

THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S DISASTROUS
WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN, PART I:
REVIEW BY THE INSPECTORS GENERAL

HEARING
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON
OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

APRIL 19, 2023

Serial No. 118–22

Printed for the use of the Committee on Oversight and Accountability



Available on: *govinfo.gov*,
oversight.house.gov or
docs.house.gov

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

51–894 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2025

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THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION'S DISASTROUS WITHDRAWAL FROM AFGHANISTAN, PART I: REVIEW BY THE INSPECTORS GENERAL

Wednesday, April 19, 2023

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY,
Washington, D.C.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:01 a.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. James Comer [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Comer, Turner, Gosar, Foxx, Grothman, Palmer, Higgins, Sessions, Biggs, Mace, LaTurner, Fallon, Donalds, Armstrong, Perry, Timmons, Burchett, Greene, McClain, Luna, Edwards, Langworthy, Burlison, Raskin, Norton, Lynch, Connolly, Krishnamoorthi, Mfume, Porter, Brown, Stansbury, Garcia, Frost, Balint, Lee, Casar, Crockett, Goldman, and Moskowitz.

Also present: Representative Mills.

Chairman COMER. The Committee on Oversight and Accountability will come to order. I want to welcome everyone.

Without objection, the Chair may declare a recess at any time. Without objection, Representative Cory Mills of Florida is waived on to the Committee for the purpose of questioning witnesses at today's hearing.

The Committee welcomes the public to this very important meeting. While you are here, I want to point out to the Members and the audience today that House Rule XI provides that the Chairman of the Committee may punish breaches of order and decorum, including exclusion from the hearing. All participants will be required to avoid unruly behavior and inappropriate language. Expressions of support or opposition are not in order. I expect all parties to these proceedings to conduct themselves in a manner that reflects properly on the House of Representatives.

I now recognize myself for the purpose of making an opening statement.

Today the Oversight Committee welcomes four United States Inspectors General to provide insight into the Biden Administration's handling of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan before, during, and after the fall of Kabul to the Taliban. No single hearing can tell the story of the United States' war in Afghanistan. No single hearing can tell two decades worth of decisions that could have been made differently. Those decisions are debatable. What is not

debatable is the catastrophe the Biden Administration delivered in the war's final months, weeks, and days.

For 20 years, Americans, American allies, and Afghans fought and died in a war to help Afghans create a country free from the Taliban's control. In August 2021, Joe Biden lost that war. There was no exit with dignity. It was a panic, and 13 American service members were murdered by a suicide bomber. Today the Taliban flag flies over Kabul. There is no American military base there. There is no American embassy there. There is no hope there, especially for women and girls who are now terrorized by the Taliban. This is Joe Biden's legacy.

I would like to show a short video of some of the events Americans saw in August 2021.

[Video shown.]

Chairman COMER. In 2021, Americans watched as crowds of thousands of Afghans stood outside the gates of Hamid Karzai International Airport just trying to get out of the country. Americans watched as people so desperate to flee clung to the landing gear of airplanes taking off and fell from the sky when the planes did not stop. Americans watched as parents handed their infants over to U.S. soldiers. And they watched as billions of dollars of U.S. equipment, trucks, aircraft, weaponry, was just abandoned to the Taliban. The American people watched these scenes and were worried about Americans, innocent Afghans, and loved ones who were still in Afghanistan.

Since the Afghan Government's collapse, the Oversight Committee has wanted answers from the Biden Administration, and we will get them. As our commander-in-chief, President Biden's poor leadership and planning led to the debacle that unfolded in Afghanistan in August 2021. Let me be clear. I was in favor of leaving Afghanistan, but it should have never been done like this. I want to also say that the U.S. military, which is stronger and more capable than any other in the world, accomplished an incredible mission, airlifting 124,000 people out of Afghanistan in a matter of days. However, they should have never been put in that position.

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has consequences that will not go away overnight despite the Biden Administration's hope that the American people will forget. Afghanistan has once again become a safe haven for terrorism as demonstrated by a rise in attacks by ISIS-K. China and Russia are emboldened. Allies around the world wonder if the US can still rise to meet the threats that face us today.

Today's hearing will be the first in a series to examine President Biden's botched withdrawal from Afghanistan. The inspectors general here today have years of experience when it comes to monitoring U.S. taxpayer dollars in Afghanistan. They have identified billions in waste, fraud, and abuse in war fighting and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. The goal of today's hearing is simple: explore the facts. These IGs will help us understand the factors and decisions that ultimately led to the collapse as well as the continued risk to U.S. taxpayer dollars going to Afghanistan.

I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today and for their guidance and assistance over the years. I look forward to your testimony.

I now yield to the Ranking Member for his opening statement.
Mr. RASKIN. Thank you kindly, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to each of our witnesses for being with us today.

When I was growing up, we were taught that partisan politics stops at the water's edge. In 1983, after terrorists killed 241 American service members in Lebanon, our country united in responding to this act of savagery rather than simply blame President Reagan for what the terrorists had done. Today, however, my colleagues seek to blame the Biden Administration for the cowardly ISIS terror attack at Kabul airport in Afghanistan, which stole the lives of 13 American heroes in the final days of the Afghan war. This is not just morally confused and politically cynical, but historically disoriented.

More than two decades long, the Afghan war was America's longest war. It spanned four Republican and Democratic Presidential administrations. Joe Biden was President during 7 of the 238 months of the war, or to put it another way, for about three percent of the duration of the war compared to roughly 20 percent for Donald Trump, 40 percent for Barack Obama, and 37 percent for George W. Bush.

The Afghan war cost the lives of more than 2,400 American service members; 3,846 private contractors; more than 1,100 allied service members; more than 66,000 national Afghan military and police; and 47,245 Afghan civilians without even getting into the Taliban side. Understanding what led to the collapse of the Afghan Government and security forces is vitally important, but it requires looking comprehensively at the dynamics of the massive decades-long military and nation building failure, not just the last few months of the war. This hearing's absurdly narrow focus is like trying to explain why the Confederacy lost the Civil War by examining only what happened at the surrender of Appomattox.

Today's witnesses have the expertise to explain the structural factors behind the collapse of the Afghan Government. John Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction since 2012, repeatedly warned for years that the U.S. lacked a coherent strategy and had not defined its purposes, had set unrealistic expectations for its reconstruction mission in Afghanistan, did not properly understand Afghan political culture and institutions, and never faced the corruption of the Afghan Government.

In 2019, Sopko issued a report warning, not just of risks created by the ongoing reconstruction effort, but also of risks arising from the Trump Administration's ongoing efforts to negotiate a settlement directly with the Taliban.

And when we zero in on the final months of the war, my Republican colleagues refuse to examine the elephant on the battlefield: President Trump's disastrous decision to cut out the Afghan Government and negotiate directly with the Taliban and then to enter into a dangerously lopsided agreement with these authoritarian religious fanatics. In the Trump-Taliban agreement or Doha agreement, Trump struck numerous bad deals and fateful bargains with the Taliban that would come back to haunt us, including the release of 5,000 Taliban fighters from prison, many of whom promptly rejoined the insurgents in their battle to recapture Kabul.

Our colleagues have also conveniently ignored President Trump's decision just four days after Joe Biden was declared the winner of the Presidential election to secretly order the withdrawal of all troops by January 15, 2021, a move that stunned his own military generals and which Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, called odd, not standard, and potentially dangerous. After significant pushback, President Trump rescinded his secret order and replaced it with a directive to draw down to 2,500 troops.

Months later when President Trump begrudgingly left Washington under a cloud of bear mace and tear gas, he did so without providing the new administration any plans at all on how to safely withdraw the remaining U.S. troops or how to safely evacuate Americans and our Afghan allies within the strict timeline prescribed by Trump's Taliban agreement.

This failure was not an accident but was calculated to force Biden's hand. President Trump later bragged about this maneuver at a rally with his supporters, stating, "I started the process. All the troops are coming back home. They could not stop the process. They wanted to, but it was very tough to stop the process." Trump moved forward with the withdrawal of U.S. troops even as the Taliban increased violent attacks against the Afghan Government and refused to sever ties with terrorist groups, including the Haqqani Network and Al-Qaeda.

When President Biden took office in January 2021, he faced the difficult choice to send more American troops back into Afghanistan to defend against the newly revitalized Taliban onslaught in the 20-year civil war or proceed with a full withdrawal from Afghanistan as contemplated by the Trump Taliban agreement. After extensive consultation, including with his top national security advisors and intelligence personnel, on April 14, Biden announced that the final withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Afghanistan will begin on May 1 and be completed by September 11, 2021.

Biden's decision to follow through on the Trump-Taliban agreement was not without risk. Despite careful planning and a consensus from the intelligence community and military leadership on the Afghan military's ability to protect Kabul and defend against the Taliban after withdrawal, the Afghan Government and security forces almost immediately collapsed, far more quickly than expected, forcing the Administration to evacuate more than 120,000 Americans and Afghan nationals within two weeks in what became the largest noncombatant evacuation operation airlift in the history of the United States. Tragically, 13 American service members lost their lives during this heroic operation, and we, as a Nation, are forever indebted to them and more than 2,400 service members killed during the 20-year war for their commitment to America and also to the people of Afghanistan.

Today, it is imperative that we put partisan politics aside to ensure that the suffering Afghan people continue to experience today, that these people will receive much needed humanitarian and diplomatic assistance. Let us work together to find ways to support funding for programs that uplift Afghan women and girls in light of increasing violent repression against them. I applaud the Biden-Harris Administration's commitment to delivering aid to the Af-

ghan people while continuing to isolate and condemn the repressive and barbaric Taliban regime.

Our country's essential position as a champion for democracy, human rights, and freedom against authoritarianism and violent fanaticism around the world requires us to engage in fact-based oversight to understand what went wrong with our two-decade mission in Afghanistan. As Mr. Sopko has stated, serious analysis means examining a series of blunders made across multiple administrations over two decades. We cannot do our faithful duty as Members of Congress by assigning blame on a partisan basis or scoring points in distorted ways. The fate of democracy, human rights, and women's equality all over the world depends on seriously analyzing what went wrong with our intervention in Afghanistan. Let us be serious to that task.

And I yield back to you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. The Ranking Member yields back. I am pleased to introduce our four witnesses today. Mr. Robert Storch was recently confirmed as the Department of Defense Inspector General in December 2022. He has a long history in the IG community, including serving for five years as the National Security Agency's Inspector General. Ms. Diana Shaw serves as the Deputy Inspector General at the Department of State, where she performs the duties of the Inspector General. She has also held leadership positions within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Office of the Inspector General.

Ms. Nicole Angarella is the Acting Deputy Inspector General at the USAID, where she performs the duties of the Inspector General. She has a long history of working with USAID's OIG in various roles. And Mr. John Sopko has been the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction since 2012. He has more than 30 years' experience in oversight and investigations as a prosecutor, congressional counsel, and senior Federal Government advisor. A very impressive witness panel.

Pursuant to committee Rule 9(g), the witnesses will please stand and raise their right hands.

Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony that you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

[A chorus of ayes.]

Chairman COMER. Let the record show that the witnesses all answered in the affirmative.

We appreciate all of you being here today and we look forward to your testimony. Let me remind the witnesses that we have read your statements and they will appear in full in the hearing record. Please limit your oral statements to five minutes.

As a reminder, please press the button on your microphone in front of you so that it is on, and the Members can hear you. When you begin to speak, the light in front of you will turn green. After four minutes, the light will turn yellow. When the red light comes on, your five minutes have expired and we would ask that you please wrap up.

I recognize Mr. Storch to please begin his opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF ROBERT STORCH
INSPECTOR GENERAL
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

Mr. STORCH. Chairman Comer, Ranking Member Raskin, and distinguished Members of the Committee, the war in Afghanistan was, in the words of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a strategic failure. Despite an investment of more than \$2 trillion over 20 years and the sacrifices of more than 2,400 American service members, the U.S.-supported Afghan Government and military collapsed almost immediately as U.S. forces began their final withdrawal from the country, resulting in a more rushed than contested non-combatant evacuation.

My office has provided robust, independent oversight of DOD activities involving Afghanistan going back to 2005. Congress established the lead IG model for coordinating oversight and reporting on overseas contingency operations in 2013. In 2015, the DOD IG was designated the lead IG for Operation Freedom's Sentinel, the U.S. counterterrorism mission against Al-Qaeda, ISIS-K, and their affiliates in Afghanistan, and related participation in the NATO-led mission to develop the capacity of the Afghan security ministries and national defense and security forces.

As lead IG, my office employs a whole-of-government approach to continuously engage and coordinate with my colleagues here from the State Department OIG, U.S. Agency for International Development OIG, and the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, and many others to develop annual oversight plans and issue quarterly reports that transparently provide information regarding the operation and our oversight of it.

With the sunset of OFS following the end of U.S. military presence in Afghanistan, my office's lead IG responsibilities continue with Operation Enduring Sentinel, the mission to conduct over the horizon counterterrorism operations and engage with regional partners. To date, we and our partners have issued 31 quarterly reports on OFS and OES. The DOD OIG has issued 223 audit and evaluation reports and advisories related to Afghanistan oversight, containing approximately 1,500 recommendations to improve DOD programs and operations. Last fall, we issued a lessons learned report on U.S. security cooperation activities that analyze the total of 66 reports from my office and our partners to identify significant challenge areas, including deficiencies with training and advising the Afghan security forces and ministries that resulted in over-reliance on U.S. and coalition forces, and a lack of accountability and control for U.S. supplied equipment.

In the latter area, my office has issued some 15 separate reports related to the inability of both the DOD and the ANDSF to properly account for a variety of military equipment and property. DOD OIG audits also identified issues with the accountability of U.S. funds that were provided to support the ANDSF, including problems with payroll systems and ghost soldiers and routine theft of fuel and ammunition. Our oversight also identified an over-reliance on U.S. contractor maintenance that persisted throughout the U.S. military withdrawal.

As the U.S. military presence was ending, the DOD OIG issued a management advisory that compiled weaknesses from nine re-

ports regarding concerns about not properly removing sensitive information from controlled inventory, and the lack of documentation for the retrograde and disposal of such equipment. We also conducted a classified evaluation of the air-strike that tragically killed 10 civilians, including seven children on August 29, one of several reviews related to kinetic strikes by my office.

After the Afghan collapse, our lead IG reporting summarized available information regarding the factors contributing to the sudden demise of the Afghan military, while our audits and evaluations pivoted to address time sensitive issues regarding the multi-agency effort supported by the DOD to evacuate and support refugees. This included assessments of 11 military installations used in that effort, and last August, the lessons learned report on those efforts. We also have a number of completed and ongoing reviews related to DOD support for DHS-led screening and vetting activities, as well as ongoing complimentary audits with State and USAID OIGs of withdrawal related contract closeout costs.

Apart from all these programmatic reviews, my office's Defense Criminal Investigative Service has conducted over 500 investigations over the course of the U.S. presence in Afghanistan, resulting in 172 convictions, orders for more than \$1.3 billion in monetary recoveries, and over 500 suspensions or debarments. Our audits, evaluations, and investigations contain valuable lessons for the conduct of DOD operations now and in the future. And we will continue to conduct impactful oversight related to Afghanistan and as lead IG to provide joint reporting and oversight of OES.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

Chairman COMER. Thank you. Ms. Shaw?

**STATEMENT OF DIANA SHAW
ACTING INSPECTOR GENERAL
DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Ms. SHAW. Good morning, Chairman Comer, Ranking Member Raskin, and distinguished Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the Department of State Office of Inspector General's Afghanistan related oversight work. I am very pleased to be joined today by my counterparts from the Defense and USAID OIGs and the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. We are all here today prompted by memories of the shocking and chaotic scene that unfolded at the Kabul airport during the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in August 2021.

While the Department has reported that the United States and its partners ultimately evacuated approximately 124,000 people in the summer of 2021, questions rightfully remain about the planning, intelligence gathering, information sharing, and decisions leading up to the events of that summer. We have questions, too, which is why in the months immediately following the evacuation and withdrawal, State OIG launched an independent review to understand not only how the Department planned for the noncombatant evacuation it helped to execute but what factors contributed to the confusion and chaos that ultimately unfolded.

Today, I can share that we do have some answers to these important questions. In the next few weeks, State OIG will be issuing

its first in a series of reports looking at the Department's planning for and execution of the evacuation of Embassy Kabul. Although aspects of this work are classified and so cannot be discussed in this forum today, I would like to share a few insights that are appropriate to the setting, and I will start with the bottom-line up front.

While the Embassy's emergency evacuation planning activities in the lead-up to the evacuation generally complied with applicable standards, the Department simply was not fully prepared for the full range of challenges it encountered, and the critical question, of course, is why.

Our review found that there were several contributing factors. For one, we founded Embassy leadership, implementing the position taken at the time by the Administration, operated under the understanding that diplomatic operations would continue in Afghanistan after the military withdrawal and did not want to engage in overt evacuation planning based on concerns that it could spark panic and undermine support for the Afghan Government. As a result, communications with Embassy personnel were unclear as to the timing and scope of a potential evacuation, leading to confusion, and in some cases, inadequate preparation. In addition, we found that the Embassy was not fully prepared to evacuate the number of people it ultimately did. This was due in part to the Embassy lacking clearly defined eligibility criteria for the evacuation and using unreliable data about the potential number of evacuees.

These issues contributed to the scenes that eventually unfolded at the airport in Kabul and were further compounded by issues relating to unclear leadership, logistical mishaps, and communication failures that I am afraid I cannot discuss in this setting, but we would be happy to brief to Congress in a classified setting when our report is released.

While the events of August 2021 have passed, as oversight professionals and as legislators here today, we must grapple with the ongoing ramifications of those events. These include the near doubling of the number of Afghans in need of humanitarian assistance since the Taliban came to power and the severe curtailment of the rights of women and girls.

Further, the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program, for which the Department of State is primarily responsible, still has more than 152,000 SIV applicants in Afghanistan undergoing processing as of last month. This is why it is so important that we continue to keep a close eye trained on the situation in Afghanistan, which is precisely what we are doing.

State OIG has issued 14 Afghanistan-related oversight products since the evacuation, and we have an additional nearly dozen projects planned and ongoing. This oversight work will address three primary strategic areas, including additional coverage of the evacuation of Embassy Kabul, support for Afghan evacuees, and the resumption of Department programs and operations related to Afghanistan. Our work will provide answers to critical questions and offer recommendations that we hope will prompt positive change.

But in closing, I would like to leave you with one final message. How the Department responds to our Afghanistan related findings

and recommendations has the potential to impact its success or failure in other important contexts, including Ukraine and Iraq. It is, therefore, vitally important that the Department continue to embrace and learn from our oversight work. This is true not only for us but for my colleagues on the panel. Each of us recognizes that our work has long lasting potential life or death implications, which is why we are so dedicated to robust, independent, whole of government oversight.

Thank you for the opportunity, and I look forward to your questions.

Chairman COMER. Thank you. Ms. Angarella?

**STATEMENT OF NICOLE L. ANGARELLA
ACTING DEPUTY INSPECTOR GENERAL
U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (USAID)**

Ms. ANGARELLA. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Comer, Ranking Member Raskin, and distinguished Members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Office of Inspector General's Oversight of USAID's work in Afghanistan. I also look forward to sharing with you lessons learned from Afghanistan that must inform USAID's future programming. I am honored to be sitting here today with my oversight partners from the Department of Defense, State and SIGAR.

Past and continued oversight of USAID programs and U.S. programs in Afghanistan cannot be done in silos. In joining forces, we avoid duplication of effort, ensure policymakers receive the information they need, and hold accountable bad actors targeting U.S. funds.

The chaotic events that occurred during the evacuation impacted our office in a significant and personal way. We had six colleagues, local Afghan employees of USAID OIG, that were trying to evacuate with their families. I was not acting as the head of our office at that time, but as a member of our senior leadership team, I was on the live group chat we had linking us with our staff 24/7 as they and their families tried to get to and through the Abbey Gate day in and day out. Those exchanges will stay with me forever.

I am happy to say that our colleagues were eventually able to evacuate and relocate in the United States. I have never been prouder to work at USAID OIG than I was during those months. The generosity and kindness our employees showed in helping their former colleagues as they built new lives in America was inspiring. I also want to recognize all of our Afghan USAID OIG employees over the years who were integral to OIG's work. Without them, the work I am going to talk about today would not have been possible.

From 2001 until the evacuation in 2021, USAID invested \$24 billion in Afghanistan. The significant level of investment required a proportionate level of independent oversight from USAID OIG. In 2010, we established a Kabul office to advance our work in country. We issued more than 300 reports covering programs valued at close to \$6.4 billion dollars. This work resulted in nearly 800 recommendations to USAID and identified hundreds of millions of dollars in question costs. Our investigative work led to criminal prosecutions, major False Claims Act statements, and suspensions or

debarments of 70 companies and individuals. In addition to the direct impact on U.S. Government efforts in Afghanistan, our comprehensive body of work provides vital lessons that can inform USAID's responses to complex emergencies around the world.

I would like to highlight three key lessons today. First, effective monitoring of programming activities is essential in complex environments. USAID must implement and then adhere to standards to ensure for effective program oversight. It must also plan ahead to ensure continuity of projects and anticipation of staff reductions. One of our Afghanistan audits found that for 127 projects reviewed in Afghanistan, only one award used USAID's monitoring system as intended.

Second, USAID must clearly define, measure, and link performance objectives to ensure that programs are actually meeting the established metrics and goals. For example, one of our audits found that USAID did not have policies and procedures in place to verify that payments to a World Bank trust fund were being used for their intended purpose. Third, in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, large sums of funding from outside donors attract corruption and diversion, including to sanctioned groups like the Taliban. USAID must strengthen processes to ensure prompt reporting of criminal activity and ensure accountability over its programs, especially those being implemented by U.N. and multilateral organizations in Afghanistan today.

Our Afghanistan oversight work continues today with planned and ongoing audit work. We also continue to receive allegations pertaining to fraud and diversion. Currently, we have four open criminal cases related to Afghanistan and three cases we are coordinating on with the World Food Program Office of Inspector General.

Our decades of work in Afghanistan yielded important lessons that USAID must apply toward programming in future conflict zones. You have my commitment that my office in coordination with my oversight partners here today will continue to provide the comprehensive, independent oversight that is expected for continued U.S. programming in Afghanistan. Thank you for your time. I look forward to the discussion today.

Chairman COMER. Thank you. Mr. Sopko?

**STATEMENT OF JOHN SOPKO
INSPECTOR GENERAL
SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN
RECONSTRUCTION (SIGAR)**

Mr. SOPKO. Chairman Comer, Ranking Member Raskin, thank you very much for inviting me to come back here to testify. I believe this is the 12th time I have testified before this Committee.

Unlike my other colleagues here, SIGAR has not been tasked with, nor do we have the jurisdiction to look at the question of the Administration's withdrawal. However, just days after that withdrawal occurred, this Committee in a bipartisan fashion asked us and directed us to examine the factors that led up to the Afghan collapse and the Afghan withdraw. Your request, I believe, is extremely critical to today's hearing and your ongoing oversight work

because it provides the context for how the Trump and Biden Administrations' policy decisions were either affected or carried out.

SIGAR's reports—and these are the two reports which we have prepared for this Committee—are based upon our over 12 years of work in Afghanistan, over 700 audits or reports we prepared, and includes dozens of lessons learned reports on particular issues in Afghanistan. They are also based on over 800 interviews of current and former U.S. and Afghan military and civilian officials. They painstakingly show that the failure to build a democratic, self-sustainable Afghan state, which was the purpose for us going into Afghanistan, was the result of many decisions made over the course of four Presidential administrations, from ignoring rampant corruption and the lack of a consistent U.S. strategy to the inability to develop self-sustaining Afghan military forces and institutions. The seeds of August 2021's drama were sown many years before.

We found that the 2020 Doha agreement and the subsequent decision to go through with the withdrawal in 2021 merely exacerbated long-existing problems. Among them, these policy decisions dramatically degraded the morale of the Afghan security forces and compounded the Afghan military's total dependence on U.S. combat and contractor support, which left the Afghan military unable to sustain operations. The Afghan Government's own self-denial about the U.S. intention to depart, the exclusion of the Afghan Government from the U.S. negotiations with the Taliban, again, systemic corruption, and the insular Afghan Government decision-making were additional factors that contributed to the disaster. But, remember this. Once each administration decided to withdraw our troops and contractors, it was not a question of if, it was rather a question of when the Afghan Government was going to collapse.

