

U.S. POLICY ON AFGHANISTAN

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS

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U.S. POLICY ON AFGHANISTAN

TUESDAY, APRIL 27, 2021

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:35 p.m., in room SDG-50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Bob Menendez, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Menendez [presiding], Cardin, Shaheen, Coons, Murphy, Kaine, Booker, Schatz, Van Hollen, Risch, Romney, Portman, Young, and Hagerty.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. BOB MENENDEZ, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY

The CHAIRMAN. This hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee will come to order.

Ambassador Khalilzad, thank you for joining us today. Thank you for your service to our country, and we appreciate your being here today.

The Biden administration has made its decision to draw down from Afghanistan by September 11th of this year, bringing to a close the U.S. military presence in the country. I believe that it is the responsibility of this committee to examine the implications of this decision for U.S. national security interests in the region and what it means for the people of Afghanistan. The issues confronting the future of U.S. policy in Afghanistan fall squarely in the jurisdiction of this committee, and I urge my colleagues to remain focused on Afghanistan, especially after the last U.S. service member leaves.

The departure of U.S. troops does not mean the end of U.S. engagement. In fact, it may require even more attention from the State Department, aid workers, and U.S. policymakers. After the departure of the Soviets from Afghanistan, the international community largely moved on. Afghanistan fell into civil war in the years that followed, and al-Qaeda and other terror groups gained traction. Addressing these problems was not a priority for the United States and the result was 9/11. I urge us and the international community not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Fulsome engagement by the United States will be necessary in the years ahead to ensure that our interests are met.

I appreciate the desire to get our troops out of Afghanistan. That is something that I support. But as I have said all along, how we withdraw and what political arrangement is left in our wake matters deeply. The messaging from the Administration since the an-

nouncement has been limited. Our troops are leaving at some point before September 11th. I got that, but what is the plan for the path forward?

For me, there are two fundamental questions at play. First, can we effectively conduct counterterrorism operations without a presence inside Afghanistan? The power of terror groups has eroded significantly over the past 20 years, but the terrorism landscape is not static. How will we gather the intelligence necessary to keep these groups at bay? Second, do we have leverage to ensure that a power-sharing agreement in Afghanistan broadly reflects the will of all of the Afghan people, including women, youth, and minority groups? Our leverage seems quite limited, to me, at this point, but we must do everything we can to ensure that the Afghan Government is in the best position possible to succeed in these negotiations.

Third, given the uncertain security situation in the country, I think we also need to consider contingency planning. If the Taliban were to come back to power, the reality for Afghanistan's women and girls, I think, would be devastating. In that regard, I want to submit for the record a joint statement from the Afghan parliament's Standing Commission for Human Rights, Civil Society, and Women's Affairs, and the Parliamentary Caucus on Women's Role in the Peace Process. The statement urges continued U.S. diplomatic and assistance support post the drawdown of troops, and I ask unanimous consent that this important statement from those women be included in the record of this hearing.

Without objection, it is so included.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The information referred to above can be found in the "Additional Material Submitted for the Record" section at the end of this hearing.]

The CHAIRMAN. On top of the challenge of the reality for Afghanistan's women and girls, my question is, what is the Administration's plan to address that? Many Afghans who work for the U.S. will face pressure and attacks from the Taliban. Does the Administration have a robust Special Immigrant Visa and refugee asylum plan in place to rapidly process what I think may be thousands of Afghans who may need to leave the country?

This committee has played a leading role in conducting oversight with respect to the Afghan peace process. I led a legislative effort to enhance congressional oversight of the peace process, a framework that is now law. The Biden administration has blown through a certification deadline and a reporting deadline established under the law. We don't write laws and expect that they will be ignored. The February 29th arrangement with the Taliban, however flawed, is still the only arrangement on record with this group. Its implementation should still matter, especially in relation to the Taliban's counterterrorism commitments. This missing certification and report are necessary for Congress to conduct oversight of this issue, and the Administration needs to deliver them immediately.

As the Taliban plans its strategy with respect to negotiation with the Government, I want to be crystal clear. I don't believe under any circumstances that the United States Senate support—will support assistance for Afghanistan, especially under the World Bank's program which provides budget support, if the Taliban has

taken a governing role that ends civil society advances and rolls back women's rights. I think the Congress of the United States, it is rather clear, controls the appropriations of assistance abroad, and I don't believe we will bend on this point. Moreover, I want to personally advocate for the U.N. and U.S., to maintain sanctions on the Taliban if women's rights are trampled under their leadership.

The choice for the Taliban is clear. The only path to international legitimacy is through the democratic process and a peace deal that serves the interests of the Afghan people. My message to the Taliban is this. If you want to play a role in governance and avoid international pariah status, then seriously pursue a peace deal, participate in the democratic process, and treat women as equal members of society. This is the only way the world will see you as legitimate.

In closing, these are very difficult issues and there are no good options, but now that the President has made his decision, we need to come together to focus on the implications and chart a path forward that is in our interests. I want the committee to be deeply engaged in that process, and I expect consistent and substantial consultation by the Administration at every step along the way.

And with that, I recognize the ranking member, Senator Risch.

**STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES RISCH,
U.S. SENATOR FROM IDAHO**

Senator RISCH. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, like many others, I have deep concerns about the Administration's rush for the exits in Afghanistan. Most everyone agrees that we need to seek a reasonable end of the war there and that our troops should come home quick—as quickly as possible. However, a U.S. military drawdown should only occur in a way that safeguards our national security interests, preserves our hard-fought gains, and protects the homeland. I hope I am wrong, but I am concerned that the Administration's decision may result in a Taliban offensive that topples the Government. Indeed, it seems that most of the people who work in this space think that that is where this is headed. It would eliminate—that would eliminate any chance for a negotiated peace, place at risk the rights of Afghan women and minorities and produce staggering numbers of refugees, and result in a safe haven for terrorists who wish to attack America.

Our departure from Afghanistan will not improve the conditions on the ground. The sobering reality is that the Afghanistan-Pakistan region remains a dangerous place. Despite some argument that the threat has diminished, there is a consensus that unless we continue to apply pressure to these terror networks operating there, we will see a threat against the United States in short order. Of the 72 U.S.-designated terrorist groups globally, 15 reside in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, and many of these groups have stated their intent to attack Americans in the United States. We cannot trust the Taliban with America's security. Worse, the incipient counterterrorism plan potentially depends on Afghanistan's neighbors, who have a long history of supporting and harboring the Taliban.

The only responsible way forward is to retain an effective U.S. counterterrorism capability, insist on conditions-based reduction in

troops, and demand the Taliban's compliance with a counterterrorism framework. In my discussions with military leaders, they have been clear that it is not easy to conduct counterterrorism from afar. We cannot commute to a fight without significantly increasing the risk to our forces. The distances are great. We lose important human intelligence networks, and we lack suitable basing agreements in neighboring countries. My fear is that Afghanistan will become a dangerous blind spot.

