

**EXAMINING THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S  
AFGHANISTAN STRATEGY, PART 2**

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**HEARING**

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

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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- \* Letter from Lower House of the Parliament National Interest Preservation Group of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan; submitted by Subcommittee Chairman Stephen Lynch.
- \* Questions to be answered in writing following the negotiations; submitted by Subcommittee Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney.
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## EXAMINING THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S AFGHANISTAN STRATEGY, PART 2

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**Tuesday, September 22, 2020**

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 11:06 a.m., in room 2154, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Stephen F. Lynch (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Lynch, Cooper, Welch, Rouda, Wasserman Schultz, Kelly, Plaskett, Lawrence, Grotham, Foxx, Cloud, Higgins, and Green.

Also present: Representative Malinowski.

Mr. LYNCH. The committee will now come to order. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the committee at any one time. I now recognize myself for an opening statement.

Good morning, everyone. Before we begin, I would like to take a moment to honor the memory of the late Supreme Court Justice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Justice Ginsburg was a force for good on the Supreme Court and a true champion for justice, equality, and the balance of power in our representative democracy. May she rest in peace.

To commence with our hearing, 11 days ago, our country marked the 19th anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks. Like Pearl Harbor, 60 years early, September 11 will forever be etched in American history as a date that we will never forget. And we will always remember the 2,977 souls that we lost on that horrific day.

After the 9/11 attacks, the United States went to war against al-Qaida and their Taliban hosts in Afghanistan. Since then, the conflict has taken the lives of 2,448 American servicemembers, and injured tens of thousands more.

In a significant milestone earlier this year, the United States and the Taliban on February 29 signed an agreement for bringing peace to Afghanistan, which outlined a way forward for the complex and complete withdrawal of U.S. forces by mid-2021. In exchange, the Taliban promised to come to the negotiating table with the Kabul government to prevent terrorist groups, such as al-Qaida, from using Afghanistan to stage attacks against the United States and our allies.

Despite multiple indications that the Taliban had not fully met their commitments under the February agreement, the Trump administration has steadily withdrawn U.S. forces from Afghanistan, which has seated much of our leverage to help shape the future of Afghanistan for its people and our national security interests.

In fact, in an interview airing over the weekend, former Trump administration and National Security Advisor, H.R. McMaster, described the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan as quote, “an unwise policy.” Instead, he argued that what we require in Afghanistan is a sustained commitment to help the Afghan Government and help the Afghan security forces continue to bear the brunt of this fight.

Since U.S. forces began to withdraw from Afghanistan following the February agreement, security conditions on the ground have deteriorated. In June, the Department of Defense estimated that the Taliban sustained levels of violence five times higher than those observed during a February 2020 reduction in violence, period. And U.S. CENTCOM command—Commander General Kenneth McKenzie later described these escalations as not consistent with someone negotiating in good faith.

Nevertheless, after months of violence, delay, and a contentious prisoner exchange, the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban finally met in Doha earlier this month to begin intra-Afghan negotiations. Many Afghans remain deeply distrustful of the Taliban’s true intention. In particular, many Afghans, especially women and girls, are justifiably concerned that human rights and democratic gains they have achieved with the U.S. support since 2001 could become jeopardized if the Taliban return to power through force or through a negotiated settlement.

Given the legacy of past failures, we must remain clear-eyed about the stakes at this moment. If the Taliban are unwilling or unable to abide by their commitments, or if political negotiations collapse, the resulting crisis will likely have a grave consequence for those Afghan people, regional stability, and international security.

So, I’m grateful to our witnesses, especially representative for Afghan reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad. Thank you, Ambassador. And Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Affairs, David Helvey. Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being here today to answer our questions about the risks and the Trump administration’s ongoing efforts to bring the U.S. war in Afghanistan to a close.

While we are all eager for our sons and daughters in uniform to return home, it is also important that we do not needlessly or recklessly bargain away the rights and freedoms that the Afghan people have gained at such a huge cost in American coalition and Afghan lives. With that, I will now yield to the gentleman from Wisconsin, our ranking member, Mr. Grothman, for his opening statement.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Thank you much. Thank you much, and a very important topic and continues to be an important topic, and I’m glad that you’re having this hearing.

I am pleased to have these witnesses here today. Through the hard work of the Trump administration, there may very well be a

prospect for peace in Afghanistan at last. They've had other successes in the Middle East. Recently, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates entered into treaties of peace, diplomatic relations, and full normalization between those countries and the state of Israel, something that I never would have dreamed about a few years ago. Those agreements will have an immediate, positive, and lasting impact on the prospects for peace in the region. The Trump administration's prioritized peace in Afghanistan is its strategy, and the goal is to ensure that the country does not become a haven for terrorist activity in the future.

The U.S. and the Taliban entered into a joint declaration this February with stipulations that the Taliban would cease attack in coalition forces in exchange for U.S. troops draw-down. The declaration also came with the condition that the Taliban and the Afghan Government entered into peace negotiations with a discussion of cease-fire firmly on the table. Although these peace negotiations were delayed for months, they commenced on September 12 of this year, and I am hopeful that the negotiations—the negotiators reached an agreement that leads to stable and long-lasting peace in Afghanistan—one that protects the rights of all citizens in the country, including women.

The obstacles we face are complex. We cannot afford to be deterred. I am interested to hear from the Ambassador how we get this right, despite the challenges that lie ahead. More than 2,400 brave men and women have lost their lives in Afghanistan, fighting on behalf of the United States, either during Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Freedom's Sentinel.

The U.S. has been invested in Afghanistan for 19 years, with the U.S. taxpayer cost for warfighting or reconstruction reaching \$1 trillion for 2001. That \$1 trillion, by the way, would sound a lot bigger a year ago than it does now. The cost for monetarizing the lives of U.S. soldiers cannot continue. I applaud this administration for seeking to bring an end to this conflict.

We've got to get this right. It isn't just the Afghan people who benefit. The veterans who fought, and the American people deserve to have a peaceful Afghanistan that does not permit terrorists to operate in that country, to perpetuate tax against the United States.

I am going to emphasize again what a great job I think you've done. How foreign affairs is a difficult thing, and I am not being partisan here, but, you know, I can't help but wonder if President Trump was the President in 2001, whether we would have gone so, I would argue, overboard like President Bush did, I don't think we would have.

Again, I think if President Trump had been elected and took office in 2009, we wouldn't have the herky-jerk pulling out of Iraq, which I think was also disastrous.

So, you know, I think he's kind of hitting that sweet spot from between where President Bush was and President Obama did. And I really appreciate you guys being part of his team.

I am pleased to welcome you here today. Your leadership is having a positive effect on Afghanistan. I want to thank the Trump administration for their efforts to bring about a peaceful solution. And I look forward to your testimony today. Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back. One housekeeping matter here. Without objection, the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Malinowski, shall be permitted to join the subcommittee and be recognized for questioning the witnesses, as procedure allows.

Now, I would like to introduce our witnesses. Our first witness today is Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, who is the special representative for Afghan Reconciliation at the Department of State. And we will hear from David F. Helvey, who is performing the duties of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs at the Department of Defense.

In accordance with the committee rules, would you both, please, rise and raise your right hand.

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?

Let the record reflect that the witnesses have both answered in the affirmative. Please be seated.

Without objection, your written statements will be made part of the record. With that, Ambassador Khalilzad, you are now recognized for your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF HON. AMBASSADOR ZALMAY KHALILZAD, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONCILIATION, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**

Mr. KHALILZAD. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to join you in offering condolences to the Ginsburg family, and may her soul rest in peace.

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Grothman, and distinguished members of the committee, I regret the circumstances did not allow me to appear before this committee sooner. During the last several months, I regard making myself available to Congress as one of my most significant and important responsibilities, and I welcome this opportunity today, and I am honored to brief you.

I was appointed the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation in September 2018 with a mandate to find a diplomatic formula that brings an end to America's longest war, reduces the burden on the U.S. military and taxpayers, provides the best chance for a sovereign, unified, and representative Afghanistan, at peace with itself and its neighbors, and respectful of the human rights of all its citizens, and most importantly, ensures terrorists can never again use Afghan soil to threaten the security of the United States and our allies.

Underlying this mandate was an assumption that there was no realistic or viable military solution to this complex conflict. To pursue these objectives, we engaged in direct talks with the Taliban and the Afghan Government in parallel. Our goal was to secure counterterrorist guarantees from the Taliban, alongside their commitment to engage in direct negotiations with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on a political settlement and permanent and comprehensive cease-fire.

Eighteen months of intense diplomacy led to two significant milestones: On February 29, the United States and the Government of Afghanistan jointly declared their commitment to reach a com-

prehensive and sustainable peace agreement to end the war in Afghanistan, including guarantees to prevent the use of Afghan soil by any international terrorist groups or individuals against the security of the United States and its allies.

A condition-based timeline for withdrawal of the U.S. and coalition forces from Afghanistan. A political settlement resulting from inter-Afghan dialog and negotiations between the Taliban and inclusive negotiating team of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and a permanent and comprehensive cease-fire.