Now, I want to change the subject because there are still major problems with our assistance in Afghanistan that this Committee should be alerted to. The United States has appropriated \$2 billion for Afghanistan assistance since the withdrawal, and a further \$3.5 billion may be available through this newly created Switzerland-based Afghan fund. While I agree and we all agree Afghanistan faces dire humanitarian and economic situation, it is critical that our assistance not be diverted by the Taliban. Unfortunately, as I sit here today, I cannot assure this Committee or the American taxpayer, we are not currently funding the Taliban. Nor can I assure you that the Taliban are not diverting the money we are sending from the intended recipients, which are the poor Afghan people.

As our 2023 High Risk List for Congress, which we were releasing today at this hearing, indicates, we face serious risk due to Taliban interference with U.N. and U.S. assistance, and we face a lack of aggressive oversight controls on the trust funds and the multilateral organizations. Which brings me to the issue that I know I have spoken before, but it is particularly a problem of the U.S. State Department and USAID's failure to fully cooperate with SIGAR audits and other inquiries.

The lack of cooperation by State—and I am not talking about the IGs; I am talking about the Department of State and, to a lesser extent, USAID—is unprecedented in the nearly 12 years that I have been the SIGAR and, I must add, in the two decades that I did congressional oversight both in the Senate and the House. Due

to this refusal to fully cooperate, a significant portion of SIGAR's work, including the five reports we did for this Committee, have been hindered and delayed. So, in conclusion, we need your help to stop this obfuscation and delay by the Department of State and to some extent USAID.

As I am sure my fellow inspectors general would agree, we cannot abide a situation in which agencies are allowed to pick and choose what information an IG gets or who an IG can interview or what an IG may report on. If permitted to continue, it will end SIGAR's work in Afghanistan, but also Congress' access to independent and credible oversight of any administration.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Chairman COMER. Wow. Thank you, Mr. Sopko. Now, to get to the question portion. We begin with the Chairman of the National Security Subcommittee, Mr. Grothman.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you. I am going to go a little bit different here when we kick off. I think collectively in Afghanistan since I have been on this Committee, we have had to have seven or eight hearings. And I always kind of view the answers I get through the prism of a guy who had been my driver one summer—was a blue-collar guy, had spent six months in Afghanistan—and I asked him what he thought was going on in Afghanistan. He says it is not going to end well. We shouldn't have stayed around. Maybe we should have, maybe we shouldn't have, but he said, they hate us.

So here is this guy, 21-year-old guy, and then I come in here before these Committee hearings, not the IG, but, you know, all the various agencies, and they are all confident now, you know, we are advancing and things are getting better and better, and the government is going to hold on for years and years. And I knew all along my 21-year-old guy who spent four or five months there knew a lot more than the high-level State Department people who were assuring us that everything was going well.

Prior to delving into the more relevant questions, I guess I will ask Ms. Shaw, and maybe it is not the IG to know this, but could you give us an opinion of where we find the State Department employees that seems so clueless about what is going on in the real world? Is there a way we could change the hiring practices or the universities that train these people, so totally flawed or lacking in common sense? How did they get this so wrong when just an average guy, boots on the ground, so to speak, understood exactly what was going on?

Ms. SHAW. So, thank you for your question. I do not know that we have worked specifically on that issue, although we do look in the context of contract oversight and monitoring and find that there are folks filling in, in these positions that lack the technical expertise, lack the experience. And so, we do have some work that point to those issues. But on the broader question, I am afraid I do not have an answer.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Yes. OK. And I am not really worried about technical expertise. I am worried about common sense, which seems to be entirely lacking. Ms. Angarella, what ongoing programs are taking place in Afghanistan today?

Ms. ANGARELLA. Sure. Thank you for your question. In Fiscal Year 2022, USAID appropriated or spent \$912 million in Afghanistan. Through Q1 and Q2 of Fiscal Year 2023, it is about \$599 million and it is more heavily weighted toward humanitarian assistance, mostly food aid, and a very small portion of it, about \$59 million, in development funding. But mostly humanitarian food assistance.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Well, thank you. Are there any indications that with \$900 million, is some of that going toward the goal of making sure that the people of Afghanistan no longer hate us?

Ms. ANGARELLA. I think the goal of getting food to people, there have been significant impediments to that in the last couple of months with the ban on women working for NGOs and most recently the U.N. As of right now, the U.N. has halted much of its programming for humanitarian assistance, I believe, until May 5 while they decide how to continue implementing programming.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. How does USAID ensure the assistance is not going to Taliban?

Ms. ANGARELLA. USAID has third-party monitoring and multi-tiered monitoring, and what we do as USAID is evaluate the type of monitoring they have in place right now.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. We will go to Mr. Sopko. Today, you are releasing your 2023 high risk list that examines the ongoing risks to U.S. taxpayer dollars. What are the biggest risks that you have identified?

Mr. SOPKO. I think the biggest risk is the interference the Taliban has with the U.N. and the Department of State and USAID programs. We do know, the U.N. has told us that they are siphoning money off. They are actually going beyond the Ghani Administration and stealing money from us. So that started.

I think the second problem is that we have to rely on international trust funds like the U.N. We have identified in the past, over the last 12 years, that these trust funds with the United Nations, World Bank, et cetera, do very little oversight and are very skimpy on giving information about it, and we think that is continuing. So, we do not think State and AID—to give you an example, when we asked State how much money is the Taliban getting from these programs, they could not answer because they do not know. So, I cannot tell you how much, but that is the biggest.

The other serious threat to our assistance, I think, is the refusal of State and AID to answer the simplest oversight questions that we have, like, who are your implementing partners. Can we interview them? We are not getting those answers back. So, I would say the three biggest threats is the Taliban; it is the fact we are over relying on these international institutions, which in the past have been horrible in providing us appropriate information; and the third thing is State and AID'S abject refusal to allow oversight.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Can you just rattle off quickly one more time the international organizations that this body, and quite frankly, the press corps should know cannot really be trusted with taxpayer dollars?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, mainly it is a number of U.N. organizations we have identified in the past. You have the World Food Program. You have something called the Colombo Plan, which the State Depart-

ment specifically ordered not to talk to us when we were doing an audit of one of their programs on this. I think the World Bank is also involved. I would have to give you a further list of all the programs involved.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thanks. Well, it is very illuminating. Thank you much for giving me another couple of seconds.

Chairman COMER. Very good. The Chair recognizes the Ranking Member.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Sopko, thank you for your service as the Special Inspector General for the Afghan Reconstruction and for the reports you have authored examining the factors that led to the collapse of the Afghan Government and security forces. Your work is critical also going forward, as you were just saying. Committee Democrats strongly support the work of all the IGs, and we will continue to urge all of the agencies to cooperate fully with your efforts.

In your February 2023 report, you said there were six key short-term reasons for collapse of the Afghan armed forces. But the very first one that you cite was Donald Trump's decision to negotiate with the Taliban for a U.S. withdrawal, negotiations that excluded the Afghan Government and then to give the Taliban exactly what they wanted, which was the commitment of the U.S. to completely withdraw all U.S. and allied forces as well as all contractors, and the April 2021 announcement following through on that agreement. You write about how this agreement between the Taliban and the Trump Administration led the jubilant Taliban to declare victory on behalf of the entire Muslim and Mujahideen nation, how it destroyed morale within the Afghan military and security forces and how it "catalyzed the collapse of the government."

Mr. Sopko, did President Trump's decision to negotiate directly with the Taliban and exclude President Ghani and the Afghan Government from negotiations undermine the ability of the Afghan Government to negotiate a stable peace agreement with the Taliban and to defend itself and the Nation against Taliban military attack?

Mr. SOPKO. As we say, this was one of many decisions. But you are correct. That decision itself undercut the morale of the average Afghan soldier and the average Afghan civilian. But the follow-up is, as we say in the report, we also say that the decision by the Biden Administration to follow also added to that elimination of the morale of the average Afghan soldier to continue fighting.

Mr. RASKIN. By following that path. I got you.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes. Yes.

Mr. RASKIN. Did the Trump-Taliban agreement embolden what you call a reinvigorated Taliban to increase its violent attacks against the Afghan armed forces?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, it did. It did. And if you talk to the Afghan generals and people who were on the ground, which we did, they will tell you that that is exactly what happened.

Mr. RASKIN. Well, one of the concessions that Trump made the Taliban was allowing the release of 5,000 Taliban prisoners then being held by the Afghan Government, including perpetrators of terrorist attacks in return for the Taliban freeing I believe it was 1,000 Afghan prisoners. Thousands of these Taliban-released fight-

ers immediately returned to the battlefield and participated, and in some cases, led the Taliban onslaught against Afghan cities, even though there was a provision saying that they were not supposed to rejoin the fight.

In September 2021, after the fall of Kabul, former President Trump lied about this deal, saying, “The inept Afghan Government led by corrupt President Ghani released 5,000 prisoners, not the Trump Administration.” We know this is a lie from the language of the Trump-Taliban agreement itself, which explicitly contemplated the release of “up to 5,000 prisoners by March 10, 2020.” Moreover, your report establishes that the Trump Administration actually pressured the Afghan Government to agree to this condition. Mr. Sopko, isn’t it correct that the Afghan Government initially opposed the release of these Taliban and terrorist prisoners?

Mr. SOPKO. You are correct.

Mr. RASKIN. And how did the Trump Administration specifically work to pressure or coerce the Afghan Government to agree to this prisoner exchange?

Mr. SOPKO. I believe it may have been Secretary of State Pompeo, I believe our report indicates may have actually threatened funding to the Afghan Government. I believe. I would have to double check with—

Mr. RASKIN. Secretary Pompeo, according to the report, threatened to withhold U.S. aid—

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct.

Mr. RASKIN [continuing]. If they didn’t go along with it. So just to get the picture straight, President Trump excludes the Afghan Government from the negotiation, takes it upon himself to work directly with the Taliban, then negotiates a provision for the release of 5,000 Taliban fighters, including terrorists. The Afghan Government opposes it, and in order to coerce them to go along with it, Secretary Pompeo says he will withhold aid. The government goes along with it, and then the disaster ensues. Now, obviously, that infusion of thousands of new fighters didn’t necessarily make the difference, but it certainly made a pretty big difference. Your report tells a shocking story indeed. I thank you for your service, and I yield back to you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes Mr. Palmer for five minutes.

Mr. PALMER. I would point out that the peace agreement with the Taliban made in February 2020. At least through September 2020, there was zero American service men or women killed in Afghanistan. I do have a question for Mr. Storch and Mr. Sopko. Apparently, the U.S. Government gave the Taliban a list of Americans and Afghan allies, names of people that were trying to get to the airport in Kabul. Are you aware of that, Mr. Storch?

Mr. STORCH. Our office hasn’t done any work on that. I will say that we are aware of the after-action work that was done by the Administration. And I immediately requested and obtained full copies of that. And my team and I are reviewing that.

Mr. PALMER. Mr. Sopko, were you aware that a list of Americans and Afghan allies was given to the Taliban?

Mr. SOPKO. I am only aware from what has been reported in the press. I am not aware of it. Again, we did not look at the withdrawal. So, I cannot answer that question.

Mr. PALMER. OK. I have a lot of concern about that, and this is for the State Department. You do not need to respond. But I do think the State Department needs to respond on this question, and if there was a list, who was on the list, and can they account for those people? It was characterized in the media by anonymous sources within the State Department that it was tantamount to giving the Taliban a kill list. Mr. Storch, were there any American soldiers remaining in Afghanistan after the final withdrawal from Kabul?

Mr. STORCH. Again, as I testified, Congressman, following the withdrawal, our office—

Mr. PALMER. It is a “yes” or “no?”?

Mr. STORCH. I do not have the answer to that, sir.

Mr. PALMER. Do you know, Mr. Sopko?

Mr. SOPKO. No, I do not.

Mr. PALMER. Do any of you know in the weeks following the withdrawal whether or not there were American service members who were still there?

[No response.]

Mr. PALMER. I will follow up on that later. I may need to talk to someone else about this. Did any of you encounter anyone with the State Department that expressed or exhibited any level of animosity or negative feelings toward American servicemen and women or American contractors or Afghan allies? And in your efforts to do your investigations, did you encounter anyone that displayed any animosity toward U.S. involvement in Afghanistan? It is a “yes” or “no.” If you do not know—

Mr. SOPKO. You are saying State Department employees who expressed that?

Mr. PALMER. Have you talked to people outside of Washington?

Mr. SOPKO. Oh, absolutely. We interviewed 800 some people, and since the U.S. Government would not talk to us, we interviewed a lot of former and current employees privately. Yes, we talked a lot of people. I do not remember encountering anybody expressing any animosity to U.S. troops in the people we interviewed.

Mr. PALMER. OK. Mr. Chairman, I will follow up on this later with you. Mr. Sopko, you have already expressed some reservations about U.S. funding, sending billions of dollars to Afghanistan to promote human rights, to support the rights of women and girls, particularly the right of women and girls to work, to get an education. How confident are you that the Taliban will make sure that every dollar of U.S. taxpayer’s money will go toward promoting and supporting human rights and particularly in regard to women and girls?

Mr. SOPKO. I do not trust the Taliban as far as you can throw them. And the information we are getting, again, not from the State Department, who is not talking to us, or USAID, who is giving us access, is that the Taliban are already diverting funds.

Let me just correct one thing, sir. I am not opposed to humanitarian assistance. That is a policy decision that Congress, and the President, and the Administration have to make. I just am saying,

if the purpose is to help the Afghan people, we have to have effective oversight to ensure the money goes to those people and not to some Taliban. And I would just say, I have not seen a starving Taliban fighter on TV. They all seem to be fat, dumb, and happy. I see a lot of starving Afghan children on TV, so I am wondering where all this funding is going.

Mr. PALMER. Well, I think we are all aware that withholding food and sustenance is a way to maintain control of a population. And I have some serious, serious concerns about what has happened there post the withdrawal and how it was handled and the post-withdrawal of private contractors to extract people, that, frankly, some of that is still going on.

The fact that the Taliban was going house to house, people could hear gunshots in the streets. I am very concerned about what has happened in that country. And I support humanitarian aid, but I do not support giving money to people who are murdering people in the street, who are denying people basic human rights, and who are basically withholding the opportunities that for 20 years Afghan women and girls enjoyed while we were there.

My last question, if I may, Mr. Chairman, is, did anyone at the Department of Defense or the State Department express any reservations about abandoning Bagram? Does any—

Chairman COMER. The gentleman's time has expired, but feel free to answer the question.

Mr. STORCH. Yes. We reported out in our lead IG reporting regarding all the facts in the case, but we have not done any oversight work related to that. And I would say as well, if I can—I know we are over—but that goes to the point that Mr. Sopko made earlier. Many of these are policy strategic decisions. And so, as IGs, our role is once those are set, to do oversight that determines whether the policy or strategy is being done efficiently or effectively.

Mr. PALMER. I thank the Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes Ms. Norton for five minutes.

Ms. NORTON. I thank the Chair. I strongly agree with the inspectors general about the need to support the people of Afghanistan amidst ongoing economic and humanitarian crises and to uplift Afghan women and girls whose basic human rights have been stripped away by the Taliban. It is critical that we provide financial assistance while isolating and condemning the Taliban regime. This new challenge requires a thoughtful and careful approach to delivering aid. While providing this vital assistance is not without risk, we must not turn our backs on our allies. Instead, we must work with the inspectors general and the Administration to identify effective ways to enable direct assistance with appropriate guardrails. We must continue working on new solutions to provide the much-needed relief to Afghan people while ensuring this aid stays out of the hands of the Taliban.

Now, Chairman Comer is holding today's hearing to focus on the events surrounding the August 2021 withdrawal in Afghanistan, and the Chairman has made his position on the withdrawal very clear over the past few years. In an April 2021 interview, Chairman Comer said regarding President Biden's decision to complete

the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan by September 2021: "That is probably the first decision Joe Biden has made that I actually agree with. I strongly support removing all the troops from Afghanistan. I think that the American public has been ready to leave Afghanistan for at least a decade".

And it was not just Chairman Comer. Several Republican Members of the Committee praised President Biden for withdrawing troops from Afghanistan in March 2021. Mr. Biggs criticized President Biden for failing to withdraw troops from Afghanistan sooner, writing, "You still suggest a May 1 withdrawal date isn't possible. That kind of thinking has kept us in Afghanistan for 20 years." In 2021, Ms. Mace stated on Fox News, "I have never been shy to disagree with the Administration, but I couldn't agree more with bringing our troops home after two decades of war in Afghanistan, a policy former President Trump and now President agree on."

Mr. Sopko, in your testimony today, you stated that while the Trump Administration's decision to sign the Doha agreement and the Biden Administration's decision to follow through with the withdrawal were immediate factors precipitating the collapse of the Afghan Government and its security forces, those decisions had antecedents that stretched to the beginning of the mission of 2001. Mr. Sopko, it sounds like it is your view that after 20 years in Afghanistan, the U.S. failed to build stable Afghan institutions that could survive the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the country. Is that right?

Mr. SOPKO. You are absolutely correct. That is what we found.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Sopko, you have been warning for years that this was the case that Afghan institutions would not survive the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. Is that right?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, it is. Going back to almost as soon as I started in 2012, we have been raising concerns.

Ms. NORTON. Today my Republican colleagues who so enthusiastically supported the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan seek to blame the Biden-Harris Administration for results of that withdrawal. I hope my Republican colleagues will pause their political posturing so that together we can work on learning the lessons that our country's 20-year involvement in Afghanistan teach us. I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentlelady yields back. Before I yield to the next questioner, I feel compelled to respond. I think I speak for all three of us that you quoted, we supported the withdrawal, but we assumed that this Administration had more competence in their ability to withdraw. We have the mightiest military in the world. They were up against the Taliban in flip flops and 1970 era rifles. We felt like that this Administration could have done a better job. And I do not think you can blame Donald Trump for this Administration not cooperating with these IGs, which is very, very troubling.

The Chair recognizes the Chairman of the full House Intelligence Committee, Mr. Turner, for five minutes.

Mr. TURNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There certainly is a lot to learn, and I think we were all aghast as we watched on television people running for planes, as the United States withdrew abruptly from Afghanistan. I know the Administration had prom-

ised an orderly withdrawal from Afghanistan, one which I opposed. I believe that there was a role for a small force to be able to continue to provide stability in Afghanistan. But the Administration promised that they were not going to run for the exits, but they did so and they did so in the middle of the night, which caused the collapse of the Afghan Government and the inability of the Afghan military to operate and led to their inability to be able to defend themselves.

Mr. Sopko, I thank you for all the work that you do. You and I have spoken before. Good to see you. I wanted to highlight some of the problems that you are having in doing your work and in your testimony, some of the problems that you identify. You sent a letter to Secretary of State Blinken; and Samantha Power, Administrator of USAID, in June 2022. And in that letter, you cited that you were directed by Congress to conduct studies of the collapse of the Afghan military, that State and USAID were required by law to provide you information to be able to do that task. And that they were being prohibited from being able to assist, to provide you the information you needed, and that you felt that it was thwarting your efforts. You contacted me. I then sent a letter to President Biden, transmitting the letter that you had sent. I ask this be submitted into the record, both your letter and mine.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. TURNER. What is troubling is, in your testimony, you relate that you are still being thwarted, that you are not getting the information that you need to be able to do the job that Congress directed you in reviewing this withdrawal and really the circumstances in Afghanistan.

Mr. SOPKO. That is absolutely correct.

Mr. TURNER. Now, I have not received a response to my letter to the President. Have you received responses from your letters that detail it all, why—that they are not providing you the information that you need?

Mr. SOPKO. Welcome to my world, Chairman, we have not received the response back from Secretary of State or, well, anybody in the Administration, really.

Mr. TURNER. You are the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction. We are not talking small dollars here, you open on page two saying that most people would be surprised that more than \$8 billion has been provided by the United States since our withdrawal, 3.5 billion of that from the Afghan Central Bank Reserve. But we are talking billions of taxpayers' dollars that are still being spent in Afghanistan. And yet your task of being able to assess the effectiveness, what is occurring with those funds is being thwarted by lack of information.

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct.

Mr. TURNER. Now, I do find interesting that even though you are being thwarted, you are still providing us information that is shocking. You indicate that the Taliban are able to benefit from these dollars, that both in fees that they provide, and that they require, in directions to NGOs. On page three, page four, you go into basically schemes that result in actually taxpayers' dollars going right into the hands of the Taliban.

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct. But we are not getting that information on a regular basis from State or AID, or in the past from DOD, although DOD is not really doing much in Afghanistan anymore. We are clever. My agents and my analysts have sources. We have developed hundreds and hundreds of sources. I think we had more sources in Afghanistan than all the other IGs combined in the GAO. So, we are still trying to get that information. But the best information, like actual contract data, actually the names of people would be its best and it should by law come from State and AID.

Mr. TURNER. I think it is shocking that the Biden Administration would not want you to be able to do your job and that billions of dollars of taxpayers' moneys are, by your assessment, going directly into the hands of the Taliban. You also, in your testimony, speak of the collapse of the Afghan military and you speak of it as in that our military was integrated into their military, really the difficulty of them being able to operate. Could you just speak for a moment of that, that literally it had to be known by the Administration that when they abruptly pulled our military from the Afghan military, that they would be incapable of continuing to operate?

Mr. SOPKO. That is a very good point, and it is one that we repeatedly made to every administration that we built an Afghan military that looked like and would rely totally on the U.S. military. Now, we have a great military, the best in the world, but the problem is you were dealing with an illiterate country, basically, and trying to get them very sophisticated. And we forced them to take very sophisticated U.S. and Western hardware that they could not supply or fix or whatever, and particularly when we saw the Doha Agreement, and everybody focused on the troops leaving. But the Doha Agreement, which was then ratified by the Biden Administration, specifically says the contractors have to leave, and we knew, once the contractors were leaving, it was going to collapse.

And if you talk to the Afghan generals, and I highly recommend as you go forth in your investigation, talk to General Sami Sadat, who was one of the best Afghan generals that fought there. He was head of the Special Forces in Afghanistan. And he can give you chapter and verse what happened when all of a sudden they couldn't repair their helicopters. That is when Afghans started dying dramatically, and that was the problem. The problem is they could not repair those.

The irony is, the Afghans were capable of repairing the old Soviet military equipment. But we decided, for whatever policy revision, to not give them Soviet military equipment anymore or former Soviet, but to give them U.S. equipment. Excellent equipment, but it pushed back by years, by decades, the ability of the Afghans to prepare or repair the equipment.

Mr. TURNER. Thank you for bringing our focus to that. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes Mr. Mfume for five minutes.

Mr. MFUME. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank you and the Ranking Member for convening us today on this hearing, and I want to go back to something that the Ranking Member said that I think is important to keep in mind. There was a unspoken doctrine in this body that all politics stop at the water's

edge. And we have had, over the years, to push ourselves and to push each other to make sure that we try not to go back and particularly always assign blame, but to find a way to move forward, and so I hope that the moving forward on this is where we are.

Some of us are old enough to remember 1975 when Saigon fell and the optics, which looks so much like the optics in August 2021. But there was a push, and I urge that we continue to push now, but that we move forward in looking at the real things that trouble us. And one of the things that troubles me, quite frankly, about this whole report is this issue of not enough accountability. I do not know how any of us can defend that. I mean, I am simultaneously in a Small Business Committee meeting, looking at the amount of fraud in the PPP program. So, we are always going back to try to find a way to be more accountable to taxpayers, to the American public, and to be more accountable to the truth in all of this.

Mr. Sopko, I should let you know that Congress, Committee Democrats here on this Committee and the previous Congress, including Chairwoman Maloney and Chairman Lynch and staff and others, repeatedly encouraged and pushed agencies to cooperate with SIGAR, I mean, repeatedly. So, I regret today, quite frankly, sir, hearing that the State Department, DOD, and USAID have produced some documents, provided some written responses and participated in some meetings, but have not given the full cooperation that is sought.

And I want to underscore something that the Ranking Member said earlier also that it is the intention of this Committee to always support the work of Inspector Generals. If we do not do that, then it is pretty difficult for us to move forward with any sense of legitimacy. And, so, given the extraordinary importance of SIGAR's work, including the role in helping Congress and the American people to better understand where we are, I am going to, on the record, urge all three of those agencies today to cooperate more, so that we might not be in a position of hearing what we have heard today or in a position of frustration like I am right now, knowing that there is apparently more information, more documents, more discussions that should be held and ought to be held. I am not saying they have to be held in public, but they have got to be held with the Inspector General to find out where we are.