In addition to counterterrorism concerns, an American departure puts Afghan women, minorities, and girls under serious threat of losing their hard-earned rights. Over the last 20 years, we have seen remarkable gains in human rights, reflected by a dramatic increase in the number of girls in school and women in positions of authority. The Taliban's view on these issues are clear as we saw during their rule in the 90s and have seen with the assassinations of female journalists and medical workers in recent months. For our part, any congressional approval of further assistance to Afghanistan should and must depend on the shape of the Government there and its adherence to counterterrorism commitments and human rights.

The Secretary of State recently announced an additional \$300 million in assistance for Afghanistan. While these programs are rightly focused on civil society, anti-corruption, women's rights, and economic improvement, I have serious concerns about oversight—any oversight of these dollars. With the departure of U.S. troops and the potential for Afghanistan to descend into violence, providing oversight of our investment will be difficult at best. There is also the matter of safeguarding our embassy and diplomats. State tells us that planning is underway, and I look forward to those consultations. I remain very skeptical of our security on the ground.

To our men and women in uniform, our diplomats, aid workers, and NATO allies, and other partners, you have borne an enormous weight since the attacks on September 11th, 2001. You have nobly served, and all of us owe you and your families an incredible debt of gratitude. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Senator James Risch follows:]

Prepared Statement of Senator James Risch

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, like many others, I have deep concerns about the Administration's rush for the exits in Afghanistan.

Most everyone agrees that we need to seek a responsible end to the war there, and that our troops should come home as quickly as possible. However, a U.S. military drawdown should only occur in a way that safeguards our national security interests, preserves our hard fought gains, and protects the homeland.

I hope I'm wrong, but I'm concerned that the Administration's decision may result in a Taliban offensive that topples the Government. Indeed it seems that most of the people who work in this space think that that's where this is headed. That would eliminate any chance for a negotiated peace, places at risk the rights of Afghan women and minorities, produces staggering numbers of refugees, and results in a safe haven for terrorists who wish to attack America.

Our departure from Afghanistan will not improve the conditions on the ground. The sobering reality is that the Afghanistan-Pakistan region remains a dangerous place. Despite some argument that the threat has diminished, there is a consensus that unless we continue to apply pressure to these terror networks operating there, we'll see a threat against the United States in short order.

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In my discussions with military leaders, they've been clear that it is not easy to conduct counterterrorism from afar. We cannot commute to this fight without significantly increasing the risk to our forces. The distances are great, we lose important human intelligence networks, and we lack suitable basing agreements in neighboring countries. My fear is that Afghanistan will become a dangerous blind spot.

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There is also the matter of safeguarding our embassy and diplomats. State tells us that planning is underway and I look forward to those consultations. I remain very skeptical of our security on the ground.

To our men and women in uniform, our diplomats, aid workers, and NATO allies and other partners—you have borne an enormous weight since the attacks on September 11. You have nobly served, and all of us owe you and your families an incredible debt of gratitude.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Risch. For the information of members, it is the chair's intention to work through these votes. We will rotate out in terms of making sure that we are on the floor to cast votes on these nominations. So I will turn to Ambassador Khalilzad for his testimony, then we will start a round of 5 minutes, and we will rotate through. Whoever has not voted, I would urge you to consider doing that now so when the time comes, you are free to cast your questions when—free to—when your turn is up, I should say.

With that, Ambassador, thank you very much again for being here, and we look forward to your comments.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE ZALMAY KHALILZAD, SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONCILIATION, DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON, DC

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of this committee. I am grateful to be here today to discuss America's strategy in Afghanistan.

As you know, President Biden has announced his decision to begin the withdrawal of remaining U.S. forces from Afghanistan by May 1, and to conclude before September 11. This decision was reached after an extensive review and clear-eyed focused on facts

on the ground. As the President laid out in his speech on April 14, he made the decision based on four judgments. First, our original objective in Afghanistan after 9/11 was to root out al-Qaeda there. That movement has been significantly degraded and its leader, Osama Bin Laden, brought to justice. Second, the world has changed since 2001. The terror threat, including from al-Qaeda, is now geographically dispersed in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

We now face new urgent challenges. As the President has said, we must fight the battles for the next 20 years, not the last 20. Continuing with the policy of the past two decades in Afghanistan is no longer sensible. It would entail high ongoing costs without commensurate outcomes. The agreement in place provided for the U.S. and coalition forces to withdraw by May 1 of this year, reason number four. To reverse course would have meant a return to war with the Taliban, a war that would have continued indefinitely. The same agreement opened the door to historic inter-Afghan negotiations. This, too, would have been undermined.

To be clear, there is no option to continue the status quo. The President determined that it was not in our national interest to maintain U.S. troops in Afghanistan. In the coming months, we will withdraw our troops responsibly, deliberately, and safely in coordination with our NATO allies and operational partners. We have made it clear to the Taliban that if they attack us as we draw down, we will defend ourselves forcefully.

We will reconfigure our counterterrorism capabilities to ensure our ability to monitor and address terrorism threats emanating from Afghanistan. We will maintain substantial assets in the region and will continue to work closely with Afghan security forces and regional partners. We will hold the Taliban accountable to their commitments to prevent al-Qaeda or any other terrorist group from using Afghanistan as a base for attacks against us. If a terrorist threat does emerge, we will be ready.

Even as we withdraw our military forces, we will continue our diplomatic support for the peace process and urge all parties—Afghans and international stakeholders—to remain focused on securing a political settlement and a permanent ceasefire. It is time for all concerned to abandon the negative patterns of behavior that have complicated the pursuit of peace. For our part, the United States will support a continuing partnership with Afghanistan, and our allies and partners have indicated that they will do the same. With the support of Congress, our partnership with Afghanistan will entail the continuation of substantial civilian and security assistance.

Our security assistance will primarily support sustainment and functionality of some 300,000 Afghan military and police personnel. They are a vital asset for their country and deserve our support. We intend to maintain our embassy and will continue to provide development assistance for more economic investment, and advocate to preserve the gains for minorities and for women, including their meaningful participation in the ongoing negotiations and their appropriate representation throughout society.

This mission is important to me personally. I was fortunate to play a small role as ambassador to Afghanistan in the early 2000s in encouraging the adoption of constitutional provisions that

upheld the rights of women. More recently, I fought for the inclusion of women on the Islamic Republic's negotiating team. They have directly and effectively engaged the Taliban at the negotiating table, challenging Taliban stereotypes and demonstrating, by their presence and skill, the important social advances that have taken place in Afghanistan since 2001. We are likewise pressing for women's inclusion in any future peace efforts.

Secretary Blinken and I want you to know that I have repeatedly demanded the Taliban release of Mark Frerichs, and enlisted the support of senior Qatari and Pakistani officials on his behalf. As the Taliban seek to end their chapter of animosity with the United States, they must know to move forward, they cannot continue to hold an American hostage.

Let me turn to the critical effort to reach a political settlement. It has been evident for years that there is no military solution to what is now a 4-year conflict in Afghanistan. We have been pursuing intensive diplomacy with both sides and with a wide array of non-Afghan stakeholders to accelerate talks. We have shared proposals to help catalyze and advance the process. Leaders from across the political spectrum in Afghanistan have come together to formulate suggestions in response to our proposals and in preparations for the next phase of the peace process. This is a sign that the process is working.

