

**EXAMINING NEXT STEPS FOR
U.S. ENGAGEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN**

HEARING

BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
REFORM

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EXAMINING NEXT STEPS FOR U.S. ENGAGEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

Thursday, May 20, 2021

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:13 a.m., in room 2154, Rayburn Office Building, Hon. Stephen Lynch [chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Lynch, Johnson, DeSaulnier, Grothman, Foxx, Gibbs, and Higgins.

Mr. LYNCH.[Presiding.] Again, good morning. The hearing will come to order.

The chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any time.

I will now recognize myself for an opening statement.

Good morning, everyone. First, I would like to thank our special witness, U.S. special representative for Afghan reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, for joining us once again. Thank you as well for your service to our country. Your perspective, especially before this subcommittee, has been extremely helpful in informing the decisions that members on this subcommittee have to make, so we are greatly appreciative of your willingness to help this committee with its work.

Today's hearing will examine President Biden's landmark decision to withdraw all remaining U.S. military forces, approximately 3,500 troops, from Afghanistan by September. When announcing this historic decision last month, President Biden underscored that the United States has achieved its primary objective for launching Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, "to ensure Afghanistan would not be used as a base from which to attack our homeland once again." I certainly share President Biden's desire to bring a responsible end to America's longest war.

Since 2001, more than 2,400 U.S. servicemembers have made the ultimate sacrifice, and over 20,000 have been wounded in support of U.S. military operations in Afghanistan. Nearly two decades of war in Afghanistan have also cost U.S. taxpayers more than \$873 billion, including an estimated \$144 billion on reconstruction costs alone. No matter how thoroughly considered, however, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan will come with significant consequences for our national security, the long-term viability of the Afghan state, and the future stability of the region, especially

in the absence of any internal Afghan peace agreement. As members of the Oversight Committee, it is our job to ensure that those consequences are recognized and those risks are minimized to the greatest extent possible, while continuing to promote the responsible stewardship of U.S. taxpayer resources.

For example, during our subcommittee hearing earlier this Congress with the Afghanistan Study Group, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joe Dunford, and former Senator Kelly Ayotte from New Hampshire cautioned that without a U.S. military presence in country, our intelligence and our quick strike capabilities against al-Qaeda, against the Islamic state in Khorasan Province, and other terrorist groups will likely be significantly diminished. Several weeks later, special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, John Sopko, testified before this subcommittee that regardless of our military footprint, the Afghan government will continue to need substantial U.S. and donor assistance to sustain its security and defense forces, as well as its fledgling political, economic, and civic institutions, or risk eventual collapse.

So, I am encouraged that the Biden Administration has made clear that, notwithstanding our scheduled withdrawal militarily, the United States will continue to provide vital civilian and humanitarian assistance to the Afghan government and to the Afghan people. Last month, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken announced that the Biden Administration will allocate \$300 million in additional aid for economic development, anti-corruption, women's empowerment, and other essential programs in Afghanistan. However, without a U.S. security presence on the ground in Afghanistan, it will become increasingly difficult, but not impossible, for independent auditors, such as Special Inspector General Sopko and his team, to conduct oversight of U.S. taxpayer-funded assistance and development programs in Afghanistan. To that end, the Administration should begin planning now, not when U.S. forces have already left, to ensure that proper oversight mechanisms and safeguards are in place to promote the effective and responsible use of taxpayer resources in Afghanistan.

Once again, I would like to thank Ambassador Khalilzad again for testifying before our subcommittee today. With that, I will now yield to our ranking member, the gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Grothman, for his opening remarks.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you. I would like to thank Chairman Lynch for holding another hearing on Afghanistan. We had one a little while ago. On the last hearing, I think you didn't see me or whatever, and I didn't give a closing statement. I wanted to point out at the last hearing that I, at least personally, did not feel it was necessary to leave Afghanistan right away, and I say that not as someone who was thrilled we went there in the first place. I was never a George Bush fan of getting involved in Afghanistan in the first place. But I am worried about our allies, people who have worked with us in Afghanistan, as well as future people who, when the United States gets involved in a mission, do they feel that the United States is in it for the long haul.

I would like to thank the Ambassador for being here. I know you are very busy. President Biden announced his intentions to with-

draw by September 11th. I would prefer to see the date not set for one of such significance and remembrance. Troops began to withdraw on the first date originally set by the Trump Administration. In fact, this withdrawal would not be possible without the leadership from President Trump. Between his efforts to bring peace to Afghanistan and numerous deals to normalize relations between the Arab world and Israel, President Trump's foreign policy was very successful.