We are all concerned about this issue of funding the Taliban indirectly. And as I sit here today, I am under the assumption that that is what we regrettably seem to be doing. The World Bank Trust Fund has not been able to verify fraud diversion, if that is taking place, we need to know. These are billions and billions of dollars out of the U.S. Treasury, that if they are not going to do what they ought to do, could be better spent at home. But they should be getting into Afghanistan to protect what we see going on with girls and with women there, the tremendous suppression of human rights. And, if that is not occurring, and we really do, ladies and gentlemen, have a big task before us in making sure that that takes place.

So, Mr. Sopko, and the other thing that grabbed me that you said, clearly on the record, that you cannot guarantee that we are not indirectly funding the Taliban as a result of not having the proper information you need. That is scary to note. I would trust

the Taliban as far as I could throw them also. And the fact that they have armaments that have been left behind, the fact that they claim to be a sovereign, independent state now, and the fact that they claim that they do not have to do anything to comply with U.S. requests, concerns me.

I know they have been hanging out with, for a lack of a better term, the Chinese and the Russians and snuggling up and creating new allies. But for us, the security of women and children in Afghanistan remains a paramount concern and the accountability of agencies of the U.S. Government to all inspectors general must be a principle that we are guided by, that we live by, and that we pledge to defend.

So again, I appreciate this hearing from both the Chairman and the Ranking Member. It helps to get us further down the road and prevents us, I think, from kind of looking back and pointing the finger, but looking forward and saying, here is what we must do now, while we have the power to protect the process that has always guided us in the Congress, in the United States in the correct way.

So, Mr. Chairman, I would yield back, and I thank you for the time.

Chairman COMER. Very good. Thank you, Mr. Mfume. The Chair recognizes Mr. Higgins from Louisiana for five minutes.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to clarify for Americans watching, we have Inspector General present on our panel for the Department of Defense, Inspector General for the Department of State, Inspector General for U.S. Agency for International Development, commonly referred to as USAID, and Inspector General for the Afghanistan Reconstruction.

So, ladies and gentlemen, I ask you collectively, just "yes" or "no," down the line. Mr. Storch, we will begin with you. Have any of you in your duties, in your respective investigations, which we very much appreciate you conducting and it is an important role that you play for Congress and thus for the Nation that we are sworn to serve. Have any of you encountered any obstacles or limitations from the executive branch that you would categorize as obstruction?

Mr. STORCH. I am not aware of any such issues for the DOD OIG.

Mr. HIGGINS. That would be a no, you have to——

Mr. STORCH. That is a no.

Mr. HIGGINS. Yes.

Ms. SHAW. No for State OIG.

Ms. ANGARELLA. No for USAID, we do not have any access issues right now.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, and I am happy to give you a list.

Mr. HIGGINS. Well, we probably have the same list. But I look forward to speaking with you further about that.

Mr. SOPKO. I am happy to provide it to the full committee, the whole list in more detail.

Mr. HIGGINS. Would you do that, sir?

Mr. SOPKO. Absolutely.

Mr. HIGGINS. I will call upon you to do that. Could we get a time-frame that we will receive that?

Mr. SOPKO. I can give it to you in the next 24 hours.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, sir. We expect to have it. Ladies and gentlemen, I am going to ask you about the bombing. I understand that this is not perhaps specifically in your purview, but America needs to know what exactly happened and why we allowed this terrorist bomber to kill these 13 Americans and 170 Afghans and horribly maimed many others when according to testimony that Congress has received, this bomber had been identified. The test runs of bombings had been conducted in the days prior to the bombing.

Our intel guys had identified what the bomber look like. And according to the testimony of Sergeant Vargas-Andrews, 25-year-old sniper, was blown up that day. He arrived on August 16 at his post. On August 22 they were advised an IED probe, a practice run by the Taliban had been performed near the airport, near the gate where he was deployed.

Days later, they received word be on the lookout for two specific vehicles. These are all signs of intelligence that had been harvested from the field. And around 2 a.m. on August 26, the intel guys advises his sniper nest that the suicide bomber in the vicinity had been identified. It was described as clean shaven, brown dress wear, a black vest, traveling with a companion. The sniper asked the intel guys, why wasn't he apprehended if we had a full description of him, and the intel guy said, they did not have the authorization to pick him up.

Later, the man was spotted by this sniper from noon to 1 p.m., that he was in the crowd. They had them in their sights. He was behaving in manners that indicated, according to their training, he was about to activate his vest. He was being guided and coached by an older Islamic jihadist man there. It was very serious, the advisor, chain of command, said please come and look at what we have got. We have got this guy. The chain of command came to the nest and told them that they did not have green light to shoot the guy and they were not going to arrest him. Why? "Leadership did not have the engagement authority. Do not engage."

We had identified the bomber. Our intel guys did their work. The Biden Administration would not authorize the shooting nor the arrest of the bomber that killed these 13 Americans and 170 of our Afghan allies, wounded and maimed many, many others. Why? Why? Why? I asked the Inspector Generals, do you have an answer? Can you provide that answer in writing to our Committee over the course of the next several days? Sir?

Mr. STORCH. So, thank you for the question. As I testified in my opening statement, following the withdrawal, we pivoted our work at DOD OIG to deal with some emergent issues—

Mr. HIGGINS. In the interest of time. My time has expired. Do you have data regarding that?

Mr. STORCH. Well, what I was going to say is we have not done oversight work on that now. But as I testified, we did obtain a copy of the Administration's after action. And we are actively reviewing that now. And if there is additional oversight work to do, we will do it.

Mr. HIGGINS. Inspector Generals, if you do have data—my time has expired—if you do have data regarding the bombing attack and murder of American citizens at the gate in Afghanistan, we ask you

to please provide your observations in writing to this Committee. Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes Ms. Stansbury for five minutes.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to welcome and thank all of our witnesses for being here today. Obviously, our Inspector Generals play a vital role in ensuring the oversight of our Federal Agencies. And I want to thank all of you, as well as your staff, for the important work that you do. I also want to take this opportunity to thank all of our active-duty military and veterans who served bravely in Afghanistan and continue to serve our country.

And, you know, I want to just acknowledge the comments of the previous speaker here. There is no question that the withdrawal from Afghanistan was chaotic. It was terrifying. It was violent. It was difficult. And the loss of those 13 service members can never be replaced. They paid the ultimate sacrifice for their service on behalf of our country. And we should be honoring their memory here today in this Committee hearing.

But I want to also acknowledge that the American mission in evacuating both our service members, American citizens, as well as our allies in Afghanistan was not in vain. In fact, in those final days, we were able to evacuate 124,000 U.S. citizens and other nationals who were allies to the United States.

And I want to say, as a New Mexican, I represent New Mexico's first congressional district, we personally saw the brave service of our service members and helping with the evacuation efforts in New Mexico. Holloman Air Force Base was one of the six designated sites where evacuees were sent when they came to the United States. And I personally had the opportunity to go down and visit, not only with the evacuees as they were arriving on our shores, but also the hundreds, literally hundreds of service members, mostly reservists, airwomen and airmen, National Guards who volunteered to go help with the evacuation mission because they understood, after 20 years of being involved in this conflict, that the Afghan allies who were being evacuated had stood bravely with our American troops on the ground.

And that our mission and responsibility as we were pulling out of Afghanistan, was to ensure that those allies were able to get out and their families were able to get to safety. So, I do want to acknowledge that those efforts were not in vain, and to acknowledge the lives that were lost.

But I also think it is really important that we set the record straight on really the path that got us into this mess in those final chaotic days. And so, Mr. Storch, I know you have been asked many of these questions already, but I just really want to be clear about the path that got us to the final days of the evacuation. So, first of all, is it not true that President Trump entered into negotiations directly with the Taliban in February 2020? And isn't it true—

Mr. STORCH. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. STANSBURY. Thank you. And isn't it true that over the course of those negotiations and the agreements that the Trump Administration had with the Taliban directly, they were negotiating di-

rectly with the Taliban, it included an agreement for a rapid draw-down of the troops who were stationed in that region?

Mr. STORCH. Yes. And I should say all of this is based on our lead IG reporting, we have reported on this.

Ms. STANSBURY. Right. And so, it was the Trump Administration who set the wheels into motion to actually rapidly draw down the troops and did so in direct negotiation with the Taliban. And yet, even though those agreements were put into place in 2020, there were a series of agreements on the side of the Taliban regarding their behavior with respect to the international community, those who remained in country and the United States, which ultimately the Trump Administration did not hold the Taliban accountable for. Is that correct?

Mr. STORCH. We have reported out on the back and forth on all of this. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. STANSBURY. Exactly. So, it was President Trump who failed to actually ensure that the Taliban upheld their portion of the agreement before agreeing to rapidly remove American troops, putting our troops at risk in those final days.

And Ms. Angarella, these actions ultimately left our Afghan communities vulnerable, and also led to the collapse of the humanitarian assistance infrastructure that was in country at the time. Is that not correct?

Ms. ANGARELLA. It certainly increased the challenges for delivering the humanitarian assistance. Yes.

Ms. STANSBURY. So, I just want to be clear, you know, in the final days of the American pullout from the war in Afghanistan, it is clear, and Mr. Sopko, you stated this yourself that the Trump Administration "sold out the Afghan Government." Mr. Sopko, did you state those words?

Mr. SOPKO. I think that is quoted from somebody else. I do not think I said that, but I think it is in our report.

Ms. STANSBURY. So, it is in your report. So, it is really crucial that we are clear about what happened in those final days, and that it was the previous administration who set things into motion. And finally, I know I am out of time here. But I do want to acknowledge once again, our brave service members who have not only continued to serve and help those evacuees and Americans who are continuing to work on these issues, but as well as our aid workers and international community. So, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair recognizes Mr. Biggs from Arizona for five minutes.

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank our witnesses for being here today. Mr. Chairman, I request unanimous consent to submit the following into the record, November 7, 2022, letter from you, and Representative Grothman to Inspector General Sopko; October 25, 2022, letter from you and Representative Grothman to Inspector General Sopko; June 22, 2022, letter from the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction to Congressional Committee Chairs; and a February 1, 2022, email exchange between individuals in the offices of SIGAR and the Department of State.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you. And each of these documents discuss and provide evidence of the Biden Administration's actions to evade cooperation with SIGAR, which has been working on five separate reports requested by Congress. These reports discussed the underlying causes that led to the rapid collapse of Afghanistan, Afghan national defense and security forces, potential loss for compromise of U.S. reconstruction assistance resulting from the Taliban's return to power, the ramifications to the U.S. military and diplomatic withdrawal for national security and for the people of Afghanistan.

Mr. Sopko, in particular, I thank you for your testimony. Last June, you informed this Committee that the Biden Administration was refusing to respond to requests for information. And you have given an update today. And quite frankly, I have not seen any public letters from the previous Democrat Chair of this Committee requesting that the Administration comply and cooperate with you. You have indicated pretty conclusively that you have got a broad scope of information you need, you are not getting it.

Sitting next to you are the Inspector Generals for those three agencies or departments. I hope that they will encourage that and look into that as well. But I want to specifically now direct the rest of my attention, Mr. Sopko, to you. There has been a number of public reports alleging that former President Ghani took money out when he fled. I know that you have tried to find it—in your own report this time, I want to get to that.

There is new documents that you have received, alleging additional funds transferred at that time. They indicate that tens of millions of dollars in cash and gold bullion spirited out of the country through Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and other neighboring countries. Can you elaborate on what you know so far and what more information you need from this Administration to conduct that investigation?

Mr. SOPKO. Thank you very much for asking about that. That is a recent investigation that we have opened up. We have sources who have given us that information. I cannot really discuss it in much detail, but it covers about the six-months to a year before the actual collapse. This information indicates tens of millions of dollars, if we can confirm it, that is the thing, in gold bullion and in currency that left the country through those three "stans": Uzbekistan, I think Tajikistan, and maybe Kyrgyzstan.

I cannot really tell you much more. We are digging into that information. It came to our attention recently. I will report back once we can. We do not know if we are going to be able to make the case, some of this information is old. We are actually in the process of translating a lot of this information right now. But I cannot really tell you much more. It seems credible to some of my investigators who have been working for me for 20 years and are retired of law enforcement agents, but we still do not know what it actually—what we have.

Mr. BIGGS. Are you getting cooperation from U.S. agencies and departments in that investigation?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes. But they are law enforcement agencies. It is not the policy people at State and AID and DOD.

Mr. BIGGS. OK. All right. Let us talk about something else. And this is really, we were led to believe that the Afghan Government

and the Afghan military was going to be able to hold out for some significant period of time post-withdrawal. And not only that, that the government, even though odd to say, we were providing more than half of their revenue for government purposes, we were told that they were going to be able to hang in there. How did the intelligence community get it so wrong?

Mr. SOPKO. I cannot really speak for the intelligence community. I mean, when we briefed our reports to the intelligence community, we would always ask them and I cannot reveal what they are saying in an unclassified. What we always ask them is, are we wrong? And they would come back and say, no. So, I do not know who was telling which administration that things were going really well.

But if you read our reports, and if you read some of the reports from my fellow IGs, particularly the former DOD IG, you could not believe the Afghan Government was going to survive, particularly when we withdrew our troops, particularly when we withdrew our air support and particularly when we withdrew the contractors.

I do not really know who would actually have thought the Afghan Government was going to survive. And in January, I believe, I issued a report and talked to this Committee, the January of that year that the Air Force, itself, was saying that the Afghan Air Force, once the contractors left, would collapse within a matter of months. So, this was the worst kept secret in Washington, about the capability of the Afghan Government to survive. Again, I am just shocked. It is like the number 300,000 Afghan soldiers and police. I do not know who is telling the Administration there were 300,000 Afghan soldiers and police toward the end. Nobody we talked to ever said that that number was near there. We had reports that half of those people were probably ghosts. We were paying their salaries, but they did not exist.

So, I mean, there is a lot of things floating around and I do not know who is in the Intelligence Committee, not the people we were talking to, because they all agreed with our assessments, our negative assessments. I do not know who is putting this information out, and what is the basis for it.

Mr. BIGGS. Thank you. My time is up.

Chairman COMER. Thank you.

The Chair recognizes Ms. Balint from Vermont for five minutes.

Ms. BALINT. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Today, we have been examining mistakes made over this 20-year war that tragically cannot be undone at this point. So, I want to focus now on one thing that Congress can and should address immediately. And that is the Afghan Adjustment Act.

Vermont is proudly home to hundreds of Afghans who had been resettled in our state. And I was honored recently to meet with a man named Shukla, who is an Afghan interpreter who worked alongside a Vermonter who served the U.S. Army in Afghanistan.

Now, Shukla and his wife reside in Vermont. And we are so grateful that they are now part of our community. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, we have welcomed approximately 100,000 Afghan evacuees to the United States since the summer of 2021.

But many of those allies were admitted only on a temporary basis. And right now, they live in fear of an uncertain future. And

I talked to many of those folks in my hometown of Brattleboro, Vermont.

In July 2021, the House voted overwhelmingly and on a bipartisan basis to increase the capacity of the Afghan special immigration visa program. And that bill would have provided an additional 8,000 special immigrant visas and would have eased the burden on obtaining visas.

Now, I ask unanimous consent to submit to the record an August 2021, *USA Today* article about that vote, which occurred as more Afghan territory continued to fall to the Taliban. And it stated, "Some of the Republican House members, who this week excoriated President Biden's strategy to pull U.S. troops out of Afghanistan and evacuate Afghan civilians, voted last month against legislation to speed up the visa applications process for Afghan citizens." All 16 no votes were from Republicans and four of those Members sit on this very Committee.

Ms. BALINT. Currently, evacuees have only two options for resolution, the asylum system or the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program. There are now well over 150,000 people currently trapped in Afghanistan, awaiting processing through the Special Immigrant Visa Program, while more than—excuse me, I was going to say 7,000; it is actually 70,000—70,000 Afghans, many of whom fought alongside our troops, are currently in the United States, living in legal limbo. So, Ms. Shaw, is it fair to say that the Special Immigrant Visa Program is severely overburdened and needs resources?

Ms. SHAW. Thank you so much for that question. That is a serious area of oversight for us. As you noted, there are more than 150,000 SIV applications still pending. And so, our work has found, prior to the evacuation, and our current work and ongoing work, I think, are trending in this direction as well, that while some progress has been made to try to streamline the process and to better resource it, there is still plenty of room for improvement. Processing times still exceed well beyond that nine-month target stated in statute.

And so, I will note that the Department, from April 2021 until 2022, did increase their processing rate by about 15 times. So, we are seeing progress, but there is still that significant backlog. And, so, it is a major area of focus for our work.

Ms. BALINT. And following up on that, Ms. Shaw, you said the nine-month turnaround in statute. Where are we right now with the timeline? What is the average timeline for one of these folks waiting for relief?

Ms. SHAW. So, I do not have averages as of today. But our past work, which looked at averages in the 2020 time period, showed that although we could not get a definitive answer on every phase of the process because of how some of the data comes in, we did determine that just two of the four phases were resulting in average processing times of more than 17 months. And, so, you can sort of extrapolate from there.

Ms. BALINT. So, years?

Ms. SHAW. Potentially, yes.

Ms. BALINT. OK. Ms. Shaw, so, is it fair to say that neither the asylum system or the SIV program can provide timely assistance right now to these individuals who need relief?

Ms. SHAW. So, it is true that they cannot provide that right now for every person in the backlog. But there are recommendations pending in our work that certainly could help improve the situation, and we hope to be able to offer additional recommendations.

Ms. BALINT. So, simply put, I just want to say, you know, our partners deserve better. This is not acceptable. And I ask my Republican colleagues to recognize the urgency of this effort and join Democrats in passing a bipartisan Afghan Adjustment Act that will make good to these people who risked their lives alongside of our servicemen and women.

Thank you, Ms. Shaw.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes Mr. LaTurner from Kansas for five minutes.

Mr. LATURNER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

During the summer of 2021, there was much debate in Congress regarding American military presence in Afghanistan. There was passionate discourse, even within the Republican Party over the matter. But nearly two years later, we have reached a policy consensus.

The Biden Administration's botched withdrawal from Afghanistan was an unmitigated disaster. Despite four months of prep time, the failed evacuation was marred by poor decision-making and incoherent operational logistics every step of the way.

This began with President choosing to make the State Department responsible for withdrawal rather than allowing our military leadership at DOD to determine how best to protect our service members and American interest.

Abandoning Bagram, our most strategic and fortified foothold in Afghanistan, before the evacuation was even complete lead to thousands of Americans and SIV holders stranded behind enemy lines.

The premature abandonment also left the Taliban armed with a vast arsenal of American military equipment. Approximately 23,000 armored vehicles and 165 helicopters or fixed-wing aircraft, in addition to 550,000 firearms, which were promptly turned upon the people of Afghanistan and the last of our remaining troops.

It does not take State Department credentials or degree in foreign affairs to realize terms of withdrawal negotiated with a terrorist state, one that openly chants, Death to America, should not be taken at face value.

President Biden's decision to entrust our enemies to secure our perimeter around Kabul's airport as the city descended into chaos and violence, resulted in the death of 13 brave United States service members.

Weeks before this debacle unfolded, President Biden made the ill-fated prediction that, "There is going to be no circumstance for you to see people being lifted off the roof of an Embassy of the United States from Afghanistan." Just 36 days later, we saw people being lifted off the roof of an embassy of the United States from Afghanistan.

The disastrous withdrawal has lasting implications beyond the fact that we now lack a militaristic presence in the preeminent terrorism hub of the world, the region in which the 9/11 attacks were plotted.

Chinese state media openly refer to the Afghan effect as an accelerant of international instability, which has emboldened them to increasingly test the waters regarding an invasion of Taiwan.

Vladimir Putin witnessed this weakness and lack of leadership and started building up troops on Ukraine's border a mere month later.

Our botched evacuation underscores much of the geopolitical upheaval we are witnessing today. And it all could have been avoided had the Biden Administration simply not rushed our withdrawal to meet an arbitrary deadline.

President Biden is our Commander-in-Chief, and the buck stops with him.

For Mr. Storch and Ms. Shaw, no American service members were killed in action between the signing of the Doha Agreement and President Trump's departure from office. The Doha Agreement was conditions based, but the Taliban was not abiding by the deal.

Do you believe the Biden Administration had ample time to renegotiate the deal between assuming office and the withdrawal from Afghanistan had they so wished?

Mr. STORCH. We have not done any audits or valuations, any independent oversight that would address that issue. There are a lot of factors that go into it. We did report out on the chronology in the lead IG reports. But other than that, we have not done any work on that.

Ms. SHAW. The same is true for State OIG.

Mr. LATURNER. Do you have opinions about this?

Mr. STORCH. So, I will share with you. I think what makes the work of OIGs impactful is that we have rigorous standards and procedures that we follow to produce our oversight products. And that is true for all of us. So, I appreciate the opportunity to testify. But on these sort of issues, if we have not done the work, we cannot really testify.

Mr. LATURNER. We will move on. Troops on the ground surrounding the Kabul airport were allegedly ordered not to intervene in passport seizure operations by the Taliban.

Can either of you identify which member of either the State Department or DOD that issued that stand-down order.

Mr. STORCH. I have no information on that. I am sorry.

Ms. SHAW. I do not either. It is potentially covered in some of our upcoming work. So, we can take that as a get back.

Mr. LATURNER. Why hasn't there been any good faith effort to identify this individual?

Ms. SHAW. I can tell you that the scope of our work is looking at the full range of events as they unfolded. The Department had a role to play. And so, we are looking at each aspect of that. I do not know if that particular issue is a major focal point of the work. We had a broader scope.

Mr. LATURNER. Would not you agree that that is an important piece of information as we are trying to get to the bottom of what happened and hold people accountable within the Administration?

Ms. SHAW. Our work is primarily looking for opportunities for recommendations, so we are looking at policies and procedures. Now, if we do identify information that suggests that there was misconduct on the part of a particular individual, we would, of

course, investigate that. I am not aware of any allegations along those lines.

Mr. STORCH. Same answer here.

Mr. LATURNER. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes Ms. Lee from Pennsylvania.

Ms. Lee of Pennsylvania. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is easy for my colleagues to Monday morning quarterback about the time that it took to evacuate more than 120,000 people from Afghanistan, but I would like to remind them of the reality on the ground. Unfortunately, the fact is that starting the evacuation mission any sooner would have likely yielded the same result.

As President Biden said on August 12, 2021, "The evacuation of thousands of people from Kabul is going to be hard and painful, no matter when it started and when we began." It would have been true if we had started a month ago or a month from now. There is no way to evacuate this many people without pain and loss of heartbreaking images you see on television. If the evacuation mission had begun any earlier, it would have signaled a lack of confidence in the Afghan Government when its collapse at that time was not inevitable certainty.

To my own, I want to say that since the Taliban takeover, women in Afghanistan have been denied their fundamental rights and freedoms. They are invisible, isolated, and suffocated in their own country. Girls can no longer go to school beyond sixth grade. Women can no longer work or travel without a male chaperone. Watching this unfold has been a sobering reminder of how swiftly and aggressively women's and girls' rights can be taken away. Something we are all too aware of here in the U.S. as women's access to health care is systematically eroded.

In another significant measure, women were barred from working for national and international NGOs.

Ms. Angarella, how did the Taliban's decision to ban women from working in NGOs exacerbate the humanitarian crisis?

Ms. ANGARELLA. Thank you for that question. It is undeniable that the inability for women aid workers, first with NGOs who were banned in December, and more recently with U.N. partners, is having a significant impediment to be able to provide services at all to women for health care, for food assistance, and for education.

It is my understanding that there are some exceptions being made, but it is ad hoc throughout the country. It is not consistent. And as recently as right now, the U.N. is currently reassessing what programming they are going to be able to continue.

Ms. Lee of Pennsylvania. So, would you agree that there are very legitimate and serious concerns about the survival of Afghan women and girls as a result of this ban?

Ms. ANGARELLA. Absolutely.

Ms. Lee of Pennsylvania. The United Nations stated that it may have to pull out of Afghanistan in May. The Taliban continues to refuse to allow women to work for the organization. What will the impact of that withdrawal have on women, and as well as the rest of Afghan civil society?

Ms. ANGARELLA. The work that we have done in conjunction with our U.N. partners and oversight partners, my office works very col-

laboratively and closely with the WFP IG, for example, UNHCR and other U.N. organizations that right now are reassessing their programming.

It will impact our ability and their ability to investigate any cases or allegations of misconduct, sexual exploitation and abuse, trafficking in persons, or even just the bare necessity, delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Ms. Lee of Pennsylvania. Thank you. In February, hundreds of Afghan refugees in Islamabad, Pakistan, organized a protest over extreme delays in the approval of U.S. visas. Many of these people are journalists and rights activists meant to be fast-tracked with priority one and priority two visas. Yet, they and thousands more remain as our visa processing remains backlogged and our refugee resettlement system remains desperately under funded.