That same day, the United States signed an historic agreement with the Taliban that would make negotiations possible. That agreement has four elements: The first is a commitment by the Taliban to prevent any group or individual from using Afghan soil to threaten the security of the United States and its allies. On that, we have seen some progress. It's also important to stress that since the signing of the agreement, the Taliban have instructed their forces to refrain from attacks on U.S. and coalition forces. There have been no American deaths as a result of Taliban attacks since the agreement was signed. And we continue to engage regularly with the Taliban to oversee the implementation of our agreement with respect to these issues and to address issues of concern.

The second is a timetable for withdrawal of American and coalition forces. That withdrawal is condition-based. We are on the path to reduce troops to levels between 4-and 5,000 by this fall. And further withdrawals will be determined based on conditions on the ground and delivery by the Taliban on their commitments.

The third is a start of Afghan peace negotiations. As you know, the talks opened on September 12, a truly historic moment. The Afghan delegation from the parties to the conflict that are sitting across from each other without international mediators or facilitators have the opportunity to bring an end to more than 40 years of war in their country. The talks are an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process where two warring sides are negotiating a roadmap for the future of their country. The Afghans are yearning for peace, and there is overwhelming support among them for these talks and for a political settlement.

Finally, the Taliban agreed that the permanent and comprehensive cease-fire would be on the agenda in Afghan peace negotiations. By any measure, the current levels of violence are too high. We know that the reductions are possible. The Taliban carried out two Eid cease-fires and earlier, a seven-day reduction in violence preceding the February 29 signing of the agreement between the United States and the Taliban.

We hope that the current negotiation will soon lead to a significant reduction in violence by all sides, reducing the number of Afghans getting killed or wounded. A reduction of violence will help build the trust necessary for these talks to succeed. We, for our part, will continue to press for this objective.

A political settlement in Afghanistan needs broad, internal, regional, international support. We have worked closely with Afghanistan's neighbors and international partners to build support for Afghanistan's peace negotiations. You can see the impact of that effort in the list of countries and organizations that were represented at the opening ceremony of the Afghan peace negotiations

on September 12, and in the U.N. Security Council Statement welcoming the start of these negotiations.

These achievements are the result of two years of intense diplomacy, and have already resulted in American lives saved, the burden on the American taxpayers lessened, and giving the Afghans historic opportunity for a political settlement that ends their long war.

Now, with an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned process and delegations that represent the country's strength and diversity, including the Afghan Government's political leaders, members of civil society, women, and religious, and ethnic minorities, the people of Afghanistan have reason to hope again.

I have urged the Afghanistan leaders to take advantage of the opportunity for a political settlement now available to them. Unfortunately, Afghan leaders did not behave responsibly or judiciously after the Soviet forces departed their country as a result of a resistance movement that had been backed by the United States. Instead of cooperating and agreeing on a political formula for their country, they started a vicious civil war. We will help Afghanistan seize historic moment, and avoid repeating what happened in the 1990's. But, ultimately, the responsibility is theirs.

Our strategy going forward, Mr. Chairman, is: one, continuing holding the Taliban to the commitments they made in February 29 agreement, including on combating international terrorism and discussing a permanent and comprehensive cease-fire at the peace negotiations; two, adjust our force posture consistent with the agreement and conditions in Afghanistan. We are on a path to reduce our troops, as I said before, to between 4-and 5,000, and with further reductions possible, but based on conditions.

I want to assure this committee that we will always maintain the ability to protect the United States. But staying in Afghanistan militarily is not an end in itself. Our goal for Afghanistan is a nation of peace with itself and with its neighbors, and firmly aligned with the United States and our allies against international terrorism; three, support the party's effort to reach a negotiated political settlement while speaking out about our values. The inclusion of women and religious and ethnic minorities in the negotiations is a landmark step in the right direction. The United States will continue to advocate their values, including electoral democracy, rights of women and religious minorities, rule of law, free speech, and free press.

At the same time, we recognize that only Afghans can find a sustainable formula that's unique to their history and culture. While we do not seek to impose our system on others, we have made it clear to the negotiators that their choices and combat will affect the size and scope of future U.S. assistance. Then this is the position shared by Afghanistan's other major donors. Four, continue to work with regional international partners and donors to build international support for Afghanistan peace. Negotiations and support of our Afghanistan long-term stability and self-reliance.

While we have reasons to be hopeful, we are under new illusions about the challenges ahead. The conflict in Afghanistan is especially complex, and negotiators will have to overcome personal interest and political differences, while representing diverse constitu-

encies. We expect that there will be setbacks and obstacles. This task that we have carried out so far has been, as required, a diverse and dynamic team made up of State Department foreign service officers, civil servants, and detailees leads from across the U.S. Government. We have also partnered closely and effectively with the Department of Defense, especially General Scott Miller, the Commanding General of the U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan.

The whole-of-government effort reflects the best, in my judgment, of American diplomacy. Mr. Chairman, ranking member, and distinguished members, I'm grateful for the opportunity to share this summary of the effort that we have made, challenges and progress of the past two years. And I look forward to your guidance, feedback, and support as we seek to consolidate this moment of promise to end this war responsibly. Thank you, sir.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you, Ambassador. Secretary Helvey, you are now recognized for five minutes.

**STATEMENT OF DAVID HELVEY, PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR INDO PACIFIC SECURITY AFFAIRS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

Mr. HELVEY. Good morning, and thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Grothman. I would also like to acknowledge Chairwoman Maloney, who has joined other members of this committee. I would like to thank you, again, for the opportunity to brief you today on our strategy for Afghanistan.

In the wake of the 19th anniversary of the attacks on September 11, 2001, there's perhaps no more fitting time to discuss with Congress, or with the American people, the importance of our mission in Afghanistan in keeping America safe against terrorist attacks. It's my privilege to focus my remarks today on the Department of Defense's strategy in Afghanistan, the criticality of our partners—partnerships in achieving our objectives, and our expectation of the Taliban in upholding their commitments under the U.S. Taliban agreement.

Pursuant to the 2017 South Asia Strategy, the Department of Defense's key objective in South Asia is to ensure that Afghanistan never again becomes a safe haven for terrorists who may threaten the United States or our allies. The strategy prioritizes ending the war through a political process, acknowledging that there is no military solution to the conflict. To achieve this objective, the Department conducts two complementary missions: one, the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission, which is focused on training, advising, and assisting the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, or ANDSF; and the second is the U.S. Counterterrorism Mission that works with our Afghan partners to mitigate terrorist threats.

We actively combat ISIS Khorasan, al-Qaida, and other terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Although these terrorists are severely degraded, continued pressure on them remains vital to ensuring that our homeland is never again attacked as it was on September 11, 2001.

On February 29, 2020, an historic agreement was signed between the United States and Taliban. And the release to end of a parallel

U.S.-Afghanistan Joint Declaration served as a pivotal moment in the path toward peace in Afghanistan. Since then, U.S. forces have adjusted to adhere to U.S. commitments within the agreement. We have reduced our force level to 8,600 and turn five bases over to our Afghan partners.

The commander of U.S. forces and Afghanistan's authorities, however, have not changed. U.S. forces continued to defend the ANDSF against the attacks by the Taliban, and we are not conducting offensive attacks against the Taliban.

We have long maintained that our force presence in Afghanistan is conditions-based. This August, the President made a determination that the conditions in Afghanistan were sufficient to reduce our force presence to between 4,000 and 5,000 by the end of November 2020. At this force level, we maintain the core aspects of the train, advise, and assist, and our counterterrorism mission. First and foremost, however, we're maintaining the ability to protect the force in Afghanistan.

I would like to make clear that the Secretary has not issued orders to reduce military personnel below this 4,000 to 5,000 level in Afghanistan, although, we are conducting prudent planning to withdraw to zero servicemembers by May 2021 if conditions warrant for the U.S.-Taliban agreement. As Secretary Pompeo said in Doha, the Taliban must uphold their counterterrorism guarantees to the United States. We also expect the Taliban to meaningfully participate in Afghan peace negotiations, and to do their part in preventing outside actors from negatively impacting the peace process.

Over the last seven months, our ANDSF partners have conditioned to demonstrate resilience in the face of high levels of violence, resolve in their fight against international terrorist organizations, and a commitment to a better, more secure, and prosperous Afghanistan. But for progress toward peace to continue, the Taliban must reduce violence against the Afghan security forces and Afghan civilians. Taliban violence, quite frankly, has been unacceptably high for too long.

We urge the Taliban, the Afghan Government, and the Afghan people to choose a path toward peace. Peace agreements are not signed between friends. They're negotiated between parties that must reconcile a shared desire for peace against years of bloodshed and grievance. We are encouraged that the Afghan peace negotiations are underway, and are supportive of the Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process.

Last, the Department of Defense remains committed to transparency to the American people regarding our efforts in Afghanistan. The Department understands that certain efforts on the way to peace, like the recent prisoner releases, will cause painful emotions to resurface for the families who lost loved ones on September 11, 2001, and in Afghanistan, over the subsequent years.

Their sacrifices are not lost on us. It is because of these sacrifices that we have advanced progress toward making America safer, and ensuring that Afghanistan is never again used as a safe haven for terrorists. These decisions, though difficult, remain focused on achieving the same noble end state for which so many have fought. We're grateful, and we continue to honor their sacrifice.