But we are here today to discuss America's longest war. For 20 years, the U.S. has had a military presence in Afghanistan, taking over 100,000 soldiers. We have lost almost 2,500 soldiers, and over 20,000 are injured. We owe these soldiers our sincerest gratitude. I think there are probably very few Americans who could not name at least one person they know who died in Afghanistan. The decision for withdrawal has been contemplated over three Administrations. President Trump finally took concrete steps to ensure the withdrawal, and hopefully we will not have any negative consequences.

He conditioned our withdrawal on the Taliban disavowing al-Qaeda, the prevention of Afghanistan becoming a safe haven for terror, and begin working toward a broader peace. President Biden's troop withdrawal is unconditional, meaning perhaps the Taliban does not have to do that. We will ask more questions of that today, but this withdrawal needs to be done safely with both the interests of the U.S., the Afghan people, and our allies all being kept in mind.

Our witness is on the front lines of ensuring this happens. We must prioritize a withdrawal that stifles potential violence, protects against the vacuum of fear, and maintains regional stability as well as maintains social gains. We must ensure social gains made by Afghan women and girls. We must ensure that Afghanistan and the Taliban are not the next Israel and Hamas. Through the groundwork laid by President Trump, I believe this is possible.

After the troops are gone, our job in Congress is not over. It is likely the American taxpayer will continue to provide assistance to the Afghan government for years to come. What we have heard from others, like the special inspector general for Afghan reconstruction, this assistance must be conditional. Sometimes the check is mightier than the sword. In a country plagued by corruption, it is vital taxpayer assistance does not fall into the hands of terrorists and drug runners. I look forward to discussing these topics today.

Mr. LYNCH. I thank the gentleman. The gentleman yields back. And now I would like to welcome our witness. Today we are joined by Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, who is the special U.S. representative for Afghanistan reconciliation at the Department of State. Ambassador, thank you for appearing before us again today. We look forward to your testimony.

It is the custom and practice of our committee that our witnesses be sworn, so could you please stand and raise your right hand?

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

Mr. KHALILZAD. I do.

Mr. LYNCH. Let the record show that the witness has answered in the affirmative. We thank you, and without objection, your written statement will be made part of the record.

With that, Ambassador, you are now recognized for a five-minute recitation of your oral testimony.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ZALMAY KHALILZAD, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONCILIATION

Mr. KHALILZAD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the committee. I welcome this opportunity to brief you about America's strategy in Afghanistan.

With the President's decision to withdraw the remaining U.S. forces by September 11th, we are entering a new phase in our partnership with Afghanistan. Our objectives for this phase include, one, safely withdraw our remaining forces, leaving Afghan forces in the best position possible to defend themselves, and security for Afghans who are at risk because they worked with us; two, promote a political settlement and oppose the imposition of a government by force—we seek a settlement that protects the rights of all Afghans, including women, children, and minorities; three, prevent Afghanistan from becoming a platform for terrorists threatening the United States or our allies; four, promote regional cooperation, including connectivity, trade, and economic development to shift the country to a peacetime mindset, and give the region a stake in Afghanistan success.

Based on these objectives, we are, one, building international support for a political settlement that would have broad support in Afghanistan; two, encouraging unity among Afghan leaders and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan side; three, sustaining military, political, and economic support for Afghanistan; four, incentivizing the Taliban to reduce violence, accelerate negotiations for a political settlement, and agree to a comprehensive and permanent cease-fire; five, strengthening our cooperation against terrorism with countries in the region through enhanced monitoring and response capabilities; and six, promoting economic connectivity, trade, and development between Central Asia, Afghanistan, and South Asia.

Mr. Chairman, the Taliban face a fundamental choice between two very different futures. They can enhance and embrace a negotiated path to peace, make the transition from a violent insurgency to a political movement, and be part of a nation that enjoys respect in the global community. But if they pursue a military takeover, they will face isolation, regional opposition, sanctions, and international opposition, and our allies' support to Afghan security forces will continue.

I want to thank Qatar for hosting the Afghan negotiations. We are working closely with the United Nations to enhance its role, which is an important one due to its expertise on matters such as cease-fires and process design. We welcome the United Nations, Turkey's, and Qatar's willingness to co-convene high-level dialog and negotiations in Istanbul. The parties need to agree to a date as soon as possible, and we expect them to come prepared with concrete proposals. The opportunities are in place, the international

will to assist is robust, and both Afghan government leaders and the Taliban need to do their part to ensure this historic moment is not lost.

