BLINKEN. Look, all I can say is we don’t have time to go through everything. I think we have addressed a number of these questions throughout this hearing, and I am always happy to pursue these conversations. I just hope that somehow we can find ways to work effectively together to shed more light than heat on these very difficult issues. I think that is the spirit in which we should approach things.

And, for my part, I have been determined to learn the lessons from this experience, not only to learn them but to act on them. And we have made the State Department stronger and better able to respond to crises than it was when we found it or it was during the Afghan evacuation. And I think that spirit is the one that I would hope would apply to everything we do.

I have worked so well with so many members of this committee on both sides of the aisle. I hope that that continues even in places where we have deep disagreements. We can question each other’s judgments. That is totally appropriate. I hope that we can get out of the business of questioning each other’s motives.

Mr. AMO. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

And, with that, I yield back.

Mr. SELF [presiding]. The gentleman’s time has expired.

I recognize Mr. Lawler from New York.

Mr. LAWLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, have you read this report in full?

[Chart shown.]

Secretary BLINKEN. I have read the executive summary of the report. I haven’t read the entire report yet. I have read the executive summary—

Mr. LAWLER. I hope that you will take this copy with you on your flight to the Middle East and read it because this is your legacy. This is your legacy.

Starting with the disastrous withdrawal in Afghanistan that resulted in the death of 13 U.S. servicemembers, creating 13 Gold Star families, families our Vice President hasn't even been bothered to meet with. Then the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The terrorist attack on Israel. The illicit oil trade between China and Iran to the tune of \$200 billion under your watch. That is what is funding Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and other terror networks in the region. China threatening Taiwan. This is your legacy, and this stems from this disastrous withdrawal.

So I hope you read the report in full and reflect upon that. You talk about the Doha Agreement. It is conditions-based. This administration had no problem reversing policy decisions that it disagreed with President Trump on.

In fact, Joe Biden revoked 94 executive orders to open up our southern border and create an absolute calamity; 70,000 Americans die every year from fentanyl overdose, as this administration has allowed fentanyl to pour into our country—drug trafficking, gangs, human trafficking, women and children being sold into prostitution. Not a care in the world. This is the legacy.

So don't sit here and tell us, having not read the report, that you disagree with it or it is not true, saying to my colleague from Florida, "Oh, it is not true we left people in Israel after October 7." It most certainly is.

I had constituents calling in a full-pledged panic, and we called the State Department, and we are told, "There is nothing we can do." Don't tell us that that didn't happen.

This administration had no problem trying to renegotiate the Iran nuclear deal, no problem lifting sanctions on Iran, allowing for the illicit oil trade.

So, when you say that the previous administration negotiated the Doha Agreement and, therefore, we were bound by it, that is complete and utter bullshit. And you know it. You absolutely had the ability, based on the conditions on the ground, to keep our troops there, to ensure the safety and well-being of American citizens, and to make sure what happened did not.

Mr. Secretary, on August 26, 2021, who was the President of the United States?

Secretary BLINKEN. Joe Biden.

Mr. LAWLER. On August 26, 2021, who was the Secretary of State?

Secretary BLINKEN. I was.

Mr. LAWLER. Okay. Take responsibility. Don't shirk in your responsibilities. Don't try to shift blame. The reality is you guys allowed the conditions on the ground to deteriorate. You did not hold the Taliban to account, and as a result, 13 U.S. servicemembers are dead, and the world is a tinderbox. We are in the most precarious place since the leadup to World War II. That is your legacy. Period. Full stop.

And, if Israel listened to this administration and didn't go into Gaza and didn't go it into the south, Sinwar would still be alive. And, if Israel listened to this administration, Nasrallah would still

be alive, and Assad would still be in power in Syria, and Iran would be stronger than ever. That is your legacy.

This Congress has passed the SHIP Act and the Abraham Accord Special Envoy. You didn't fill the special envoy, and you didn't enforce the SHIP Act. You have had over a year to do both. That is your legacy. You leave the world worse off today than it was when you inherited it.

Mr. SELF. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. LAWLER. Enjoy reading this—

Mr. SELF. I recognize the gentlelady from Pennsylvania, Ms. Wild.

Mr. LAWLER [continuing]. Because this is your legacy.

Ms. WILD. Thank you, Mr.—

Secretary BLINKEN. I have a very different legacy, one that I will be happy to reflect on. I won't have the time to do it today because of course you don't provide any time to do it. It is very nice to make a speech, leave me no time to respond—

Mr. SELF. The chair has recognized Ms. Wild.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. That is the way this works out, Mr. Chair.

Ms. WILD. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Secretary Blinken, let me just say that hearings such as this one probably will aid you in getting over this job very quickly. I do think that you have served commendably. I think also that you have been handed an unprecedented set of world affairs and that you have handled them very well, and I thank you for that.

I, too, along with so many of my colleagues, want to express my tribute and my thanks to our Gold Star families, and, of course, to our servicemembers who lost their lives in all of Afghanistan's war, not just on the day that we withdrew. But that is really at the heart of what we are discussing today, Americans who wore our country's uniform, those who were injured, those who lost their lives, and, of course, their families that served alongside them. And I do still wish—I say to all the families—that your loved ones had not been there on that day. I personally feel strongly that we should not have been in that war at that time. And I am sorry for your losses and that that happened.

Secretary Blinken, I do want to ask you the same question I asked Ambassador Khalilzad when he testified here a few months ago because I think it really gets to the underlying reality of why we are here today. Why over the course of 20 years in Afghanistan did administrations of both parties fail to correctly assess the level of dedication and cohesion of the Afghan forces and their political leadership?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is a critical question. I hope that the bipartisan commission that is looking into the 20 years of Afghanistan gets at exactly that. And, as someone who served in several of those administrations, I also take responsibility for that, that we did not, I think, see with clarity—not only the durability of the Afghan Government and the Afghan security forces, but see with clarity how difficult if not impossible it would be for us from the outside to somehow build a cohesive country and society. And that is something that, as you said, took place over multiple administrations, and I think that is a critical question that we get a better

understanding of. And my hope is that the commission will look into that.