Mr. Chairman, ranking member, members of the committee, thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and I'm happy to take any questions that you may have.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you very much. I will now yield myself five minutes for questions. First of all, Ambassador, I want you to know that I fully appreciate the difficulty of your task. As someone—I was elected on September 11, the day of the attacks in the Democratic primary in Massachusetts. I immediately came to this committee. I have been a member for 19 years now and have had many, many, many trips to Afghanistan, and I understand the complexity that you face, and the difficult task that you face. So—but nothing that I ask or say here from this chair diminishes the difficulty that you face. And we appreciate your service to our country and your efforts on our behalf. We do. We appreciate that.

We had a chance to meet with the Afghan team, Ashraf Ghani and his team, at the Munich Security Conference. We also met with the U.S. negotiating team as well, at the negotiations—at the Munich Security Conference some months ago. And we learned that the U.S. negotiations did not include, as a priority, the status of women and girls in Afghanistan. And I got a letter yesterday from, I think it's 19 members of the Afghan Parliament.

And I am going to ask unanimous consent to enter into the record the letter from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Lower House of the Parliament National Interest Preservation Group, to this committee. Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. LYNCH. It says, it's rather pointed, and it's—in its message. And one of the most important excerpts of this two-page letter, I will read as follows: It calls upon the United States to rise to the occasion, and I am quoting now, rise to the occasion by standing up for the great cause of women's rights, which is indisputably human rights, and let this deal, this agreement, be known as one that preserved the rights of every Afghan man and woman, not a deal that prevents little girls from going to school, not a deal that leads to the destruction of our institutions, and not a deal that backtracks on the great achievements of freedom and democracy. Those achievements purchased at a high price among U.S. servicemembers as well as coalition and Afghan forces as well.

How is it that—and I understand that you don't set the parameters for negotiations, you conduct them. So, this is not your decision. But how do we—how do we demonstrate to the Taliban that the status of women and girls is a major priority in restoring that country's stability, advocating for human rights in that country, when we don't list it as a priority in our negotiations, but instead leave it to the Afghans to fight that fight? Isn't that—that's an American ideal. It's a democratic ideal. And please explain how—how omitting that as a priority for us, for our country, helped the Afghan Government achieve a lasting peace?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Thank you, Chairman, for that question and sentiment, and belief behind it. I want to assure you that human rights, women's rights, the rights of minorities and children, indeed, all citizens of Afghanistan, particularly, women, is of a highest importance to the United States. And I have a track record personally in helping the Afghan women when the post-9/11 government was drafting the constitution, that we stood with them. And

I want to, through this hearing, want to assure the Afghan women that we will be with them.

We have—I have met just—I just arrived from Doha, and I met with the women members of the delegation twice before leaving for the United States. And I have left the team behind to—while I'm gone, to make sure that, in the negotiations, the women's future of the achievement that I am very proud of, and we should all be proud of.

Mr. LYNCH. Ambassador, I have to interject, though.

Mr. KHALILZAD. Please.

Mr. LYNCH. We were told by the Afghan team and the U.S. team that the status of women and girls in Afghanistan was not a lead priority for us. That it was going to be the part of the Afghan Government to negotiate that. Am I wrong in that, because I have been told that by both sides in the negotiations?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, of course, that the negotiations that resulted in the agreement was signed and dealt with four issues that I described, and one of which is inter-Afghan negotiations. And as I mentioned in my statement, to us, these negotiations are not yet completed, because the four elements are a package agreement. The terrorism, withdrawal into Afghan negotiations including—

Mr. LYNCH. But none of those four, specifically, raise—none of those four parts. The part that you're referring to was the part that you were going to hand off to the Afghans to negotiate. That was part of the—one of the four. That was one of the four elements.

Mr. KHALILZAD. Sure.

Mr. LYNCH. And it could contain anything, right? The part that you give to the Afghan Government could contain anything. But the issues that we supported, obviously, national security, interest of the United States, and I understand that, that's very important, very important priority.

Mr. KHALILZAD. Right.

Mr. LYNCH. But I also think the status of after all we've been through, the most important accomplishment, I think in 50 years looking back, we taught a quarter of a million Afghan women how to read and write. It's probably going to be the biggest impact in that country in the next 50 years. It will be the one accomplishment that we can look at that made a difference, but not yet. And yet, the rights of women and girls was not included as a priority for us going into negotiations, and the Taliban knew that. And I just think that it undermined their efforts and our efforts by neglecting that priority.

Mr. KHALILZAD. I respectfully, very respectfully disagree. This is an unfinished package yet. We are in the middle of it. Some things have been settled. Two issues have not been settled yet. And even with regard to the issues we have reached an agreement on, implementation, we are watching closely. And we will be involved, although it's Afghan-owned and Afghan-led negotiations, we will be involved, and we will monitor, and we will express ourselves forcefully. And I want to assure you that the women's rights issues, the achievement that we should be very proud of—and I'm glad you have listed what we have achieved—we will be very supportive, and depending on decisions that they make, that will affect the future of U.S. policy toward Afghanistan.

Mr. LYNCH. I appreciate that. I have far exceeded my time limit. I want to thank you. I just think it should have been established at the outset, not in the middle of negotiations introducing that as an issue.

I want to yield to my friend and colleague, the gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Grothman, and I will afford him the extra time that he needs.

Mr. GROTHMAN. That's OK. Thank you. That's very kind of you. I'm not sure, you have a very, very difficult job, but I want to begin by kind of letting you describe what a difficult of a job it is.

How many ethnic groups are there in Afghanistan, or do you have a general idea?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Over a dozen.

Mr. GROTHMAN. OK. How many different major, what I call major languages?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Three or four major languages.

Mr. GROTHMAN. So, you're dealing with people with different languages. Has there traditionally been a lot of religious freedom in Afghanistan?

Mr. KHALILZAD. There have been tension between religious parties, but Afghanistan generally has been historically a more moderate kind of relations among sects within Islam, and in terms of relations with non-Muslim minorities as well.

Mr. GROTHMAN. As I understand it, there are many, many, different ethnic groups. The Taliban, insofar as they fight, it's not even a regular army, is it? It's a variety of different people, they come and they go?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Oh, yes, there are tribes besides ethnic groups, and there are political parties. There are the old elite of Afghanistan representing tribes and ethnic leaderships, and also, the new elite now, which is as a result of what the Chairman mentioned that the Americans encountered with Afghanistan.

And they're all now around the table to negotiate a roadmap where they can have their differences, their different priorities and background but they can live in a peaceful environment in Afghanistan and search and agree to a formula.

Mr. GROTHMAN. How many American soldiers passed away last year in Afghanistan?

Mr. HELVEY. Thank you for that question. The data has it as 17 U.S. military personnel passed away under hostile actions in 20—

Mr. GROTHMAN. What if you were to go back three or four years?

Mr. HELVEY. In 2019, the numbers were slightly elevated as violence had increased as the Taliban was posturing. But in recent years, the numbers were, in 2018, 13 service personnel were killed; in 2017, there was 11. In 2016, there were nine. But since the February 29 agreement was signed, there have been no U.S. service personnel killed in Afghanistan.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Let me have you repeat that again. That's one of those things as you almost—if I repeat it back home, people won't even believe the numbers. Can you say that again?

Mr. HELVEY. Zero U.S. service personnel have been killed since February 29 when we signed agreement with the Taliban.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Wow, so in the last seven months, no Americans have been killed in Afghanistan, right? That's what you're saying, seven months without any—that's a pretty incredible job you guys are doing over there.

OK. I think there are people who feel that you have got to hold some troops over there. It's important to hold some troops over there. But there are obviously people who feel, unless we kind of change some of the gender differences over there that, you know, we ought to maybe be a little bit—get more involved there. Are there any other countries around the world that if we begin to go down this path of America must get involved until they straighten things out, that you can imagine that maybe we also would have to get involved in, if that's the standard?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, we have very many instruments in our toolbox, and we stand proudly for the value that we had at our universal values, but different instruments come to be brought to bear. And on when there is a threat to the national security, the armed forces have their role and responsibility.

Mr. GROTHMAN. I am under the impression, for example, Pakistan will be a country that, you know, forced marriages, that sort of thing, not unusual, honor killings, right?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Yes. We, obviously, that is inconsistent and we, with our values, and we oppose it, but we don't send the armed forces to enforce that change. We use economic leverage, we need diplomatic leverage, political relations, assistance programs to shape behavior. And I think we will continue to have leverage in Afghanistan, and we would use that leverage to make sure that our values are respected, and to the maximum extent possible.

Mr. GROTHMAN. We have done that a lot already. It's a great thing. Yes, I agree with my subcommittee Chairman here. We have made a lot of progress, haven't we?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Historic progress.

Mr. GROTHMAN. And because the United States was there, right?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Afghans are living longer because of our presence. They are living longer, they are healthier than they were—although, still there is a long way to go. More Afghans are—have access to education. More Afghans have access to telephones to communicating, and networking with each other and with the rest of the world. It is a different country than it was in 2001. And I keep telling them, when I talk with the Taliban, that this is not their father's Afghanistan, this is different Afghanistan, and they need to adjust and accommodate that change.