Mr. Chairman, Pakistan has an important role to play. We remain in close touch with Pakistan's leaders, pressing them to exercise their considerable leverage over the Taliban to reduce violence and support a negotiated settlement. I believe Pakistan understands that a protracted war in Afghanistan is not in its interest. As you know, we have already begun the process of withdrawing our remaining forces. The withdrawal so far has taken place without significant incident, and we expect this to continue. However, we are prepared to respond forcefully if attacked and have made this very clear.

Mr. Chairman, we are building an international consensus in support of a political settlement in Afghanistan. We recently had productive meetings with Russia, China, and Pakistan, and separately with our European allies, and released powerful joint statements calling on the two sides to reduce violence and engage seriously in negotiations, and on the Taliban not to pursue a spring offensive. All our partners have made clear that a peaceful Afghan nation, resulting from dialog and negotiations, and not from force, can count on material assistance, support, and mutually beneficial relationships. With the support of Congress, we are committed to maintaining substantial security assistance through the Afghan Security Forces Fund. Our NATO allies and partners are likewise committed to stand with Afghanistan, its people, and its institutions in promoting security.

We have heard justifiable concerns regarding the safety of the thousands of Afghans who have worked with our diplomats and soldiers over the past 20 years. As Secretary Blinken has made clear, we are working hard to ensure that we have expedited considerations for those at risk. At the same time, we must not assume the inevitability of a worst-case outcome. Our goal should be an Afghanistan in which all the country's people can live in peace and security. Ideally, Afghans who have acquired education, skills, and international experience will form the backbone of a new economy and prosperity for a peaceful Afghanistan. Strong measures must be taken to ensure that the value of these individuals is recognized and that retaliatory acts or formally forsworn. This will be an integral and essential part of peace talks and of our discussions with the Taliban. We will continue to advocate preserving the gains for minorities and for women, including their meaningful participation in the ongoing negotiations and their representation in society and politics. This is something I have worked hard on during my time as Ambassador and in my capacity, and the significant progress achieved must not be lost.

The Taliban should also understand that the Afghanistan of today is very different than it was 20 years ago. We are reconfiguring our counterterrorism capabilities to ensure our ability to monitor and address threats emanating from Afghanistan. We will maintain intelligence collection in the region, and we will continue to work closely with our Afghan counterparts. We are developing opportunities for enhanced cooperation with regional partners who share our concern and are open to cooperation. We will hold the

Taliban accountable to their commitments to prevent al-Qaeda, and ISIS, or any other terrorist group from using Afghanistan as a base for attacks against the United States and our allies.

Please note that the release and safe return home of Mark Frerichs, who has been held as a hostage since 2020, is very important to Secretary Blinken and to me. Secretary Blinken has raised Mark's safe return repeatedly with his counterparts in the region, and in my meetings with the Taliban, I have demanded his release. I want to take a moment to acknowledge the tremendous loss following the recent attacks on a girl's school near Kabul. This was a deeply shocking incident. It appears that ISIS was responsible, but, ultimately, it is the ongoing violence and chaos that makes such attacks possible.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I want to take a moment to thank all U.S. personnel, military and civilian, for the sacrifices that they have made to make America more secure from threats from Afghanistan given what happened on 9/11, and for making Afghanistan a better place, the progress that has been made there for transforming Afghanistan, and giving Afghanistan's leaders a chance for peace negotiations. Now it is up to the Afghans to seize their opportunities. Our troops are coming home, and Afghanistan deserves a chance to find its own way forward with help and encouragement from its friends, especially the United States.

I look forward to your questions. Thank you, sir.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you. I will now recognize myself five minutes of questions.

Ambassador Khalilzad, I think in your opening statement, you have framed the central question very, very well. You posit that either the Taliban can embrace a negotiated path to peace, make the transition from a violent insurgency to a political movement, and be part of a nation that enjoys respect in the global community, or they can pursue a military takeover and "face isolation, regional opposition, sanctions, and international opprobrium." That really does present us with two scenarios that might happen. Unfortunately, the Taliban have not behaved in a manner that convinces me that they are inclined to choose the former, and I think much of that is shaped by the teaching in Deobandi and Madrasas in Northern Pakistan as well as Southern Afghanistan.

In the lead inspector general for Operation Freedom's Sentinel's most recent quarterly report, U.S. forces in Afghanistan reported "a historic increase in enemy-initiated attacks since the signing of the U.S.-Taliban agreement." And in addition to the violence that you have noted in your opening statement, the Defense Intelligence Agency assessed that the Taliban is likely to use targeted assassinations in Afghanistan "to create security vacuums in the major cities, discredit the Afghan government, and highlight the weakness of the Afghan security apparatus." That has been happening as well across Afghanistan.