Ms. WILD. Well, thank you. I hope so, too. You know, I have grave concerns about the politicization of intelligence that somehow seems to fit a predesigned agenda over several decades of U.S. military involvement. That is by no means any kind of critique of our troops, ever. It is the people who were making decisions at a much higher level. And I worry that we have a cherry-picking of intelligence and data. And I hope that is something that the commission will also look at because I think it is vital to make sure that we don't end up in any more forever wars.

How do you account—and I know we are running out of time—but can you comment on the intelligence failures, specific to Afghanistan?

Secretary BLINKEN. Look, I think this is collective, which is to say the State Department had knowledge and perspective on this; the Defense Department, having worked with the Afghan military for 20 years, had perspective and knowledge; and, of course, the intelligence community did. So the judgments that we reached, I would say, were collective judgments. And, as I said before, and we have said repeatedly, as we looked at the preponderance of views, there was not—and no one anticipated the collapse of the government, the collapse of the Afghan forces—when it happened or as quickly as it happened.

Ms. WILD. Can I just stop you real quickly? Because I wanted to ask you, were you personally surprised by President Ghani's decision to flee.

Secretary BLINKEN. I was because I think, as I mentioned earlier, I was on the phone with him late at night on the 14 of August. And he told me—we were working on trying to get an agreement to move forward between the Taliban and the government to negotiate some kind of transitional government as a way of averting all of this and moving Afghanistan to a better place. He told me that he was determined to try to do that, but if the Taliban refused, he was going to stay and fight. That was on August 14. He was gone on August 15.

Ms. WILD. Well, thank you. I do hope we as a country learn from this experience. There is obviously a great deal of information to be gathered and, hopefully, will be gathered in a nonpartisan or a bipartisan manner so that we can learn in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. SELF. The gentlelady yields. I recognize myself for 5 minutes.

You have mentioned probably five times today the fact that your intel failure to know what was going to happen. There is an old book you need to read; it is called "Groupthink." It examines disasters exactly like this in the past. It probably is worthwhile reading. Because that is what happened. "Groupthink."

Now, those of us on this committee who served in Afghanistan and Iraq understand that evil still stalks the world. We saw it. And many of my colleagues on this committee served far deeper into Afghanistan and Iraq than I did. But evil still stalks the world. And I have also heard you say several times here about humanitarian assistance.

There is an old military political concept that says military use is a failure of diplomacy. It is the last bastion of it.

Well, as expected, Mr. Secretary, this has been an interesting back and forth, as I knew it would be. And, since I am fairly low on the totem pole here, we have plowed that ground well. I want to talk about the consequences of this in the world following the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan. I think one of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle talked about repercussions. There have been many. I will just mention two.

Following this botched withdrawal and the Taliban takeover, our adversaries have been on the march around the world, encouraged by this error, this strategic error. Words fail to capture the magnitude of the consequences that have been suffered across the globe because of this withdrawal.

Yet, according to President Biden himself, the emergency evacuation that cost 13 American servicemembers' lives, left behind 7 billion at the low end of military equipment, was an extraordinary success. Yet, our perceived weakness following Afghanistan—I think it was 2 months later Putin started moving troops toward Ukraine—also set the scene for the horrific attacks on October 7. Hamas terrorists and thugs obviously invaded Israel in an unprovoked assault that left Israel men, women, and children dead, wounded, and hostage, and Americans as well I might add.

That was a critical unforced error by Hamas. Since that day, Iranian hegemony has faltered. Hamas has lost its leaders in uncontested control over Gaza. While Hezbollah's senior leadership has been eradicated, setting their ambition back for decades—and I will stop here and say that both UNRWA and UNIFIL did not do their job in Gaza and in southern Lebanon to disastrous consequences.

We now find ourselves in the midst of yet another serious issue, which is Syria. The fall of Bashar al-Assad. Both Russia and Iran have lost leverage in the Middle East. And, while it is good that his reign of terror is over—gassing, torturing, slaughtering thousands—there is still looming questions like, who is keeping the lights on in Syria today, and who is going to control the levers of government in tomorrow?

Amid the chaos, our steadfast ally, Israel, remains strong. They have significantly weakened Hamas and Hezbollah, directly diminishing Iran's influence in this region. Without Israel's chutzpah and determination, the threats to the United States in the Middle East would be far greater.

Israel over the past few days has done the necessary work of destroying the military power of rump Syria so whoever does emerge to rule Syria cannot threaten Israel. According to the White House National Security Council Spokesman John Kirby, it is an open question who is currently running Syria.

Yes, Iran and Russia have failed, but I—have lost influence in the area, but I am very eager for the leadership of the incoming National Security Advisor Mike Waltz. And I want to make sure that is Mike Waltz, the incoming National Security Advisor, not our recently failed Vice President candidate.

So a couple of questions for you. First of all, Mr. Secretary, are you confident that the leader of HTS will be able to keep his word to protect Christians and Islamic women in rump Syria?

Secretary BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, I am not confident, I am encouraged by the fact that they have said the right thing, but what we have to focus on is whether they do the right thing, including protecting minorities.

Mr. SELF. The second question is, do you expect Syria to descend into a terrorist enclave.

Secretary BLINKEN. We certainly need to do everything possible to avoid that. And the coming days, the coming weeks will be critical to that. That is why—and by the way, I very much appreciate you keeping this hearing on time, along with Chairman McCaul. I need to leave to get on a plane to go to the region to see King Abdullah of Jordan. And I appreciate that there are some other members here who have not yet had a chance to ask questions. I am happy to take those questions for the record and get back to you quickly.

Mr. SELF. Mr. Secretary, I yield back to the chairman, and he will recess this—

Chairman MCCAUL [presiding]. Thank you, sir.

The chair recognizes Mr. Moskowitz.

Mr. MOSKOWITZ. Mr. Chairman, thank you.

I will be quick, Mr. Secretary.

First, let me thank Chairman McCaul for his bipartisan work on this committee. This has been one of those bright spots of this Congress.

I want to thank you, Mr. Secretary, for your sacrifice and your service to the country. These jobs are unforgiving and have deep impacts on everybody's individual families. And so I want to thank you for your service.

I want to thank the Gold Star families for being here and, like I have before, apologize to them for what happened to their loved ones in Afghanistan.