Mr. GROTHMAN. No, they're very nice, I just found something else here, and I will tell you, you know in the 20 years since we've been there, the population of Afghanistan has almost doubled? Did you know that? It's kind of amazing. OK.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields. The Chair now recognizes the distinguished Chair of the full Committee on Oversight, the gentlewoman from New York, for five minutes of questions.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you very much, and welcome to our panelists. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for your determination to hold this hearing, and recognizing the responsibility of Congress to conduct oversight of the war in Afghanistan. Thank you, too, for your very sharp pencil pointing at how women and girls are treat-

ed. We know that when women succeed, nations succeed. And nations that respect their women and protect them have less violence, less terrorism, and it is an investment for peace in the world to advance the rights of women.

Mr. Ambassador, as a New Yorker, I am painfully aware of 9/11, where so many people were innocently killed in New York and the Pentagon and on Flight 93, going straight to our Capitol. Americans were just killed for being Americans in peaceful areas. And I remember the tapes, the advertisements, the propaganda coming out of Afghanistan from Osama bin Laden, and others: Come to Afghanistan. We'll train you to go out and kill Americans. This is where we plotted it. It's so easy. We're here freely living. We're training. Here are our training places.

We went into Afghanistan to make sure that they would not be training people to kill our allies and Americans and come back at us. Yet, I don't see anything in your agreement on February 29 that really makes sure that this does not happen again. And, in fact, over the weekend, the Former National Security Adviser McMaster said, and I quote, "Terrorist organizations who pose a threat to us are stronger now than they were on September 10, 2001."

So, I am concerned about the withdrawal of U.S. forces, will it leave a power vacuum that al-Qaida and other terrorist groups can exploit again to plot attacks against Americans and our allies? And your response?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, first, it's great to see you.

Mrs. MALONEY. Thank you, Ambassador.

Mr. KHALILZAD. And, of course, I share with you, I was in the White House when 9/11 happened. I remember that very vividly, and it affected my own life and the trajectory of my personal circumstances. So—and what you described the situation during that time is exactly right. But I respectfully disagree to say the terrorists in Afghanistan, in particular, are stronger today, al-Qaida, than they were at that time. And we did discuss that in another setting in detail, and I think you should ask the intelligence community to brief you on that.

With regard to going forward, the agreement with the Taliban, they have made commitments not to allow the kind of things that you said that were taking place at that time. No training, no fund-raising.

Mrs. MALONEY. Mr. Ambassador, my time is almost up, and I would love more of a conversation in writing on how we can enforce and make sure any time there's any activity, we can come back in, or maybe we should stay until there's more security there.

But I do want to followup on the Chairman's questioning on women. In 2017, in a bipartisan way, we passed a very strong bill, the Women Peace and Security Act, that recognize when rights and status of women are protected, societies are less violent, there's less terrorism.

Yet, in the agreement signed earlier, there was nothing in it to protect the rights of Afghan women and girls, and we know that they were murdered for going to school, they were not allowed to learn, they could not work, they could not protect themselves in any way. And as our chief negotiator, you have said that the talks

have to be Afghan-led, and that's true. But we have leverage as the United States to stand up for the protection of women and girls. And I'd like, in your remaining time, to tell us exactly how you are going to protect them.

I also ask unanimous consent to place into the record a series of questions to be answered in writing as we followup on these negotiations. This is very, very important to our country——

Mr. LYNCH. Without objection, so ordered.

Mrs. MALONEY [continuing]. And, I believe, world peace. So, what was specifically in there to protect women and girls and to protect us from being attacked again?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, the protection regarding security, as I said, there are specific commitments by the Taliban.

Mrs. MALONEY. But is there enforcement? What if they do not do them? How do we——

Mr. KHALILZAD. We are free from the commitment that we have made. That's why I say it is condition-based. That means they don't deliver on the commitment, we don't have to withdraw forces. We adjust our force posture. Those are decisions that our management will have to make. But this is not an agreement that is based on trust. It is an agreement that is a package. What they do and what we do, and the two are linked with each other.

With regard to women's rights, the Afghan negotiations, the peace negotiations are not finished yet. We have had the phase dealing with terrorism and forces completed, but that has opened the door to two other issues, the future of Afghanistan and complete and permanent cease-fire. And I want to promise you, I assure you, I know of your strong commitment and feelings in this regard, and that reflects our values and my instructions that we will work very hard to make sure that the gains that have been made are built upon.

And we will press all sides in this regard, and we will have the leverage of future relations and assistance in addition to what is going on currently to advance the agenda that we have on our values and that I share. And you have been a champion, and I salute you for the work that you have done in this regard.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentlelady yields back.

Mrs. MALONEY. I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The Chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from North Carolina, Ms. Foxx, for five minutes of questions.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I may use up that extra time you took assuming my colleague didn't.

You know, I find it very interesting—I want to thank our witnesses first of all for being here. And I find it really, really interesting that our colleagues are here today castigating the work that's being done by the Trump administration to bring peace to Afghanistan, and focusing so much on the role of women.

I have been a fighter for women's rights and women's equality all of my life, but I find it really interesting that the hypocrisy comes out. I mean, we hear about the fight for women in Afghanistan. I remember very well when President Obama was President, the issue of Boko Haram, and the women being stolen away by Boko Haram. And every Wednesday for several years, we were asked to wear red on behalf of Boko Haram. Lots of statements

made by the Obama Administration about getting these women back. Not a single one of those women was rescued under the Obama Administration. Nothing was done by the Obama Administration to advance the cause of women.

And yet, here we are raising this issue suddenly when the President is having such success in Afghanistan, suddenly this is being held up, there is a gold standard being held up here that was never held up under the Obama Administration.

So, I want to thank you both for the success that's being had in Afghanistan. We all want to see peace around the world. We want to see the senseless war ended. And I think it's very encouraging that since the agreement was signed, we have had no deaths of U.S. soldiers. We don't want any deaths of any soldiers under any administration.

Now, Mr. Ambassador, I'll get to my questions. You have said that a political solution, including a peace agreement among Afghans, is the only realistic option at the present time. I personally agree with you. Do you believe such a solution is achievable given that the Afghan Government and the Taliban are starting off negotiations very far apart?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, thank you, ma'am, for what you said. I want to also say that women also want peace. They want the war to end. I know many Afghan mothers who have lost their children to this war that has been going on for 40-plus years. So, we should not forget that.

As to the plausibility, likelihood of agreement between the government and the Taliban, I think they're under a lot of pressure from the people that he must come to an agreement. This Afghan negotiation, the search for peace is very popular, politically, among the Afghan people. I have seen a recent poll that shows the support, perhaps more than 80 percent of the population.

But you are right, there is a big gap between the two sides, and there will be difficulties and challenges, no doubt. But I believe that they have a serious opportunity, a real opportunity not present in the last 40 years, and thanks to the American diplomacy and the sacrifices of the men and women of our military, that this opportunity has been made available to them.

We will help them if they need that help to come together, but ultimately it is their decision, it's their responsibility. But difficult, yes, but possible, sure. Vital that they do for their own people and for their own country.

Ms. FOXX. Well, you know, there's a saying in this country, which I assume is probably true in any country in the world, If mama's not happy, then nobody's happy. And I agree with you, I don't think there are any more people, no one has a more vested interest in the safety of children than mothers. And I have no doubt that the mothers in Afghanistan are not happy with the loss of their children.

Would you talk a little bit more about the status of the troop draw-down based upon the joint agreement. And do you believe—and the current trajectory, we'll continue to draw down troops, or will the timeline need to be revised?

Mr. KHALILZAD. I will ask David if he would comment on that.

Ms. FOXX. Thank you.

Mr. HELVEY. Thank you for that question, ma'am. As I mentioned in my opening statement, since the signing of the agreement on February 29, we have reduced our forces per the terms of that agreement to 8,600 forces, and we have continued that reduction based on guidance and direction from the President and the Secretary.

Right now, based on the conditions, the plan is to achieve somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000 U.S. service personnel in Afghanistan by the end of November 2020. We have received no orders—the Secretary has issued no orders to reduce below that level at that time. Obviously, the terms of the agreement specified zero by May 2021, but this is fundamentally, to use words that Ambassador Khalilzad has said, this is fundamentally conditioned-based.

So, we will be watching very carefully to assess the conditions, Taliban's compliance with its term—with the terms of its agreement, and that will be used to inform decisions on further and future withdrawals.

We can continue to perform the core elements of primary missions which is train, advise, and assist our Afghan partners in the counterterrorism mission. We are also providing for the security of the forces that are there within that number, based on the conditions that we currently see.

Ms. FOXX. And my assumption is, again, that future actions are based, as you said, on the conditions on the ground, and the fact that we've had no deaths since the agreement was signed is a very hopeful sign. And as long as things are going in the right direction, then we're very hopeful that we'll be able to withdraw on schedule. That's what I'm hearing you say, and I know we all pray that that is going to be the situation.

And with that, I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentlelady yields back.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Vermont, who has had many trips to Afghanistan, has been active on this issue for a very long time. We now recognize for five minutes Mr. Welch.