Ms. Shaw, as you have closely reviewed the SIV program, would you commit to a similar review of priority one and two visa processing for Afghans?

Ms. SHAW. That is certainly something we can take into consideration as part of our work planning and as part of the broader series of products we are doing on SIV program.

Ms. Lee of Pennsylvania. Thank you. Over the last year, around 124,000 people have been evacuated from Afghanistan. Our communities have stepped up to assist them.

My home city of Pittsburgh welcomed over 700 Afghan refugees last year, and Pennsylvania as a whole took in over 2,000. The U.S. is responsible for a lot of the harm caused in Afghanistan and we must work to repair those harms.

We have an obligation to aid our allies who supported American forces as well as their families. We must work to end the harmful annihilation of women's rights perpetuated by the Taliban. I thank you all on the panel. And I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes Mr. Fallon for five minutes.

Mr. FALLON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Inspector General Sopko, who was inaugurated President of the United States on January 20, 2021? Trump or Biden?

Mr. SOPKO. Oh, this is a trick question. I think Biden.

Mr. FALLON. No, it is not. I promise.

Mr. SOPKO. Biden, I think.

Mr. FALLON. Yes. OK. And the fighting season in Afghanistan, roughly speaking, Mr. Sopko, is it May through September or is it October through April?

Mr. SOPKO. I am sorry, I did not hear the question.

Mr. FALLON. I am sorry. The fighting season in Afghanistan. There is a fighting season. Is it roughly April to October? Or is it October through April?

Mr. SOPKO. There used to be that fighting season. But I think over time, maybe it is global warming or whatever, but it has changed. So, the Taliban just continued fighting throughout that whole period of time.

Mr. FALLON. But were there, the violence, was it greater in the summer than in the winter?

Mr. SOPKO. Usually, it is greater in the summer than in the winter.

Mr. FALLON. Summer, yes.

Mr. SOPKO. Once the passes open up, then they were coming in. But once the Taliban started taking more territory in Afghanistan, they did not have to worry about going over the passes and waiting for the snow to melt.

Mr. FALLON. And who was Commander-in-Chief when the troops retrograded? We drew down from, against the advice incidentally of senior military commanders, we drew down from 2,500 to about 650. Was it Biden or Trump?

Mr. SOPKO. Oh, it was President Biden. I thought you are talking about the Commander-in-Chief from the ground.

Mr. FALLON. No, no.

Mr. SOPKO. OK.

Mr. FALLON. And who was the President of the United States on August 26, 2021, when ISIS-K terrorists, who are amongst the 5,000 that escaped Bagram because we drew down to 650? Who was President then, on August 26, 2021? Biden or Trump?

Mr. SOPKO. I think it was Biden.

Mr. FALLON. Biden, yes. And this Administration, the Biden Administration oversaw the abandonment of approximately \$7 billion worth of U.S. military equipment in Afghanistan. And then the Administration, Joe Biden's Administration, the National Security Council, authored a 12-page report on the Afghan withdrawal.

Mr. Sopko, who did the report blame for this disaster?

Mr. SOPKO. I cannot say. I mean, I have read it. I do not know.

Mr. FALLON. Well, I mean, it is clearly that they blame President Trump and that was just very disingenuous. And the State Department, in your own words, did not cooperate with your oversight responsibilities. Is that true?

Mr. SOPKO. True. But I had nothing to do—my agency was not asked to help prepare that report.

Mr. FALLON. Oh, I know because that report—yes, Mr. Sopko—

Mr. SOPKO. Our reports stand for themselves.

Mr. FALLON. Yes, your report is actually from an independent entity.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes.

Mr. FALLON. That report was garbage, and it was not worth the paper it was written on. And I remember being in Armed Services in about a month after the attack on our service members that killed 13 Americans.

And I asked General Milley and Secretary Austin, if they could guarantee the American people that none of those 5,000 terrorists and criminals and scumbags that escaped Bagram, a couple of weeks prior to the 26th, were responsible directly for the attack that killed the 13 Americans. And they both said that they could not guarantee that. Well, come to find out that the suicide bomber was indeed one of the 5,000 folks that escaped.

And what has this Administration done? I mean, they have obfuscated, they blamed President Trump, they stonewalled SIGAR's oversight responsibilities, and this has been a catastrophic failure. And Secretary Blinken defended the withdrawal, saying that he made the right decision. Secretary Austin said that he had no regrets, just recently. I mean, this is absolutely inexcusable. So, Mr.

Sopko, did the Afghan security forces have the expertise and training required to take over and secure Bagram airbase?

Mr. SOPKO. I cannot speak specifically for that airbase. But the way it occurred, they didn't even know the Americans were gone until hours afterwards. But to actually protect the base? They probably could have if they had been given advance notice.

But what they told us and what General Sadat told us and others, they kind of woke up one morning, and all of a sudden, we were gone.

Mr. FALLON. And how long did the Afghan forces remain in place before the government fell?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, the place was collapsing, starting six months before. But they basically, it ended when President Ghani ran away. I forget what actual date that was.

Mr. FALLON. So, we are talking weeks.

Mr. SOPKO. Weeks from when to when? From Bagram to Ghani—

Mr. FALLON. Well, it is not years. Yes, from the time in which we had our final withdrawal until the time the Taliban had full control of Afghanistan.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, Ghani flees, I think, August 15. Doha Agreement was signed February 29, 2020. Biden made his decision, I believe, on April 14, 2021. So, those are the dates.

Mr. FALLON. Well, the tragedy is—

Mr. RASKIN. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. FALLON. Well, my time has expired.

Mr. RASKIN. OK. He has expired.

Mr. FALLON. I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman's time has expired.

The Chair recognizes Mr. Casar of Texas.

Mr. CASAR. Thank you. The 20-year Afghanistan war caused extraordinary death and devastation for the Afghan people and for American troops, killing by some estimates over 70,000 civilians and 2,400 American service members. And we still have so many constituents and friends here in the United States, suffering even if they survived the war.

It is really important that the Biden Administration ended the longest war in the history of our Nation. Not only was it an important thing to do, I believe it was the right thing to do. No other president was able to do that in 20 years with bipartisan support from folks on this Committee. But almost two years later, in addition to living under a repressive and autocratic Taliban regime, over half the Afghan population is on the brink of starvation, in part because of actions taken by the U.S. when we froze Afghanistan central bank assets, resulting in a liquidity crisis. That means that normal people are not able to access their money.

Human rights groups have warned that 70 percent of Afghans are unable to meet their basic needs, including food, and more civilians could die from this financial crisis in the country than during the 20 years of war. Afghan feminist activists have pointed out that the economic collapse caused in part by the asset freeze overwhelmingly devastates the lives of Afghan women and girls. Mr. Sopko's report just came out this morning, detailing the Biden Administration creating the Afghan funds to disperse \$3.5 billion of

people's frozen assets back into Afghanistan and creating liquidity for folks to make sure that kids have shoes in their feet and food in their bellies and farmers can produce and folks can live. But also, the report details the risks associated with making sure those funds do not fund terrorism and that there is not money laundering.

We have to fix this problem. People should not starve, for humanitarian reasons, but also folks starving pushes them further into the hands of their oppressors. And we do not want the money going to funding terrorism. So, how are we going to solve this problem urgently and quickly, to whoever can respond?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, you have hit it on the head, Congressman. I mean, the dilemma we have is if we do not, and we are giving most of the assistance, humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, of all the countries combined. If we stop that assistance, millions will starve. Unfortunately, and this is the difficult thing. The difficult thing is, we do not have the adequate oversight to prevent the money from going to the Taliban or other nefarious groups. I think, as IGs, we say, do better oversight if you make that policy decision on continuing funding.

There is a further dilemma, which you have touched upon, and that is the way the Afghans are treating over 50 percent of their population. Basically, if you are a woman in Afghanistan, you are in a prison, and this is the thing, I think, one of the Congressmen was hitting on. By not allowing women to work for the U.N. or for NGOs, that means poor women who are starving to death cannot go to get food, because they cannot travel in that country unless they have a male companion. They cannot go to an office run by the U.N. unless there is a woman there.

Mr. CASAR. And, Mr. Sopko, I do not mean to cut you off.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, sure.

Mr. CASAR. It is really serious, but the humanitarian assistance is critical as we have laid out.

Mr. SOPKO. It is critical.

Mr. CASAR. But figuring out the macroeconomic situation is critical so that folks can sustain themselves. It is a real problem. What are we going to do? I mean, it has been almost two years. What do we think here, amongst us, we could do to solve the fact that folks cannot go to the bank and get access to their money?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, right now, we cannot give that money. And I do not think the State Department or the Treasury wants that money to go to the central bank, because the central bank is basically not an independent bank. So, this is a very difficult thing. And that is what we are just alerting to you. It is a good idea—

Mr. CASAR. Oh, I hear you, and I hear that there are problems, but my question is, what are we going to do about it? The world is real rough, and in Afghanistan, it is way worse than that. So, what are we going to do? And, Ms. Shaw, if you have 15 seconds to answer that, it would be great, before my time expires.

Ms. SHAW. Sure. I would just say, as it has been said before, we do not decide the policy. But when that funding is given, our work does show that there are improvements that can be made to the monitoring and oversight of those funds, to provide the sorts of assurances that you are talking about.

And our investigative work can also look at situations and allegations of potential fraud, diversion, and mismanagement. So, there are mechanisms that can be used to better safeguard. It may not be perfect. It cannot guarantee no dollars will go into the wrong hands. But in terms of balancing those competing interests, that is what our work has been able to show.

Mr. CASAR. Well, we denounced the Taliban as we should. But when the U.S. contributes to the suffering of everyday people, that pushes the population further into the hands of their oppressors. So, if we want to make Afghans and Americans safer, if we want to take on the Taliban, we should focus on feeding and clothing people, not starving them, and we should solve this problem. Thank you.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes Mr. Donalds from Florida for five minutes.

Mr. DONALDS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really want to get off the last line of questioning and focusing. We have a problem, that is pretty clear and apparent. There is obstruction coming out of the State Department and USAID. Mr. Sopko, in your letter and in your testimony, it has been very clear that this Administration has unilaterally stopped all of your ability to get the information that Congress has authorized you to collect. Is that correct?

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct.

Mr. DONALDS. OK. In your letter, you state, "Three prior administrations understood and abided by these legal certainties. It is shocking that State and USAID officials are choosing, at this particular juncture, to violate the law, obstruct SIGAR's oversight work, and refuse to cooperate with our oversight requests." Mr. Sopko, how many oversight requests has SIGAR made of State, of the Department of State under Tony Blinken and USAID?

Mr. SOPKO. I do not have the exact number in front of me, sir, but I did promise another Congressman and I promised the Chairman and Ranker, we would give a list of all of that. I mean, it goes back to the simplest thing, sir, and I do not want to take your time.

Mr. DONALDS. Sure.

Mr. SOPKO. But we asked for the Doha Agreement back in 2021, copies of and access to the documents related to the Doha Agreement, sent multiple letters. We still have not even gotten a response from that, so it is as simple as that.

Mr. DONALDS. Mr. Sopko, and not to cut you off,—Mr. Sopko. I know.

Mr. DONALDS. But to me, it sounds like you are a Republican Member of Congress, because Republican Members of Congress send letters over to the Administration and we do not get answers either, so this is actually a consistent pattern. Ms. Shaw, you are the IG over at the Department of State. Are you aware of the obstruction from Department of State employees toward this Inspector General over Afghanistan?

Ms. SHAW. So, I have read Mr. Sopko's testimony. I can say, for our part, that we have not experienced the same sort of lack of cooperation.

Mr. DONALDS. No, no, no. I am not asking about if you as an inspector general with your role of having oversight over State. I am talking about, are you aware of State Department employees will-

fully ignoring and obstructing the investigations that are lawfully authorized by Congress from SIGAR, Mr. Sopko's office. Are you aware of State Department employees ignoring and obstructing his investigations?

Ms. SHAW. I am aware of Mr. Sopko's statements. Yes.

Mr. DONALDS. Ms. Angarella. I got it. Ms. Angarella, you are the IG over USAID?

Ms. ANGARELLA. I am acting in that role. Yes.

Mr. DONALDS. Acting?

Ms. ANGARELLA. Yes.

Mr. DONALDS. Similar line of question. Are you aware of USAID employees willfully obstructing SIGAR's ability to conduct congressional oversight, which is their legal mandate?

Ms. ANGARELLA. I would say the same as Ms. Shaw. I am aware of IG Sopko's letter. I would say we have not had any access issues, and I would say further that I am happy to partner with any oversight IG to do joint work or get access to any documents or people at USAID and assist in that matter.

Mr. DONALDS. Well, I guess, here is the question. Ms. Shaw, you do not have a problem. Ms. Angarella, you do not have a problem. What is the problem with Mr. Sopko? What is his problem? Like, why is it that he is being blocked from doing the thing that he was legally charged by this Congress and previous congresses, mind you? Not just the 118th, the 117th, the 116th, the 115th have all given him authority to conduct oversight and State and USAID are blocking him. Is anybody at the table aware of the President's thought process when it comes to inspector generals? I mean, has the President put out a statement that he does not want his Administration to comply with the requests from inspector generals? Anybody? Has the President made that statement?

Mr. SOPKO. My experience, sir, is that most Presidents do not like to talk to inspectors general in both parties. As I joke about, I work for one person and one person only and that person never wants to see me, and I think it is just they avoid talking to IGs. Now, we have talked to senior officials at State and AID and DOD over the years, not since this Administration. But we used to brief on a regular basis the Administrator of USAID, senior officials at State, senior officials at DOD, including the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, but since this Administration coming in, it has been radio silence with us.

Mr. DONALDS. So, Mr. Sopko, look, I am going to end my line of question with you, because I actually read one of the SIGAR classified reports right after the fall of Afghanistan. It was quite eye opening, to be frank, about your capabilities, of your team to get information about what was actually going to happen in Afghanistan. I would urge my colleagues to go back and read some of those classified reports on what was going on in the ground in Afghanistan, because it is revealing. Mr. Sopko, I will let you answer, but it was pretty clear to me, anybody who read this report could see that Afghanistan will fall pretty quickly. Your reports or your Department's reports, were they transmitted to the White House prior to the fall of Afghanistan?

Mr. SOPKO. Actually, all of our reports are provided to all agencies. The classified ones are obviously not put on the website, but

we definitely provided those, and we provided it to all the intelligence communities. Let me just add one thing about those classified reports that you should also know. At the request of this Committee and other committees, we requested DOD, State, and AID to declassify all of those reports, many of them going back 12 years. We still have heard nothing back from those agencies. And I see Congressman Lynch is here. I believe he was fighting to get those reports and that information declassified. Many of those reports were classified because we had a general tell us because President Ghani was embarrassed if they were released. Now, there is no President Ghani anymore, but still the DOD, State, and AID will not declassify.

I have no declassification authority as a SIGAR. I have to rely on the agencies. You have to rely on the agencies. And we are still waiting for, like, 12 years of reports to be declassified, many of them just because they embarrass President Ghani who is no longer president of Afghanistan. So, I may sound a little upset. I think you should be upset. This is ridiculous.

Mr. DONALDS. Well, I share your concerns. I think those reports should be declassified, especially considering the fact that we have gold bullion moving all over the place. We got billions of dollars going into Afghanistan, not getting to the people. I mean, we should have all that information. The American people should have it as well. I apologize. Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Mr. ARMSTRONG. The Chair calls on Ms. Crockett from Texas.

Ms. CROCKETT. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you so much for being here. I know it has already been a pretty long day for you all.

My Republican colleagues have convened this hearing today to condense the conflict in Afghanistan into the last few months of this, what I call, forever war. However, the price of this decades-long war has had long standing effects on Americans. My district, Texas 30, is home to the Dallas VA Medical Center. I had an opportunity to go and sit down with them over the last two weeks. The cost of this war on our servicewomen and men is immeasurable. Members of our armed forces died in battle, other sustained injuries, physical and mental, that have altered their lives forever. We owe it to them to talk about this war and their service, beyond what transpired during the last few months, months that were largely dictated by a withdrawal agreement from the last administration. We also owe it to our service members to take the lessons of this war and make sure we fully understand the cost and not just sit up here and pontificate for political points.

As Members of the Oversight Committee, it is our duty to ensure effective management and accountability mechanisms for our government when engaged in longstanding wars, particularly when it comes to lives, taxpayer dollars, and trauma both here and abroad. So, Mr. Sopko, in your estimate, how long was the U.S. aware of waste, fraud, and financial corruption in addition to issues in tracking military equipment?

Mr. SOPKO. I think we may have started highlighting that going back to the first year I was a SIGAR back in 2013.

Ms. CROCKETT. OK. I have got some reports that may go back a little bit earlier than that.

Mr. STORCH. And I would just say that if it is helpful, we have reporting going back to 2005 that identified some of these issues, many issues related to accountability and controls over all sorts of both financial and equipment, if that is helpful.

Ms. CROCKETT. OK. Perfect.

Mr. SOPKO. I only started in 2012, so I cannot go back before that. But I think you are right. There have been reports for a long time.

Mr. STORCH. I started more recently, but I have been reading a lot, so.

Ms. CROCKETT. In my research, it looks like it went back to the early 2000's. And so, you know, just to be clear, because in this Committee a lot of times it feels like it is D versus R, and our job is really just to be oversight. We are supposed to all care about let us just be transparent, let us be real, and let us be honest. And so, I just want to point out that that was under a Republican Administration that we are talking about, I won't say the name, if we go back that far. And so, what I want to talk about is the impact of the waste and fraud on our service members and missions. We are talking about money that was meant for girls in Afghanistan. We are talking about money that was meant for service members. Yet, you know, we are talking about these young girls receiving fewer hygiene products and medical supplies overall going into the country.

During the 20-year war, we spent roughly \$2.3 trillion. You may have given a different number. You opened, and I thought, man, he got my notes. But roughly \$2.3 trillion taxpayer dollars. But in July 2018, in a letter to three Members of Congress, Inspector General Sopko reported that of the roughly 42 percent of money appropriated for Afghan reconstruction between 2002 and 2017, nearly a third was found to have been subject to waste, fraud, and abuse. That is an alarming number.

These taxpayer dollars could have been used to support our servicewomen and men at home and abroad. We could have increased the salaries for our military members sacrificing their lives while being deployed. We could have used those taxpayer dollars to fund our VA centers to give our members the physical and mental treatment they deserve at a quicker rate. We could have funded VA workforce and vocational training programs for our members transitioning back to civilian life. We could have helped hundreds of thousands of veterans struggling with substance abuse, and also address the unacceptable rates of veteran homelessness.

Clearly, I have a long laundry list of things that we could have done, and I am running out of time, so I am going to skip this question, maybe.

Mr. ARMSTRONG. You can have a little more time.

Ms. CROCKETT. Thank you so much. How can the United States ensure that there are robust oversight mechanisms in place so that American supplied equipment and taxpayer dollars are adequately accounted for in future conflicts? And I am going to just try to keep it real short, because I am going somewhere with this even though you all may not have thought I was. Anybody?

Ms. ANGARELLA. Sure. I would say for USAID, who does the majority of non-security programming in complex environments, the

three top lessons that I think are practical from Afghanistan are USAID conducting better and more effective monitoring and oversight of its programming, of better defining what success means and matching the programmatic metrics to those humanitarian or development objectives. And then third, holding their implementing partners accountable for reporting and doing the first line of monitoring and evaluating.

Ms. CROCKETT. Thank you so much, and first of all, I really do appreciate you all being here. I bring up all of this because right now we are dealing with conversations here in D.C. and we are talking about the debt ceiling. And when we talk about the debt ceiling, the average American does not know what we are talking about. But we are talking about the fact that we have run up the credit card, we have spent this money. And now, we have to pay our bills otherwise we end up with bad credit essentially, right?

And so, what I want us to do in this Committee is focus on figuring out how we can be better stewards of taxpayer dollars so that we do not end up at a cliff. And we are at a cliff because we ended up spending money on stuff that we did not need to spend it on anyway. It was a forever war.

And let me be clear. I am also upset about the lives that were lost not just in the withdrawal, but in the war as a whole. I am also upset that the American people right now are potentially going to suffer the effects of the fact that we failed at our oversight. And, now, for whatever reason, we are going to be held hostage by the people in charge in this body instead of just paying our bills, moving on, and making sure that as we go forward with our new budget, we are clean about it. And the money that we give out in that new budget, we make sure that we have effective and good oversight, and we do not sit in forever wars. Thank you so much, and I yield back.

Mr. ARMSTRONG. The Chair now recognizes himself for five minutes.

In 2019, *The Washington Post* published the Afghanistan papers, which largely comprised of a series of interviews conducted by SIGAR. The Post wrote that there are gaping contradictions between what the U.S. official said in public and what they believed in private as the war unfolded. The Afghanistan papers combined with SIGAR's work painted a very bleak picture of an unwinnable, untenable situation. Mr. Sopko, you have stated in the past that, "I am assuming throughout the course of the 20-year conflict that the American people were constantly lied to." Is that a fair statement?

Mr. SOPKO. I think I use the term hubris and mendacity. I do not say lying, but mendacity.

Mr. ARMSTRONG. I will use the term lie. I won't put that in your words. My problem is, is I think the Biden Administration is continuing to perpetuate these very same lies. Two weeks ago, the White House posted on its website a 12-page review of the withdrawal.

The AMP reported that this was written by National Security Council with input from President Biden. Unfortunately, this document lists no date, no author, and yet again, tells a story that any-

one with eyes can see is meant to politically protect the Administration rather than give an open and honest account.

Mr. Sopko, the White House paper claims that the assessment in early 2021 was that the Taliban advances would accelerate across large portions of Afghanistan after a complete U.S. military withdrawal and potentially lead to the Taliban capturing of Kabul within a year or two. Was this claim consistent with your assessments prior to withdrawal?

Mr. SOPKO. Partially. We predicted the Taliban would win. We never gave a date. I think that may have been overly generous to think it would have lasted two years, particularly since the U.S. Air Force was telling us as of January of that year that if we took away the contractors, the Afghan Air Force would collapse within a matter of months. So, I do not know where that assessment came from.

Mr. ARMSTRONG. The White House paper claims that throughout the late spring and early summer of 2021, intelligence reports continued to suggest that even if the Taliban made gains in some Afghan provinces, the capital, Kabul, would be more difficult for the Taliban to take and that the Afghan forces would defend it. Was that claim consistent with your assessment prior to withdrawal?

Mr. SOPKO. Again, I do not know where that assessment came from. I do not think we would agree with that.

Mr. ARMSTRONG. The White House papers states prevailing military intelligence and military view was that Kabul would hold beyond the end of the withdrawal. But according to the Afghanistan papers, one unnamed U.S. military official told government interviewers in 2016 that about a third of the local police seemed to be drug addicts or Taliban. He added that their main concern was getting fuel from the U.S. unit. They always wanted fuel. Would you have confidence in a force who a third was either drug addicts or the Taliban?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, it was not just drug addicts and the Taliban. They just were not there. The provincial Governor of I believe it was Herat province back in 2000—it was the second year I was there I believe, third year—said that 50 percent of his police never existed. So, I mean I go back to saying it was not just drug addicts and Taliban, it was also they did not exist.

Mr. ARMSTRONG. My next question is on ghost soldiers. The White House paper states that the ANDSF had significant advantages compared to the Taliban. They had vastly superior numbers and equipment, 300,000 troops compared to 80,000 Taliban fighters, an Air Force and two decades of training and support. Yes or no, was that an accurate assessment?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, they did have an air force. Unfortunately, they were trained on the Soviet equipment, and we switched equipment to American. And our Air Force, again, said they were not going to be ready as an air force by themselves till 2030.

Mr. ARMSTRONG. So, they had an air force, but when stuff broke down, they could not get it in the air?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes. Have you ever repaired a helicopter—

Mr. ARMSTRONG. I have not.

Mr. SOPKO [continuing]. Via telephone and Zoom? I mean, it does not work.

Mr. ARMSTRONG. And I think that is my problem. And we have 20 years of conflict. We have 20 years of painting a rosy picture. We have it across Republican Administrations, Democratic Administrations. We know all that. But given everything that we have heard testifying and the Biden Administration's 12-page report, we are not having an open assessment of the errors made in the war as a whole, but particularly in the withdrawal, and we want to talk about leaving politics at the water's edge and dealing with all these things. I think the first thing would be, is not to have a 12-page piece of political fiction that is on an official White House Administration website.