I am not going to go into all of this stuff that has been said by 30 people. But I do want to say this, Mr. Chairman, you know, the official Twitter account of this committee put out a tweet at 11:27, and it says, "At this committee's final hearing of this Congress, we brought in Secretary Blinken to testify on the disastrous Biden-Harris withdrawal from Afghanistan after months of stonewalling. Sadly, many of the Democratic seats are empty at this important hearing."

I don't know what intern put this out, but it is misinformation, and it is literally a lie. First of all, if you look at the picture, half the seats on that side of the aisle are empty. And I am not blaming them. That is how these committees work. We all know this. People come in and out of these hearing rooms.

But let me give you the numbers: 20 of the 23 Democrats on this committee were here today; 23 of the 28 Republicans were here today. Of the ones that were here, 17 Democrats asked questions; 17 Republicans asked questions.

So the official account of this committee is making it appear that we don't care about what happened in Afghanistan. It is not true. And that tweet should come down.

Because, while our enemies are trying to divide us abroad in social media, we are just giving them a gift by saying, "Hey, half the party, half the country doesn't care."

There were major mistakes made in Afghanistan. I have said that in previous hearings. So I appreciate everyone going on their soapbox about morality and truth and facts in trying to hold the Secretary to that high standard. Then we got to do it ourselves in this committee.

Mr. Secretary, a lot of things were said. I know you have to leave. I just wanted to give you the balance of my time to close about your legacy.

Secretary BLINKEN. Thank you. Look, I have to leave it to others to make those judgments. But, from my perspective, we have worked from day one to reengage, reenergize, and even reimagine our alliances and partnerships around the world. We have done just that. And, as a result, we are in a much stronger position than we were to deal with a multiplicity of challenges, more complicated than any time in the 32 years that I have been engaged in this work.

We demonstrated that with the work of bringing more than 50 countries together in support of Ukraine as it dealt with the Russian aggression. We have demonstrated that in building extraordinary convergence that we have never seen before in terms of purpose and action when it comes to dealing with the challenges posed by China, among European allies and partners and among partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

We have seen that in bringing countries together to tackle everything from COVID to fentanyl to food security. Across the board, that is a result of our engagement, of our diplomacy, of bringing countries together in common purpose and in ways that advance the national interest. That is how I have seen it. Others are free to make their own judgments about it. But I think, in doing that, one of the sources of our strength and success is the ability to work closely with Congress.

We are stronger at home because we have made remarkable investments in things like infrastructure, the CHIPS and Science Act, the IRA. That goes directly to our strength abroad. Other countries see that. They see that we have reinvested in our own competitiveness. They want to work with us. They want to engage with us. They want to partner with us.

And, because we have been so attentive to our alliances and partnerships, we now have countries that, before, were looking to do things on their own without us, that are now united with us in common purpose. That doesn't just happen. It happens because we have extraordinary men and women at the State Department, among other places, who are out there every single day building those alliances, building those partnerships, and then using them when we need to deal with challenges like Russia and Ukraine, like China, like some of the other challenges we face around the world. Thank you.

Mr. MOSKOWITZ. Thank you.

I yield the balance of my time back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields. The chair recognizes Mr. McCormick.

Mr. MCCORMICK. Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you for being here, Mr. Secretary. I know that your main responsibility as the Secretary is to execute the President's foreign policy. As an Afghan veteran and as a guy whose got tons of friends that served over there even longer than I did, got years away from their family, the guys who lost their limbs, the families who sacrificed, the people who lost their lives, my hat's always off for those families who are Gold Stars. And, even the families who just served and made that sacrifice away from their families, I really have great respect.

I know we were there for about 20 years in Afghanistan. So you can't take responsibility for 20 years, but you can take responsibility for this 4 years. I know that we spent about 2 trillion of that dollars while that wasn't on your watch. That is also a lesson learned that we had to live with. I know 2,462 lives roughly passed because of that war that we sacrificed as Americans, but most of those are not on your watch.

What I do want to hold you and our leadership accountable for is the stuff we left behind very specifically. Yesterday, I had the Ambassador of Pakistan in my office, and we were talking about terrorism in his Nation, and how we create stability in that region. I am a foreign affairs guy. That is my region. And they had over 600 terrorist attacks in their nation last year. And I was like, why? Why so many? He said because a lot of the weapons that we left behind in Afghanistan are now being used for attacks in Pakistan and other areas around there, and it is munitions we left behind.

I personally thought it was a horrible withdrawal. I talked with—I have already had, you know, a breakdown. He went down and step by step went through the process of the withdrawal. But, quite frankly, it wasn't just the \$4 billion of our troop supplies that we left behind, but the 90 billion that we had given to the Afghans that was then used now to sustain their country and the evil empire that is basically spreading terrorism throughout the region.

I don't really accept the premise that they are not harboring bad guys. I know we have terrorist cells, and I know that they are training. We have been briefed on that. We don't need to get into specifics. But I, quite frankly, think in a real sort of way the equivalent of equipment that we left over there, which is probably similar to what we just gave to Ukraine in aid and to fight a first world army, the Russians, is now being used to spread terrorism throughout the world, and that is on us. The United States is literally sponsoring terrorism around the world using the weapons that we gave them we didn't hold accountable for.

And one thing we learned in the military, whether it was 16 years in the Marine Corps, 4 years in the Navy, or training with the Army, accountability is our first step. We take responsibility for what we do.

How would you answer to that?

Secretary BLINKEN. So, two things, Congressman, I appreciate very much appreciate the question. First, the weapons you are referring to built up over 20 years. The hard reality is that, in order to avoid extending the war, escalating the war, sending tens of thousands of Americans back into Afghanistan, it would have been impossible to take out all of those weapons, all of that equipment.

Much of it was dismantled or otherwise made inoperative. Much of it that remained is almost certainly inoperative because it had to be maintained, and they don't have the capacity maintain it. But I grant you there are no doubt some number of weapons or equipment that, yes, are being used by the regime. But the Taliban Government itself is not in the business of—for all of the horrific things that it is doing inside Afghanistan to its people—is not in the business of exporting terrorism in this moment. And that at least is a good thing.

And so I don't see this equipment such as it is being used for that purpose. It is very regrettable that equipment was left behind. But I think it is a reality of 20 years, trillions of dollars of equipment to the Afghans.