Mr. WELCH. Thank you very much, Chairman Lynch. And thank you, Ambassador. Really appreciate your presence here.

The question I ask is, if the Taliban ultimately prevails and is in charge in Afghanistan, what is the U.S. position or what is your recommendation with respect to providing economic assistance to that impoverished country; whereas I understand it, 90 percent of people are below the poverty line living on \$2 a day?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Thank you, sir. I don't accept the proposition, just for the , that the Taliban will prevail. We're in a stalemate situation.

Mr. WELCH. Let me interrupt here. Let's stay on that. I mean, first of all, I applaud your work, and I believe it is time for the United States to be out of Afghanistan, but I also think it's important for us to be clear-eyed about this.

Mr. KHALILZAD. Absolutely.

Mr. WELCH. As I understand it, the government that we've had in Afghanistan that we've supported has never had popular support, and the Taliban have refused to have direct negotiations with the elected government, and it's only having conversations with the

government, the quote, “elected government,” as well as opposition leaders. Is that true?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Yes. Now they’re negotiating, the Talibs, and that’s an achievement of this effort that the government-led delegation, that includes political forces and inclusive, includes women, civil society, the Taliban and what said they wouldn’t sit with the government, now they are sitting across the table with a government-led delegation.

Mr. WELCH. Here’s where I want us to be clear-eyed. The elected government in Afghanistan has had one backer, and that’s essentially the United States. We propped them up with troop support and with a trillion dollars of expenditures and hundreds of billions of dollars of aid, most of which has gone missing.

It is not unreasonable to expect that the Taliban that’s managed to sustain itself is ultimately going to be in charge in Afghanistan. My question to you is, how does—what’s the U.S. policy toward a government that may well be Taliban led?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, restating without repeating what I said about my assumption, but as far as assistance that Afghanistan needs, through the Taliban, we have legal and policy issues that preclude that at the present time. So, if the Taliban become part of a future government, what we would do is an issue for the United States, for Congress, and the executive branch should decide. Policy currently is we are not in a position to provide assistance to Taliban.

Mr. WELCH. Right. This second question is, in the negotiations, was there any discussion about the fact that throughout our time, throughout our time in Afghanistan, Pakistan in the tribal territories were used as safe havens, and what arrangements are made to diminish or eliminate the threat that comes to the United States through the continuation of the Pakistani safe havens?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Thank you for that important question. Part of the challenge, as you alluded to, is regional environment and Pakistan, in particular. The Pakistani leaders have been helpful for the effort that I have been making to encourage a political settlement. We also, as part of this effort with help from our allies, are looking at an agreement between Afghanistan and Pakistan that neither side’s territory would be used against the other. And we’re hoping that by the time that these other negotiations are over, we could also achieve as a success in that regard.

I think that one benefit of peace in Afghanistan is connectivity and trade and economic development in the region, and General Bajwa, said, the leader of the military forces in Pakistan, the nations do not develop; regions develop. And one potential implication and positive one is a greater economic trade and cooperation, and that links Pakistan/Afghanistan to central Asia for the benefit of all. Your point is obviously well taken.

Mr. WELCH. Thank you very much.

My time is up, Mr. Chairman. I applaud the success in getting some kind of peace arrangement, but I think we’ve got to be clear-eyed that the likelihood is the Taliban will be in charge, that country will continue to be very impoverished, and the instability in that region continues.

Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. Thank you. The gentleman yields back.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Cloud, for five minutes.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you, Chairman.

And thank you, Ambassador and Secretary, for being here. Appreciate the work. I think we all acknowledge the difficulties of working in that region, a region where we in America probably have more of a centralized national identity of Afghanistan than those actually living in Afghanistan. Very fractured, and then you're dealing with, of course, Taliban and the Afghan Government, which have kind of conflicting goals. It's been said that this is the longest war a number of times in this hearing, which—in our U.S. history.

Secretary, could you speak to the authorizations for our presence in Afghanistan? What authorities do we have to be there, is my question?

Mr. HELVEY. It's my understanding that we're there under the terms of the authorization, the use of military force post-911. And the mission that we have in Afghanistan is to conduct counterterrorism and then supporting that, as do our NATO mission, is for train, advise, and assist of our Afghan partners.

Mr. CLOUD. Right. So, our primary role is counterterrorism?

Mr. HELVEY. The U.S. role primary mission is counterterrorism with the train, advise, and assist.

Mr. CLOUD. Right. OK. I ask this because, you know, does humanitarian abuses—I mean, our founding documents talk about inalienable rights, but does humanitarian abuses of any nation give us authority to occupy or to invade a nation?

Mr. HELVEY. I mean, as Ambassador Khalilzad said, look, we want to live our values and our principles, and we have a number of tools that we can use to accomplish that and to advance those goals, advance those ideals.

Mr. CLOUD. Right.

Mr. HELVEY. Using military force is one of the tools that we have, but that's not the only tool that we have, and that's typically not the tool that we use to pursue those types of values and principles. I mean, there's economic tools, diplomatic tools, other aspects of our government and our country that we can use to advance those.

The mission that we have in Afghanistan, the reason why our military force is there, is focused on, as I've said before, ensuring that Afghanistan never again is a safe haven for terrorists that can strike the United States or our allies.

Mr. CLOUD. Right. I think we all hope for the best that in a negotiated peace we would be able to have the best settlement that would respect the human rights of all people through diplomatic channels. But I do think it's important that we recognize that the President was right to prioritize the drawdown of troops, the removal of troops from Afghanistan, while protecting the counterterrorism efforts there. You know, recognizing that threats have changed over the last 20 years and notably, of course, with China, even when we talk about human rights abuses, we can talk about what's going on through the international organized criminal activity that happens even through our border, and the women and chil-

dren that are affected in our communities because of that. So, it's important that we prioritize that.

Could you touch on, Ambassador, some of the notable successes and yet what are a couple of the notable challenges that remain in actually seeing the results of a negotiated peace?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, the successes are first in terms of Afghans is a start of peace negotiations between the government and the Taliban, which I have said is unprecedented, given the long war. And from our point of view, the successes, why we have the right to defend the Afghan Security Forces, their attack, but the Taliban have adhered to the commitment largely not to attack U.S. personnel and the U.S. Forces. And that's allowed us to be able to carry out the mission that we have, the core mission, that hasn't changed, but to do it at much lower numbers.

Mr. CLOUD. And you mentioned no U.S. casualties.

Mr. KHALILZAD. There is fewer U.S. casualties, including wounded, compared to the same period, if you compare it to last year or the same period of time. But I think that if we succeed—and I'm not assuming necessarily that we will. I mean, this is unpredictable, complicated, difficult circumstances—then we would have helped Afghanistan achieve the peace that they are yearning for the people, but at the same time, lower very dramatically the cost to ourselves. And hopefully—and that will be the test that there will be no terrorism from Afghanistan threatening the United States.

These are all objectives and we have work to do to achieve those goals, and there will be challenges and set backs, but I see among the alternative that we have that what we're doing is the best option for the United States and for Afghanistan, I might say so.

Mr. CLOUD. I had one more question. We know Iran and Russia are at work in the region trying to undermine our efforts, of course. How much of that is motivated by anti-American designs or how much of it is regional—trying to expand regional influence even against each other?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, for Iran, I believe, it's largely anti-American. And they would like to keep us entangled there and under pressure, suffering costs of different kinds. With regard to Russia, I believe where there is an American dimension, but they also have concerns like us about ISIS, which is a threat to them and their policy support for some elements is based on that, primarily based on that concern.

But they have been largely supportive of our diplomacy, as indicated in the Security Council or in the discussions that they have had with the Taliban encouraging them to agree to a cease-fire or reduction of violence and negotiating with the government. So, Iran is largely negative. Russia is mixed, in my view.

Mr. CLOUD. Thank you very much.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields back.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Rouda, for five minutes.

Mr. ROUDA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for bringing us together for this hearing. And thank you to the witnesses as well.

By now, we are all very familiar with The New York Times story reporting that Russia offered bounties to the Taliban to kill U.S. soldiers. And we're not in a classified setting, so I won't ask anything about specific intelligence underlying this reporting, but like most Americans, I'm very concerned that Russia and other outside actors may be providing various levels of support to the Taliban and concerns that this administration has not stood up to Russian President Putin on behalf of our troops that are deployed overseas.

So, Mr. Helvey, at the unclassified level, can you speak to the support outside actors such as Russia and Iran are providing to Taliban and other forces within Afghanistan?

Mr. HELVEY. Thank you for that question. We are aware and we know that there are outside actors, including Russia and Iran, but also there's others that are engaged in malign influence in Afghanistan. Some of this has been through the provision of weapons funding and other types of support. Obviously, with respect to the specific question, as we are always looking at threats to our forces and we put the protection of those forces as among the top priorities that we have, as any commander would have. And since those reports have come out regarding Russian programs, we've been looking specifically to identify corroborating information. We've not yet found it, but we continue to look for that because we want to understand the threats and to be able to address them.

Mr. ROUDA. And as we've done the troop reduction and the anticipated troop reduction, have you seen an increase in that influence by these outside entities, these foreign countries?