I thank you all for your time. And before I quit, I am going to ask unanimous consent to enter the following documents into the record: SIGAR's report, Why the Afghan Security Forces Collapsed; the 12-page White House paper on the Afghanistan withdrawal; and from the Afghanistan Papers, The Unguarded Nation: At War With the Truth.

Mr. ARMSTRONG. And I think we are going to allow the witnesses to have a 10-minute break just to refresh. So, we will take a 10-minute recess. Thank you all.

[Recess.]

Mr. FALLON.[Presiding.] The Committee on Oversight and Accountability will reconvene. And the Chair will recognize the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Frost, for five minutes.

Mr. FROST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, like many folks have said, and I will say for myself, I do not support endless wars. I know that when we send in troops, we need to ensure that we know how we are going to get them back out and at home with their families. You know, many Republican colleagues and Democrats for a while have agreed that the war in Afghanistan needed to end. And just a few years ago when Donald Trump was President, Republicans in Congress were raving about the need for a speedy withdrawal.

And my Republican colleague, you know, Mr. Biggs, had publicly called for an immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan. Our Chairman, Comer, praised the Trump-Taliban agreement, which was riddled with concessions, including the release of 5,000 Taliban members, and the agreement that President Trump made set a deadline to withdraw that, I would say, was even worse, January 15, a time of transition, just a few days before President Biden was sworn in. And so now that President Biden had the courage to do what President Trump could not, which was saying no to the endless war, now we have this political outrage. And the reality of war, especially this war, is that withdrawal was always going to be messy.

And, Mr. Storch, I want to ask, can you point to a specific thing you believe that President Biden could have done to guarantee a safe and orderly withdrawal with no lives lost?

Mr. STORCH. Thank you for the question. So, we have not done any oversight regarding what one administration or the other did with regard to that. We did find a number of issues, and some of them are very similar to the ones that IG Sopko talked about that led to the rapid demise of the Afghan security force and that led to the much more expedited noncombatant operation.

Mr. FROST. And given that the war in Afghanistan spanned decades and countless Americans serving overseas, if President Biden had waited another year or deployed another 100,000 troops, would that have helped guarantee a safe and orderly withdrawal with no lives lost?

Mr. STORCH. Again, that is not something we have done an independent oversight on, although as I have testified before, one of the things we did do is get a copy of the full after action that was done, and we are examining that now. And if there is additional lesson learned or oversight to be done, we will do that.

Mr. FROST. OK. Ms. Angarella, if President Biden had doubled the amount of aid that we were providing, can you say that would have prevented the rise of a Taliban Government?

Ms. ANGARELLA. We have not done specific work on that, so I could not say.

Mr. FROST. And, Ms. Shaw, I think you know kind of where I am going with this, but if President Biden had re-negotiated the terms of the withdrawal bearing in mind that the Taliban were already ignoring many of the Trump Administration's lax terms, would that have guaranteed a safe and orderly withdrawal?

Ms. SHAW. So, not specifically speaking to decisions that might have been made with the President, which are not in my purview. But the upcoming work that we have done did find that there were contributing factors that led to the confusion and chaos, including, you know, unreliable data about the number of evacuees, so there are definitely opportunities for improvement. That work will have recommendations, and certainly, we are fully supportive of ensuring that we all learn from the mistakes of the past.

Mr. FROST. Of course. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. FALLON. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes the gentlelady from North Carolina, Representative Foxx.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, very much. I thank our witnesses for being here today.

You know, it is getting a little tiresome to hear President Trump blamed over and over for the Afghan withdrawal. It was the Biden Administration that pushed the disastrous and chaotic withdrawal, and it is the Biden Administration that is responsible for its poor execution. We all have confidence in our military, but when they are given orders from their Commander-in-Chief, they follow those orders. Mr. Sopko, were the orders to withdraw in the manner that they withdrew given by the Biden Administration?

Mr. SOPKO. Congresslady, as I mentioned before, we did not look at the withdrawal—my Agency, so you could ask the State Department IG. I think they looked at the withdrawal.

Ms. FOXX. Ms. Angarella, do you have a comment on that?

Ms. ANGARELLA. From USAID's perspective, no.

Ms. FOXX. No? Ms. Shaw?

Ms. SHAW. I am sorry. Do you mind restating the question?

Ms. FOXX. Were the orders to withdraw in the manner that they withdrew given by the Biden Administration?

Ms. SHAW. So, our work looks specifically at decisions and directions given by embassy leadership at the time. And so, we did find that they were taking primary lead working with the Department of Defense to execute that noncombatant evacuation.

Ms. FOXX. But somebody had to give the order to the Embassy, right?

Ms. SHAW. Presumably so.

Ms. FOXX. Presumably so. OK. Mr. Storch——

Mr. STORCH. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. FOXX [continuing]. Were the orders to withdraw from Afghanistan given by the Biden Administration?

Mr. STORCH. Thank you for the question. We reported out in the lead IG reporting on the facts of what happened with the operation. In terms of doing any oversight related to that, as I have testified, when the evacuation took place, our office pivoted to working on very time-sensitive issues related to the evacuation itself, to the refugees, and that. So, we have not done any independent oversight that I could testify to. As I have also testified, we have gone back and gotten the full after action that was done by the Department. And my folks and I are examining that, and if there is work to be done, we will do it.

Ms. FOXX. I think it is a pretty pitiful situation where we have four Federal Government employees who cannot answer a simple question, was the order to withdraw given by the Biden Administration. I am really not sure that that is under any question.

Mr. SOPKO. Congresswoman, I will cut to the chase. Obviously, the Biden Administration was in charge, so the order had to come from the Biden Administration. I think what all the IGs are saying, particularly mine, I have no jurisdiction to look at that decision, but, obviously, it was made by the Biden——

Ms. FOXX. I didn't ask you to look at the jurisdiction.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes.

Ms. FOXX. I asked a simple question. Were the orders to withdraw given by the Biden Administration?

Mr. SOPKO. Somebody in the Biden Administration gave those orders.

Ms. FOXX. OK.

Mr. SOPKO. I will take a risk and say that, but yes, yes, yes.

Mr. STORCH. To the extent that is the question, there is no question——

Ms. FOXX. A Federal Government employee taking a risk. Oh, my goodness, this is a red-letter day. Ms. Angarella, do you agree with that?

Ms. ANGARELLA. I would agree with IG Sopko, yes.

Ms. FOXX. All right. Let us take this to Ms. Shaw. Will you agree with that?

Ms. SHAW. Yes, I will agree.

Ms. FOXX. And Mr. Storch?

Mr. STORCH. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. FOXX. All right. Finally, we get an answer out of this panel having to do with the withdrawal. OK. Probably my next question is going to be a waste, so I will go on. Let me ask this question, or let me make a comment. I think the hasty and chaotic withdrawal reeks of poor planning, failed execution paid with the blood of American soldiers. But as inspectors general, all of you had offices at the U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan. So, what was your experience like while planning and executing the evacuation of your officers?

Mr. SOPKO. I am happy to answer that. I think the statement you made about it being confusing, hectic, and whatever, I did have people there. It was, and I think the best example of this, if you can get access to it, is to get a hold of the dissent cable. Because what we were told—I have never seen it, but there was a dissent cable done by career State Department employees who describe, we have been told, the problems and how chaotic and how horrible it was at that situation.

Ms. FOXX. Well, thank you for that information. Ms. Angarella?

Ms. ANGARELLA. Yes, I would say our direct hire American Foreign Service Officer staff were withdrawn earlier, but USAID IG had locally employed staff, six of whom were trying day in and day out to get to and through the Abbey Gate. And as a member of the senior leadership team at the time, we were engaging 24 hours a day on a text message exchange with all of that staff, and, as I testified, it will stay with me forever.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you. Ms. Shaw?

Ms. SHAW. So, our two remaining U.S. personnel left with the order departure in April 2021, so did not experience the circumstances of August, but our work did find that it was confusing and chaotic.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you. Mr. Storch?

Mr. STORCH. Yes, ma'am. We have a number of offices at different times in Afghanistan doing oversight. The number of people in country started to decline beginning in 2016 and then with COVID. So, by the time of the actual demise of the Afghan Government and the like, we were primarily working from Qatar and other locations.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, I apologize for going over.

Mr. FALLON. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes Ranking Member Lynch from Massachusetts.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate your great work on all these issues as well. I just want to clean up something that was said earlier in the hearing hours ago. Mr. Chairman, before you were in the chair, there was an allegation that our Committee, and specifically my Subcommittee, had not done oversight of the withdrawal process, including the Biden-Harris Administration's Afghanistan withdrawal. I just want to remind my colleagues that in the 117th Congress, my National Security Subcommittee held three separate hearings regarding U.S. policy in Afghanistan, including one with former Special Representative for Afghan Reconstruction, Zalmay Khalilzad, after President Biden announced the withdrawal in April.

In August 2021, at Mr. Grothman's request, who was my Ranking Member then, Republican colleague, we received a bipartisan briefing for the Subcommittee from one of today's witnesses, Special Inspector General John Sopko. The Subcommittee also received a classified briefing jointly from State, DOD, DHS, and intelligence community in September 2021. And in December 2021, we held another hearing on withdrawal, and we had a classified briefing on the Administration's counterterrorism policies, including in Afghanistan.

So, to claim that the Democrats hadn't done oversight on Afghanistan is simply not true. In addition to those formal settings, we also sat with the negotiating team, the Donald Trump's negotiating team with the Taliban at the Munich Security Conference. And also, here at the Capitol with Republican leadership, we were able to sit down twice with—we had two luncheons with President Ghani and his whole team after the agreement had been signed to withdraw by the Trump Administration with the Taliban, but prior to actual withdrawal.

You know, oddly enough, I was elected on September 11, the day of the attack. So, as soon as I arrived in Washington, DC. as a new Member of Congress, Afghanistan was at the top of our list of priorities. During my time in Congress, I have led or participated in over 20 CODELs to Afghanistan. Mr. Sopko and I are old friends. We have done a lot of work.

And Mr. Sopko, you know, you are an honest broker in all of this. You have seen enough of me, and every single CODEL I did was with Democrat and Republican Members. And I know sometimes people do this, but I never, ever went to Afghanistan without Republican Members as important and participating Members of those congressional delegations.

So, Mr. Sopko, there was a suggestion that we were a hindrance, the Democrats were a hindrance to getting information, you know, on the ground in Afghanistan and getting information to Congress. What do you think? You saw this Committee and the Subcommittee particularly in action many, many times in Afghanistan. Were we a hindrance to getting the truth and the information? Or were we of assistance to you?

MR. SOPKO. Congressman, furthest from the truth. This Committee, yourself included, the Chairman now, the Ranking Members, I mean I think I have testified I think 11, 12 times before this Committee. This Committee has cared more about Afghanistan and more about getting the truth than probably any other committee of Congress. I mean, kudos to all of you for what you did and what you are continuing to do, I hope.

So, I cannot say more about how happy I am to come back here. My first Committee I ever testified about in Afghanistan was this Committee. Maybe you were chairing at that time. I remember Chairman Issa, and my mind is going blank—forgive me—who the Ranking Member was. And he said, Mr. Sopko, you are about the only witness who brings us all together in a bipartisan manner, and I will remember that. Because that is what the job of an IG is, to be nonpartisan, to bring people together to try to get the facts. And this Committee should be proud of itself for doing that. And I think under Chairman Comer, I think, it is continuing that, so that is all I can say.

MR. LYNCH. Well, that is plenty. Mr. Chairman, just a unanimous consent request. So, the Committee Democrats have long supported the vital work of inspectors general and we appreciate the work that you do. That is why last Congress my colleague, then-Chair Maloney, and I was then Chair as well, Subcommittee Chair, we spearheaded a bipartisan request to SIGAR to examine the factors that contributed to the collapse of the Afghan Government and its security forces last September.

As Mr. Sopko has testified before, this request led to five reports that have provided us and the American people with exceptional insights into the failures and mistakes over 20 years that explain the rapid collapse of the Afghan Government and its armed forces.

So, what I would ask through you, Mr. Chairman, to Chairman Comer, Full Committee Chair Comer, would be an effort to draft another letter similar to the one that we tried to do last session to support our inspectors general and to encourage the Administration and the agencies to be forthcoming and cooperative with the attorney general community in terms of getting the information and the truth and the facts out so that we might learn from those lessons and maybe prevent, you know, missteps from being made in the future.

Mr. FALLON. Thank you. And yes, I think that, clearly, the Inspector Generals' Offices play a vital and critical role. We need independent oversight. And I am sure that myself, the other Subcommittee Chairs and Chairman Comer would very much like to write a letter supporting, in a bipartisan fashion, the work of the IGs, because that is just one critical tool to get to the truth.

Mr. LYNCH. And I will leave that up to our very capable staffs to come up with language that would reflect that intent.

And I yield back. And I thank you for your courtesy, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. FALLON. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Perry.

Mr. PERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank each one of you for your service to the country. You can imagine that we, as Members of Congress in the legislative branch, have a little bit of a difficult time getting information from the Administration for no other reason than they are the executive branch and we are the legislative branch, and the whole separation and so on and so forth. But I am concerned that it is deeper than that and there are reasons other than that.

And in the shadow of Tax Day, look, a lot of people in the last couple of days just wrote checks to the Federal Government. They are probably not real happy about it, and they probably do not realize, and this is according to your report, sir, Mr. Sopko, that since October 2021, the American taxpayers spent \$8,275,952,000 in Afghanistan. That is since October 2021.

And, also, included in your report 23-16, the United States left 43,139 ground vehicles behind in Afghanistan; specialty munitions, including millions of rounds of small arms ammunition in the tune of 1,537,000 rounds; weapons from Mark 4s and M-16s to howitzers and mortar systems; 316,260 aircraft vehicles, including individual GPS devices, 22,950. These numbers are staggering. They are staggering. They are unacceptable.

Now, in previous conversations with some of my colleagues, the other inspector generals kind of implied and gave me the impression via the questioning that everybody is cooperating and there is no obstruction. And I want to drill down on that, because that is not the perception I get from Mr. Sopko. And if you are getting something different, then we need to know that.

A November 22 report found that the Taliban likely gained access to approximately \$57.6 million in funds. And I just remind ev-

everybody we say the Taliban. Let us remind ourselves that the Taliban is a murderous terrorist regime. A murderous terrorist regime. \$57.6 million in funds that DOD, State, and USAID provided to the former Afghan Government, yet the murderous Taliban has them.

And it also in the report says that the three agencies did not provide or were unable to provide SIGAR with information showing the amount of on budget assistance funds they left in the country at the time of the Taliban takeover.

So, are they just not complying with him? Or are they providing you with this information regarding the \$57.6 million that goes to DOD, sir? Ma'am, State? And ma'am, USAID? What say you?

Mr. STORCH. So, a couple of things. Thank you for the question. First of all, we have not experienced a lack of cooperation in getting information from the Department. With regard to the important question you ask about equipment that was left behind, I believe the Department in its submissions to the Hill has estimated \$7.12 billion worth of equipment that was in the hands of the Afghan military when it collapsed. They have indicated that much of that may not still be in operation. Mr. Sopko has talked and we had similar work about the lack of—

Mr. PERRY. So, are you saying they are cooperating with you but not the Special Inspector General in Afghanistan? They are fully cooperating with you. And should he be coming to you for the information since he cannot get it from DOD?

Mr. STORCH. So, it is a great question. Just to finish the last point, we have no ability to audit, obviously, in Afghanistan at this point to determine how much

[inaudible].

Mr. PERRY. Yes, I know, "The server went down, and we do not know where the equipment was. And oh, my goodness, we got to spend more money on the military."

Mr. STORCH. With regard to our office, we have not experienced any lack of cooperation from the department—

Mr. PERRY. So once again, should Mr. Sopko be talking to you since DOD won't cooperate with him?

Mr. STORCH. Well, it is the Department's information. I am happy to help with any IG to ensure—

Mr. PERRY. OK. How about State?

Ms. SHAW. So, we also have not encountered any lack of cooperation or access issues related to our Afghanistan oversight. We de-conflict our work, so we are not looking at those same questions when we know that SIGAR is looking at them. So, we have not encountered the same issues. We are about to launch work to look specifically at how the Embassy disposed of its armored vehicles and sensitive assets. So, we do have work in that space that we hope will answer questions.

Mr. PERRY. So, the October 22 report also details State's failure to complete required oversight and evaluation of its anti-terrorism assistance program in Afghanistan. Do you recognize that as true? And has the information they provided lead you to the same conclusion or a different conclusion?

Ms. SHAW. We have not looked specifically at that issue because that was an issue that SIGAR was looking at. So, we work really hard to stay out of their way.

Mr. PERRY. But if they cannot get the information, should he come to you?

Ms. SHAW. He is certainly welcome to. He has not.

Mr. PERRY. And how about USAID?

Ms. ANGARELLA. Yes, we are happy to do joint work.

Mr. PERRY. OK. Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Mr. FALLON. Thank you. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Timmons.

Mr. TIMMONS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This has been one of the more difficult hearings I have had in Congress over the last four and a half years. I am very frustrated in the narratives that are being pushed. I am very frustrated with the lack of accountability. I am very frustrated just across the board with the manner in which particularly Ranking Member Raskin's opening statement characterized all of this.

And I tried to think through what made me so mad about it. And I am offended at the manner in which he is accusing the Trump Administration. I tried to think through it: "What is wrong with it? Why is it so bad?"

And the best example I could think of is the JCPOA, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action that was negotiated by the Obama Administration. What was the problem? Everybody knew the problem. The problem was Iran was trying to get a bomb. There was disagreement about how to best go about stopping that. But they chose a path. That path was agreed to in July 2015.

When Trump got into office, he said, "I disagree with that path. We are going to take a different path." And in May 2018, he pulled out. The thing that drives me crazy is that if Iran had gotten a nuclear weapon during the Trump Administration and he had not pulled out of the JCPOA, this would be 100 percent Trump's fault. It would not be Obama's fault. We would not be talking about the \$400 million that was sent over in U.S. currency. We would be talking about Trump and Trump's failure.

But here we are, 13 service members are dead. Thousands of Afghans have been brutally murdered. Women have had their rights given to them and then taken away in a manner in which this world has never seen. But we are talking about Trump's failure because of the agreement that he entered into, his Administration entered into, in February 2020. So, this is Trump's fault because he tried to do something we all knew we needed to do. We needed to leave Afghanistan. The question was how.

He negotiated an agreement. His Administration negotiated an agreement, and now here we are having a hearing about what went wrong and what we can do differently to make sure it does not happen again in the future. But instead of talking about that, we get these ridiculous documents that I read, these classified documents that are just ridiculous. We need to actually get to the bottom of this, so it does not happen again. The American lives that were lost, deserve that, they deserve that.

I guess, Mr. Sopko, do you think that my JCPOA analogy is a good one? I mean, did the Biden Administration have the ability

to change course? I mean, they technically delayed the withdrawal from May to September. They could have pushed it back further. They could have said, Taliban, if you do XYZ, we are going to stay, we are going to do this, we are going to, and he could have shot some missiles somewhere. He could have done anything, but instead he did not, and 13 service members died, thousands of people were killed, and our credibility in the global stage was lost.

I guess what are your thoughts on my JCPOA analogy, No. 1? And No. 2, in what world are we talking about Trump's deal and not talking about the mistakes that were made in the days and weeks leading up to the withdrawal?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, Congressman, I really cannot comment on the JCPOA analogy.

Mr. TIMMONS. Do you think it would have been Obama's fault if Iran got a nuclear bomb under the Trump Administration?

Mr. SOPKO. Look, I think you are asking a good question. I think this Committee or State IG or whatever should look at that question. You know, was it reasonable to delay? I cannot tell you whether it was reasonable for President Biden to delay or not. Maybe the State IG is looking at that, but those are good questions to ask. That is what oversight should be, and it should be independent, nonpartisan oversight. And I fully support that. I spent 20 years working on Congress working for Sam Nunn, John Dingell, Bill Roth. We did independent oversight, and I think you need to do that. But I cannot really tell you if he was right or wrong on that because we have not looked at it.

Mr. TIMMONS. The 20 years that we spent money and blood in Afghanistan and the 13 service members that died deserve accountability for the mistakes that were made. And we are not doing our job. The documents that I read, the classified documents, the biggest joke I have ever seen. We need to do our job. We need to make sure this does not happen again. We need to learn from our mistakes, so we do not make them again, and with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. SOPKO. And I agree with you, 100 percent.

Mr. FALLON. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Virginia by way of Massachusetts, Mr. Connolly.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you very much. Go Red Sox. And thank you all for being here today, and I agree with the gentleman who just asked his line of questions. We need to learn from history, but you do not learn from history by whitewashing it. Decisions and events that took place had history, they had context, they had antecedents. And some of my friends on the other side want to pretend history never existed. It all started when Kabul fell on someone else's watch, but that did not happen in a vacuum.

And I might add, until that very day, my friends at the other side of the aisle were still trumpeting Donald Trump's peace agreement in Doha. In fact, let me quote from their web page, which is behind me here.

[Chart.]

Mr. CONNOLLY. "Trump has continued to take the lead in peace talks as he signed a historic peace agreement with the Taliban in Afghanistan which would end America's longest war." You know when that came down? The day the Taliban marched into Kabul.

They were proud of it. But today, they want you to believe none of that happen, Joe Biden caused it all.

Mr. Sopko, you and I have known each other a long time. And you know the respect I hold you in and the work you and your team have done, always thorough, not always well sung, not your fault. And I wish Congress had listened a lot earlier to some of the warning signals you sent us.

And I am not going to ask you who is at fault. I am going to ask you some facts, though. You had a report and I want to quote from your report. "The U.S. decision to withdraw U.S. military and military contractors from Afghanistan through the February 2020 signing of the U.S.-Taliban agreement under the Trump Administration and the withdrawal following President Biden's public address in 2021 was a factor in the demoralization and ultimate disintegration of the Afghan military, and ultimately, Afghan Government." Is that a correct statement?

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And let us go back to the decision led by then Ambassador Khalilzad. He was a chief U.S. negotiator on behalf of our government under the Trump Administration, and he led the U.S. side in the negotiations in Doha, correct?

Mr. SOPKO. That is correct.

Mr. CONNOLLY. And did he not bless a decision that was a State Department decision, I assume backed by the Pentagon at the time, to negotiate with the Taliban and not to invite the Afghan Government itself in the preliminary negotiations?

Mr. SOPKO. That also is correct.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Now, let us stop there. That took place on Trump's watch entirely. What could possibly be the impact of actually not inviting the government we are allegedly fighting for and defending and equipping by telling them, "We are going to negotiate with your armed, violent terrorist, medieval opponents, the Taliban, without you at the table, and we are going to cut our own deal with them and you are going to have to live with it whatever it is"?

I am just spit balling here. Mr. Storch, you are from the Pentagon. Could that have a demoralizing effect on any military?

Mr. STORCH. Well, we didn't do any work on that, but I see your point, Congressman.

Mr. SOPKO. We did, Congressman. And we said it did have a debilitating effect upon the Afghan morale.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you.

Mr. SOPKO. If you talk to any of the Afghans, they will tell you that.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Sopko. I counted on that. Maybe the Pentagon could learn from the forthrightness we just heard. That is kind of common sense, Mr. Storch. And if you are advising another government and you withdraw support from that government in the form of who we are going to negotiate with, it has consequences.

And by the way, did that agreement that was produced between us and the Taliban, did that lead to any release of prisoners?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, I think we referred to as 5,000 Taliban were released. They agreed not to participate in fighting. But almost every one of them joined the fight against the Afghan Government.

Mr. CONNOLLY. So, it was kind of a fig leaf agreement, right? Like we agreed to it, we accepted it—

Mr. SOPKO. Yes. And it was forced upon the Afghan Government.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Right. And forced upon the Afghan Government by whom?

Mr. SOPKO. I believe we found it was Secretary of State Pompeo.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Sopko. I just think it is important as we are discussing lessons learned, so that we do not repeat mistakes, we be honest about the history and the context that preceded dramatic events in August 2021.

I yield back.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. [Presiding]. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Georgia, Ms. Greene.

Ms. GREENE. Thank you, Madam Chair. This has been a pretty interesting hearing today. I would like to remind everyone here watching this hearing and in this room and my colleagues across the aisle that Joseph R. Biden was inaugurated on January 21 of 2021 and was President and Commander-in-Chief over the Afghanistan withdrawal.

The all attempts to blame President Trump for all of the failures and deaths and arming the terrorist Taliban Government fall completely and squarely on the shoulders of President Biden.