Mr. McCORMICK. So I would disagree with one premise, and this is where I think the crux of this issue is because I want to learn from this: We should never set a date or a time to be political about anything we do. This is about the survival of our troops, what is best for our investment, return on investment. And I think we got locked into a date.

If I can learn anything from this, we got locked into a date that let us make some really bad decisions planning-wise that left a lot of equipment behind. And, quite frankly, when I was there, we had fewer people there than we have Spain. We never fought a war in Spain. And we are so in a hurry to say, "I want this feather in my cap that I got out of Afghanistan," that we forgot to do it right. When you forget to do it right, shame on us.

And I think we should never be locked into a date or a time or a situation where we are not in control because we are the biggest, baddest country on the planet. And shame on us for not doing it right because I think that costs us a lot of reputation.

With that, I yield.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman's time has expired. We are going to try to keep this brief. I know the Secretary has to go to the Middle East to meet with the King of Jordan.

Mr. Moran from Texas is recognized.

Mr. MORAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Secretary, thank you for being here today. I want to start with where Mr. Moskowitz left off just a second ago. Speaking about the withdrawal, he said, and I quote, "There were major mistakes made in Afghanistan."

First of all, do you agree with statement by Mr. Moskowitz?

Secretary BLINKEN. I do.

Mr. MORAN. Could you specify mistakes that you believe were made in the withdrawal from Afghanistan?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think the most fundamental mistake was, again, not recognizing that the fragility of the Afghan Government, the Afghan security forces, and not anticipating across the government—and I take responsibility for this, along with the other departments of government—in recognizing that there was potential, more than a potential likelihood of a very quick collapse by both the government and the security forces.

Mr. MORAN. How would you advise a President in the future under similar circumstances to do something different? What different advice would you give to him or her?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think we have to do what we did, but, obviously, we didn't see this piece of it, which is to continuously question the assumptions, to continuously prod and push on any assumptions, including about the durability of the government or the military forces.

Mr. MORAN. Do you think it was a mistake to withdraw even though the conditions preceding in the Doha Agreement had not been met by the factions in Afghanistan?

Secretary BLINKEN. I do not. I believe it was the right thing to do to end America's longest war. I believe that our country is actually better for it, stronger for it. I believe our adversaries have seen that we were not going to get bogged down into another decade of war in Afghanistan, and that has been a good thing.

And, again, I just remind you that the basic choice, to the extent there was a choice, was between ending the war and leaving or escalating it. Because part of the Doha Agreement was a commitment by the Taliban not to attack our forces between the time the agreement was signed and the withdrawal date that was set in the Doha Agreement was reached. Once that was breached, they would go back to attacking us, our partners. Our military determined we would have to send tens of thousands of forces back to Afghanistan. That was the choice.

Mr. MORAN. I think I heard you say earlier that you didn't think there was a connection between the botched withdrawal and the aggression, the increase in aggression, by Russia as against Ukraine earlier. Did I hear you correctly say that?

Secretary BLINKEN. That is correct.

Mr. MORAN. When the withdrawal occurred, former U.S. Ambassador to NATO Ivo Daalder warned a few days after President Biden's unconditional surrender to the Taliban that, quote, "Moscow and Beijing will look closely at how we react in one situation to set the stage for the other."

So did you disagree with that then, or do you disagree with that now?

Secretary BLINKEN. So what we saw, first of all, is that, of course, Russia had amassed all of these forces well before the withdrawal or the decision, actually, to go forward with it. We saw that take place in the spring.

Second, Russia has a long experience with Afghanistan. It probably knows better than anyone the folly of getting bogged down in that country.

And what we have seen since is the United States marshaling more than 50 countries coming to the defense of Ukraine and doing tremendous damage to Russia's efforts in Ukraine.

Mr. MORAN. Let's look at what the Chinese said about this. On the second anniversary of the withdrawal, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said, quote, "On this date 2 years ago, the whole world witnessed the 'Kabul moment' when the U.S. hastily withdrew its troops from Afghanistan. What happened in Afghanistan marked a military, political, and counterterrorism failure of the U.S. in Afghanistan." That is a quote by a Chinese Government official.

Do you think that our withdrawal from Afghanistan and the way that we handled it precipitated additional aggression by China toward Taiwan?

Secretary BLINKEN. I don't. In fact, we have seen this buildup for more than a decade.

And, again, as I said earlier, in 2008, we had 200,000 troops between Afghanistan and Iraq. That is when the Russians invaded Georgia. In 2014, we still had 12,000 troops in Afghanistan. That is when the Russians first invaded Ukraine.

These decisions are made for their own reasons. And with Russia and Ukraine or with China and Taiwan, this long predated any things we decided or did in Afghanistan.

Mr. MORAN. I want to ask real quickly, as my time expires, about before and after our withdrawal.

So, if we are looking before and after the withdrawal, do you think that the situation in Afghanistan is better inside Afghanistan today or before withdrawal as it relates to, No. 1, the safety and security of women and young girls?

Secretary BLINKEN. I think the situation is worse for women and young girls. There is no question about that—

Mr. MORAN. What about the access and opportunities for education for women and young girls, today or before the withdrawal?

Secretary BLINKEN. Worse. No question about that.

Mr. MORAN. And the opportunities to enter the workforce for women, today or before withdrawal?

Secretary BLINKEN. Worse.

Mr. MORAN. Do you think a leave-behind force, even a small force, may have created stability in the region? Or would that not have been something you—

Secretary BLINKEN. That was not the choice. The choice was not leaving 2,500 people there. The choice was whether we were going to send tens of thousands of Americans back indefinitely with no guarantee of better results.

It is also remember to important that, by December 2020, the Taliban either controlled or contested territory that had 75 percent of the population of Afghanistan. Life for them then, including women and girls, was not good. But I agree with you, it has gotten worse.

Mr. MORAN. Do you agree we need to take additional steps to protect the lives of women and young girls in Afghanistan?

Secretary BLINKEN. Yes, we are doing—I agree we need to maximize every effort to do that.

Chairman McCAUL. The gentleman's time has expired.

Mr. MORAN. I yield back.