Mr. Ambassador, on Tuesday, you testified the Taliban, "They seek normalcy in terms of relations, acceptability, removal from sanctions, and not to remain a pariah." I struggle with the duality here. You know, the assurances that we receive from the Taliban leadership and their negotiating team in Qatar, and the evidence that we have and the reports we have from women's groups in Af-

ghanistan, from government officials on the ground, and that is supported by the reports of our own personnel who remain on the ground in Afghanistan. I just have to ask you, what calculus, what evidence has led you to conclude that the Taliban would prefer to reach a peace agreement with the Afghan government than what we saw back in the 90's? They ruled as a pariah in the late 1990's. Why would they not be prepared to do so again after resisting the United States for two decades?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Thank you, Chairman. That is obviously an excellent observation. Skepticism is justified. We will have to see what they do. But what I have said is based on what they have told me they seek, that they do want to be accepted, to have normal relations, to receive assistance from the United States, that their country's needs are great and will continue to be so. That assistance will be needed, and they do want to get out of the blacklist. Some of the leaders are on our list and also on the U.N. list. They have repeated this, and that they have learned from their mistakes of the past, of the 90's, that they were not prepared and they made mistakes for which they have paid a high price, 19 years of war and all the rest.

With regard the commitments they have made, their record so far is mixed. They have kept, it is important to keep in mind, many of their commitments, particularly not to attack our forces after we signed the agreement, and not a single American, thank goodness, has lost his life or her life since we signed that agreement. So, we have to be prepared for the decisions that they make with regard to those choices that they face. We can't be driven by wishful thinking that they will make the right choice that we would like, but at the same time, we shouldn't close the door to that possibility, and confront them with opportunity costs for them and for Afghanistan if they make the wrong choice.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you. My time has expired. I now recognize the gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Grothman, for his questions.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you. Just to clarify, is that September 11th a hard date, or if things really go south or the Taliban clearly are not acting within the spirit of the agreement, is there still wiggle room to extend our presence there?

Mr. KHALILZAD. The President has been quite clear that all our forces will be out of Afghanistan by September 11th.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Even if it is clear that the Taliban have no desire to—

Mr. KHALILZAD. I will not speculate about what ifs, but I think the President's decision is quite clear.

Mr. GROTHMAN. I believe the Afghan government has some reputation for graft, and obviously we intend to continue a financial presence in Afghan. If we are going to continue to aid the Afghan government, do we have assurances that the United States would perhaps not be giving money, or be giving a minimal amount of money, and be buying themselves, reducing the chance for graft? We wouldn't be going through organizations like the United Nations, which is hardly a model for, you know, keeping things. Will the United States do all they can to make sure we are buying military equipment, what have you, and we are not transferring money through these international organizations?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Thank you, sir. Of course we would like to be able to provide assistance. We are determined that we would like to provide assistance to the Afghans to defend themselves and to advance our values, including women's and girls' rights, and assistance is critical in that regard, and our partnership against terrorism with Afghanistan will also require us to provide support, but governance has been a problem. In fact, the problems of governance and Afghanistan's corruption is one of the challenges, a reason for where we are.

Mr. GROTHMAN. It is. They only give me five minutes here, so.

Mr. KHALILZAD. Oh, sure.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Would we give them money—

Mr. KHALILZAD. We will do all that we can to make sure that the money is spent as intended.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK.

Mr. KHALILZAD. And we will have—

Mr. GROTHMAN. So we will not transfer money through a third organization that might have their own corruption problems, and we will, insofar as we can, give the Afghan government things, not cash to buy things. I guess that is what I am looking for.

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, we have some obligation to provide cash support through institutions that exist, but we pay, obviously, close attention to the practices—

Mr. GROTHMAN. Yes, we will do that minimally. We do that minimally. Minimally. I mean, I don't like to give cash to third party organizations because third party organizations may have their own graft problems. Will we use them minimally, with the greatest degree possible, make sure we are giving them money, and I don't even like giving money, or we will give whatever supplies or food stuffs or whatever that we have to give?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Just to be clear, Ranking Member, that we do provide salaries for the Afghan security forces—

Mr. GROTHMAN. Right. Right.

Mr. KHALILZAD [continuing]. Through an arrangement that is managed—

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. That is fine.