Since 2002, the U.S. has spent over \$2.3 trillion in Afghanistan. The U.S. lost 2,328 U.S. military lives and over 20,000 other military members were wounded. Our country is responsible for funding and building the mines in Afghanistan that hold \$1 trillion worth of rare earth minerals.

The United States had intelligence days before the suicide bomber exploded himself, murdering 13 of our military members. They had the intelligence. It was even in the news that they knew this was coming. But yet, it happened anyway. Arming the terrorist Taliban, the Taliban who we fought since 2002, is unthinkable and most Americans cannot even comprehend it.

And now, since the failure in the withdrawal in Afghanistan, Bagram is now under the control of Taliban and China. And since Biden's failure, \$8 billion has been given in assistance to Afghans and Afghanistan. It is incomprehensible. But yet, we are here trying to figure out how and why and what happened.

And I have to tell you, most people I talk to in my districts and most people I talk to when I travel across the country cannot understand how this happened. And many veterans I talk to take pride in our military, as I take pride in our military, and they are so ashamed that our military was humiliated in this failure in Afghanistan.

And so, I do have some questions. And I thank you all for coming to speak with our committee. Mr. Sopko, in October 2021, in a letter to Dafna Rand, an official at the State Department, you said the Biden Administration instructed SIGAR to remove all reports from your website following the collapse and asked you to redact information on the website. Who specifically in the Admin instructed your office to do that and why?

Mr. SOPKO. I do not remember the name. We can get the name of the person who sent that. I do not have that in front of me. The explanation was that this could be potentially a threat to Afghans. But we asked for any specific threats, "Do you have any specific threat information?" And some of the requests were just unbelievable. They wanted us to take down our complete website and also to take down from all of our reports the name of, let us say, President Ghani.

We assumed the Taliban knew who President Ghani was, why do we have to scrub all of our reports for that? They also wanted us to take down the name of a city in the United States, which I think the Taliban could look at a map. So, it was a bizarre request. And they never did give us any information as to why they wanted us to pull down all of our reports, which had been public, many of them, for 12 years.

Ms. GREENE. Yes, that is pretty hard to understand why any administration would want to censor information. And you are right. I mean, Afghanistan can easily look at the map. Or they can talk to their friends in China because they flew a spy balloon across our country, and I am sure they pretty much have pictures of everything. Thank you.

Mr. Storch, on August 17, 2021, a U.S. air-strike in Afghanistan killed 10 civilians, including seven children. Since the strike was supposed to target an ISIS terrorist, Mark Milley called it a righteous strike. A few weeks later, however, U.S. Central Command admitted that they had hit the wrong Toyota Corolla.

My question is, as the Inspector General of the Department of Defense, do you see this kind of absolute failure from Mark Milley a lot? And have there been other times when the military has hit the wrong Toyota Corolla or another target on accident accidentally killing a bunch of innocent children? And then Mark Milley called it a righteous strike. I still do not understand that. Can you explain, please?

Mr. STORCH. Yes, ma'am. Thank you very much for the question. So, the strike on, I believe it was 29 August, our office did do a classified review of that strike and we looked at what led up to it. We looked at the reporting on it. We looked at the communications thereafter. As I say, it is classified, so I cannot talk about it in this briefing, but happy in an appropriate setting to provide more information about that.

I would also say that is one of a number of reviews that our office has done regarding different kinetic strikes, and not limited to Afghanistan as well. And as I say, happy to provide more information in the appropriate setting.

Ms. GREENE. Thank you, Mr. Storch. We will have committee staff follow up. And I yield back my time.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Thank you. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from New York, Mr. Goldman.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Thank you very much, Madam Chairwoman. Mr. Sopko, did the Afghanistan war start on January 21, 2021?

Mr. SOPKO. No, 20 years before.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Yes. It is the longest war in our history.

Mr. SOPKO. Absolutely.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Is not that right?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes.

Mr. GOLDMAN. And certainly, in your evaluation of the last 9 or 10 years of that war, was it your understanding that one decision impacts the next decision, which impacts the next decision and so forth?

Mr. SOPKO. It depends on the decision. But yes, I mean, I think we highlight that four administrations made many mistakes over that 20 years.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Right. Now, Mr. Storch, are you aware of a November 11, 2020, memorandum from President Trump relating to the withdrawal of troops from Somalia and Afghanistan?

Mr. STORCH. I am not sure I am familiar with that. I am sorry.

Mr. GOLDMAN. OK. I find that interesting, because it was a memo that Donald Trump issued to all servicemen to withdraw all troops, every single troop from Afghanistan by January 15, 2021. Is that familiar to you now?

Mr. STORCH. Yes, it does. Thank you.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Yes. And do you know whether that was vetted by anyone at the Department of Defense?

Mr. STORCH. And let me explain my initial question. That is not something that our office has done independent oversight on, so I honestly do not know the answer to that.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Why not? I mean, it is absolutely incredible that a President would issue an order to withdraw all troops from an ongoing war without consulting anyone at DOD, which is what both Secretary Austin and Chairman Milley have said.

Mr. STORCH. Yes, it is a great question. I really appreciate it. You know, one of the things that I think underlies the response to that question and just in general some of the issues we have discussed is, as inspectors general, our work looks at the execution of policies and strategies that are set by administrations regardless of partisan affiliation, right?

So, with regard to who made which decision and how that was made, those are matters for the management and for the Administration and the leadership of the agencies to do. Once those policies are set, we look to see whether they are done effectively, efficiently, economically—

Mr. GOLDMAN. Thank you for that. Thank you for that explanation.

Mr. STORCH. Yes, sir.

Mr. GOLDMAN. The point I am making here and, Mr. Sopko, you have been making this all day, and I think it is a very valid point, which is, if we are to conduct meaningful oversight over the war in Afghanistan that lasted for 20 years, we cannot just start on January 21, 2021. Would you agree with that, Mr. Sopko?

Mr. SOPKO. No, you cannot start with the Doha agreement, either.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Right.

Mr. SOPKO. I mean, we had years of problems, which put the context of why the Trump made a certain decision and the Biden Administration made a certain decision.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Right. The 5,000 members of the Taliban who you just referenced to have been released and then not abided by their promises, in your investigation of the withdrawal, did you deter-

mine whether any one of those 5,000 Taliban members were involved in the violence surrounding the evacuation?

Mr. SOPKO. I do not think we had that granularity on that. We just knew that the Afghans said that most of them, the Afghan soldiers and military, they said most of those Taliban went back to fight.

Mr. GOLDMAN. But it is certainly possible that some of those would have been there, right?

Mr. SOPKO. It could have been. It could have been.

Mr. GOLDMAN. They were fighting.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, yes.

Mr. GOLDMAN. You know, this war is very personal to me and my district. I represent Wall Street and 911, the World Trade Towers. And this is where the 911 Museum lives. This is where the principal attack that led to the Afghanistan war. And one of the things that I am really struggling with is that we have what is clearly politicized oversight, trying to have a got you moment against President Biden. But my colleagues on the other side do not support additional support for our veterans. They did not support the PACT Act, the burn pits.

Mrs. LUNA. Will the gentleman yield for a question?

Mr. GOLDMAN. I have 20 seconds. We are about to go.

Mrs. LUNA. Well, you know, I can give you some of my time. So, the issue that—

Mr. GOLDMAN. Can I just finish? Can I just finish?

Mrs. LUNA. Will you yield?

Mr. GOLDMAN. I will not yield. Let me just finish, and if I could have a little bit more time, Mr. Chairman. You will have plenty of time to respond, Mrs. Luna.

The point I am trying to make here is that there are two significant pieces of legislation that would not only support our veterans by providing more health care, but would also support the many Afghans, the hundreds of thousands of Afghans who helped our troops during the 20 years of the war. And my colleagues on the other side of the aisle do not support these bills. So, we can talk all we want about the evacuation, but let us see where we are going to be when we put our votes on the line and whether we are going to support our troops and whether we are going to support our foreign allies who helped us over a 20-year war.

And I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. [Presiding] The gentleman yields back. Before the Chair recognizes the next speaker, I feel we have to respond to the statement that this is a political hearing. Our four witnesses are inspectors general, and the main thing that I have heard thus far is that they are not getting cooperation from this Biden White House.

Mr. GOLDMAN. OK. Mr. Chairman, what is the basis for you opining on this right now?

Chairman COMER. Well, I was just correcting a misstatement.

Mr. GOLDMAN. It is not a misstatement. It is an assertion of me that you want to focus solely on what has happened since January 21, 2021. And that is to score political points because meaningful oversight would go back for 20 years.

Mrs. LUNA. It is about fighting for the families that never got closure because they lost loved ones on failed military leadership, so stop making it about this. If you want to ask the questions, do not bring up the PACT Act.

Mr. GOLDMAN. I do not understand what basis she has to talk.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes the Ranking Member for point of order.

Mr. RASKIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I mean, I appreciate the Chair's indulgence of real discussion among the Members. I hope that we would be able to keep it balanced in some way. So, if the gentleman could have the chance to respond to you, that would be wonderful, and then we could move on.

Chairman COMER. We will move on. Point taken. The Chair recognizes Mrs. McClain from Michigan for five minutes.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Wow. I think from both sides of what we hear, this has not been a success. But at the end of the day, we have to take a look at leadership, because if you are in charge of the greatest country in the world, which is the United States, then it is your job to lead. You cannot just pick up what is ever convenient to pick up when you want it to pick up, so I am hoping we can all agree on that.

Biden is our President. That is a fact. He made the choices he made when he made them. That is a fact. And we can go back and go back and make this about Trump if we want. What I do not understand is, the other side, you just cannot quit Trump. I mean, man, he is living in your head rent free. So right now, we are talking about the Commander-in-Chief right now, which is President Biden. Anytime he wants to relinquish that, I am sure we could have a different discussion.

But with that said, let us talk about the facts. The Biden Administration has wholeheartedly defended this atrocity in Afghanistan. They have defended it. They have told Congress to ignore images of people desperately hanging and falling to their deaths from the U.S. military aircrafts that they left at the Kabul airport. We have the photos of that. The Administration had claimed that the death of 13 American service members as a success. The President calls the abandoning of billions of U.S. assets a success. The President thinks abandoning our allies to be hunted down and killed by the Taliban as a success.

To my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, you honestly cannot call that a success. I do not know how in any frame of reference that can be delivered as a success. For anyone in this chamber to parrot the Administration's lies that the debacle of Afghanistan and the withdrawal of it was a success, I think in my humble opinion is delusional.

So, I have one question, sincerely. In good conscience, would you call the death of 13 U.S. service members, the loss of billions of U.S. assets, which, by the way, are paid for by the U.S. taxpayers, the abandonment of U.S. partners, and now the potential for another terrorist safe haven in Afghanistan, would we define that as a success? General Sopko, I would like to hear.

Mr. SOPKO. Congresswoman, I do not think I would ever, ever say the death of an American soldier as a success.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Thank you. What about the billions of assets that we left over there?

Mr. SOPKO. That is wasteful to say the least, but—

Mrs. MCCLAIN. I think that is the frustration with the American people, is, you know, you hear the waste, the fraud, and the abuse.

Mr. SOPKO. But, Congresswoman, if I can just tell you, I mean, if you are talking about a withdrawal, no matter what time, you are going to leave a lot of equipment behind. And a lot of it is broken and you try to destroy some of it. So, a lot of this equipment was not under the control of the U.S. military.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. How much did we destroy?

Mr. SOPKO. I do not know. I did not look at it. But we tried to destroy. But remember, we were not at all of these Afghan military bases.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. Agree.

Mr. SOPKO. The Afghan soldiers and police were there, and what they did with them, I think that is part of the problem. And at the end, our troops were gone. They were protecting Kabul. And, you know, we do not know where that stuff was.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. To my point.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. To my point. And to the gentleman's question earlier about going back, I think we cannot fix a problem and learn from history unless we can have an honest look at history.

Mr. SOPKO. I agree.

Mrs. MCCLAIN. So, I agree. We have to stop whitewashing this as a success. I do not think the American people expect perfection from us, but I do think that they expect progress from us. And I think we owe it to the American people to have an honest dialog about the facts of what actually happened on the withdrawal. And again, if you are in charge, if you are the coach of a baseball team or if you are the coach of a football team, and you lose the game—I've never heard Nick Saben say, "Well, you know, it is not my fault. It is my offensive line's fault." No. As the leader, you actually take some ownership. I think we all could learn a little bit from that.

But in conclusion, we all have eyes. We all saw what happened during the disastrous withdrawal. There is no way anyone can claim this as a success, and with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back. Thank you.

Chairman COMER. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair recognizes Mr. Moskowitz for five minutes.

Mr. MOSKOWITZ. Mr. Chairman, thank you. This is an important topic and we do need to get to the answers of why the Afghanistan withdrawal did not go according to what the experts in the Pentagon and elsewhere thought. We need to know why there were intelligence gaps. We need to know how that happened. There are lessons to be learned so they are not repeated, so that other soldiers, other Americans, men and women, do not wind up in the same situation.

I want to remind everyone we had soldiers die over 20 years of the war, not just in the withdrawal, so this is just as much about them as well. And it is an important topic, and it is something I think the American people want to know and want examined, and

we have to make sure that we improve our military through oversight. But, you know, this Committee, who says it is an important topic, you know, we are 100-plus days into the next Congress and this Committee thought that before we would talk about the Afghanistan withdrawal, they thought it was more important to talk about Twitter first.

And not only did they think it was more important than the Afghanistan withdrawal, they thought it was more important to talk about the hiring policies of the Biden Administration. They also thought it was more important to talk about a laptop that was found at RadioShack before the Afghan withdrawal. You know, they thought it was more important to talk about the D.C. Government and public urination before the Afghan withdrawal. I know this is a serious topic, but just look at the hearings we have had before this one. And so, it is tough for us on this side of the aisle to accept that this is not a serious hearing.

This was a 20-year war. It was started by President Bush. You remember President Bush? I know many of you have disowned him because he disagrees with President Trump. But four Presidents, 20 years of good decisions, 20 years of bad decisions. You do not want to examine 20 years. You only want to examine, like, the last week. You know, when marriages dissolve after 20 years and they get in front of a judge, they do not just say, you know, everything was great until the last week of marriage. It is crazy.

President Trump invited the Taliban to Camp David around the anniversary of 9/11. What? Like, are there any questions about that? Trump released 5,000 prisoners, many that included terrorists. 5,000 Taliban prisoners, many that included terrorists. I thought, Mr. Sopko, you said that it was Secretary Pompeo who negotiated that release of the Taliban prisoners. Is that correct?

Mr. SOPKO. That is my understanding. It may have been somebody else with him, but I do not remember now.

Mr. MOSKOWITZ. No, fair enough, and because this Committee has amnesia, as we have shown on our COVID debates and other debates, who did Secretary Pompeo work for again?

Mr. SOPKO. This is another trick question, isn't it?

Mr. MOSKOWITZ. It is.

Mr. SOPKO. I think President Trump.

Mr. MOSKOWITZ. OK. Can you imagine for a second—you do not have to answer this one—if Joe Biden had released 5,000 Taliban prisoners, many of who probably wound up in Kabul that day, can you imagine what these folks would be doing? I mean, the heavens would open for them based on that. I mean, it would be unbelievable to watch, but they have no questions and never had any questions, and many supported the release of these prisoners. No, they do not want to know what effect that had at all on the fall of Kabul. No, do not look at that at all. Only look at the fact that it happened during a Democratic Administration.

You know, I am even hearing some of my colleagues say that they cannot get information out of this Administration. It is ironic when those same colleagues did not comply with subpoenas now complain they cannot get information. That is the problem with this place. It is not serious. This is no different than COVID. You

guys only wanted to talk about COVID under the Biden Administration. COVID was a three-year issue.

And so, I will end with this, Mr. Chairman. It was accused that the Democrats do not want to quit Trump. We will quit Trump when you quit Trump. We look forward in a bipartisan fashion quitting Trump together. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. GOLDMAN. Mr. Chairman, I have a unanimous consent motion. I would like to introduce a November 11, 2020, memo from the Acting Secretary of Defense. The subject is Withdrawal from Somalia and Afghanistan.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes Mr. Edwards for five minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I can see now why things are so tough to get done up here in Washington, DC. And I also understand why the folks on the other side of the aisle want to distract this conversation from its true purpose. As I look at this memorandum for the purpose of this meeting, I read that it is to examine the audits and evaluations conducted by inspectors general regarding factors that led to the collapse of the Afghan Government and its' security forces, issues when it comes to evacuee resettlement, and lessons learned from the evacuation from Afghanistan. And when I look at the timeline given to us produced by the Department of Defense under control of Biden, that evacuation began on April the 14th, 2021 under Biden's control.

So, I would like to return the conversation back to the purpose of this hearing. And I appreciate all four of you being here and indulging us through the duration of this often-distracted process. Mr. Sopko, you have mentioned many, many times that you have not received the cooperation that you would have expected to have received in your investigation. And obviously, while this is the first time I have had a chance to meet you, obviously, you have got a long history in testifying before this Committee. And so, based on that history, what would be the advice to this Committee as to what our next steps should be given the obstruction that you are getting from the current Administration?

Mr. SOPKO. Just dealing with the obstruction issue, sir, I mean—I think the question somebody asked before is why are not they providing us with the information, but they are providing it to the other IGs. I would seriously like to find out why they are doing it.

If you are talking about just the obstruction, I am not talking about your obstruction that you may have related to other investigations. I am talking about my problem. I have a job to do, and I am not able to do that job because of State and AID, and mainly State, because they have issued this ridiculous legal opinion basically saying I no longer exist.

Mr. EDWARDS. Thank you. And so, what would be your advice to this Committee as to enable you to do your job? What can we do to enable you to do your job?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, call in the Administration and have them explain it. Look, I used to work for—

Mr. EDWARDS. Perfect. That is all I need. Thank you. Mr. Storch, do you know through your investigation was there any specific consideration given to sensitive equipment that might have been left

behind? We have talked about broken equipment and flat tires and all the other things that might have been left behind, a total of \$7.2 billion I heard you testify. Was there any specific consideration to sensitive equipment?

Mr. STORCH. Thank you for the question, Congressman. Yes, my office actually did an evaluation in August 2021 as events were unfolding that looked at exactly that issue in terms of the accountability and controls to ensure that sensitive equipment was essentially wiped, that the sensitive information was taken care of, and that also that there were appropriate controls in place. And essentially, we found that there were concerns that some of the sensitive information had not been taken off it before it was turned back in.

Now, to be clear, this is being turned back in to the United States authorities. But on the other hand, we found that there were significant concerns regarding controls over that equipment so that we really could not be sure that all of it in fact was turned in.

Mr. EDWARDS. And so, would you consider that we had additional national security risks because sensitive equipment was left behind?

Mr. STORCH. I would not have any basis to go there. Again, you know, you do not know what you do not know, right? So, I cannot say that there would be particular national security risks. What our report found was that with the equipment that was turned in, not all the sensitive information was appropriately taken off it and that there were concerns regarding accountability. And frankly, concerns about accountability, as we have both testified, Mr. Sopko and I, about going back years. And so, those two taken together create risks, but I could not go beyond that.

Mr. EDWARDS. And so, if there was sensitive equipment of national security interests left behind and now we do not know whose hands that equipment is in, then there has to be additional risk, would not you agree?

Mr. STORCH. Well, again, I cannot say whether or not there was national security information that would not have been wiped. A lot of this was personal information, medical information, and things like that. But certainly, if you cannot account for all the equipment, you cannot rule out that possibility.

Mr. EDWARDS. All right. Thank you. Mr. Chair, I see my time has expired, so I yield.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes Mr. Garcia for five minutes.

Ms. GARCIA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all the witnesses for being here. I want to obviously just begin by saying that there is no question that the withdrawal from Afghanistan was very difficult, that we know this. We have had a 20-year war, and certainly we had failed to build a sustainable state or an Afghan military that could withstand alone against the Taliban. And so, we understand this is a very complex issue, and I want to thank you all for your service.

Now, in an era of increasing global threats, and with so many priorities, we know that we can also not fight these forever wars. And so, this has been a difficult withdrawal, and certainly we can argue that the Administration could have moved slower, but I also

want to remind some of our colleagues some of the history here. Now, in July 2019, just two years into Mr. President Trump's presidency, then Secretary of State Pompeo revealed that President Trump had ordered him to reduce the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan by the 2020 election, even though the Pentagon was opposing this policy. So first, to Mr. Storch, were you aware of any tactical or are you aware of any tactical reason why November 2020 would have been the appropriate date to draw down troops from Afghanistan?

Mr. STORCH. So, we reported out in the lead IG reporting regarding that chain of events. We did not do independent auditing or evaluation to analyze the tactics involved or the strategic decisions. And staffing in particular is a, sort of quintessentially, management position. There are a lot of things that go into it. So, we did not go any further than.

Mr. GARCIA. Mr. Sopko, same question.

Mr. SOPKO. We do not have any specific information on what was behind that decision.

Mr. GARCIA. Because I am not personally aware of any technical reason why that date would have been set, and I think most of the public would agree with that. Before that plan could be enacted, President Trump signed also the highly flawed Doha Agreement. In October 2020, President Trump's national security adviser announced that the Trump Administration would follow through on the Trump-Taliban agreement that was made in draw-down forces in Afghanistan to 2,500 by early 2021. Just hours later, and before the vice-Presidential debate, we are all aware, President Trump then recklessly tweeted, "We should have the small remaining number of our brave men and women serving in Afghanistan home by Christmas." Now, Mr. Sopko, based on your extensive research, did the Trump Administration's conflicting messages have an impact on any of the morale of the Afghan security forces?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, it was not just the Trump Administration, but I think there was mass confusion on statements being made about the withdrawal.

Mr. GARCIA. And, Mr. Storch, to your knowledge, was there any military reason to designate December 2020 as a withdrawal date?

Mr. STORCH. Again, Congressman, my answer would be the same. We reported out on the chronology, but we did not do independent audits or evaluations as to the rationale.

Mr. GARCIA. OK. I think most of the public and I certainly agree that there was no reasoning as far as that date, and I think that has been pretty clear and been made clear today at this hearing as well.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley, testified that on November 11, 2020, just four days after President Trump lost the Presidential election, and he did lose that election, he received the memo signed by President Trump directing the immediate withdrawal of all U.S. forces from Afghanistan no later than January 15, 2021. And we have heard this as well in this Committee. Mr. Storch, to your knowledge, by November 2020, have the situation on the ground changed in such a way to warrant the complete withdrawal of troops by January 15, 2021?

Mr. STORCH. Again, Congressman, in the interest of time, my answer would be the same.

Mr. GARCIA. OK, and mine would as well. I want to thank you all because I find it troubling that President Trump, knowing that he had lost an election and with just weeks left in office, set in motion a series of events that would lead to the collapse of the Afghan Government and its security forces. And that is a real failure that this Committee should be investigating. And with that, I yield back the remainder of my time.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes, Mr. Langworthy, for five minutes.

Mr. LANGWORTHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I would like to express my gratitude to our witnesses for joining us here today to discuss one of the most significant failures in American military history. And even though the military operations in Afghanistan have concluded, we are still discovering that our American tax dollars are being spent in Afghanistan. Americans have lost too much in Afghanistan, and I do not believe that this body will stand for wasted tax dollars ending up in the hands of Taliban and other bad actors.

Mr. Sopko, based on your high-risk list report, can you speak a little more about multilateral organizations in Taliban interference?

Mr. SOPKO. From our discussions with the United Nations, basically, and I think maybe the World Food Programme, they are talking about the Taliban, first of all, issuing the order, not allow women to work at NGOs, issuing another order not allowing women to work at the international organizations. We also were told that the Taliban is not so much stealing the money directly from the United Nations, although they may be doing that. We do not know for sure. But what they are doing, is that they are illegally billing or charging the subcontractors for the U.N. and other international organizations, and then getting that money.

They are also interfering by telling the U.N. and other implementing partners that they cannot give money or assistance to certain ethnic groups. The Hazaras, in particular, have been identified. We have also been told that they are diverting some of the food assistance, mainly to the wives, the children and actually Taliban fighters, instead of going to people who are maybe more needy. So, there is a whole series of those issues that were being told by officials of the international organizations. Problem is, we are not able to get books and records from the international organizations or from the State Department or USAID.

Mr. LANGWORTHY. OK. I think it is just important that we understand how funds are getting to Afghanistan, especially knowing that wire transfers are restricted. Regarding your high-risk list report, can you explain the process of how U.S. funds are going to humanitarian aid groups and then getting to Afghanistan?