Chairman McCAUL. The chair recognizes Mr. Moylan.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you—

Secretary BLINKEN. Mr. Chairman, I am very sorry to interrupt, but, as we said before this hearing, I had a hard stop at 2 o'clock. I—

Chairman McCAUL. I agree.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. Have to get on a plane—

Chairman McCAUL. If we could keep this limited. We have Mr. Moylan and Mr. Van Orden—

Secretary BLINKEN. I am happy to take—I very much respect the members and their questions. I am happy to take the questions and respond within the next week.

Chairman MCCAUL. Why don't we ask—both of you, I want to give you the opportunity to ask one question.

Mr. MOYLAN. One question. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Miller was our last commander of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, Mr. Secretary, and he came before this committee. And the important thing that General Miller wanted to relay to us was about the characterization of your State Department's attitude toward the military, Mr. Secretary.

General Miller was saying to this committee that there was this assumption, the State Department's assumption, that we don't need the military. It was the State Department's assumption, according to General Miller, that, "Why don't you know this, General? You are withdrawing. Why don't you get out of here, all of you? Just go away."

That is General Miller, our last commander of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, what he felt important to share with this committee.

Now, Mr. Secretary, in institutions like the State Department, your State Department, such attitudes often come from the top. I am an Army (ph) officer myself, and all look to the leadership.

So is it your assumption, sir—did you assume to your State Department that your embassy in Afghanistan did not need the military?

Secretary BLINKEN. Absolutely not. And on the contrary, Congressman.

First of all, I have tremendous respect for General Miller, everything he has done, everything he has put at risk himself.

Second, I have had the incredible honor of serving this country in various capacities—State Department, White House, National Security Council—for the better part of 30 years now. And throughout those 30 years, one of the things I take the most pride and pleasure in is the work that I have been able to do with our military. I have—

Mr. MOYLAN. I understand—

Secretary BLINKEN. And so—

Mr. MOYLAN [continuing]. That, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. My Department, in my time, certainly in terms of my own instructions to them, has done nothing short of do everything possible to strengthen and continue this essential collaboration.

Mr. MOYLAN. Mr. Secretary—

Secretary BLINKEN. We can't do our jobs without the United States military.

Mr. MOYLAN. I will take back my time.

In this case, Mr. Secretary, I understand what you are saying here and now. But General Miller, our last commander of U.S. Forces, this is what he had to say to us.

And, sir, you may be saying this now, but, however, the example that your employees understood is different than what you are telling me. And it is as if there was an absence of leadership that put the State Department employees in America, and America, at risk.

And I am sorry to say, sir, that this type of attitude that your State Department has had regarding—

Chairman MCCAUL. I would ask the gentleman to please expedite the question.

Mr. MOYLAN. Yes, sir, Mr. Chairman.

Basically, sir, it didn't work out, according to General Miller, our last commander of U.S. Forces.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields back.

The chair recognizes Mr. Van Orden.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for having me on your committee, and thank you for your leadership throughout the years.

Mr. Secretary, thanks for coming here.

I am just going to establish some bona fides. I am going to ask you a couple quick—series of questions, and then I am going to actually give you the chance, sir, to make sure that you could leave your last hearing by doing something good for your legacy.

I have served multiple tours in Afghanistan and Iraq, including one where I held one of my friends' hands as he was dying, listening to his wife crying through a satellite phone into his ear because she knew she would never see her husband again.

And the Gold Star Families here have my greatest sympathy. And we owe you a debt that does not go away. It is not a mortgage; it is not a 30-year commitment. It is forever.

I am the longest-serving enlisted member of the United States military to ever be elected to Congress in the history of our Nation. I was responsible for writing contingency plans for the entire continent of Europe and making sure that they worked.

So, with that said, I mean, I want you to know that, because a lot of the stuff that you said to my colleagues is either not true—and that is either on purpose or due to incompetence.

I would encourage you to hand to your successor Joint Publication 3-68 and have them open up to chapter 5, page 1, paragraph C. Because what you told these guys about who can do this is just not true.

So you said that there was a plan. When was it written?

Secretary BLINKEN. Okay. You are referring to the—to the—

Mr. VAN ORDEN. The NEO.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. NEO plan? Through the course of the spring.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay. Through the course of the spring. That should have been done years before.

Secretary BLINKEN. Well—

Mr. VAN ORDEN. When was it rehearsed?

Secretary BLINKEN. Can I add to that—I am sorry, Congressman—just to be very precise?

We have a team of people that go to every embassy, especially embassies of concern, every year, including Afghanistan—

Mr. VAN ORDEN. I know, sir. I have participated in those teams.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. To work on this.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. So did it include removing the military and leaving civilians to fend for themselves against terrorists and then reinserting the military in a panic to help rescue the Americans

that you abandoned in Afghanistan? Was that an annex on the plan?

Secretary BLINKEN. It was based on the premise——

Mr. VAN ORDEN. It wasn't. Okay.

Secretary BLINKEN [continuing]. That the government wouldn't collapse——

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Did it include flying over 170,000 unvetted Afghans and distributing them throughout the country, including the 13,000 that you sent to my district in Fort McCoy, Wisconsin?

No? Okay.

Where are those Afghans, by the way? We don't know.

And I was just given this now. What you just testified under oath is not true. The Ambassador who led the NATO—excuse me—led the NEO said they weren't operating on a plan. So you just lied under oath.

Secretary BLINKEN. That is not true, Congressman.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay.

Did your plan include intentionally abandoning American citizens and green-card holders to terrorists in Afghanistan?

Secretary BLINKEN. Of course not.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Did it include unintentionally abandoning American citizens and green-card holders to terrorists in Afghanistan?

Secretary BLINKEN. No, of course not.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Well, it happened, didn't it?

Were American citizens and green-card holders left in Afghanistan? The answer to that is "correct."

How many? You can't tell me.

Secretary BLINKEN. And you know why that is——

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Hey, listen, man. I forgot to mention that, like my colleague Cory, I was one of the guys who went to go rescue American citizens. So I know you couldn't tell me. We knew, and you either didn't know or you lied.

And here is my question. You are the Secretary of State now. Can you, with Secretary Mayorkas, grant a green card to someone who can absolutely, 100 percent be verified for saving hundreds and hundreds of American servicemembers and risking his life for over a decade, who is currently here under humanitarian parole? Can you guys do that?