We welcome the decision by the United Nations to play an enhanced role. Together with Qatar and the United Nations, Turkey is ready to host a high-level meeting between the Islamic Republic and the Taliban in Istanbul. The opportunities are in place that international will to assist is robust, and it is now up to Afghan Islamic Republic leaders and the Taliban to seize the moment.

This committee well understands the special role of Pakistan. We have urged Pakistan's leaders to exercise their considerable leverage over the Taliban to reduce violence and support a negotiated settlement. Pakistan has publicly stated that they do not support a military takeover by the Taliban. I believe they understand that their country, too, will face grave consequences in the event of a return to a wider civil war. They have expressed support for a peace process in Afghanistan.

In my discussion with the Taliban, I have painted the choice between two very different futures for them. They can embrace a negotiated path to peace, make the transition from a violent insurgency to a political movement, and join their fellow Afghans in a nation that enjoys respect in the global community. But if they obstruct a negotiated settlement and instead pursue a military takeover, they will be opposed not only by the Afghan Republic, but by the United States and our allies and partners in the region. They will face isolation, regional opposition, sanctions, and international opprobrium. There is remarkable consensus within the region and the international community against a military takeover by the Taliban.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, thank you for this opportunity to update you. I want to state in closing that the United States investment in Afghanistan over the past two decades, made possible by you and your constituencies, has been enormous and honorable. We have given blood and treasure to the efforts to stabilize and de-

velop a society far from our own, not just because terrorists planned 9/11 there, but because we, as a nation, also cared about the plight of millions of Afghan women and girls, about the fledgling civil society that has grown powerful and independent, and about peace for millions of families there in cities and villages we now know well.

Afghanistan has been transformed. We want our investments and sacrifices to have been worthwhile, and if we navigate the coming months appropriately, I believe that this can be—this can happen. In the end, however, it will be up to the Afghans to seize their opportunities. Our troop deserve to come home, and Afghanistan deserves a chance to find its own way forward with help and encouragement from its friends, led by the United States.

Thank you again, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad follows:]

Prepared Statement of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished members of the Committee. I am grateful to be here today to discuss America's strategy in Afghanistan. As you know, President Biden has announced his decision to begin the withdrawal of remaining U.S. forces from Afghanistan by May 1 and to conclude before September 11. This decision was reached after an extensive review of the United States' mission in that country over the past 20 years, of the facts on the ground there currently, of the options available to us now and their likely consequences, and of the global situation and challenges our country needs to address with regard to both state and non-state actors.

As the President laid out in his speech on April 14, he made the decision based on four judgments:

1. Our original objective in Afghanistan after 9/11 was to root out al Qaeda there. That movement has been significantly degraded and its infamous leader Osama bin Laden brought to justice.
2. The world has changed since 2001. The terror threat, including from al Qaeda, is geographically dispersed, in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Moreover, we have urgent challenges in front of us: an increasingly assertive China, defeating the pandemic, and strengthening alliances to confront cyber threats and manage emerging technologies. We must fight the battles for the next 20 years, not the last 20.
3. Continuing with the policy of the past two decades in Afghanistan is no longer sensible. It would entail high ongoing costs without commensurate outcomes.
4. An agreement was already in place providing the U.S. and coalition forces would withdraw by May 1 of this year. To reverse course would have meant an inexorable return to war with the Taliban—a war that would have continued indefinitely.

To be clear, there was no option to continue the status quo. The President determined that it was not in our national interest to maintain U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

In the coming months we will withdraw our troops responsibly, deliberately, and safely, in coordination with our NATO allies and operational partners. We have made clear to the Taliban that if they attack us as we draw down, we will defend ourselves forcefully.

We will reconfigure our counterterrorism capabilities to ensure our ability to monitor and address terrorism threats emanating from Afghanistan. We will maintain substantial assets in the region and will continue to work closely with our Afghan security force and regional partners. We will hold the Taliban accountable to their commitments to prevent al Qaeda or any terrorist group from using Afghanistan as a base for attacks against us. If a terrorist threat does emerge, we will be ready.

Even as we withdraw our military forces, we will continue our diplomatic support for the peace process, and urge all parties concerned to remain strongly focused on encouraging and helping the Afghans secure a peace dividend while avoiding some of the negative patterns of recent past.

Afghan themselves—leaders and influential personages on all sides—must know that as responsible national figures, they should craft a joint way forward instead of jockeying for individual or group power. It is incumbent on all leaders in Afghanistan—those who've had the privilege to be educated, the business-minded, the young people who make up over 60 percent of the population, the farmers—all need to focus on rebuilding a stable post-war economy. And the region and the world need to stay engaged with advice and assistance.

For our part, the United States will support a continuing partnership with Afghanistan, and our allies and partners have indicated that they will do the same. With the support of Congress, our partnership with Afghanistan will entail the continuation of substantial civilian assistance and security assistance through the Afghan Security Forces Fund. This primarily supports sustainment of combat operations and related functions by 300,000 Afghan military and police personnel: they are a vital asset for their country and worth our investment.

We intend to maintain our embassy and will continue to provide development assistance, promote economic investment, and advocate to preserve the gains for minorities and for women, including their meaningful participation in the ongoing negotiations and their appropriate representation throughout society. This mission is important to me personally. I was fortunate to play a small role, as Ambassador to Afghanistan in the early 2000s, in encouraging the adoption of constitutional provisions that upheld the rights of women. More recently, I fought for the inclusion of women on the Islamic Republic's negotiating team; they have directly and effectively engaged the Taliban at the negotiating table, challenging Taliban stereotypes and demonstrating by their presence and skill the important social advances that have taken place in Afghanistan since 2001. We are likewise pressing for women's inclusion in any future peace efforts.

It is important to me and to the Secretary that you know that I have repeatedly demanded the release of Mark Frerichs, who has been held by the Taliban since February 2020. I have also enlisted the support of senior Qatari and Pakistani officials on his behalf. As the Taliban seek to end this chapter of animosity with the United States, they must know they will not have it as long as they hold an American hostage.

We will renew our commitment to a results-focused peace process between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the Taliban. It has been evident now for years that there is no military solution to a conflict in Afghanistan that has now gone on for over 40 years. A negotiated settlement within the country itself, supported by the regional powers, is the only path to sustainable stability.

We have been pursuing intensive diplomacy with both sides and with a wide array of additional stakeholders to encourage the sides to accelerate the peace process and make progress toward a political settlement and permanent and comprehensive ceasefire. We have shared proposals on how to achieve a peace settlement, in order to help catalyze and advance the process, and these have generated useful discussions. Leaders from across the political spectrum in Afghanistan have come together to formulate suggestions in response to these proposals and in preparation for the next phase of the peace process. This is a sign that the process is working.

The United Nations has agreed to play an enhanced role in supporting the peace process, leveraging their expertise on ceasefires, process design, and constitutional reform. We view the U.N.'s continuing role as central to the Afghan peace process. Together with Qatar and the U.N., Turkey is ready to host a high-level dialogue between the Islamic Republic and the Taliban in Istanbul. The opportunities are in place, the international will to assist is robust, and it is now up to Afghan Government leaders and the Taliban to seize the moment.