Mr. KHALILZAD. But we pay attention as to the money is spent as appropriated.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Quick question. I don't think the Taliban are known for being, you know, all that nice. If the Afghanistan regime would collapse, I assume people who helped us would not fare that well. How many people do you think would die or what would happen to people if the Afghan regime fell?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, it depends on different scenarios, but the risk to the people who have worked with us has increased. We are prepared to provide a detailed briefing to you, classified, on the numbers and what we are planning to do.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. I will give you another question. There has been a lot of emphasis on this committee on making social improvements in Afghanistan, and, particularly, progress for women and girls. On the other hand, I think our enemies in the Taliban and maybe the members of the Afghan government are not thrilled about that. Does this commitment make it more difficult for the Afghan government to hang on?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, the Afghan government is concerned, legitimately, in the aftermath of the decision that the President has made, but they respect the decision and would like to receive assistance and support, which we are prepared to do. There are several futures——

Mr. GROTHMAN. I know I am over the limit here. Can I ask one more question——

Mr. KHALILZAD. Yes, sir. Sorry.

Mr. GROTHMAN [continuing]. Because you are not really answering my question. I talked to a soldier who was over there, and his line to me was, “They hate us.” I think that is not across the board, but I am mindful of that. I think as we push them to treat women and girls more like they do in the United States, I don’t know if that makes it more difficult for the Afghan government to hang on, and I am afraid that if the Afghan government falls, a lot of people will die.

Mr. KHALILZAD. Right.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. So I wondered is there a tradeoff here between making conditions on the way the girls and women are treated in Afghan society and the ability of the Afghan government to hang on.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman’s time has expired, but the gentleman may answer.

Mr. KHALILZAD. Thank you, sir.

Mr. LYNCH. Briefly, please.

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, I think that the fact of what the government stands for, that includes respect rights of women and girls, is the basis also for the support that it is getting from the population of Afghanistan. There is a difference of views among Afghans on values as well as on political philosophy and arrangement, and the Afghans need to come together on a formula for how, given the differences in values and beliefs, including on human rights, they can co-exist as citizens in a single nation. I think that one should not look at advocating or respecting, advancing the rights of women and girls as a net negative for the government. In my judgment, it is a net positive.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Johnson, for five minutes.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Ambassador Khalilzad, for being here today. When President Biden announced last month that the U.S. would withdraw all of its military forces from Afghanistan, the President insisted that the United States would not “take our eye off the terrorist threat,” and would reorganize our counterterrorism capabilities “from over the horizon.” Last week, acting assistant secretary of defense for Indo-Pacific security affairs, David Helvey, testified that the Defense Department was working with the State Department to “reposition our counterterrorism capabilities, including by retaining assets in the region, to prevent the re-emergence of a terrorist threat to the U.S. homeland from Afghanistan.” Mr. Helvey testified that, thus far, the Administration has not reached an agreement with regional partners that would provide DOD with the necessary access

basing or overflight to enable the over-the-horizon capabilities the Administration envisions.

Ambassador, as you talk to Afghanistan's neighbors and our regional partners about the importance of reaching a peace agreement in Afghanistan, are you also talking to them about the need for the U.S. to have these over-the-horizon capabilities, and has any progress been made on reaching an agreement with regional partners in order to establish those capabilities?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Thank you, sir. The answer is, yes, I do discuss with the neighbors the need for enhanced cooperation for monitoring the situation in Afghanistan with regard to the future of terror, as well as the ability to strike should that decision be made to do so, and there is progress. That is all I can say in this setting.

Mr. JOHNSON. Given President Biden's deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. troops being less than four months away, do you have a timeline for when you expect such an agreement?

Mr. KHALILZAD. We have agreement and understandings already for enhanced monitoring and continued overflights for both monitoring and if strikes should be needed, and this is a work in progress. We are confident that although our monitoring capability will diminish with the full withdrawal of our forces, and that will also affect our strike capability, but given this lower level of terrorist threat, that we would be in a position to monitor and respond adequately when our forces are out of Afghanistan.

Mr. JOHNSON. All right. Thank you, sir. Last September, you told this subcommittee that, "With regard to terrorism, al-Qaeda in this setting, what I can say is that the Talibs have taken some steps, based on the commitment that they have made, positive steps, but they still have some distance to go." Just recently, the Defense Intelligence Agency reported that, "al-Qaeda continues to rely on the Taliban for protection, and the two groups have reinforced ties over the past decades, likely making it difficult for an organizational split to occur." Mr. Ambassador, the Taliban was supposed to cut ties with terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda, as part of the February 2020 agreement. Have they done so?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Sir, what I can say in this setting is that they have agreed not to allow terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda, from using Afghan territory to plot an attack on the U.S. and coalition countries, and the definition of that has been not to host, not to allow training, recruitment, or fundraising by these groups. And what I can say, since my last briefing to you, there has been further progress by the Talibs with regard to what I just described, but we are still not satisfied and are pressing more. I would be happy to provide greater details in a proper setting.