Secretary BLINKEN. I would be happy to work with you on that.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. His name is Azizullah Aziz.

Secretary BLINKEN. Happy to pursue that with you, Congressman.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you very much, sir.

And I will tell you right now: You get this done, it is going to go—it is going to be one of the best things you could possibly do to redeem your reputation and your legacy as Secretary of State.

And, with that, I yield back.

Chairman MCCAUL. The gentleman yields.

Let me just say thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being here. I want to thank you for your service as well.

I think that you will be pleased to know this will be the last time you will appear before this committee as Secretary of State and me as chairman.

And there has been a lot of talk about legacy. I know we have been working on legislation together, called the Overseas Crises Response Implementation System and Immediate Strategy Act, or Overseas CRISIS. I hope that can be part of your legacy and mine, as we close the chapter on Afghanistan, sir.

And I wish you Godspeed to the Middle East. And, again, thank you for your service.

Pursuant to committee rules, all members may have 5 days to submit questions.

Chairman McCAUL. Without objection, the committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:25 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING RECORD



**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
FULL COMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE**
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6128

Michael T. McCaul (R-TX), Chairman

December 4, 2024

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs to be held at 10:00 a.m. in room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing is available by live webcast on the Committee website. <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/>.

DATE: Wednesday, December 11, 2024
TIME: 10:00 a.m.
LOCATION: 2172 RHOB
SUBJECT: An Assessment of the State Department's
Withdrawal from Afghanistan by America's Top
Diplomat
WITNESSES: The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State

*NOTE: Witnesses may be added.

By Direction of the Chair

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202-226-8467 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS
MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day Wednesday Date December 11, 2024 Room 2172 RHOB

Starting Time 10:14 Ending Time 14:25

Recesses ☐ (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____) (____ to ____)

Presiding Member(s)

Chairman McCaul, Rep. Self

Check all of the following that apply:

Open Session ☒

Executive (closed) Session ☐

Televised ☒

Electronically Recorded (taped) ☒

Stenographic Record ☒

TITLE OF HEARING:

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN BY AMERICA'S TOP DIPLOMAT

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Attached

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

NA

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☒ No ☐

(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*

Attached

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____

or

TIME ADJOURNED 14:25

Meg Wagner

Full Committee Hearing Coordinator

Committee on Foreign Affairs

118th Congress

ATTENDANCE

Date: December 11, 2024 HEARING

Representative	Present	Absent	Representative	Present	Absent
Mr. McCaul	X		Mr. Meeks	X	
Mr. Smith	X		Mr. Sherman	X	
Mr. Wilson	X		Mr. Connolly	X	
Mr. Perry	X		Mr. Keating	X	
Mr. Issa		X	Mr. Bera		X
Mrs. Wagner		X	Mr. Castro	X	
Mr. Mast	X		Ms. Titus	X	
Mr. Burchett	X		Mr. Lieu	X	
Mr. Green	X		Ms. Wild	X	
Mr. Barr	X		Mr. Phillips	X	
Mr. Jackson	X		Mr. Allred		X
Mrs. Kim	X		Ms. Jacobs	X	
Mrs. Salazar	X		Ms. Manning	X	
Mr. Huizenga	X		Mrs. Cherfilus-McCormick		X
Mrs. Radewagen	X		Mr. Stanton	X	
Mr. Hill		X	Ms. Dean	X	
Mr. Davidson	X		Mr. Moskowitz		X
Mr. Baird	X		Mr. Jackson		X
Mr. Waltz		X	Mrs. Kamlager-Dove	X	
Mr. Kean	X		Mr. Costa	X	
Mr. Lawler	X		Mr. Crow	X	
Mr. Mills	X		Mr. Amo	X	
Mr. McCormick	X		Mr. Mfume		X
Mr. Moran	X		Mr. Schneider	X	
Mr. James		X			
Mr. Self	X				
Mr. Zinke	X				
Mr. Moylan	X				
Mr. Van Orden	X				





GEORGE W. BUSH
INSTITUTE

**Statement for the Record
George W. Bush Institute
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing
“An Assessment of the State Department’s Withdrawal from Afghanistan by America’s Top
Diplomat”
December 11, 2024**

Dear Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the George W. Bush Institute, thank you for convening this important hearing.

As the Bush Institute highlighted in its “[Captured State](#)” paper series released earlier this year, the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has left its population under the rule of a repressive and brutal regime, while U.S. adversaries have been emboldened and have profited from the Afghan people’s misfortunes.

As we look to the new Administration and Congress in 2025, we recommend the following policy changes:

- The United States should call for an update to the UN list of Taliban members who merit designation and use its own national accountability mechanisms to apply targeted sanctions on Taliban leaders who are engaged in corruption and human rights violations, especially those responsible for gender persecution. Coordinating Global Magnitsky sanctions with democratic allies who also possess similar legislation would multiply pressure on the Taliban and boldly demonstrate America’s longstanding commitment to protecting the inherent dignity of all.
- The United States should also investigate the Taliban’s capture of Afghanistan government ministries, subnational entities, and enterprises. It should designate those individuals and industries that have become conduits for illegal activity, terrorist financing, corruption, and human rights abuses for targeted sanctions and as primary money laundering concerns under Section 311 of the USA Patriot Act.
- The United States should designate the Taliban as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO.)
- The United States should support Afghan civil society and elevate diverse Afghan voices within every forum related to Afghanistan’s future.

It’s timely to review the U.S. diplomatic efforts toward Afghanistan as we approach five years since the signing of the Doha Agreement, and more than three years have passed since the withdrawal of military forces from Afghanistan.

In this time, the Taliban have consistently failed and even flouted their obligations. Afghanistan under Taliban rule is again a safe haven for terrorist groups, and the dynamics of poverty, totalitarian propaganda, and ruthless oppression risk fueling a perfect storm in which broader segments of the Afghan population will be increasingly susceptible to radicalization. The Taliban’s unprecedented restrictions on women and the systematic denial of their fundamental human rights through gender apartheid are an affront to the Doha Agreement’s calls for intra-Afghan dialogue.



GEORGE W. BUSH
INSTITUTE

Although our leverage has changed, the United States and international community can do far more to support the Afghan people – especially women and children – and simultaneously hold the Taliban accountable for their ever-expanding use of brutality, corruption, and graft.