Mr. HELVEY. We see a continued interest, a continued presence, and a continued effort to gain influence. I wouldn't be able to say if it's increased or decreased, but particularly with respect to lethal attacks or violence against U.S. military personnel as we've indicated before that we've had no U.S. combat deaths since we signed the February 29 peace deal with the Taliban.

Mr. ROUDA. Right. But it's not just U.S. personnel; it's also Afghans, and also, support civilians for the U.S. military. But let me ask you, what do you see as the primary objective of Russia, as an example, in using this type of influence within Afghanistan?

Mr. HELVEY. As the Ambassador mentioned, yes, I think it appears that Russia's primary interests is related to expanding its influence in an area that it has historically had influence in. Some of it is related to its concerns over ISIS-K, ISIS Khorasan counterterrorism. Some of it is also related to frustrating the United States.

So, I think, you know, Russia's motivated by a number of interests in Afghanistan, and we've been watching that very carefully.

Mr. ROUDA. And I believe it was recently that H.R. McMaster, the former national security advisor, might have been on 60 Minutes, but he was talking about the alumni, for a lack of a better term, of ISIS and al-Qaida entering the country as foreign fighters. And can you talk a little bit about—and he said this is a much worse situation than what we saw previously. Can you talk about the influx of these foreign fighters and what that can mean to the instability in the region?

Mr. HELVEY. We are obviously watching, monitoring very carefully and vigorously pursuing our counterterrorism objectives. I'm

not familiar with the comments that General McMaster made about that, but what I do know is that al-Qaida and ISIS Khorasan have been under tremendous amount of pressure in Afghanistan. That's one of the areas that we are very much focused in degrading and preventing those terrorist groups, or any others, from operating in Afghanistan from being able to use Afghanistan as a safe haven to plan, plot, and execute attacks against the United States.

Mr. ROUDA. And that leads me to my next question. I would actually like you to elaborate a little bit more on that, while we have—our counterterrorism efforts have had successes in Afghanistan, there's still aspirations within those terrorist organizations within Afghanistan. Can you talk about capabilities and aspirations by them?

Mr. HELVEY. I think it is clear that ISIS-K and al-Qaida and al-Qaida in the Indian subcontinent do have aspirations, and that's one of the things why we want to be able to maintain this pressure on the groups today, but also going back to the negotiations that we had with the Taliban and the commitments that the Taliban undertook with us. We are looking for making sure that the Taliban lives up to its obligations and its commitments to us with respect to counterterrorism. So far, they are not fully compliant, so we have work to be done there. I think we know that. The Taliban knows it.

And, ultimately, what we want to be able to see in Afghanistan is an enduring peace. And in that type of environment, the terrorist organizations, terrorist groups will not be able to operate, will not be able to plan, will not be present. So, that's the focus, and we're looking to get the Taliban to adhere to its commitments.

Mr. ROUDA. Thank you, Mr. Helvey. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

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, if you don't mind, please explain to those watching and to this committee, describe the economic conditions in Afghanistan, please, for a citizen, a resident of Afghanistan, describe the economic conditions.

Mr. KHALILZAD. My impression is that Afghanistan is a very poor country, of course, and the conditions have improved significantly compared to prior to U.S. engagement. As I said before, healthcare has improved, longevity has improved, per capita income has improved, but that's from a very, very low base in a country still extremely poor. Unemployment is high and income is unevenly distributed, but there is a very substantial part of the population. The President of Afghanistan in one of his statements recently said 90 percent of the population lived in poverty. That was his statement, which is worse than it has been sometimes in the past, but so it's a very, very poor country; dependent a lot on foreign assistance, especially American assistance, in terms of paying salaries and meeting its obligations.

Mr. HIGGINS. So, that assessment is reflective of my understanding and our research. And I think it's just important for the

Americans watching to understand just how economically challenged the people of Afghanistan are and, therefore, the importance of our current negotiations seeking a lasting peace and stability within the Nation to allow economic prosperity.

It's in my opinion, and I believe my colleagues on both sides of the aisle would agree, that economic stability can only be achieved if there's some stabilization regarding the elimination of conflicts, and therein lies the Taliban.

So, Ambassador, do you believe that the Taliban can be trusted in negotiations to eliminate terrorist training facilities and the tendency toward allowing terrorist training facilities or encouraging and developing terror training facilities within Afghanistan? Do you think that there's a chance that our peace negotiations can establish an environment within Afghanistan that will not afford the opportunity for terrorists to train and from which to perhaps launch attacks against the United States?

Mr. KHALILZAD. On the first point you made, I agree with you. And with peace and participation by all key forces in the country, there is an opportunity for Afghanistan to have economic development. They have mineral resources. They have a good geography in one way in terms of being a land bridge between Central Asia, which has vast resources and South Asia where the population and the markets. And, therefore, we're looking at with other donors and assistance, investment, trade to stabilize or consolidate any peace agreement.

On your second point, it's not a question of trust, Congressman; it is a question of making it in their interest not to allow that. And that is, the Taliban want to be accepted as a legitimate partner. They want to receive assistance and to have good relations, and we have to make those things that they need conditional and be continuously monitoring and reacting so that they deliver on the commitments that they have made.

They say they have learned the lesson from the past and that they will not allow terrorist to use the territory against us. And we've taken some steps and they've taken some steps, but we need to make it in their interest not to enter—necessarily rely on trusting them.

Mr. HIGGINS. Thank you for that answer.

Mr. Chairman, my time is expired. I yield.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields.

The Chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from Florida, Ms. Wasserman Schultz, for five minutes.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador and Mr. Secretary, while we're right to debate how we responsibly withdraw our troops from Afghanistan, I did as a senior member of the Appropriations Committee, and so I'm also concerned about the future of our continued nonmilitary and civilian assistance to the Afghan Government.

Since 2001, the U.S. has committed hundreds of billions of taxpayer dollars to support Afghan reconstruction, which has been critical to support the livelihoods of the Afghan people and especially Afghan women and girls. Now, I share the Chairman's concerns, both Chairwoman Maloney and Chairman Lynch, but the

U.S.-Taliban agreement reached in February does not explicitly protect the rights and status of Afghan women and girls.

So, Ambassador Khalilzad, will the State Department and USAID continue to provide gender-related programming in Afghanistan regardless of what happens during intra-Afghan negotiations?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, we are committed to support the Afghan Government and both economic assistance and humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan, and that's where we are right now.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Right. But I'm specifically asking you, will the U.S. continue to provide gender-related programming in Afghanistan regardless of what happens during intra-Afghan negotiations?

I'm concerned about the—what I've seen as a reduction in the prioritization of the continued rights and progress of Afghan women and girls. I mean, you're the chief negotiator in Afghanistan. Making sure that—are you having conversations with Secretary Pompeo, Administrator Barsa, Director Richardson, about continuing the absolute necessity to continue these vital programs?

Mr. KHALILZAD. We have said—I've been instructed to say and the Secretary himself has said, while we want to reduce the military costs through these negotiations to achieve peace for the Afghans and our own security, we are committed for the long term in terms of Afghanistan, providing assistance to Afghanistan, and that we anticipate that given that we want the long-term partnership to include assistance, including on issues that you have described. That has been a general directive that I'm operating under.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Is it a priority of the administration to include in the negotiations and the ongoing assistance that we provide to the Afghan people that there is continued advancement and improvement of the rights of Afghan women and girls? I'm not hearing you even say the word "women and girls."

Mr. KHALILZAD. The rights of women and girls and minorities, indeed of all Afghans, but especially those that you mentioned, is a high priority of the United States and that will remain so.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. OK. What about other foreign assistance, development, and reconstruction programs? Should U.S. assistance be sustained regardless of the U.S.-Taliban agreement or ongoing intra-Afghan talk?

In March 2020, Secretary Pompeo announced that the U.S. would withhold a billion dollars in assistance to Afghanistan due to political impasse between leaders in the Afghan Government. I'd like to know where we are in ensuring that we understand what the criteria are for continuing that assistance.

Mr. KHALILZAD. On future assistance, and you also referred to the negotiations, of course, it depends what happens in these negotiations and what decisions the Afghans make. And our decisions regarding assistance will be influenced by the decisions that they make. So, while we would like to have long-term partnership and assistance program to the Afghans, but that will depend obviously on implementation on what the agreement is in terms of our interests and our values, and we'll decide based on that.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. OK. In June, Ambassador, you told reporters, quote: "I think the money is cut and the implementation

is with the Pentagon.” But the Secretary, Secretary Pompeo said the political impasse was, quote, resolved, implying that the reduction in U.S. assistance would not take place.

So, Mr. Helvey, did DOD suspend a billion dollars in assistance from Afghanistan, which I would assume would have been without congressional authorization or notification, or do you still plan to?

Mr. HELVEY. Thank you for that question, ma’am. The Secretary is still making a decision on how he’d like to move forward with a reduction in ASF, Afghan Security Forces, funds for Fiscal Year 2020 per the announcement that Secretary Pompeo made. But if I could just offer that, you know, support for the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces through the Afghan Security Forces fund, or ASF, is now perhaps more important than ever.