Mr. JOHNSON. Thank you, sir, and I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back. The chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from North Carolina, Ms. Foxx, for five minutes.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Ambassador, for being here today. Ambassador, you know, the American people are very concerned about the treasure we have invested in Afghanistan over the years, and what is going to be the result after we leave, and there are mixed emotions, of course, about our leaving there. But in his speech announcing the troop withdrawal, President Biden stated that the U.S. will continue to

support the rights of Afghan women and girls by maintaining significant humanitarian and development assistance. And I heard your comments to Representative Grothman about your saying that the government wants to continue those, although there are differences of opinion. How are we going to be able to ensure that any assistance that is provided will go toward the intended goal and the intended recipients, because I think people are pretty concerned about not continuing to waste money. We would like to do humanitarian work and make life better for women in Afghanistan, for all the people, but how can we know that the money we are spending is going to make a difference?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Of course that is the obligation of the executive branch, that the money is spent as intended, and we intend to maintain a robust embassy and to protect that embassy, secure it so that we can perform that responsibility, the oversight of money spent, as intended going forward. So I understand the concern, I understand that a lot of resources have been spent, I understand the ambivalence, but given the alternatives available and the decision of the President, the choice that he has made, we will continue to advance the values that you described, ma'am, and will do our best in terms of oversight. And the rationale that I described for the embassy is continued operation in Afghanistan.

Ms. FOXX. President Biden also made a commitment to continue providing support to the government of Afghanistan and assistance of the national defense and security forces, but we also know there has been tremendous corruption in that country among the forces. What level could you put on the pervasiveness of the corruption within the Afghan security forces? How would you describe it?

Mr. KHALILZAD. I think overall, corruption is a serious problem. The governance is a serious problem. And, as I said before, part of the reason for finding ourselves in the position that we have is because of these problems that we have not managed and they have not managed to win the war. And we have got essentially a stalemate, meaning that we don't see a military solution anymore, and that either we have a long war or a political settlement. But corruption, in my judgment, will continue to be an issue, and we need to do our best and that our resources are made conditional on performance with regard to corruption, and that is part of an agreement that we have with the Afghan government.

Ms. FOXX. So our presence is going to continue in Afghanistan, and so if we are going to continue there, again, at what level do you expect that presence to be, and how confident are you that we are going to be able to have some accountability for the funding that we continue to give them given the corruption? How are we going to monitor that? That is what we want to know.

Mr. KHALILZAD. Perfectly understandable. It is our responsibility, and one mechanism, the key mechanism, will be the embassy. There are other mechanisms for making sure that we monitor the resources spent on intended goals and projects that are being approved, that the money is dedicated for, in fact, are taking place as intended. So it is a challenge. I don't want to underestimate it, and perhaps it will become more difficult, but we are committed to following the law and making sure that the money is spent as intended.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentlewoman yields back. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Ohio, Mr. Gibbs, for five minutes.

Mr. GIBBS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ambassador, for being here today. You know, it is going to be a difficult thing. We will see how this works to withdraw the troops. But in your testimony, you talked about economic development and education, which, of course, is essential to give people more freedom and protect a struggling democracy. And even before 9/11 happened, you know, we had a lot of corruption in the opium trade, and poppy farming, and then the production of heroin, and I think that has increased exponentially over the years. And, Ambassador, we talk about, you know, so much corruption. You know, can you relate to us about how this illicit drug trade in Afghanistan flows in, and in trying to do economic development, you know, are there really good prospects for economic development Afghanistan, or is it just the drug trade and all the corruption? You know, what is the outcome here to bring stability and an ideal end state, as the study group talked about, in Afghanistan?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Thank you, sir. Of course, as you said correctly, narcotics is one big source of income, and there are not only the Afghans. Farmers probably get a small part of that income. The traffickers, those who take the opium and turn it into heroin and then sell it, they make more money, and the involvement of people in Afghanistan and beyond Afghanistan. And as long as there is demand, of course, supplies will come.

And one reason Afghanistan, in my view, has become a place as big as it has become, despite our efforts of the last 20 years, is because one key factor is war, and rule of law is obviously limited in the condition of war. And we have tried alternative livelihood, eradication, various other programs, but the net result hasn't been effective. And one key factor is in war, the law cannot be applied effectively throughout the country because of the war, and so—

Mr. GIBBS. Well, let me interrupt you, Ambassador, because the Taliban, they are really the beneficiaries of the revenue stream for this drug trade, right?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Right. That is one of the sources of income, sir, for the Talibs, narcotics, also others who benefit from narcotics, but it is a key source of income for the Talibs as well.