As this Committee well understands, Pakistan has a special role to play in supporting peace, and senior U.S. officials and I have been in close touch with Pakistan's leaders over the past several weeks. We have urged Pakistan's leaders to exercise their considerable leverage over the Taliban to reduce violence and support a negotiated settlement. Pakistan's leaders have emphasized publicly and to U.S. officials that they do not support a military takeover by the Taliban. I believe they understand that not only Afghanistan, but their country too will face grave consequences in the event of a return to a wider civil war.

The Taliban must recognize that they have a choice between two very different futures: They can embrace a negotiated path to peace, make the transition from a violent insurgency to a political movement, and join their fellow Afghans in a nation that enjoys respect in the global community. But if they obstruct a negotiated settlement and instead pursue a military takeover, they will be opposed not only by the United States but by our allies, partners, and the region. They will face isolation, regional opposition, sanctions, and international opprobrium. There is remarkable

consensus within the region and the international community against a military takeover by the Taliban.

Let me reiterate that even as we withdraw our forces in the coming months, the United States will remain a steadfast partner of Afghanistan. Our vision is for peace, development and regional connectivity, trade and cooperation. We will continue to provide support as Afghans defend their country, and we will maintain our efforts to support a negotiated settlement and a comprehensive ceasefire.

Thank you for this opportunity to update you. You have my assurances I will do all I can to maximize the prospects for peace in Afghanistan. I want to state in closing that what the United States, what you and your constituencies have done for Afghanistan over the past two decades, has been enormous and honorable. Our men and women in uniform have sacrificed their lives, and thousands now live with permanent physical and other disabilities as a result of their service. We have given hundreds of billions to this effort to stabilize and develop a society far from our own, not just because terrorists planned 9/11 there, but also because we cared about the plight of millions of women and girls, about a fledgling civil society that has grown powerful and independent, and about peace for millions of other families there, in cities and villages we now know well. We want our investments and sacrifices to have been worthwhile, and if we navigate the coming months appropriately, I believe that this can happen. In the end, however, it will be up to the Afghans to seize their opportunities. Our troops deserve to come home, and Afghanistan deserves a chance to find its way forward, with help and encouragement from its friends.

Thank you again, and I look forward to your questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Ambassador. With that, we will start a round of 5-minute questions.

What do you think the Taliban has been fighting for over the course of the past 20 years? What is their goal?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. They have argued that they are fighting to get the international forces—the foreign forces out of their country, and that they regard those forces as occupation forces.

The CHAIRMAN. Mm-hmm. Would you agree that their vision has been to establish an emirate that would return Afghanistan to the brand of governance seen before 9/11?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. That has been a stated vision, but they have—also have said that they have changed since the dark days when they ruled Afghanistan in the 1990s.

The CHAIRMAN. With their desire to establish an emirate still their vision, if that is the case, what makes you think that giving them—that they will give up from their stated vision now that U.S. forces are leaving? Do you really think, for example, that the incentives of international legitimacy, lifting of sanctions, international assistance, will be all it takes for them to peacefully participate in the democratic process?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. I think those are factors they say are important, but more important is that they cannot have peace in the foreseeable future, and they will have a long war confronting them because their fellow Afghans, those that support the Republic, for example, do not support the restoration of an emirate or the emirate back in Afghanistan.

The CHAIRMAN. No, I know their fellow Afghans don't, but they do, and, militarily, they seem to have already covered a good part of the country. I know that there is rising violence in Kabul, and we are far from a withdrawal. So I am trying to understand why they are suddenly going to change the dynamics of what their stated goal is when they will have less of a consequence to meet—a challenge to meet them as they try to pursue that goal. And so that is one of the challenges I have in trying to understand what we are doing here.

The Department was required to provide a report on Taliban compliance with the February 29th agreement. In my view, they have already violated that agreement by maintaining ties to al-Qaeda. This report was due on April the 1st. When will the Department submit this report?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. I understand what you are saying, Mr. Chairman. I think your staff and the Department are in discussions. I will take this message again back to them. I believe that work is underway to address your concern.

The CHAIRMAN. I hope it is, Ambassador. You know, we do not write provisions of law to have them ignored. I held the previous Administration to the same standards as the ranking member. I would intend to hold this Administration to the same standards. The purpose of the information is to be able to be informed so that members can make decisions on what U.S. policy should be. So I wrote this provision of the NDAA to gain insight as Congress conducts oversight of the agreement, and I didn't write the provision with the expectation that the Administration would ignore it.

I expect the Department to comply with the law, and I hope that you will work to make sure this compliance takes place from your role since obviously they will call upon you for the insights to make that report. So do I have your commitment to work to try to get it to us sooner rather than later?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. As I said, Senator, we understand the importance of what you have stated, and we are working with your team to respond very quickly.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, let's put it this way. If I don't get the report, there will be no authorizations forthcoming from this committee.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Understood.

The CHAIRMAN. So we'll get the report. That's not the way I like to operate, but if that's—if we are going to be ignored, then there has to be a consequence. Do I have your commitment to brief this committee after the next round of negotiations between the Taliban and Afghan Government?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. I am always available, Senator. I have sought opportunities to be—to brief. When it has not happened, I have regretted that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. I will take that as your answer is yes.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. From my side, yes.

The CHAIRMAN. Yes. Okay. I understand. Is the State Department going to significantly increase its Special Immigrant Visa slots for Afghans seeking to flee the country?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. We understand the importance of this issue. We are working on a plan, and we will work with Congress to respond to it. I am sure many Afghans with skills would like to stay in their country and help the country develop, but we understand our responsibilities in this regard and will consult with you. A plan is being developed.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I hope the Department has—this is the last point I will make, and I will turn to the ranking member—I hope it has a very vigorous Special Immigrant Visa program. I hope that they will want to stay in their country as well and contribute to the nation's future. But we don't have a good history of taking care

of those who sided with us in conflict and making sure that if they feel they cannot sustain themselves in their country or are unwilling to do so, that we take care of them. And that sends a global message: don't fight with the Americans because when they're finished, they leave you behind. That's not something we can tolerate.

Senator Risch? Both Senator Risch and I need to vote. So have you voted, Jeanne, on this first—

Senator SHAHEEN. Yes.

The CHAIRMAN. You have? Okay. Okay. So I have in the order of who's here, Senator Kaine is next, then Senator Shaheen. So shall we go that—

Senator KAINE. Mr. Chair, would you want to go to a Republican just to alternate since you—

The CHAIRMAN. I can do that as well. I am sorry. So Senator Kaine, then—oh, no, I am sorry. Senator Romney—I forgot Senator Risch held for the moment—and then Senator Kaine, and I should be back by then, but if not, Senator Shaheen.

Senator ROMNEY. Ambassador, it is a wonderful thing to see you again, and I express my deep appreciation for the effort you have made over so many years to bring peace and stability to the nation of Afghanistan and to the people there, and particularly to the women there. It is a debt of gratitude our Nation owes to you.