You know, we believe that a strong and capable ANDSF focused on combating terrorist threats in defending the Afghan people is going to be our best chance supporting and defending U.S. interests.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Thank you. I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentlewoman yields.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee, Mr. Green, for five minutes.

Mr. Green, you may need to unmute. I know you’re out there.

The Chair now—while we’re trying to find Mr.—while we’re trying to find the communications with Mr. Green, we’re going to call on Ms. Kelly from Illinois for five minutes.

Ms. KELLY. Thank you. Trying to get to my questions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A few months after taking office, President Trump outlined a new strategy for the United States and Afghanistan. During an August 2017 speech, he stated: Conditions on the ground, not arbitrary timetables, will guide our strategy from now on. America’s enemies must never know our plans or believe they can wait us out.

But three years later, Trump seems to be doing exactly the opposite of what he promised to do.

Under the February 29 peace agreement, the United States agreed to reduce the number of troops in Afghanistan from about 13,000 to 8,600 by mid-July 2020, followed by complete withdrawal by May 2021. And despite repeated administration assurances that our withdrawal from Afghanistan is, quote, conditions based, President Trump has allegedly, and I quote: Repeatedly voiced a desire to leave Afghanistan sooner than the timetable laid out in the February 29 peace agreement.

The facts on the ground seem to bear that out. In mid-June, CENTCOM Commander General McKenzie announced that the United States had already met its commitment to reduce U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan to 8,600, almost a month ahead of time. General McKenzie also recently told Voice of America that the U.S. would be down to about 4,500 troops in Afghanistan by late October, which is consistent with the President’s stated aspirations to have fewer than 5,000 troops in Afghanistan by the 2020 election.

Ambassador, what incentive do the Taliban have to meet their commitments under our agreement with them if the U.S. is with-

drawing forces even faster than the timeline detailed in that same agreement?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Thank you, Congresswoman. I want to say that the agreement that I have negotiated to adjust forces downward depending on conditions. And although there have been reductions that you describe, that those reductions has not meant that we cannot do the mission that our forces have. But I believe that once we get to 4,500 or so, as you said, between 4,000 to 5,000, we would have to evaluate before we reduce further, based on the agreement, whether the conditions are such that further reduction will not undermine our ability to carry out the mission that the United States is committed to in Afghanistan.

I believe the Taliban would like us to leave and they think we want to leave. And I've said, true, we would like to leave, but departure depends on the conditions. If they can deliver on the commitment they have made, then we would like to withdraw our forces and bring the troops home. And if we are to stick to that agreement, we need to implement condition-based adjustment downward in forces or adjustment in forces, and I believe we are committed to the terms of the agreement.

Ms. KELLY. Has President Trump or anyone in the White House ever told you that U.S. force levels in Afghanistan should be reduced to a certain level by November 2020 election? And what about Secretary Pompeo? And if they have discussed this with you, what number did they say?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, as you said, the CENTCOM Commander has said what the forces would be by November or in November, which is between 4,000 to 5,000. But I know, I would like to ask David to comment further, that our Defense Department, our military leaders believe that with those forces, the 4,500, we will be able, given the conditions present, able to do the mission, which is go do counterterrorism and to, with allies, help the Afghan forces.

Ms. KELLY. And, Mr. Helvey, has Secretary of Defense Esper ever told you that U.S. force levels in Afghanistan should be reduced to a certain level by November 2020 election?

Mr. HELVEY. Ma'am, what the Secretary of Defense has said to me and publicly is, you know, we're looking to get to between 4,000 and 5,000 troops in Afghanistan by the end of November 2020.

Ms. KELLY. OK. Thank you.

My time's almost up. I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentlelady yields back.

The Chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands, Ms. Plaskett, for five minutes.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding this hearing. I just want to share that I share your view that while the start of the Afghan negotiations is an important step in ending decades of conflict, we cannot assume that it will inevitably lead to peace.

With the U.S. withdrawing forces from Afghanistan, we have lost much of our leverage against the Taliban to hold them to their commitments, especially their promise to sever ties with the terrorist organizations and to continue negotiations with the Afghan Government. In a May 2020 report, the U.N. Security Council found, quote: The Taliban regularly consulted with al-Qaida during

negotiations with the United States and offered guarantees that it would honor their historical ties. Al-Qaida has reacted positively to the agreement with statements from its acolytes celebrating it as a victory for the Taliban cause and less for global militancy.

And then in August, the lead inspector general for Operation Freedom's Sentinel released its quarterly report to Congress, which covers the periods of April 1 to June 30, 2020, several months after the U.S. agreement with the Taliban. And that report found that the Taliban continued a high tempo attack targeting the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and maintained its ties with al-Qaida, conducting some attacks alongside members of al-Qaida's regional affiliate al-Qaida in the Indian subcontinent.

Ambassador, Ambassador Khalilzad, do the Taliban still maintain ties with al-Qaida?

Mr. KHALILZAD. First, Congressman, thank you. You stated that the intra-Afghan negotiations is a positive development. I agree with you. But that wouldn't have been possible without the agreement and without the condition-based adjustment in the force. This is a package.

With regard to terrorism, al-Qaida, 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 have some distance still to go. And whether we go further down beyond that 4,500 will be contingent on them delivering on the commitments that they have made. So, we are in the middle of the process and the picture that is

[inaudible] progress, but it's not completed. Neither has our force reduction—

Ms. PLASKETT. So, Ambassador—

Mr. KHALILZAD.—our withdrawal has not been completed, and the two things are very much alike.

Ms. PLASKETT. So, Ambassador, would you say that that means, sir—excuse me, does that then—would you then say that they still maintain some ties with al-Qaida? Is that what you're saying?

Mr. KHALILZAD. As I said before, in this setting what I can say is that they've taken some positive steps. We look for more steps before we are satisfied, and—

Ms. PLASKETT. So, more steps meaning—

Mr. KHALILZAD.—I believe that once we reach to 4,500, we would do an evaluation of ties and actions that they've taken and make decisions based on that.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. So, the fact that they need to take more steps would lead me to conclude, sir, that you do, in fact, agree that there are still some ties with al-Qaida if more steps need to be taken. Are there benchmarks or indicators that the United States is using to monitor the extent to which the Taliban continue to maintain those relations with al-Qaida or with terrorist groups?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Yes. We are monitoring that very closely. We have an interagency jointly chaired by Defense and state monitoring compliance of Taliban compliance with regard to commitments they have made.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you. We all know—and thank you for your testimony—a lot is at stake here with the start of the intra-Afghan

negotiations. If these discussions fall apart, the Afghan people will suffer and our homeland security could be at risk. While we all hope for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, what do you think will happen if negotiations between the Kabul Government and the Taliban do not succeed?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, we hope that they will succeed, and we will do all that we can to be helpful. This is a historic opportunity for Afghan leaders. The people are tired of war. They want an end to the war. We will protect our interest, of course, in all circumstances, but the Afghan people will suffer if there is no peace agreement.

Ms. PLASKETT. So, the Afghan people will suffer if there's no negotiation, if it's not successful. And as you have said, your government will do what's necessary to protect its interests?

Mr. KHALILZAD. I did.

Ms. PLASKETT. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I yield back.

After almost two decades of war, it would be devastating if the Taliban were able to wrest control of Afghanistan from the Kabul Government and al-Qaida were able to regain the safe haven enjoyed prior to September 11.

I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentlelady yields back.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Kentucky, Mr. Comer, for five minutes.

Mr. COMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you and the ranking member for holding this very important hearing. I don't think I need to remind anyone in here that public opinion on the war in Afghanistan is very strong with an overwhelming majority of Americans now favoring a withdrawal and an end to this very long war.

I have to mention that I'm proud to represent Fort Campbell Military Base in Ft. Campbell, Kentucky. We've had a lot of brave women and men serve, currently serving in Afghanistan, have given their lives, have gotten injured for the cause, and I appreciate their service. I also represent many National Guard units in Kentucky that have had many forces in Afghanistan over the years.

Ambassador, you mentioned success. We all want to see success in Afghanistan. What, sir, is your definition of success and when would that success be achieved?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Thank you, sir. Of course, long-term success is in Afghanistan the end state, which we want the country that's at peace within it and with the neighbors, that doesn't pose a threat to the United States or our allies, and respects the human rights of its citizens and that they end the conflict with each other and there is permanent cease-fire.

But that end—getting to that end will be through stages. And right now, we are at the stage of start of the negotiations among Afghan in regard to the future of Afghanistan. And we have the commitments from both the government and the Taliban on terrorism-related issues to us. So, this is not an act that magically we get to the end point. It goes through process and stages and steps by all sides, and we are in a hopeful moment. There will be difficul-

ties and challenges, as I said, but we are in a better place than we have ever been with regard to peace in Afghanistan in the last 40 years.

So, that's something. That's something to be said about where we are, but agreement or success is not assured and there are spoilers. People who prefer the status quo to a peace agreement because personal wealth, access to money, access to power, these are all important considerations. So, difficulties are there, but I'm hopeful.

Mr. COMER. Mr. Helvey, let me switch gears. And you mentioned, obviously, the goal is to ensure that terrorist cells cannot operate in Afghanistan, and I think that's a bipartisan goal. That's why we went there in the first place. My question is, is there a way to achieve that without having American troops on the ground?