Mr. SOPKO. We are sending bulk cash to Afghanistan, I think, on a regular basis, and maybe the AID IG would remember the exact number. I do not know if it was \$5 million or \$15 million a week or whatever. And then the money is then used to go to the U.N. and go to the implementing agencies. So, it is all cash. You are al-

ways worried when you are dealing with that much cash in a place like Afghanistan.

Mr. LANGWORTHY. Yes, I can imagine. So, we are not seeing that the Taliban is directly shaking down the NGOs. It is more through fees, and other means that they are—

Mr. SOPKO. That has been explained to us. They are getting clever at that. We do not know. They may be doing other shakedowns, but, again, if State and AID do not answer our questions, and do not give us the books and records, I cannot tell you.

Mr. LANGWORTHY. Thank you very much. Ms. Angarella, does the USAID have any ongoing programs in Afghanistan?

Ms. ANGARELLA. Yes, USAID has mostly humanitarian assistance, very small developmental programs. And to add on to what IG Sopko said, we do have current work in Afghanistan. We have investigations that we are working. Our criminal law enforcement agents are working for cases that have come to us either through USAID self-reporting or the NGOs or implementing partners that USAID is working with. We also have memorandums of understanding, which are formal information sharing agreements. So, we know how many open investigations the WFP IG has, and how many effect USAID funding. So, we are coordinating right now on three cases that are active that WFP is investigating in Afghanistan related to USAID funds.

And specifically, what we are seeing in the interference of the delivery of foreign assistance, both in-kind, is pressuring organizations to pay taxes and tariffs, intimidating some aid organizations to hire Taliban affiliated personnel, and the preclusion of NGOs and U.N. organizations from hiring women to actually deliver the assistance and the programs.

Mr. LANGWORTHY. Thank you very much. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. The Chair recognizes Ms. Brown for five minutes.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you. I first want to acknowledge the Chairman, Ranking Member and our witnesses for being here today. I would also like to say it is important to note that while in office, President Trump routinely vilified public servants across the government. He particularly antagonized what he referred to as the Deep State Department. Amid this tenure, the State Department's workforce plummeted by nine percent from December 2016 to March 2018. So, Ms. Shaw, can you tell us how the attrition at the State Department impacted the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program?

Ms. SHAW. Thank you so much for the question. Our work over many years has determined that staffing has been an issue in terms of being able to keep pace with a number of applications. The work we published in 2020, I believe, recommended that an assessment be done of staffing levels. When we did a follow-up compliance review, we found that the staffing assessment had been done and some changes had been made, but the backlog still was not being wound down at a pace that would keep pace with the applications. And so, we have ongoing work to further look at the way the program has been streamlined to see if we are finally seeing some of those positive effects.

Ms. BROWN. To follow up, you mentioned the backlog. Was there a substantial backlog for the Special Immigrant Visa application program in 2020?

Ms. SHAW. You know, off the top of my head, I could not tell you exactly where it was at that time, but I believe that what our work found at that time period was that there was a backlog. It has, of course, since been impacted by the evacuation.

Ms. BROWN. For the record, that backlog had increased to 18,864. Another question. Ms. Shaw, what was the Trump Administration's impact on other refugee settlement and support services relevant to the Afghanistan withdrawal?

Ms. SHAW. Well, I can think of one context. We recently issued a report about resettlement agencies that the department worked with domestically to resettle Afghan evacuees. And what we did find is that the reduction in the number of refugees that was decided within the Trump Administration had a down-stream effect, and that the implementers and resettlement agencies did scale back their resources, recognizing that they would not have as many people to serve. And then of course, with the evacuation, we saw a huge surge, and so their ability to quickly staff up to meet that spike was one of the major challenges that we identified.

Ms. BROWN. So, would you say that the visa and resettlement program should have been contemplated as part of a successful Afghan withdrawal effort during the Trump Administration?

Ms. SHAW. I cannot say whether it was or not. But I know from the State Department perspective, based on our work that they did give some focus to it after we found that there were significant issues, including one of the most senior level positions to oversee that program, the senior coordinating official, had been a position left vacant for several years during that Administration.

Ms. BROWN. I will take that as a "yes." I think it is fair to say then that President Trump failed to put critical pieces in place before aggressively advancing the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. And I want to close by asking unanimous consent to submit to the record a Twitter thread by Olivia Troye, the Former Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Advisor to Mike Pence.

Chairman COMER. Without objection, so ordered.

Ms. BROWN. Thank you. In this Twitter thread, she is replying to an assertion that Trump would have successfully evacuated all Afghan partners. And she wrote, "There were Cabinet meetings about this during the Trump Administration where Stephen Miller would peddle his racist hysteria about Iraq and Afghanistan. He and his enablers across government would undermine anyone who worked on solving the SIV issue by devastating the system at DHS and State." She continued to say, "Trump had four years while putting his plan in place to evacuate these Afghan allies who were lifelines for many of us who spent time in Afghanistan. They had been waiting a long time. The process slowed to a trickle for review of their priorities, then came to a halt."

Donald Trump and his Administration knew full well that his withdrawal commitments were a recipe for disaster but did nothing to address it. Those facts should not be ignored during our discussion today. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentlelady yields back. The Chair recognizes Mr. Burlison for five minutes.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you, Mr. Chair. You know, real leaders accept responsibility for mistakes and pass on credit for successes. I am from Missouri. We are the home of President Harry Truman, who famously had on his desk, "The buck stops here." We are a long way from Harry Truman because this whole hearing for hours, all we are hearing is we want to blame any mistakes, not on myself or my Administration or accept any responsibility. Instead, we are going to blame it on previous administrations. And so, I think—I respect and applaud your efforts because you and your reports have looked past blame and are just trying to get to the answers. And what? Because we do not want to see this ever happen again.

And so, I think most of my questions are going to go in a different direction than what some of the ones I have heard earlier. I want to find out what is going on today. So, in October 2022, the Department of Defense OIG released a report called the evaluation of DOD security and life support for Afghan evacuees at Camp Bondsteel. OK. Camp Bondsteel is located in Kosovo and was selected for one of the several locations where we temporarily housed Afghanistan refugees. It was scheduled to be decommissioned or taken down, but has been renewed and apparently it is going to be keep going. What is happening there?

Mr. STORCH. Thank you for the question. The report you are referencing is one of 11 management advisories that we did looking at different facilities, U.S. military installations, that were used in order to house, feed, give medical care and the like to evacuees. The one in question is actually one where I think it is fair to say we found a fair number of issues and concerns regarding the way in which that was carried out, and we made a number of findings. My understanding is that those were addressed promptly there, after-action reports were done. And so, our office, you know, continues to follow up on all of that, but as we have moved forward, we have moved on into audits and evaluations looking more at the cost of the process. But having said that, there were after-actions done to address those issues.

Mr. BURLISON. So, the issues were processing issues or conditions?

Mr. STORCH. I think there were a number of issues regarding the way in which different aspects of care were conducted; the medical care, some of the feeding, the housing, those sorts of issues, and then the more processing issue.

Mr. BURLISON. About how many evacuees were processed there?

Mr. STORCH. I do not have the specific number for that one. The total number was about 108,000.

Mr. BURLISON. And what is the purpose for this? These people, they are kind of in purgatory. You know, what is their status?

Mr. STORCH. So, as I understand it, the purpose was to provide safe spaces for these individuals to continue to pursue their refugee status and their applications for visas. And so, folks were evacuated from Afghanistan—

Ms. BURLISON. But there was red flag issues with some of these evacuees, is that not accurate?

Mr. STORCH. So, we also found in our in our vetting work, and again, DOD is not primarily responsible for the vetting. That is primarily the responsibility of DHS. But we did find issues when we looked at that, regarding whether all of the information that DOD had in its systems regarding some individuals was whether all of that information was being provided to DHS, essentially, because of limitations on the sharing of that information that were in place when they got that.

And so, there were sort of informal procedures worked out to identify individuals who had derogatory information. That does not mean that they necessarily say, we are terrorists or something else, but there were concerns and not all of that went forward. We are doing a follow-up project right now, that is looking at the current status of that.

Mr. BURLISON. So, the reason why the camp is still being funded, and we have, you know, the U.S. nationals, you know, government housing these individuals because we have not been able to process them? We have not figured out who they really are, whether they are a terrorist or not?

Mr. STORCH. No, I am sorry. I think those are separate issues, and I can get back to you with more information on this if you would like. But, there is the one issue regarding the provision of housing and other services to the people under Operation Allies Welcome. The separate issue is the support for the screening and vetting process, and that is what I was alluding to with the latter. I do not believe that the latter was particularly related to Camp Bondsteel.

Mr. BURLISON. Do you have any idea how many Afghanistan refugees that have entered in the United States? Are you aware or investigating any crimes that they have committed in the United States?

Mr. STORCH. So, my office has, I believe, about two dozen active investigations that—both from legacies, from OFS, and from OES, those do not involve refugees or that sort of situation. One of the issues we found was that there was ambiguity regarding jurisdiction over how to investigate crimes involving individuals who were brought into the country, and that is one of the places.

Mr. BURLISON. But there have been crimes?

Chairman COMER. The gentleman's time has expired, but please go ahead and answer.

Mr. STORCH. Yes, I do not know that there have been crimes, my office—that would not be our jurisdiction, our jurisdiction is over DOD. One of the things we found was there needed to be better delineation of jurisdiction over who would investigate any such crimes, but I do not have any information regarding whether those individuals themselves had committed crimes, if that helps.

Chairman COMER. Thank you. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Gosar, for five minutes.

Mr. GOSAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, four, for being here. The United States' 20-year experiment in Afghanistan has been a complete and total disaster. Two-point-three trillion dollars was spent, 23,028 U.S. military personnel have been killed, and in almost every theater the U.S. meddles in, whether it be Iraq, Syria or Afghanistan, death and destruction follows, and the

U.S. has nothing to show for it. And what a shame considering the immense sacrifice our brave soldiers have made fighting in senseless wars, forced upon them by out-of-touch political elites.

The obvious lesson to draw from the recent Middle Eastern wars, and the one that the American people learned long ago, but somehow few elected officials from either party seem to understand, is that these wars do not work. The only fruits are evil. Many people die, lives are ruined, and America is weakened. But now our genius leaders have decided that what did not work in the Middle East, and which was tried multiple times, must be rinsed and repeated in Europe. And the same result is playing out in Ukraine as it did in Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, the list goes on and on. And the result is a more unstable world and an immense amount of human suffering.

Mr. Storch, the grieving mother of a Marine who was one of the fallen 13 servicemen who died at the hands of the infamous suicide bomber in Kabul, contacted my office with some pertinent questions. The Marine's name was Marine Lance Corporal Dylan Merola. As a background, President Biden sent 3,000 troops in August 2021 to help with that evacuation. Also, if one would use the ages of the 11 of the 13 servicemen who died, they were anywhere from the ages of 20 to 23. Marine Lance Corporal Dylan Merola, and eight others had only been in Afghanistan for under two weeks when they were killed. So, my question, why were such young, inexperienced troops chosen for such a dangerous mission?

Mr. STORCH. So, thank you for the question. Obviously, each of those losses is a tragedy, right? So, having said that, I always want to be frank with you. Our office has not looked at that. I did mention earlier, I did reach out to get the full after-action report, the classified report that was done by the Department. And my team and I are reviewing that and if there is additional oversight that is impactful to do, but we will do it.

Mr. GOSAR. Love to, you know, one of the things you are going to look at is, what percentage of the 3,000 troops had two years of experience of service or less? We want to find out about that, because this seems that when you are coming from a hostile situation, you want your best, your brightest, your most trained. And then also who made the final call as to that the 3,000 troops? And reading in your testimony, it is clear that U.S. taxpayer money has been funding the Taliban. Once again, you mentioned in your testimony that you could not determine whether hundreds of millions of dollars of ammunition were used properly. Are you confident this ammunition did not fall in the hands of the Taliban?

Mr. STORCH. So, we know and the Department, I believe, as it reported to Congress, that there was about \$7.12 billion worth of various equipment that was in the possession of the Afghan military at the time of the collapse. The condition of that, we do not know. And obviously we cannot go back in to audit. With regard to things like ammunition, we found for years, in many audits, that there was not adequate control, and there was subjecting to theft and otherwise, things like ammunition, radios, vehicles, night vision devices, all sorts of stuff. And so, I would not have any confidence as to the status of any of that.

And with regard to the equipment, I will say in fairness, the, you know, the Department of Defense has said that much of that was demilled, it was rendered inoperable. Again, we have no way to go back in to check on any of that.

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Sopko, in your testimony, you cite the Taliban's practice of forcing NGOs to give them a cut of the aid the NGOs distributed. You even mentioned an instance where the Taliban often allowed one particular NGO to rent vehicles directly from them, the Taliban. How much foreign aid do you suspect reaches the Taliban? And could you hazard to give me a percentage?

Mr. SOPKO. I cannot, sir, because of lack of cooperation from State and AID.

Mr. GOSAR. This is troubling to me, really troubling, and I think it is troubling for a lot of us because you cannot make decisions if you have no information in front of you.

Mr. SOPKO. I agree.

Mr. GOSAR. And it is really sad. I will have a bunch of follow-up questions for all of you, and I think we need to follow the money. Thank you. I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. The Chair recognizes Mrs. Luna for five minutes.

Mrs. LUNA. Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for being here. And before I go into my questioning, I just wanted to correct some of the statements made by one of my colleagues from across the aisle.

First of all, for those who are reporters here, the reason why some Republicans did not support the PACT Act, and I say this as a veteran and the wife of a combat wounded veteran in Afghanistan, that when you are using veterans, especially with burn pits, and then you stick \$400 billion in unnecessary spending so you can get your pet projects paid for, we are not going to support that. And we do not advise using veterans to get your pet projects paid for, so that is the first thing.

Second thing, Mr. Garcia had annotated earlier that this is a very complicated issue. Obviously, the entire region of Afghanistan has been destabilized, and it is known as the graveyard of empire. So, there is a big foreign policy issue that we have in this country. And I do believe that this Administration is unqualified and intentionally doing the wrong thing because, in my opinion, they are trying to empower China and I will go to the grave with that one.

But to further why we are here today, I believe that the military as a whole is suffering from people that have been put in charge and do not truly understand the culture of the military, and, thus, they have implemented policy that is not enabling our warfighters to do their jobs. War is not fun. I would never advocate for it. But when you have people that are on the ground, specifically with what happened in Afghanistan, they need to be trusted to do the right thing, and therefore the red tape has to be cut.

My question is for Mr. Sopko. You know, I heard a testimony from a previous Committee that had a young Marine sniper that had said that he was not authorized to take the shot that could have prevented the suicide bomber from detonating that and thus saving the lives of the 13 killed, 170 civilians and then the 45 wounded service members. Has anything been changed with the

laws of armed conflict and/or memorandums from the DOD to enable, whether it is team sergeants and special operations communities, whether it is people who are at the lowest level of leadership to authorize those military officials to do their jobs?

Mr. SOPKO. I am not able to answer that because I am not the DOD IG. I think you should ask Mr. Storch.

Mrs. LUNA. OK. Mr. Storch, would you be able to answer that question?

Mr. STORCH. I am sorry. Could you repeat the question?

Mrs. LUNA. Has anything been done in regards to the law of armed conflict or memorandum done to allow lower levels of leadership, to include team sergeants of special operations communities and/or the acting commanders in some of these units that go out, to do their jobs to make those decisions, where they are not looking at necessarily, I guess, from my opinion, getting in trouble for doing the right thing and protecting their guys?

Mr. STORCH. So, I am honestly not aware of the answer to your question. I would be happy to have my folks look into it and get back to you.

Mrs. LUNA. OK.

Mr. STORCH. I will say, we have done work looking at the law of war and the need for updating of the policies. Whether that goes to your question, I do not honestly know the answer, but we will check into it and get back to you.

Mrs. LUNA. We need to empower our warfighters to do their jobs. And that means that we have to trust them to make those difficult decisions in those horrific times. The reason why I am so impassioned about this topic is, behind me, you will see a picture of Staff Sergeant Ryan Christian Knauss. He was actually one of the 13 that was killed in Afghanistan, and his mother lives in my district back home. And although I was not a Member of Congress at the time, within 24 hours of finding out that he had been killed, I actually called his mom, and I had to make that phone call.

And as a Member now, I am sure any Representative who has had to do that, that is one of the hardest phone calls you will have to make to hear the heartbreak in a parent's voice for losing a child. And when you sit here and you hear how this Administration handled it—I do not know if you are aware of this, but President Biden after seeing his mom at a memorial for this, his first statement to her, her name is Paula Knauss, "I can understand if you are angry," but then declined to hug the actual mother of which she responded, "This could and should have never happened." What has this Administration done to really help the families heal after the fact, because the fact is, is that had that Marine Corps sniper been authorized to take that shot, this might not have happened the way that it did.

There are a lot of, obviously, drops in regards to foreign policy, but I want to know now that that is done, what is the Administration doing to allow this family and these families to have closure? Any of you.

Mr. STORCH. I can just say that is not something we have done any work on. I appreciate the question.

Mrs. LUNA. Are you guys in correspondence or actively talking to any of the family members in regards to your report?

Mr. STORCH. The oversight that we have done would not call on us to contact the family members, so I think the answer is no.

Mrs. LUNA. Would you be willing to if they reached out? Because I can tell you that my office spoke with about seven of those family members, and I think that they would like to get some answers?

Mr. STORCH. So, we are always happy to talk to people and to hear from them, and if there are issues to be addressed, we will look into addressing them.

Mrs. LUNA. Perfect. Thank you very much. Chairman, I yield my time.

Chairman COMER. The Chairman recognizes Ms. Mace for five minutes.

Ms. MACE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank all our witnesses today for being with us this afternoon. As one of the biggest military failures in decades, this Administration has yet to provide adequate information regarding the botched Afghanistan withdrawal. Instead of reflecting and learning from this catastrophe over the past year and a half, it has been nothing but stonewalling and pointing fingers. Even the Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, said he has no regrets about the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan, no regrets for the 13 lives lost. I believe that is an embarrassing comment from the Secretary. Well, I am not sure what Secretary Austin saw in August 2021, but I can tell you, the American people saw the execution of a half-baked withdrawal plan which resulted in the deaths of 13 U.S. soldiers and left behind thousands of interpreters that were willing to risk and take a bullet for our country, whom we left behind our country and our soldiers.

I want to say thank you to the Inspector Generals for being here. We have a long road ahead of us to get down to the bottom of what actually went wrong. And we appreciate your time and your effort this afternoon in that endeavor, as we continue this fact-finding mission.

Mr. Storch, while I have you here this afternoon, I have a few questions unrelated to Afghanistan. My first few questions are about the role of an Inspector General and you can presume that my questions are "yes" or "no." Do you believe in protecting the integrity of our government? Is that the role of the IG?

Mr. STORCH. Yes.

Ms. MACE. Do you believe in detecting waste, fraud, abuse, misconduct, and corruption in our government?

Mr. STORCH. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. MACE. Do you believe the government should be transparent in all that it does?

Mr. STORCH. Yes.

Ms. MACE. Do you believe in providing reports to the government about potential waste, fraud, abuse, misconduct, and corruption in government?

Mr. STORCH. Yes.

Ms. MACE. Do you believe such reports should have a full set of facts in order for them to be complete?

Mr. STORCH. Yes.

Ms. MACE. All right. Mr. Storch, in 2020, your office issued a report on the JEDI cloud contract. Are you familiar with that contract?

Mr. STORCH. I am.

Ms. MACE. Are you familiar with the report?

Mr. STORCH. I am.

Ms. MACE. OK. As you said earlier, without having a full set of facts, a review cannot possibly be full and complete. I have read the report and talked to different folks. It appears here we had an employee at the Pentagon who sold her company to a partner of a major contractor at the Pentagon, and you had exposure to that contractor in her job. And when you read it, it looks like there is the potential for conflict of interest, something that the American people have no appetite for, regardless of who is in charge. And either she spectacularly failed to disclose who she sold her company to and the amount of money that she was paid during the duration of her employment at the Pentagon, or maybe she did the bare minimum legally. It was appropriate, but maybe not morally or ethically.

If you sell your company for a \$1.5 million to a partner that does business with a major company, billions of dollars of business with the DOD, maybe you would want to disclose that information before taking that job. And she spectacularly would have failed to disclose payments and/or maybe she did the bare minimum legally. It is hard to say. But to the average American, it just looks like pay to play. It looks like corruption at DOD. It looks like corruption of a Federal agency.

And so, my next few questions are for you today. Would you be able to provide me a list of all the IG investigators and employees who worked on this particular report?

Mr. STORCH. So, let me say I am familiar with the report.

Ms. MACE. "Yes" or "no," would you be able to provide me a list of the IGs and/or investigators—excuse me—or employees who worked on this particular report?

Mr. STORCH. I am responsible for the work of my office, so, no, I do not believe it is consistent with IG practice to provide the names of underlying individuals who worked on it.

Ms. MACE. Do you think the report is complete and full?

Mr. STORCH. So, I did have the opportunity, as I am sure you know, based upon other inquiries, to review it myself. And I am satisfied with the report. We are doing additional follow-up work and I am aware of this.

Ms. MACE. I am not satisfied with the report. How can anyone conclude—

Mr. STORCH. I would be happy to discuss that with you, ma'am.

Ms. MACE. Well, we are doing that now. How can anyone conclude there was no conflict of interest or ethical violation by this employee if we failed to find out who purchased her company and how that connection was—like, you know, do you believe that a DOD employee should disclose who is buying their company before they come into the job or after because she disclosed these payments the week that she left on her termination report but did not disclose all of it before she got hired?

Mr. STORCH. So, when you are—

Ms. MACE. Should they disclose this information before or after they get hired?

Mr. STORCH. When you were taking me through the litany of questions, you may have noticed——

Ms. MACE. Yes.

Mr. STORCH [continuing]. I paused a bit when you talked about all the relevant information.

Ms. MACE. So, my question is, should a DOD employee disclose who they sold their company to before or after they take the job?

Mr. STORCH. I think the only honest answer is, it depends, ma'am. And so, what I would not do is assume that the information in the report represents the full sum of information that was available at my office.

Ms. MACE. So, it is an incomplete report is what you are saying?

Mr. STORCH. No, no, it is standard practice——

Ms. MACE. Well, if it does not have the full sum of information in the report, then how do you describe it as complete?

Mr. STORCH. So, it is. I was a Federal prosecutor for 24 years before I joined the IG community. Not all the information you obtain in any audit or investigation is going to be included within the report.

Ms. MACE. It is 317 pages document.

Mr. STORCH. Believe me, I am painfully aware of that, ma'am.

Ms. MACE. So, how do you say it is complete if it does not have the sum of all information? I mean, it is certainly in the 20 pages that mentioned the specific employee, does not mention at all who she sold her company to. I mean, it is absent there. Would you agree to cooperate with me and other Members of Congress as we investigate this issue?

Mr. STORCH. I would be happy to cooperate with Congress and provide whatever information I appropriately can.

Ms. MACE. All right, thank you. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman COMER. Thank you. The Chair recognizes Mr. Burchett from Tennessee for five minutes.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Members, Ranking Member. Mr. Sopko, do I get that name right?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, it is.

Mr. BURCHETT. All right, great. My name gets slandered quite a bit. So, I just want to make sure I got yours right. Mr. Sopko, what is the value of the equipment and weapons left behind?

Mr. SOPKO. I do not have that figure in front of me. I think it was close to \$7 billion, I believe. I think.

Mr. BURCHETT. All right, 7.2, that is close.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you. Is there any evidence that Taliban is using those weapons?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes.

Mr. BURCHETT. All right. How much money we give in Afghanistan in aid since we have left?

Mr. SOPKO. Maybe I have been sitting here for too long. I think a total of \$8 billion if you include the \$3.5 to the Afghan fund in Switzerland, \$2 billion for humanitarian. It is getting——

Mr. BURCHETT. That is the ballpark.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, it is billions.

Mr. BURCHETT. Pretty big ballpark.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes.

Mr. BURCHETT. Mr. Storch, the Department of Defense report to Congress states at least 78 aircraft, worth \$923 million were left behind. I assume that is correct?

Mr. STORCH. Well, honestly, as I said earlier, I have no way of knowing. That was the reported figure, but we cannot go in to audit that. But that is what they reported, yes, sir.

Mr. BURCHETT. Well, if we do not have it, then they do, I would assume. The Department of Defense also reported 300,000 weapons and 40,000 vehicles were left behind. And that is correct as well?

Mr. STORCH. Again, I have reviewed the same report.

Mr. BURCHETT. All right. Is the Taliban giving U.S. equipment left behind to other terrorist organizations or hostile countries, do you think?

Mr. STORCH. I have no idea.