Governments, international organizations, and private sector entities must remain united against legitimizing the Taliban. And those who deviate from the global posture on non-recognition through bilateral actions should be called to answer for their hypocritical actions.

The United Nations and national governments – including the U.S. – should expand the definition of apartheid to include gender-based discrimination and segregation and pursue every channel possible to hold the Taliban accountable for their horrific brutalization of Afghan women and girls.

Women and other vulnerable populations should be notably represented in all convenings, hearings, and negotiations focusing on the future of Afghanistan. Too often, the communities that shoulder the majority burden of the Taliban's abuse are sidelined in critical discussions. This must stop, especially as peace and security are impossible without them.

Most importantly, the U.S., in partnership with the international community, must fully enforce and expand the use of existing tools to hold the Taliban accountable for the corruption, continued support for terrorist and extremist groups, and gross human rights abuses.

This includes strengthening and expanding the use of UN Resolution 1988 Committee sanctions that designate 135 individual senior Taliban leaders and 5 entities under a travel ban, asset freeze, and arms embargo. Since August 2022, when blanket travel ban exemptions for designated Taliban expired, the UN Security Council has approved nearly four dozen exemption requests for both official and personal reasons, like accessing medical treatment. And on several occasions, senior Taliban leaders subject to 1988 Committee sanctions have traveled without an exemption with little scrutiny.

Meanwhile, Afghan women have been imprisoned in their homes and are prohibited from employment, education, and free movement. Their children are dying needlessly from preventable and treatable illnesses as Afghanistan's health system crumbles and the Taliban continue theft of humanitarian aid.

At the same time, most current Taliban officials are not actually subject to U.S. or UN sanctions. From Europe to Africa to Asia, Taliban leaders have freely traveled for high profile events, official meetings (including with designated terrorist groups), and personal benefit.

This cannot continue.

Where the United States leads, the rest of the world follows. We urge Congress and the executive branch to work together to hold the Taliban accountable.



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EIN:87-3921693 | 501(c)3

Submitted by AfghanEvac

December 11, 2024 – House Committee on Foreign Affairs Hearing

“An Assessment of the State Department’s Withdrawal from Afghanistan by America’s Top Diplomat”

Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Meeks, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing this letter to share my perspective as President of AfghanEvac on the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the efforts that followed to resettle eligible Afghan allies. AfghanEvac is a coalition of veterans, frontline civilians, humanitarian organizations, and advocates united by a shared mission: ensuring the safety, relocation, and successful integration of Afghan allies who supported the U.S. mission.

Our work is driven by loyalty—loyalty to the interpreters, aid workers, and military contractors who stood alongside U.S. forces, as well as to Afghan refugees whose lives are still at risk because of their support of the American mission there over the course of two decades of conflict. We must recognize that our obligations extend equally to both of these groups - Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders *and* refugees. These Afghans, who sacrificed so much, are deserving of the same protections, legal pathways, and respect regardless of their immigration category. Their service was essential to U.S. operations, and we cannot abandon them now.

It is my sincere hope that through today’s hearing you will seek to learn what has transpired since August of 2021 while recognizing that this is not yet history. This effort is still underway. Every day, the interagency team is working with men and women from across the American experience to help get those who stood with us into position to seize the American dream that they earned by serving alongside our servicemembers, diplomats, aid workers, and more.

The Story of AfghanEvac

AfghanEvac’s Core Mission: Reducing Uncertainty, Maintaining Urgency, Increasing Throughput

At AfghanEvac, we focus on three guiding principles: reducing uncertainty for Afghan allies, maintaining urgency in all efforts, and increasing throughput for relocation and resettlement processes. These principles drive everything we do, ensuring that no Afghan who stood with America is left behind.

Origins of Urgency

AfghanEvac was formed during the fall of Kabul in August 2021. Veterans, frontline civilians, and advocates around the world mobilized in response to a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented scale. What began as an emergency effort to coordinate evacuations from Hamid Karzai International Airport evolved into a coalition of over 250 organizations, all working toward one shared goal: ensuring America keeps its promises to those who risked their lives to support its mission. – not only the promises made to our wartime allies, but to our veterans and service members as well.

From Crisis Response to Sustained Advocacy

Our early work centered on communication with our Afghan friends and neighbors, compiling evacuation manifests, securing flights, and advocating for safe passage. As the crisis evolved, we expanded our efforts to include policy advocacy, public awareness, and direct support for Afghan families, including those still in hiding or stranded in third countries. Today, as ever, we focus on maintaining urgency, increasing throughput, and reducing uncertainty.

Our partnership with the U.S. government demonstrates that this effort could not succeed through public or private action alone. By combining government capabilities with grassroots expertise, we've addressed gaps in the system, advanced policy solutions, and created new pathways for Afghan allies.

Our Perspective on the U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 was a chaotic process that left thousands of Afghan allies in danger. AfghanEvac was born out of that crisis, driven by veterans, frontline civilians, and advocates determined to uphold America's promises. What began as a volunteer-driven emergency response evolved into a nationwide coalition, representing every part of the American experience, working alongside the U.S. government to relocate and resettle over 185,000 Afghans.

While we were not working hand-in-hand with government in August of 2021, we began shortly thereafter. September 13th, 2021 was the first meeting we had. And since then, Secretary Blinken and his team have been extraordinary partners. They've taken critical feedback from us, nearly daily, and what we've built together is unprecedented.

Progress Since August 2021

Relocation and Resettlement Milestones

- **Relocations Support:** AfghanEvac and our members have played a critical role in the relocation and resettlement of over 185,000 Afghans, leveraging public-private partnerships, innovative problem solving, and bolstering U.S. government operations.
- **Policy Impact:** Our advocacy helped secure bipartisan support for the Afghan Adjustment Act, CARE Authorization Act, and additional SIV allocations. These legislative priorities remain essential even as more remain outstanding.
- **Enduring Welcome:** This program exemplifies what public-private collaboration can achieve. Through this joint effort, government agencies, non-profits, and civic leaders worked together to create a comprehensive framework for welcoming Afghan families, demonstrating the power of aligned purpose and action.