Mr. HELVEY. Thank you for that question. And from our perspective, the mission that we have is to ensure that that doesn't happen. Now, we can do that in a couple of different ways. One, there are things that we do directly in Afghanistan, but I think an important part of this is the work that we're doing with our Afghan partners to build up the capabilities of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces through the contributions that we've made, the work that we've done, not only through the Afghan Security Forces fund, but the work that we're doing with our partners in NATO, to build up those capabilities so that the Afghans themselves are able to pursue shared counterterrorism objectives.

So, that's part of our enduring mission there in Afghanistan is to help ensure that we have a capable and strong Afghan partner that we can work with and that can operate ultimately on its own.

Mr. COMER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentleman yields.

The Chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from Michigan, Ms. Lawrence, for five minutes.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate that women are included in Afghan Government's negotiating team, but I also fear that multiple high-profile attacks against prominent Afghan women in recent months may be a dangerous sign of things to come. In August, Fawzia Koofi, one of Afghanistan's Government female negotiators, was injured in an apparent suicide attempt. During a recent incident that same month, Saba Sahar, an actress and director, was shot in Kabul. And in July, the Taliban reportedly executed a woman prisoner guard, shooting her eight times after abducting her from a bus.

Mr. Ambassador, I serve on the Women's Caucus here in Congress and very active in laws and policy to protect women's rights and freedoms in America. What specific steps are you and the Department of State taking to protect the rights and status of women and girls in Afghanistan?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Thank you very much, Congresswoman. I believe that protecting the rights of Afghan citizens, their human rights, particularly women and minorities, are one of our highest priorities. This speaks to our interest but especially to our values, and we're committed to advancing and protecting those values and those interests.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Can you give me some specific language or programming to ensure that you are achieving that goal?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, specific, for example, was that we insisted that women be included in the negotiating team. I'm speaking about my role, which is as a peace process in negotiations, and women are included in the negotiating team, including Fawzia Koofi that you referred to.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Yes.

Mr. KHALILZAD. And we meet—I have met twice with the Afghan women delegates that are in Doha. And we have said that as negotiations go on, although it's Afghan's own, Afghan led, that our future assistance, support, will depend on what decisions are made. And in those decisions, the rights of women protecting the achievements of the past will be central.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. Mr. Ambassador, have you received any assurances from the Taliban that they intend to protect the right and the status of Afghan women and girls? Have you received from them in a negotiation the actual language or commitment to protect women and girls from the Taliban? Have you received that?

Mr. KHALILZAD. They have spoken on this positively that women have the right to education, to work, to be ministers, but, you know, it's less important—although it's important, but less important what they say, we will see what they do if they become part of a future government. And that, in turn, will affect our policy toward them and toward Afghanistan.

Mrs. LAWRENCE. I want to say, Mr. Chairman, if we are to continue to set a moral example for the rest of the world, we cannot abandon women and girls of Afghanistan's to be oppressed by the Taliban again. And I want to be very clear that we as a government, I feel strongly, that instead of hopes and dreams, that we actually negotiate policies to protect women and girls in our agreements.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. LYNCH. The gentlelady yields back.

I do want, just a matter of clarification, Fawzia Koofi was injured in an assassination attempt; she was not injured in a suicide attempt.

Mr. KHALILZAD. I agree with you.

Mr. LYNCH. Just want to clarify that. And she returned to negotiations afterwards, so pretty heroic in her regard.

The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Malinowski, for five minutes.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador, we've already established at this hearing that the Taliban continues its cooperation with al-Qaida. Have they instructed their followers explicitly to discontinue that cooperation, yes or no?

Mr. KHALILZAD. I have—I need a different setting to comment on that.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. OK. Well, the cooperation we've established continues. Is it even a requirement of our agreement with the Taliban explicitly that they stop their cooperation with al-Qaida?

Mr. KHALILZAD. The condition of the agreement that will affect what we do that they do not host, they do not train, they do not allow fundraising for terrorist groups such as al-Qaida, and that they—

Mr. MALINOWSKI. But the agreement does not—excuse me. The agreement does not say al-Qaida. It simply says terrorist groups.

Mr. KHALILZAD. No. It does say al-Qaida.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. It says al-Qaida with respect—

Mr. KHALILZAD. Such as al-Qaida.

Mr. MALINOWSKI [continuing]. With respect to allowing a tax from Afghan soil to the United States, but it explicitly does not say al-Qaida when it comes to cooperation with terrorist groups. Presumably al-Qaida resisted that.

Mr. KHALILZAD. The categories I just enumerated applies to al-Qaida as well.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. That's not in the agreement. And if you can show me another part of the agreement that explicitly says that, I would appreciate it.

Would it violate the agreement if the Taliban conducted any of those activities with al-Qaida from Pakistani soil, yes or no?

Mr. KHALILZAD. That would—we would regard that as a violation, but the agreement is about Afghanistan.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Correct. So, the agreement does not preclude them from cooperating with al-Qaida to attack Americans from Pakistan. And the Taliban operates on both sides of the—

Mr. KHALILZAD. We would regard that as a violation if they did.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Interesting. Well, I wish it were in the agreement itself.

Would it be violating our agreement with the Taliban if the Taliban stoned a hundred women to death in a soccer stadium, yes or no?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, our agreement has four parts. I don't know we're in accord, so I have to explain this. It's a little complicated.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Well, I've read it and I haven't seen anything that would include that. So, am I right or wrong?

Mr. KHALILZAD. I just think the issues of what happens, the future of Afghanistan and relations between Taliban and other groups and how a future government deals with its population, what they do will affect what we do in terms of our assistance program.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Correct. So, it's not a condition in the agreement, nor would it violate the agreement if the Taliban were, for example, assassinating Afghan Government officials or attacking or trying to assassinate members of Afghan civil society, as the Afghan Government believes they're doing now. Is that correct?

Mr. KHALILZAD. As I said, we are—our objective is to bring Afghans together to negotiate the future in which they can live in peace with each other. And depending on whether they do or not and what policies that government pursues, we will respond to that based on what we do or don't do.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Got it. But I'm talking about the conditions for withdrawal. Because you say in your testimony that our withdrawal is conditions based.

Mr. KHALILZAD. If condition is terrorism—

Mr. MALINOWSKI. So, let me just be very clear. Are there any conditions tied to the withdrawal other than they not shoot at our troops as we leave and not allow attacks on the United States from Afghan soil?

Mr. Helvey, are there any other conditions tied to the withdrawal in the agreement? Yes or no?

Mr. HELVEY. The agreement, as the Ambassador is saying, does specify not only do they have commitments for counterterrorism and our expectations for which they're not fully compliant, there is moving forward in intra-Afghan negotiations or the Afghan peace negotiations, which they have, there are specific provisions not attacking our forces, but we do have expectations of a reduction in violence, and the violence that we are seeing today is too high—

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Understood. I'm glad that that is our expectation, but, again, the Taliban have made no commitments in that regard. And, look, we haven't just promised to withdraw fully. We've also pressured the Afghan Government to release Taliban prisoners, terrorists, which they have done. We've promised to lift sanctions against Taliban leaders. If we're going to leave, and many Americans want us to leave, why give them these gifts on the way out?

Mr. KHALILZAD. Well, because we just don't want to leave, because we could have left. We didn't need anybody's permission to leave. It is because we want a peace agreement to end the war in Afghanistan, but that's not what the Afghan people want.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Well, that's not a condition of our—

Mr. KHALILZAD. It's difficult—well, we have four elements in the agreement, as I said, and that's a package which has intra-Afghan negotiation and a permanent cease-fire. And without those difficult decisions—and I know we're not happy about those release of prisoners, but those difficult decisions were necessary to get to where we are where peace negotiations can start. And we will decide based on what happens in the peace negotiations and what they do on the terrorism front.

Mr. MALINOWSKI. Well, let me just say in conclusion, I hear you saying things like the Taliban have learned their lesson and the Taliban want good relations with the outside world and, sir, I have to say, it strikes me as incredibly naive.

This is a totalitarian movement that seeks power in Afghanistan. Not peace, but power. And to base our hopes on—to base our policy on the hope that somehow it has changed its nature, while providing all of these concessions up front, and the only thing that they promise to do is to stop shooting at us as we leave, I think—look, we're all for peace, and I understand people want to leave, but I think what you're selling us is not peace; it is a fairy tale to make us feel better about leaving Afghanistan.

And with that, I yield.

Mr. KHALILZAD. Now, Mr. Chairman, we're not giving an accounting on the words of the Talibs. The agreement is condition based on our management if we are to implement the agreement with them to see behavior, just not words. And I also would like to say that among the alternatives that we face, this is the best available, given the constraints and alternatives available.

Thank you.

Mr. LYNCH. In closing, I want to thank—hearing no further questions, in closing, I want to thank the panelists. Thank you, Ambassador, thank you, Mr. Secretary, for your testimony here today. I want to commend my colleagues for their very active participation

on this important discussion. This is certainly a momentous time for Afghanistan and the region, and a moment of great consequence.

With that, 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 I ask if there are further questions, that the witnesses to please respond as promptly as you are able.

This hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:07 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