Mr. BURCHETT. Does anybody have any idea? Mr. Sopko?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes. I just talked to General Sami Sadat who was an Afghan general, last week, and he said it has become basically a weapons bazaar, and the money—

Mr. BURCHETT. Right.

Mr. SOPKO [continuing]. And the equipment is going to terrorists both in country and out of country.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK.

Mr. STORCH. And if I can, the thing I just want to be careful about is speculating without going in to be able to do the sort of auditing and review.

Mr. BURCHETT. Right. Right.

Mr. STORCH. When I say I have no idea, I can hear what people say.

Mr. BURCHETT. Sure.

Mr. STORCH. But unless we can go in and independently verify it, I do not want to give you an answer on that.

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes.

Mr. SOPKO. I trust General Sadat.

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes. I agree with you on that. Ms. Angarella, did I get that?

Ms. ANGARELLA. You are—

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes. How do you say that?

Ms. ANGARELLA. Angarella.

Mr. BURCHETT. Angarella. Thank you, ma'am. How is USAID working to ensure the aid we are sending now does not end up in the hands of the Taliban?

Ms. ANGARELLA. Sure. Thank you. Right now, USAID is not physically on the ground, so they are using third-party monitors and their multi-tiered system in addition—

Mr. BURCHETT. Is that generally reliable?

Ms. ANGARELLA. There are limitations to it. Absolutely.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. Again, as Mr. Storch has pointed out multiple times, you are not there to see it. I guess, that is tough. OK. Mr. Sopko, have you experienced any difficulties getting documents and information from U.S. Department of State, USAID, Department of Defense, or the Treasury Department?

Mr. SOPKO. Yes, to all four.

Mr. BURCHETT. Which would you say is the most difficult?

Mr. SOPKO. State.

Mr. BURCHETT. What about USAID?

Mr. SOPKO. They come in second.

Mr. BURCHETT. Department of Defense?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, they are not doing much in my world over there. So, their obfuscation and delay is no more, but they did. I mean, they were particularly big problem when we were doing about the collapse of the Afghan military—

Mr. BURCHETT. Obfuscation is a big word, and I am sure I understand what it means, but Chairman Comer does not. And could you explain that to me?

Chairman COMER. Well, I am from that area, too, so I think he understands it well. He has probably experienced it. They are foot dragging.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. That is what I figured. OK. Well, thank you. You know, Robert Gates, he is the former Secretary of Defense under President Obama, warned that Biden had been wrong on nearly every dadgum major foreign policy and national security issue for the last four decades. This Afghanistan withdrawal to me is no exception. \$7.2 billion in equipment is being used or sold to our enemies.

And, of course, we know that will end up probably killing Americans in the future or our allies. Hundreds, if not thousands of Afghans are dead, 13 U.S. service members were killed, including my constituent, Army Staff Sergeant Ryan Knauss from Corryton, Tennessee. I know his daddy, and I know Mrs. Luna represents his mama, and I know them very well. His father, I guess, is a neighbor of mine since I live in the Corryton community now. And it just disgusts me that he should have been spending his Easter with his family.

And the Biden Administration cannot keep hiding the true cost of his disastrous actions. And I appreciate the inspector generals being here today to finally provide some dadgum transparency for the American people. I think we deserve it, these families deserve it, and it still just disgusts me, so thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman's time has expired. The Chair recognizes the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Government Operations, Mr. Sessions, for five minutes.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much, and thank you to each of you. I sat in for about 40 minutes earlier today, and it was lively then and probably exactly what you came to expect. Perhaps it has turned a little bit later this afternoon. Thank you for your time. We count on you. We count on your reports. We count on your information.

When I was here a little bit earlier, there was a brief discussion about the Administration's view about how they became prepared or lack of preparedness based upon some bit of intel that they, and I do not mean an intelligence report, I am talking about their viewpoint—that the Afghan air force would be able to take care of the problem when we pulled out. We know that is the crux, the part of how they defended themselves. Is that a fact?

Mr. STORCH. Well, as both Mr. Sopko and I have testified, there are significant concerns about relying upon the Afghan air force both in terms of it being overtaxed, in terms of its dependence on U.S. contractor support for maintenance and some of our work. I think we found anywhere from 80 percent and up of the maintenance was done by U.S. contractors. So, once those were pulled out, hard to figure out how those planes were going to stay up in the air. And as has previously been testified, there were pretty clear predictions that they were not going to last for long.

Mr. SESSIONS. Yes, sir. I am not very bright today. My point is, is not that true that that became some symbolism by the State Department, the Defense Department, they were relying upon that bit of information about how they decided their withdrawal would work? In other words that the Afghans, someone had told them, hey, we got the air force. We will be stable. We can sustain ourselves. Is that the true statement, or is there more to that?

Mr. STORCH. Well, Mr. Sopko may have more. But I will say, in the lead IG reporting, we do report that there was a belief that the Afghan air force and the military would last longer, and therefore that would facilitate a more orderly evacuation.

Mr. SESSIONS. Right. OK. Thank you. That is what I was wanting to hear back. So now, I have got 2 minutes and 19 seconds, give or take, our Chairman is very benevolent and our Ranking Member is very benevolent. And maybe this is not the bow to wrap it up, although you are getting close to the end. You can go have lunch by about 4:30 or 5 today.

My point is, we lots of times have found ourselves fighting, whether it be getting out of Vietnam, getting out of anything else, we fought about getting out of here. Has someone taken time to have a document that really depicts a "what-if" chart, and how we need to be prepared for things? Because I will be quite blunt. I was shocked, stunned, disappointed.

I had heard that the NSA, DOD, three letter organizations, maybe others, CIA, had said to the White House or to the NSA, maybe, or the White House, this is now January 2021. President comes in, here is the document, here is what we think to be prepared for. And they waited until well past August to even give direction to those agencies. Is there truth to that? Did you look at that, to say what kind of preparation was necessary because we heard that? I was a part of everybody leaving, trying to get people here who had been supportive of us. What was that modeling to the White House to say, look, you started, when President Biden, 100 days before the election, they embedded people into the Administration. You know that, I do too, to be prepared for when, whoever the winner was, would take over. Did the agencies that I suggested, did they provide the White House an analysis, and when was that analysis responded to?

Mr. STORCH. That is not something that my office has looked at, to my knowledge.

Mr. SESSIONS. Anybody?

Mr. SOPKO. That is a very good question, sir, and hopefully your Committee will look into that. We have not looked at that.

Mr. SESSIONS. Who would be best for us to write to and say, can you please go give us this analysis because I have looked at a num-

ber of these briefings, and I have yet to see, “oh, DOD provided this, CIA provided this”, the vulnerabilities about how we might be approaching this. And then once again, unfair, we heard the White House waited months and months and months and months to give them direction back, and that was the biggest frailty. The planning that was done ahead of time was not responded to.

Mr. SOPKO. If I can help you answer that question. I think, first of all, you have to look to the people who are on the ground. So, it is General Miller and his team, very competent generals, who were giving advice back to Washington as to what the situation was on the ground. Also, we have intelligence entities that were on the ground, giving advice. So, I would start there as to what those people, the Embassy to some extent, was giving advice on what they saw and what they thought. I would start there and then see what happened back in Washington with the information.

Mr. SESSIONS. OK. I know I am taking time here. I am suggesting, I believe on or about February 10 or 15, documents of preparation were given to the White House. And those documents were never responded to until literally weeks before the decision was made. I want to thank each of you. I am going to write you a letter. We are going to ask for this. Mr. Chairman, thank you for the extra time.

Chairman COMER. Thank you. The Chair recognizes myself for the purpose of asking questions.

Mr. Sopko, the White House Press Secretary was just asked about an hour ago, whether the Biden Administration has stonewalled you and your office. She responded, “The Biden Administration has consistently provided updates and information.” My question, sir, is the Biden Administration cooperating with your investigation?

Mr. SOPKO. I cannot talk about the whole Administration, but I can talk about State and AID and DOD and, no, they have not, and I am happy to give you chapter and verse on that.

Chairman COMER. Have they consistently provided updates and information?

Mr. SOPKO. No.

Chairman COMER. Do you have all the information you need to complete your work?

Mr. SOPKO. No.

Chairman COMER. Is it even the Administration’s decision to determine what information and documents your office is entitled to?

Mr. SOPKO. No. That flies in the face of what an independent IG should do. We determine what we need, who we need to talk to, and what reports we write. Otherwise, we are not independent Inspectors General.

Chairman COMER. I am sure the *Washington Post* fact checker will correct her. Mr. Sopko, in President Biden’s memo released earlier this month, he indicated he was bound by the Trump Administration’s Doha Agreement when it came to planning for the withdrawal. The President Trump’s agreement outlines several conditions the Taliban had to meet for the U.S. forces to leave. After the agreement, negotiated by President Trump, and President Biden’s inauguration, how many of U.S. service members were

killed in action in Afghanistan? After President Trump and President Biden's inauguration?

Mr. SOPKO. The only ones were the unfortunate individuals killed at—

Chairman COMER. They were zero at that time. For over a year, the agreement negotiated by President Trump kept our military men and women serving in Afghanistan safe while we were still at war. The agreement negotiated by President Trump ensured not one life was lost at the hands of the Taliban, ISIS, or Al Qaeda. And is it your understanding that the Biden Administration was bound to enforce an agreement negotiated by the Trump Administration?

Mr. SOPKO. That is really beyond my pay grade.

Chairman COMER. Because they have undone a lot of other executive orders and resolutions and agreements, but were they bound to this particular agreement?

Mr. SOPKO. We did not look at that, so I could not tell you, sir. I am sorry.

Chairman COMER. In your testimony, you mentioned the withdrawal of contractors from Afghanistan and how it contributed to the collapse of the Afghan Government. Did SIGAR ever provide any kind of report before the withdrawal and what the removal of contractors may do, and what was the significance of contractors' work in Afghanistan?

Mr. SOPKO. We alerted numerous administrations on that going back to 2013. We kept talking about the inability of the Afghan military to fight on their own. And I think as late as January of that year, we highlighted in particular a problem of the support for the air force, that it would cause the collapse of the air force within a matter of months.

Chairman COMER. You referred several times to the Afghan fund being in Switzerland.

Mr. SOPKO. Yes.

Chairman COMER. In a Swiss account. That sounds peculiar to me. Why a Swiss account? Would not that be the hardest country on the planet to get any information about an account and where the funds were being spent?

Mr. SOPKO. Well, Mr. Chairman, when you think of openness and transparency in financial institutions, you usually do not think of Switzerland?

Chairman COMER. Yes.

Mr. SOPKO. They do not—

Chairman COMER. The President's family, I wish they had thought of Switzerland here before.

Mr. SOPKO. I am not going to go there, sir. All I am saying is that one of the questions we have is what rules of law cover the access to that material? Is it Swiss law or is it U.S. law? And so that was one of the questions we asked Treasury, and we still have not heard back.

Chairman COMER. Mr. Storch, it is my understanding the Department of State believed it was going to maintain a diplomatic presence with a U.S. Embassy in Kabul, while the Intelligence Community and Department of Defense were clear about the threat from the Taliban. As the lead IG who worked with many different

IGs to examine Afghanistan, how can departments streamline their effort to create more coherent evacuation strategies?

[No response.]

Chairman COMER. Microphone, hit the microphone.

Mr. STORCH. Thank you. I am sorry. It is a great question. I know that my colleague from the Department of State has indicated their office is doing work on that, so maybe it is better for her.

Chairman COMER. Please, Ms. Shaw.

Ms. SHAW. That is exactly right. Thank you so much. Our work is looking at the issues with the evacuations, in particular the planning and execution, and we will have recommendations to help in the future.

Chairman COMER. OK. Let me ask one last question before my time expires. What was the number the State Department estimated about how many evacuees there would be prior to the evacuation? Because the estimates that I was hearing prior to the evacuation, and the total number of evacuees far exceeded the numbers that I was hearing. Can you answer that question?

Ms. SHAW. Sure. So, I do not have the precise number that they were anticipating, but our work did find that they were not prepared to evacuate as many people as they did, and, in part, it has to do with the way the rules are set up. So, in an evacuation, typically planning would include U.S. citizens and permanent residents and U.S. staff, but, of course, there were many more at-risk Afghan partners and allies that ultimately were considered for evacuation.

Chairman COMER. Should we be concerned that there were significantly more people who were evacuated than what we had planned on evacuating? In other words, could there be Taliban people that we evacuated to the United States from Afghanistan?

Ms. SHAW. Certainly it is a risk that I think is baked into the process. So, the screening and vetting is incredibly important, and we are actually partnering with the Department of Homeland Security OIG to look specifically at those processes to assess that risk.

Chairman COMER. Thank you. The Chair recognizes Mr. Mills from Florida for five minutes.

Mr. MILLS. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. It is an honor. I really appreciate you waiving me on. You see, unlike a lot of the Members of Congress, I do not use a boilerplate photo, the chaos that had assumed, you know, all of Afghanistan. The actual photo behind me actually comes from my own personal photos because during my campaign, I actually paused to go over and rescue a mother and three children with our team, conducting the very first successful overland rescue after this botched withdrawal. You see, I spent over seven years of my life in Iraq, three years in Afghanistan. I am intimately familiar with not only the work that the IG does, but also of the mistakes that happen when you put political optics over military strategy.

Now, I will start with you, Mr. Storch. In seeing that there was a drastic increase in veteran suicides from 22 a day to 25 a day after this botched withdrawal, would you feel confident in saying that this botched withdrawal contributed to the increase in suicide and deaths of our veteran service members who served abroad?

Mr. STORCH. Well, thank you for the question, first of all, and thank you very much for your service. This is an incredibly serious issue obviously, and one that our office has taken seriously for a long time. We have done a good body of work on mental health issues, and particularly in the area you are speaking about. One of my Deputy Inspector Generals testified here before SASC last year, I believe, about it. I do not know honestly whether I have enough, you know, sort of information to make the causal link that you are saying, definitively, but, you know, sort of generally what you are saying certainly make sense. And so, that is probably the best I can do.

Mr. MILLS. Understood, and I appreciate that. And I am sure the family of Master Sergeant Chadwick Paul, who was a good teammate of mine, who took his own life, would feel the same way.

Mr. STORCH. Goodness. Yes, sir.

Mr. MILLS. Ms. Shaw, would you agree that State Department cables are not protected by executive privilege if they are not directly being sent to the President themselves or the executive branch?

Ms. SHAW. Thank you for that question. It is actually not an issue that I have considered. It was not an issue in the course of our work, so I am not sure I have an answer for you on that.

Mr. MILLS. Well, the reason I asked that is that there was a cable that was sent by the United States State Department, which was known as the 23 diplomat dissent cable, that talked about the fact that the political optics that was being placed above military strategy was actually endangering the mission as a whole. Now, I found it really interesting that, not only are we having to subpoena those cables, which are not protected by executive privileges, being blocked, but I heard from Mr. Sopko that the State Department and the USAID is also not wanting to cooperate.

Mr. Sopko, I know you have said it many times, and I will make it really quickly. Was there a tremendous amount of obstruction that was being placed to try and get information by USAID and State?

Mr. SOPKO. Obstruction, against us? Yes. Yes.

Mr. MILLS. And is there any mystery to the fact that even as far back as 2011, during the original SIGAR, you started having things where they were talking about billions of dollars of waste, fraud, and abuse that was utilized by things like the Kandahar Helmand Power Project, by things like the ASI, Afghan Stabilization Initiative, South, North, West and East. The fact that the implementing partners who were there on the ground at the time could not even stop the corruption and fraud that was going on. And now we think that not having Americans on the ground is going to somehow make our corruption more under control or worse? What would you say, Ms.—and I am sorry, I do not want to butcher your name.

Ms. ANGARELLA. Angarella. Yes, I appreciate the question. Not having eyes on the ground makes oversight much less effective and more complicated.

Mr. MILLS. I think that is a polite way of stating it. And as someone who had spent a tremendous amount of time in Afghanistan, especially understanding the significant importance of Bagram and knowing that it had the ability for us to not only shelter and pro-

vide the force protection that could have prevented the 13 brave heroes and the 13 new Gold Star families from losing their lives, but also give us the opportunity to be able to do proper vetting, which you talked about the thousands that were put on the plane, which were actually prioritized above Americans and above P2 and SIVs that were just randomly being thrown on grade sell aircraft.

But my question is, is that, would you feel that if we were able to have had Bagram Air Base to be able to do proper vetting and manifesting without the chaos before they went on to the plane, that that could have contributed to potentially making sure that we did this more effectively? I will start with you, Ms. Shaw.

Ms. SHAW. Thanks for that question. So, we have not considered that question squarely. Bagram was a DOD facility and so I would invite IG Storge to weigh in, but certainly—

Mr. MILLS. Understood, Ms. Shaw, understood, but the reason I asked you is because it was something that was very strange from my understanding. When I saw the State Department taking operational control over the Department of Defense when it came to what planes were flying and flying out. The reason I know this is because I was on a plane that was a November tail number, which is an American aircraft designated as a humanitarian aircraft to rescue 28 Americans, with 20 special operations operators on there, with five PPR approvals that was continually being denied on approach when we are already hovering above Afghanistan by the State Department, not to mention the coordination to have an F16 do a flyover for intimidations and the threats of being shot down as an American aircraft there to save Americans.

These are the types of answers that people need to get an answer to, the 13 Gold Star families, why they are dead, the Americans that were left behind, the billions of dollars to supply a nation that I fought in to stop from being a safe haven of terror that you have actually permitted through failed administrations to be a safe haven of terror. I want the response, I want these reactions, I want IG to do a better job, and I want accountability for those who are actually left behind and those who died. With that, I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman's time has expired. We will now move into closing statements. I recognize the Ranking Member for his closing statement.

Mr. RASKIN. Chairman Comer, thank you. You know, some of our colleagues today have been assailing endless wars and hopeless wars and so on, and that rhetoric resonates with me. I grew up with the central image of World War II as the paradigm of a just and defensive war that unifies the country. And that ends, actually, with the elevation of democracy and human rights over authoritarianism and fanaticism. But so many of the wars of our times have been failures: the Vietnam War, the Iraq War, the Afghan War, the War on Drugs, all of them wrapped up with corruption, profit taking, and massive loss of civilian life. And it would be wonderful, indeed, to have a serious investigation of the Afghanistan war, all 20 years of it, and it would be a wonderful thing to have investigation of all these wars and whether war works today. But that was not this hearing. The purpose of this hearing, obviously, was to belatedly score a few cheap political points at the expense of President Biden.

The Afghan war was our longest war, and there was broad bipartisan consensus it was time to end it and bring the troops home, and there are lots of Members over on that side of the aisle, including our distinguished Chairman, who were demanding that the troops come home and demanding an end to the war. Now, President Biden, whose Administration constituted, by my reckoning, 2.8 percent or 3 percent of the duration of the Afghan war, inherited an impossible situation as a result of a series of disastrous decisions, I think, Mr. Sopko has proven that in his reports, but, specifically, most recently, the disastrous decisions of President Donald Trump while he was in office.

Trump entered into a bizarre, lopsided Trump-Taliban agreement that not only excluded the Afghan Government from the negotiations, but then proceeded to negotiate the release of 5,000 jailed Afghan freedom, so-called freedom fighters, whose ranks included terrorists. So, Afghan fighters, including terrorists were released under the terms of that agreement, and President Trump agreed to withdraw all U.S. troops by May 1, 2021.

But he left no plans for executing the withdrawal at all to his successor in office, but he moved forward with the draw down to just 2,500 troops. So, he negotiated for the release of 5,000 Taliban fighters and then drew down our troops to 2,500. And when the Afghan President and Government balked at releasing those 5,000 Taliban fighters, according to the testimony of Mr. Sopko and other sources, Secretary Pompeo threatened to withhold aid, millions of dollars in aid from the Afghan Government if they did not go along with the release of these Taliban fighters.

President Trump also gutted the Special Immigrant Visa Program, which is supposed to allow Afghan allies to seek refuge in the United States. With only three months left under the timeline set by the Trump-Taliban agreement, Biden faced an impossible choice: pull out of the agreement entirely and then send more troops into Afghanistan to face renewed attacks from an emboldened and resurgent Taliban, with everybody telling him to get out and attacking him, or carry out the withdrawal set into motion by his predecessor, which is what would be done normally from one presidency to the next.

Unlike his predecessor, Biden extensively consulted his national security advisors and military leadership, and he made difficult decisions informed by the best available intelligence. The Administration conducted an historic withdrawal and non-combatant evacuation operation—124,000 people, including not just our soldiers and civilians and contractors, but Afghan nationals evacuated in just 17 days.

The last few months of the war were agonizing and deeply flawed, and we all need to recognize that. And we must always honor the heroic sacrifice of the 13 service members who were killed by ISIS in a terrorist attack during the evacuation, along with the more than 2,400 other American service members who perished in Afghanistan. But if we truly want to learn from this experience, from the mistakes of this 20-year war, we cannot focus on the last few days to the exclusion of the prior 231 months, any more than we could learn about the causes or character or conduct of the Civil War just by studying what happened at Appomattox.

Meantime, we must ensure the continued support of the women and girls whose basic rights have been stripped away by the fanatical, misogynistic Taliban regime by providing much needed humanitarian assistance to the millions of Afghans experiencing poverty and food insecurity while establishing the guardrails needed to prevent any funds from falling into the hands of the Taliban. Although we are no longer in Afghanistan, we have every continuing interest in seeking to determine what went wrong. And that is why it is so important that we continue to support SIGAR and work to ensure that the agencies cooperate with Mr. Sopko requests, just as they have been cooperating with their own inspector generals.

I look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, on drafting a bipartisan letter to relevant agencies to ensure that SIGAR has access to the information needed to carry out its mandate, so we can carry out our own. Thank you for your indulgence. I yield back.

Chairman COMER. The gentleman yields back. As I said in my opening statement, no single hearing can tell the history of the United States' war in Afghanistan, but today was a good start. And it is a good start, because when the Democrats were in the Majority, they held no hearings after Kabul fell. The testimony provided by today's witnesses answered questions and raised troubling new ones that this Committee will pursue. The fact that the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, Mr. Sopko, today cannot confirm American tax dollars are not funding the Taliban is shameful. It is horrifying.

Nearly two years after the United States withdrawal from Afghanistan, the United States continues to send billions of dollars to Afghanistan, which is run by the Taliban, since the country was lost in August 2021. The Biden Administration is taking money out of the paychecks of American truckers, American teachers, American farmers, American builders and American soldiers, and sending it to the same people who shot at those soldiers, who murdered those soldiers until not long ago. That is on the top of the billions of dollars in equipment left for the Taliban to use. And the Biden Administration has no interest in identifying the waste, fraud, and abuse connected to Afghanistan.

Mr. Sopko's testimony today that the State Department is continuing to direct its employees not to cooperate with SIGAR is shocking to me. We have demanded the Administration cooperate with SIGAR, yet it continues to stonewall and ignore SIGAR's important work. Secretary Blinken will be expected to answer for this obstruction of the inspector general. A reckless Biden Administration will not avoid accountability whether from inspectors general or this Committee.

Finally, I want to respond to some of the comments made today about the necessity of this hearing or who is to blame for the loss of America's war in Afghanistan. This hearing has been to conduct oversight. That is what this Committee is meant to do. That is what Congress is meant to do. To characterize a hearing with four inspectors general, who also conduct oversight, as political theater or Monday morning quarterbacking is just, it is bizarre.

The witnesses today are nonpartisan, government witnesses tasked with identifying problems within their agencies. The decisions of this Administration toward Afghanistan deserve the Over-

sight Committee's attention because, after all, it is the current Administration. I think some of my friends on the other side of the aisle forget Joe Biden is the President, not Donald Trump.

This Committee had many hearings on the Trump Administration's Afghanistan policies while President Trump was in office. Was that political theater? That there have been problems identified in the Biden Administration by the inspectors general and that this Committee seeks to hear those problems is not political theater. Those problems identified in the Biden Administration's withdrawal from Afghanistan were obvious to anyone who had a television in August 2021 and witnessed the disastrous withdrawal the Biden Administration oversaw.

I supported withdrawing from Afghanistan. I am grateful no additional Americans will die in Afghanistan. Joe Biden told the American people to trust him to be their Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. military. He lost the war in Afghanistan in eight months. That is President Biden's legacy, and that is what the American people should and will hold him accountable for.

In closing, I want to thank our panelists once again for their important and insightful testimony today. We respect and depend on the IG community for our substantive oversight work.

And with that, and without objection, all Members will have five legislative days within which to submit materials and to submit additional written questions for the witnesses, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response.

Chairman COMER. If there is no further business, without objection, the Committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:45 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]