A Partnership with the U.S. Government

- **State Department Engagement:** AfghanEvac has maintained a Memorandum of Understanding with the State Department since 2022, through which we've partnered closely with the Office of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE) and other U.S. agencies to identify and resolve bureaucratic challenges.
- **Interagency Coordination:** Our collaboration with the National Security Council, Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Health and Human Services, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has strengthened operational and policy-level coordination.
- **Congressional Caseworkers Briefings:** Since September 2021, we've conducted regular briefings with hundreds of caseworkers focused on Afghan relocation cases from a bipartisan, bicameral group of congressional offices.
- **Real time feedback:** AfghanEvac, and our associated member organizations, provide rapid, real-time feedback on the impact of policy decisions. The interagency team we've worked with has eagerly accepted our feedback and actioned it, resulting in smarter, more efficient policies.

Public Awareness and Combating Misinformation

AfghanEvac has led targeted campaigns to combat misinformation aimed at Afghan families and ensure that evacuees and their advocates receive accurate, actionable information. By amplifying stories of resilience, we have reframed the national conversation and underscored the moral and strategic necessity of Afghan resettlement.

Current Challenges

1. Administrative Backlogs and Family Separation

Tens of thousands of Afghan applicants remain trapped in processing backlogs, delaying family reunifications. U.S. military families await reunification with loved ones still in Afghanistan or third countries. Many children remain separated from parents due to bureaucratic obstacles, making family reunification an urgent moral and policy priority.

2. Disproportionate Impact on Women and Girls

Afghan women and girls have borne the greatest burden of the U.S. withdrawal's aftermath. They face targeted violence, legal restrictions, and systematic exclusion from public life under Taliban rule. Delays in processing and limited relocation options have left thousands in harm's way. The U.S. must expand resettlement pathways that account for these unique risks.

3. Equal Treatment for SIVs and Refugees

America's obligation extends equally to both SIV applicants and Afghan refugees. Afghan military interpreters, military partners who served alongside our servicemembers, relatives of U.S. service members, and others who stood up for American ideals share the same risks and are deserving of the same consideration. Immigration policy must reflect this reality, ensuring that no Afghan ally is left behind due to program limitations or political calculations.

4. Critical Need for Additional Visas

The Afghan relocation program is at a breaking point. With nearly 50,000 additional visas needed to meet ongoing demand, Congress must urgently expand the SIV cap. This expansion is critical to delivering on America's promises and preventing thousands of eligible applicants from being stranded in danger.

5. Funding Shortfall

The Afghan resettlement effort is running out of money. Funding for relocation and integration is projected to run dry within months. Maintaining this program requires approximately \$2 billion per year—a fraction of the \$2.23 trillion cost of the Afghan war. It is important to note that not only do Afghan arrivals contribute more economically than they receive in relocation and resettlement assistance, but also domestic funding goes directly to local communities to help arrivals integrate and thrive. Everything from starting small businesses, filling critical labor shortages, and becoming leaders within their community. This investment is a moral and strategic necessity, ensuring America keeps its promises while maintaining global credibility.

6. Communications Gaps

Inconsistent and unclear communications within government systems and to Afghan allies continue to create confusion and frustration. Establishing and maintaining streamlined and transparent processes is critical to reducing uncertainty and ensuring trust in the system.

Recommendations for Congress and the Incoming Administration

1. **Pass the Afghan Adjustment Act:** Provide permanent legal status for Afghan evacuees, ensuring stability and security for those who supported the U.S. mission.
2. **Allocate 50,000 Additional Visas:** Expand the SIV program to address current backlogs and ensure that all eligible applicants can be processed.
3. **Maintain and Expedite Family Reunification:** Prioritize reunification for separated families, especially U.S. military families with loved ones still in Afghanistan or awaiting processing abroad.
4. **Fund the Ongoing Relocation Effort:** We must not shy away from the cost of these efforts. Afghans who stood with us deserve the same level of support they gave to us.
5. **Create Immigration Policy Exemptions for Afghan Allies:** Ensure Afghan evacuees are excluded from any restrictive immigration enforcement policies that may be coming with a new administration.
6. **Ensure Equal Treatment for SIVs and Refugees:** Treat all Afghans who supported the U.S. mission fairly and equally regardless of their immigration category, recognizing their shared sacrifices and contributions.
7. **Strengthen Civil Society Partnerships:** AfghanEvac and similar organizations remain ready to work with Congress and the incoming administration. We stand prepared to provide policy expertise, operational support, and advocacy grounded in lived experience and on-the-ground knowledge exemplified by the great success of Enduring Welcome.
8. **Address Communications Gaps:** Invest in clear and consistent communications to reduce uncertainty and frustration for Afghan allies.
9. **Invest in U.S. Capacity to Welcome:** AfghanEvac urges Congress to provide supplemental, robust funding for the Departments of State, Homeland Security, and Health and Human Services to ensure continuity of operations in administering the ongoing relocation and resettlement efforts and the essential work of our unfulfilled mission.

10. **Codify relocation operations with the CARE Authorization Act:** Institutionalize CARE to ensure long-term stability, accountability, and operational efficiency in Afghan relocation efforts.

Looking Ahead

AfghanEvac was founded on the belief that promises must be kept—not out of charity, but out of loyalty and shared responsibility. The cost of keeping these promises pales in comparison to the cost of breaking them.

The U.S. mission in Afghanistan may be over, but our moral obligation continues. We urge Congress and the incoming administration to act urgently, passing legislation, allocating funding, and ensuring Afghan families can build safe, stable lives in the country they helped protect.

The roughly \$2 billion a year it takes to support these resettlement efforts is, frankly, a bargain. It's a small price to preserve America's soul. We cannot allow a war – our war – to end without providing the same commitment to those who stood with us as we did to the fight itself.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our story and recommendations. AfghanEvac stands ready to support this mission through continued advocacy, operational collaboration, and strategic engagement. Together, we can ensure that America's promises are kept—not just in words, but in deeds.

We are ready to continue to do what still needs to be done — to keep our promises, to honor our allies, and to ensure that the work of ending a war is met with the same resolve and enthusiasm as the work of waging one. And we hope we can count on this committee's ongoing support.

Respectfully submitted,



Shawn VanDiver
President, AfghanEvac and U.S. Navy Veteran