Mr. GIBBS. On economic development initiatives, what are some possibilities in Afghanistan for economic development? What sectors of the economy? What are we looking at? Manufacturing? Agriculture? What are the possibilities?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, mining has great potential. Traditionally, subsistence agriculture has been what Afghanistan has had. It has land, it has water, but water is not properly managed, so there is great potential for alternative livelihood products for which there is demand, and they could be produced in Afghanistan. And then location could be an asset. That is what we have been focused on, and that if there is regional connectivity, which requires peace for it to happen, then mining, which is potentially a huge resource should it be developed, and increased agriculture, and the rent that it could charge as a land bridge between Central Asia—

Mr. GIBBS. Well, I just wanted to highlight—

Mr. KHALILZAD [continuing]. And those potential sources.

Mr. GIBBS. I just wanted to highlight that because I think that you made a key point. Other countries in the region would have to partners in this and rule of law, and then there is a possibility of getting capital in there. And that is how you really end this problem, concern of us pulling out and Afghanistan becoming a terror safe haven again. And so I think that is important on the economic side, so I am glad to hear there are some possibilities and opportunities there if we can get stability and we get private capital coming in from around the world, especially our neighbors. That would enhance the peace prospects.

I thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Louisiana, Mr. Higgins, for five minutes.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ambassador, thank you for appearing before us today. You have a very difficult job, sir, and we very much respect your efforts. As a spokesman for the citizens that I serve, we have serious concerns about continued investment of treasure in Afghanistan because of the notorious reputation for corruption. We have lost life and limb for 20 years in a region that has been at war with itself for 9,000 years. I think it is time to bring our troops home. We should do so in a strategic manner, and what we leave behind should be a sufficient intelligence apparatus to protect America from emerging threat that could threaten our homeland or our allies abroad. Our investment in American treasure for 20 years has been the equivalent of about \$8 billion a month. That as an incredible amount of treasure, and it is time for Afghanistan to take care of itself. That is my opinion.

I would like to ask you, Mr. Ambassador, you know, we are talking about the withdrawal of American troops, and many Americans envision that as a vacuum of tactical operations, capabilities. Please speak to the capabilities of Afghanistan's own military assets and the existence of 18,000 or 20,000 private military contractors that remain in Afghanistan. Please speak to their capabilities and give us your thoughts on that, please.

Mr. KHALILZAD. Thank you very much, sir. Afghanistan has substantial military and security capabilities that they did not have 20 years ago, thanks to the taxpayers and the effort of the U.S. military and contractors. And it has some 300,000 large security forces, very substantial, perhaps one of the largest special forces of any country in that region, numbering close to 40,000. It has significant counterterrorism capabilities. I believe with continued support in the new context of no military presence, the Afghan security forces, if politically led properly, meaning that the political class does not fragment along ethnic or other lines, should do well in terms of defending the republic. And so—

Mr. HIGGINS. Mr. Ambassador—

Mr. KHALILZAD. Sure.

Mr. HIGGINS [continuing]. Thank you for your response. In the interest of time here, let me just state for clarification that it has been envisioned that the Taliban will become part of the political process that you referred to. I personally have zero confidence that there will be success of political engagement with the Taliban. But let's just say that I am wrong and those that want continued Amer-

ican treasure post-withdrawal of American troops, let's say they are right. The Taliban is making about \$40 million a week from heroin. If the Taliban is part of the political solution, why would they not be part of the financial solution, and I give you the floor, sir, for the remainder of my time to respond to that.

Mr. KHALILZAD. Without commenting on the number that you mentioned, I believe that if the Taliban joined the political process, lived by the rules of the international system, meaning observe international law and agree to a formula with fellow Afghans about how they can run their country, that will be success, in my judgment. If that is achieved, that would be success for Afghanistan. That will be good for the United States because that would mean that our security will not be threatened from Afghanistan, and we would have left a great legacy behind for Afghanistan's war to end, a worthy legacy given the sacrifices that you referred to, sir, and the chairman and others have referred to.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you, sir. Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your Indulgence. My time has expired.

Mr. LYNCH. I thank the gentleman. The gentleman yields.

Ambassador, I think that most of the concerns expressed by the members today have focused on, first of all, the fact that with the U.S. withdrawal of security forces, we have also withdrawn 13,000 U.S. contractors that provided the services, and that infrastructure, those 13,000 contractors, from security, to healthcare, to food assistance, rule of law, with the withdrawal of that infrastructure, also the oversight and the adherence to U.S. contracting laws and the custody of U.S. resources in the country were protected. Now that we have removed, or we haven't removed them, but they have decided to leave since the security forces are leaving, we don't have an infrastructure there whereby we can be confident that the money that the Administration continues to send into Afghanistan is getting to the right people. So that is a major concern.