I am also mindful of the sacrifice of the sons and daughters who have lost their lives or lost loved ones in the conflict in Afghanistan. It breaks my heart to think of these soldiers and the blood that was shed, and yet I recognize that as they carried out their responsibilities to serve our country in a foreign place and, nonetheless, were injured or lost life there, that they believed that the things they were fighting for were in the best interests of their fellow brothers and sisters across the world, and were in the best interest of the United States of America. And I think it is important that we understand what their sacrifice brought to the people of Afghanistan and to the people of the United States of America.

And I will begin with a question by asking, are you satisfied with the negotiating process that was carried out between yourself and the Taliban? Do they—the agreements reached, were they honored in large measure, or do you believe that we were not dealt with in a fair manner in our—in your negotiations with the Taliban?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, thank you very much, Senator Romney. It is a great pleasure and honor to see you again. Under the circumstances, with the desire of the United States to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, the agreement that we struck with the Taliban was the best possible under the circumstances. And with regard to the implementation of the agreement, I would say that the inter-Afghan negotiations, which is foundational for the future of that country, is one key consequence of that, and those have started. And the Taliban, a second part, have agreed not to attack the coalition forces after that agreement was signed. That has been honored. We have had, thank goodness, no fatalities since that agreement was signed over a year ago.

Number three, there was an agreement by the Taliban not to allow the territory that they control to be used for plotting, and planning, and carrying out attacks against the United States and its allies. That has been a positive development, but we are not sat-

isfied. We would like to see more on that, and I can discuss that in a different format in greater detail. But there are other areas in which we are less satisfied. The level of violence has been too high compared to what we expected to happen. So positive, but also some areas of concern that have remained.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you, Ambassador. What do you predict—I know you are not going to want to make a prediction, but do you predict that there will be an agreement reached between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban, and stability or relative stability and—or do you instead see an imminent collapse, that as soon as we are gone, that the military runs, that the Government folds, that the Taliban takes over and we find herself in the same position of the Afghanistan we looked at 20 years ago? Which do you see, and if there is a different forecast, I am happy to hear that.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Sure. I do not personally believe that there will be an imminent collapse. I know there are others who have had a different view. I believe the choice that the Afghans face is between a negotiated political settlement or a long war, and this is a choice that the Afghan leaders make for the sake of their current generation of Afghans and future generations. I hope they will learn from the mistakes of the past, such as when the Soviets withdrew, that rather than coming together, agreeing that by force—the record is that one party has tried to impose its will on others—has not produced results, stability, progress, that they come to an agreement on a formula where they can compete and cooperate.

That opportunity is once again confronting them, and it is up to them. The opportunity is there. Our support is there. The support of the rest of the international community is largely there.

Senator ROMNEY. Iran as well?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Although I am, of course, very skeptical of Iran and its policies, but in the case of Afghanistan, since the announcement by the President, they have expressed support for a political settlement. They said they are opposed to a Taliban takeover, and they are opposed to the restoration of the emirate, as is the case with China, with Russia, with Pakistan, with all their Afghanistan neighbors, and, of course, with their allies.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. Senator?

Senator KAINE. We are being really polite to each other on this side. I think actually Senator Coons was here before I was, and so he would probably be next in order. Senator Shaheen, do you agree with me on that?

Senator SHAHEEN. [Off audio.]

Senator COONS. If you would—thank you, Senator Kaine, very much. Would you please check and see if Senator Cardin is available online or not? Is Mr. Cardin—is Senator Cardin available?

[No response.]

Senator COONS. Cardin, party of one? Cardin, party of one?

[No response.]

Senator COONS. May I proceed with questioning?

Senator KAINE. Yes.

Senator COONS. Thank you, Senator Kaine. Thank you to Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, for holding this hearing, and to Ambassador Khalilzad for your dedication and service and engagement on this challenging strategic issue. I am glad this committee is exercising its oversight role in examining the Administration's decision to bring America's longest war to a responsible end. I have heard from hundreds and hundreds of Delawareans over recent years who want our troops to come home, and I look forward to consulting closely with the Administration, with members of this committee, our allies and partners, and the Afghan people to do our best to support the peace process, and to find a responsible path forward.

As the chair of the appropriations subcommittee that funds our foreign assistance programs, I am concerned about our ability to successfully implement what have been, for 20 years, robust assistance programs to support the development of Afghanistan and the Afghan people, particularly if violence increases after withdrawal, particularly if the Taliban do not keep some commitments that they have made. Speaking for myself, I will continue to support robust development assistance for the Afghan Government and the Afghan people, but not if there is a takeover by the Taliban and they break some basic commitments to respecting the role of women, and fundamental human rights, and a democratic process.

So, Ambassador, how can we ensure the viability, the success of our ongoing development programs of our investment in the Afghan Government and the Afghan people, and what could this committee and the Appropriations Committee do to be most relevant and helpful?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, thank you very much, Senator. I believe that the Afghans might be also watching these hearings. The message of commitment to them, that we renew a partnership with them and no direct military presence, but a commitment to them to development assistance, humanitarian assistance, and even security assistance to the armed forces of Afghanistan will be robust. That is what we would like to have, but, of course, it depends on the conditions and the performance by the Afghans.

I believe that the development assistance which Talibs say they also want from the United States provides us with leverage to incentivize, but, as you say, and I support that, it would be condition based depending on—that the Afghans will make their own choices, and the United States, in turn, will respond to that and makes its decisions. They know there is no ambiguity, Senator, I can assure you, based on conversations that we have had with the Taliban or with the other Afghans, as to where we stand, what we would like to see happen. We respect that they will make their own decisions, but we will respond to that. But our commitment to continue with the strong partnership with Afghanistan has been clear, and we have expressed it. And I am grateful for what you said, Senator.

Senator COONS. I am interested in hearing from you your assessment of China's interests in Afghanistan going forward. We have recently marked up a broadly bipartisan bill about strengthening the United States and our tools and our abilities with regards to engaging in the world. And part of what informed that debate was

a clear-eyed view about China as a competitor in some spheres and as a potential partner in others. What do you see as China's core interest in Afghanistan? And my last question. If there is a resurgence of violence in Afghanistan, do you see a scenario where the Afghan Government might request U.N. peacekeepers? There was strikingly earlier this month a South China Morning Post story that Beijing was considering sending a peacekeeping force to Afghanistan, which surprised me. So if you would answer both of those questions, I would appreciate it.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, thank you very much. Of course one of the realities of the current world is an increasingly assertive China. And with regard to Afghanistan, the Chinese have been satisfied to see us deal with the challenge of Afghanistan, the challenge of terrorism in Afghanistan that they also feel threatened by. And now China and other neighbors of Afghanistan have to rise to the occasion, encourage a political settlement, and then provide assistance—development assistance for Afghanistan as well. I think the withdrawal, some in China fear that we had some permanent presence concept for our forces in Afghanistan that could threaten their interests. But now, of course, there is—it is a changed environment, and I hope they will rise to the occasion. They have said their core concern is terrorism from Afghanistan, but they have also had some economic interest the last several years. They have been interested in some of the resources of Afghanistan, some mines to develop those. Because of the security environment, those have not really borne out, in part. But China's interest—I think core number one interest—has been the terrorism interests and economic interests second.

Senator COONS. Is there any credible scenario in which the Afghan Government would request international peacekeepers? Last question.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, if there is a settlement, then one notion in peace settlements where a third party has been the enforcer have tended to last longer. The academic literature demonstrates that. So that is a possibility that they might. That is obviously their decision, but as of now, this has—this issue has not come up. But we have asked the U.N. to play a more active role in promoting, facilitating the peace process in Afghanistan.

Senator COONS. Thank you very much, Ambassador. My understanding is that Senator Johnson is the next senator to question.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Senator Coons. Mr. Ambassador, welcome. In your opening statement, you used a phrase similar to your policy is going to be based on clear-eyed facts on the ground. You also mentioned that “if the Taliban wants to move forward.” I have never seen much evidence of the Taliban embracing the modern world, wanting to move forward. They seem to want to move back, and I really fear that they are going to move back to how they governed Afghanistan earlier. Is there evidence that they truly want to move forward, that they will embrace, you know, some movement toward a modern world?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, we will have to see whether in practice they will. They say they do. Obviously, they have their own values and they have expressed it, but those values that they speak about—Islam—that is present in many countries in the

world in that region and beyond, and you see that—those values practiced differently from place to place. And the Talibs say they are interested not being a pariah and being welcomed, and we will have to see. All I can say is that we have made it clear that if they do, they can end their prior status. There can be progress in a relationship with us and with others. But if they do not, the very thing that they say they do not want to happen will be inevitable.

Senator JOHNSON. I think all of our concern is we have seen in the past how they practice their values in an incredibly brutal fashion. And I do not want to preempt Senator Shaheen's questioning here, but in our secure briefing, she pointed to a classified document describing or potentially predicting what is going to happen to the women and girls in Afghanistan. In your testimony, you also said if the Taliban behave in a certain way, that we will hold them accountable. So the two questions I have, first of all, what can you say publicly in terms of what the predictions are in terms of Taliban treatment of women should they take over the Government?

Again, you know, personally I am concerned about public executions and other forms of brutality that will just be so incredibly offensive, and if that is the case, what do we do? Are we going to sit back and just watch that, wring our hands, mourn the fact that we had made so much progress? And, by the way, I think America and allies have to take pride in the progress that was made. I think that is probably our biggest concern here is having that—all that progress be for naught. But, again, the question is what were the predictions that you can talk about in an unclassified setting, and how would we hold them accountable?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, thank you very much, Senator. I share those concerns, and I have been grateful to Senator Shaheen for always raising them. And we have been very mindful of that, and we are very proud of the positive developments that have occurred thanks to American generosity and American support. But, of course, war is a terrible thing, and there have been some setbacks in Afghanistan with regard to values because of the ongoing war. And some schools have been closed because of security environment, mothers are not sending their kids—parents to school. Sometimes there are heartbreaking stories even. Some members of the Afghan elite that send their—if they have two kids, send them all on alternate days to school because they worry that they might lose both kids in one incident.

So there is the yearning for peace, for ending this war that is there, but there is also the concern about what the Talibs will do given their past record. We have said that they do want U.S. assistance, they want international acceptance, they want to end their prior state, they want de-listing. Those things will be all affected by how they treat their own citizens, first and foremost, the women of Afghanistan, children and minorities. The issue is should we use the U.S. troops to enforce particular values, especially in a situation where we have been there for 20 years and a war that—for which there is no military solution. We have other instruments that will remain relevant and powerful, in my view, that we would have to rely on and send that message loud and clear, like you, Senator Shaheen, and other senators have made today.

Senator JOHNSON. Well, thank you. Hopefully Senator Shaheen can maybe get a little more detail there. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I understand Senator Cardin is not with us at this moment on Webex.

Senator CARDIN. I am with you.

The CHAIRMAN. Ah, okay.

Senator CARDIN. Sorry about that.

The CHAIRMAN. This is the virtual world. Senator Cardin.

Senator CARDIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First, let me thank our witness for his incredible service to our country, and I think we all agree that there is no easy solution here and there are no good options. So I heard you testify as to the effect that if Afghanistan, with or without the Taliban, wants to be a country that is respected globally and does not want to be a pariah state, then they are going to live up to their commitments on anti-terrorism and on human rights. So I want to seek your advice.

That is a lot easier said than done, and I mean taking action against the Government when it violates norms on anti-terrorism or human rights. Anti-terrorism is little bit more easy for us to define. Human rights is not. So what advice would you give us to be in the strongest possible position to enforce good governance on Afghanistan, to make sure there is no backsliding on the progress that they have already made, to make sure that women and girls' rights which have been very difficult in that country do not move in the wrong direction? What advice would you give to the United States Senate or to Congress in order to maximize the leverage so that, whatever happens with withdrawal of our troops, we are in the strongest possible position to encourage the Government of Afghanistan to live up to its commitments on human rights?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, thank you very much, Senator. I think the key instruments to rely on for incentivizing compliance to the commitments that the Afghan Government or the Taliban, or the Taliban as part of a future government, that they remain committed to that, is to, first, make assistance conditional on compliance, on progress in dealing with problems of human rights, with issues of governance, and to—

Senator CARDIN. If I could just interrupt you on that point because we can do that. The challenge is that there are normally waivers that are done in those circumstances or it gets involved in the discussions on cooperation on anti-terrorism, and sometimes the commitments to human rights gets pushed to the back burner. Yes, we can condition aid, but we then normally give the Administration discretion on how to exercise that conditionality. Is there a way that we can be clear as to the importance of the protection of women and girls and other human rights issues?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, of course, clear statements are important; of course, the challenges of checks and balances, discussions that occur on many fronts that ultimately shape our policy. And I would believe that, going forward, that two issues that will remain paramount in our policy regarding Afghanistan would be the issue of threats from Afghanistan, that we want compliance in dealing with that, and on human rights and development issues. So we need to make it clear that both are important, and that, with regard to incentivizing cooperation on terrorism, not only the rela-

tionship with security forces in Afghanistan will remain important, but also demonstrating—keeping our eyes on the ball, demonstrating a capability that we can take action if necessary.

And with regard to the other part of the agenda, I think conditionality and advocacy on behalf of those conditionality's will remain important. I know that the Administration—I personally have made it very clear that issue of human rights, particularly women's rights, is second to terrorism in terms of the hierarchy of U.S. policy importance, and we need to continue to do that. But I do not have a fix for the checks and balance and the process of negotiations that take place when decisions are made. But I would say that what you are saying and Senator Shaheen is saying will remain important advocacy on behalf of human rights.