Even when we had 100,000 troops on the ground with NATO, and with our allies, and the United Nations, it was extremely difficult to maintain rule of law and accountability with respect to the resources that we were putting into Afghanistan because of the level of corruption there. Do we have a plan B? You know, this committee and Congress in general has a responsibility to make sure that we try, to the best we can, to spend whatever resources the American taxpayer allows us to contribute to this country, to do so in a responsible way. And I just don't see the checks and balances and the oversight capacity, and I have heard this from the special inspector for Afghan reconstruction, Mr. Sopko. He is very concerned that without security forces, he cannot get out to these projects to review them.

We continue to rely upon Afghan or third country nationals to go out inspect these projects. Members of this committee, including myself, we have done that in the past on a regular basis, but I daresay that those opportunities will be few and far between now that we have no security going in there. When members of this committee went in, including myself, we had plenty of military protection when we went into these areas to do our inspections. That would be fraught with great hazard if we were to try to do that after September. And so, do we have a plan B if, one, the Afghan

national army is overrun, or, in combination with the Taliban's insertion to the government, we lose complete control of the resources that we are contributing to Afghanistan?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Sir, I hear you loud and clear, and I share the concerns that you have expressed. I have been there as Ambassador during the early phases, the challenges we faced of doing development projects with the security environment in which we had to operate, and over time we developed mechanisms to do better. But now that a decision has been made, it is quite recent, and I think you will have to wait to see. I want to assure you that we are working very hard to think about alternative futures for Afghanistan and what could happen, and how we would operate and carry out the mission that the President and Congress decides for Afghanistan, and how the mission could be carried out, and how we can spend the resources of the taxpayers as intended.

And the plan is not finished. I think you obviously are entitled to receive information and be informed, and we are committed to doing that. But I just want to remind ourselves that this is a decision that came only a few weeks ago, and your state Department people, USAID people, are working hard to come up with plans. But we hear your concerns loud and clear, and I personally share them as well.

Mr. LYNCH. I thank you for that. And, look, I don't discount the extreme difficulty that we are faced with here. There are no good choices.

Mr. KHALILZAD. Right.

Mr. LYNCH. But we do have an open line of communication with many of the women—

Mr. KHALILZAD. Yes.

Mr. LYNCH [continuing]. In Afghanistan, who are in positions of some power and part of the government. And the reports that we are getting from them regarding their own safety, regarding the opportunities for girls in Afghanistan, are extremely fragile right now. There is great fear in many of the communities across Afghanistan, but especially in Kabul. And so, we have got an onslaught of people who are trying to get out because they are known to have been helpful to the U.S. government. And so, I am trying to get reassurance that we are at least acknowledging the dilemma that we face, and that we are taking every reasonable precaution to prevent the worst of outcomes from occurring. So, I do want to thank you. I know you have worked on this for many, many years, and you have been a stalwart advocate for democracy in Afghanistan, and you have been outspoken to your own risk in your time in Afghanistan, and we appreciate the service that you have rendered to our country.

In closing, again, I want to thank you, Ambassador Khalilzad, for your testimony here today. I want to commend my colleagues for their insightful observations and their important questions. I am sorry. I yield to the gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Grothman. I did not see you return. Thank you.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Yes. I would like to thank you for being here. Just in closing, I think you could tell from my questions I am also very concerned about what happens here, America's reputation. People helped us. I think it is simplistic when people, including

some Republicans, just say, let's get out tomorrow. I wasn't thrilled to get in 20 years ago, but we are there now. If you need more wiggle room, I am sure there are Republicans who would not at all be critical of you for taking advantage of that wiggle room. I am worried if the worst would happen, the number of people who would die, and if we need more flexibility and whatever to prevent them from dying, I certainly understand that.

I strongly hope that insofar as we put money in Afghanistan, and I suppose we will put a lot of money in there, that we, you know, keep it on a short leash, you know, don't send it to any third party organizations that we can't trust and that. But I would like to thank you for being here, and I hope you don't feel pressure to, like I said, get out before, at least the rumors are you don't even have your full team over there yet, which is understandable. Every new Administration takes a while. But just remember our people and who helped us, and remember what would happen if things collapse, and it is more important to get it done right than get it done quick. So, thank you much for letting me speak again.

Mr. LYNCH. I thank the gentleman. The ranking member yields back.

With that, and without objection, all members will have five legislative days within which to submit additional written questions for the witnesses through the chair, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response. And, Ambassador, I would ask you to please respond as promptly as you are able.

Mr. LYNCH. This hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:18 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