Senator CARDIN. And we will continue to speak up, but I would just point out, Mr. Chairman, it may be important for us to give directives to the Administration in regards to these issues. So it may be necessary for congressional action to make it clear to the Afghan Government that, if there is backsliding, the Administration is not going to be able to save them in negotiations, that Congress is going to demand that action be taken to protect the rights of women and girls, and to protect human rights for the people of Afghanistan, that there be no backsliding. We will be clear, but I am concerned about what happens at the diplomatic table at times, and this is an area that is just too important for us to lose the progress that we have made. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. I appreciate your comments and look forward to working with you to make sure the Administration knows where we stand on these issues. Senator Risch.

Senator RISCH. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I would certainly agree with our distinguished colleague who just spoke. I think we need to be very clear with the Administration as to what our thoughts are in that regard. I think probably the Afghans already know where we are, but it would not hurt to underscore that and tell them we really, really mean it through the—through the Administration. Along those lines, Mr. Ambassador, you talked about your work in getting the constitutional rights for women in the Afghan constitution. Indeed, some of the predictions that have been made, and it seems like the majority of predictions, is that it is merely a matter of months before the Taliban retake the entire Afghan Government. What is your view of the likelihood—what is your view of those rights that are in the constitution, those women's rights in the constitution, staying in place? What is the likelihood of that happening up?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Thank you, Senator. When you were out of the room, I associated myself personally that I do not believe that the Government is going to collapse, that the Taliban is going to take over.

Senator RISCH. I understand that is your view, but suppose the other view pervaded.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. I think that we should all—we should be concerned that those rights could suffer, and we would have to then use our diplomatic engagement. If there is a government dominated by the Talibs, that recognition, normal relationship with

it, dealing—providing assistance, diplomatic support for the concerns that they would have, would be not available if they did not respect the human rights of Afghan women and other citizens of Afghanistan. That will be the instrument that we would have to rely on. But I share the concern, and that—and I think not only I share it, but Administration as a whole is both concerned—would be concerned, and we will do whatever we could to shape Taliban actions and respond based on what they decide and what they do.

Senator RISCH. And, again, first of all, to be clear, I hope you are right, and that is that the Administration can hang on in Afghanistan. But, as you know, there is a very substantial cadre of people who think that is not going to happen, and even the most optimistic think it will only be a matter of months. And you would agree that if that happens, those constitutional rights that you worked to get into the constitution there are, in all likelihood, in jeopardy since the Taliban do not share the same view on that issue. Am I right on that?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, I have a concern about that, yes.

Senator RISCH. All right. Thank you. And then, again, not trying to be too pessimistic, but realistic. And that is, if collapse does happen within a matter of months, and particularly if it starts looking like that very quickly, do you agree that we ought to hold up on this \$300 million that have—that we have talked about as additional assistance for Afghanistan, and be more cautious as far as distributing that at this point?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, our actions, as we have said repeatedly, will depend on the actions that the Afghan Government takes. If the Taliban were in that government or dominated that government, certainly our assistance will be conditional on what they do.

Senator RISCH. Well, that is certainly the case. I guess I am talking about the interim right now when we are in this state of flux where we are moving out and the Taliban, at least they are telegraphing to some people that they are going to move in. It seems to me we would be better off holding onto our \$300 million right now until we see exactly which way it is going.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. But the announcement of the release of the \$300 million that we had withheld was to demonstrate to the Afghan Government that we are in support of the Government and in support of Afghan women and civil society at this time of transition where our military role will change and our military presence will end, that we are committed to a positive engagement with the current government. It does not say anything about a future government that would be, speculation, dominated by the Talibs. In that case, obviously, we would have to review.

Senator RISCH. Well, it seems to me that simply by handing over the \$300 million and demonstrating that we support the current government is not going to help them hang on in the face of the Taliban. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Senator Murphy.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your service. Thank you for continuing to come before our committee, both in classified and open settings. I think my sense is, and others would likely agree, that both President Obama and

President Trump's instinct was likely to end the war in Afghanistan, focus resources other places, and admit that it was not likely that, during their Administrations, our goals of political and military stability in Afghanistan were going to be met. They were convinced otherwise, ultimately in part by military leadership that put on a very impressive presentation about what could happen if we stayed another year or two. I know those presentations are impressive because I have watched probably a dozen of them. Every time that I went to Afghanistan, a new, impressive, highly-credentialed general would explain to me how the next year was going to be different than the prior year.

I think President Biden came to the conclusion, as he said in his remarks, that we are at a point where we have to accept the facts on the ground rather than the fantasy of endless PowerPoint presentations. And the facts on the ground are that we are moving backwards, not forwards, that the security situation is getting worse, not better.

And so I guess I have one additional question, but given that there is nobody that knows this portfolio better than you, just to speak for a moment about what it would look like if we stayed for another year at our current levels, and why the team has come to the conclusion that it is likely the trajectory would continue, that the security situation would continue to degrade, the Taliban would continue to advance, the Afghan Government would not be any closer to being legitimate in the eyes of the majority of the Afghan people. That is not an appetizing scenario, but I think the conclusion was made that 1 more year or 2 more years was not going to change the trajectory. Am I wrong about that?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, two additional factors to your very able description of the conditions, one, that if we did stay another year or two or indefinitely, that we will be back at war with the Talibs. For last 13 months or so, they have not—that we have not had any fatalities because part of—one consequence of the agreement was for the Talibs not to attack coalition forces, although we had the right to come to the defense of the Afghan forces under the agreement when they were attacked by the Talibs. If we said we are staying, we are getting out of that agreement, it means we would be back at war with them. So whether the current numbers then would satisfy that we have had 2,500 plus, there could have been potentially demand for more forces to be able to maintain the status quo, not to lose significant ground.

But, two, that we were—the military balance was changing territorially negatively for the past several years, so things were not standing still with—in the configuration that we have been in for the last several years. So there was no military solution. I think that that was a judgment for some years for Afghanistan, but the decision to pursue a withdrawal and a political settlement, I think several presidents had that in mind, and, of course, we know what President Biden decided.

Senator MURPHY. So there are capabilities, especially on the military side, that we have been midwifing for 20 years. I mean, I remember going there during my House days and hearing about our desire to have the Afghan air force be able to provide their own close air support so that they would not be reliant on us. We have

made very little progress on many of these capabilities, including that one. They are still very reliant on us to provide that support for counterterrorism missions. Is it your assessment that some of these security capabilities are unable to be possessed by the Afghan military, or is that they were conveniently able to rely on us for the last 20 years, and so they did not have to do the difficult work of constructing their own security capacities?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, first, the Afghan security forces have developed significantly. I was ambassador—special envoy first and ambassador since 2002 to 2005, and really nothing existed, so now we are talking about the capabilities of the forces exist. They have very capable special forces in the thousands, perhaps as high as 40,000. Their air force, yes, is dependent on us for maintenance and even some degree of operations, but it has been effective in many operations. It is used to compensate for some of the challenges in other areas. And we are working with them to make sure that as we withdraw, that they have access to others who could provide those services for them.

I think we need to continue to invest in those security forces, to assist them, and we are committed to doing that, but we will have to make arrangements where we used to do it, now they have to do it. I believe that sometimes we—some of our analyses are worst-case circumstances that—or challenges that we confront, but I think the—it would be a mistake, in my judgment, to dismiss the Afghan security forces as not being a credible force that could perform well, although they will face more difficult circumstances now.

Senator MURPHY. You have been consistent in your relative optimism about the capabilities of the Afghan security forces.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Right.

Senator MURPHY. We hope that you are right.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Right.

Senator MURPHY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Senator Portman is with us via Webex.

Senator PORTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the testimony today, Ambassador Khalilzad, and, more importantly, your service over the years, including many years devoted to a peaceful resolution in Afghanistan. And I understand you are supporting the Administration today. I imagine you are doing it with mixed feelings given what you have been through. Could I ask you a couple of scene setters? How many American troops are in Afghanistan?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. I think slightly above 2,500, I understand.

Senator PORTMAN. Okay. And how many troops are in Kuwait?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. I do not know that. I do not—

Senator PORTMAN. Thirteen thousand five hundred. How about—how about Qatar? Eight thousand.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Right.

Senator PORTMAN. In Bahrain, 5,000. Are the majority of the coalition troops American troops in Afghanistan?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. No.

Senator PORTMAN. The majority are other NATO troops, right?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Right.

Senator PORTMAN. I do not know. I just—I think that is important scene setter to understand what we are talking about. How many casualties have been among American troops over the last year, say?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. No fatalities, but some casualties, but not very many.

Senator PORTMAN. Yeah. So I just think we need to set that as the stage. Look, this is a tough question. It is a really difficult one, and I do not envy you or others who have to make the decision. But I am very concerned that we are pulling out not because of any conditions having been met, but just choosing an arbitrary date which gives the Taliban tremendous leverage, and I think it unravels a lot of the progress that we have made. And I asked my team to tell me something about what has happened. I have been there, as I think almost all members have who have been in Congress for a while. I have been there a few times and seen this.

But we now have women who have been given an opportunity to participate in the economy. Women now have joined the military. They have now joined the police. They have now held political office. They have become internationally-recognized singers. They have competed in the Olympics. Over the past two decades, we have spent millions of dollars and done a lot of hard work to ensure that. And a Taliban takeover stemming from a U.S. withdrawal, which, to me, seems likely at some point, must mean that all those points of progress that I know you are very proud of, are going to be reversed. Do you disagree with that?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. I just want to make one comment, Senator, which is that the reason that the casualties are low and no fatalities is because of the agreement that we have had with the Taliban, which required us to withdraw altogether, and that without that agreement, if we want—went back to war, that that is the alternative if we did not implement withdrawal.

Senator PORTMAN. Well, let me—if I could, let me talk about that agreement just for second, Mr. Ambassador.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Sure.

Senator PORTMAN. That is the February 2020 agreement you are talking about. It was interconnected. We said we would withdraw if the Taliban took action to prevent Afghanistan from being a terrorist haven for al-Qaeda and other groups. But, you know, from the DIA, to the Treasury, to the United Nations monitoring team, this is what we found over the past year. AQ members—al-Qaeda members—are integrated into the Taliban forces and command structure. Taliban is creating a safe haven for AQ. The Taliban is not taking steps to suppress the threat that AQ poses to the international community. Would you disagree with those?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. It is our judgment, and I could go into details in an appropriate setting—

Senator PORTMAN. Yeah.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. —that the Taliban have taken several positive steps, as I mentioned before, with regard to terrorism, the commitments not to host—not allow training or fundraising or recruitment by these terrorist groups that would threaten the United

States or our allies, that they have taken several positive steps. But we are pressing them for more.

Senator PORTMAN. Well, the evidence—I would say that the evidence is clear that they have not kept their part of the agreement. And so when we talk about the agreement, you know, I just worry it becomes a safe haven for terrorists again. I know—this is not easy stuff, and yet I am very concerned. And, you know, I—again, I have been there. I have had some troops from Ohio, our troops that have had injuries in Afghanistan. I know there have been casualties and there have been fatalities, but do think that pulling out on an arbitrary date, not conditions based at all and not providing any sense of continued support for the intelligence community to be able to keep us safe from what happened on 9/11, concerns me a lot.

So, again, I thank you for your service. You have been a stalwart in various administrations, including your service to Afghanistan over the years. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Senator Kaine has stepped out for the moment, so I will turn to Senator Booker who is with us virtually I understand.

[No response.]

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Booker.

Senator BOOKER. I am here. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I really appreciate it, and I have appreciated this conversation so far. I want to reiterate the concerns that have been expressed about human rights and the challenges that will be facing Afghan women after this. But in the meantime, I would like to go a little bit deeper from our witness, and I express my appreciation for the witness' service to our country. Could you share the posture of our allies in this effort, and who will share some of the burden with us in the days after our withdrawal, and what their position and focus will be as well?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, thank you very much, Senator. As it was stated, right now our allies have more forces in Afghanistan than we do. Our allies share with us values, and we are in lockstep in terms of conditionality of assistance going forward, making that clear to the Talibs that if they do not respect human rights, do not honor Afghanistan's commitments, which they cannot count on assistance from our allies, and—of course, we speak for ourselves—and the United States. So we are—we have a very strong group, U.S. and our European allies, that we had a meeting virtually a couple of days ago going over where we are and what do we do next. And the concern is shared there with regard to human rights between us and our allies.

Senator BOOKER. Well, I appreciate the human rights concerns. I want to just turn a little bit to the concerns I have on our counterterrorism, joint efforts, and perhaps you can talk to me about how credible you believe the Taliban assurances are on not allowing al-Qaeda to operate anywhere in their areas of controls. There are, as one of my colleagues mentioned before, concerns about the infiltration of al-Qaeda, but I am wondering how credible do you think their assurances are in terms of their operations. And, again, as was mentioned earlier, we have no basing agreements in Central Asia. And in light of Russia's cultural, historical ties to the

region how difficult do you think will be for the U.S. to operate in the region, and counter those threats that might occur from the number of other terrorist organizations in the region?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, as you have heard from the intelligence community, there will be some degradation in terms of our ability to know exactly what is going on. We do not have a physical military presence associated with other agencies there. But we believe, given the nature of the threat right now, with efforts that are underway to—for the over-the-horizon presence to monitor, that we would get adequate warning. That is outside my domain. You should ask the intelligence community, but that we would get adequate warning to be able to respond. That part of our effort right now is to—not only to have capabilities placed to the best level possible given that we would not be in Afghanistan itself, that we will have the capabilities in the region now, for the near future, obviously will be largely in the Gulf, but perhaps beyond that area to respond in a timely manner. Having those structures or those capabilities in place, I believe, would be important also to send a message that there will be consequences if Afghan actors allow that threat to re-emerge or to grow.

Senator BOOKER. And the last thing I would like to get your input, I know that there has been a decrease in their poppy cultivation and the heroin production. Afghanistan's illicit drug economy remains a very significant driver in the region and has been for decades. And I am just wondering what plans, if any, does the Administration have to try to address the Afghan drug trade and its international implications after withdrawal of U.S. forces?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, we have been very focused on this challenge, as you said, Senator, for some time. Unfortunately, the results have not been commensurate with the—of the level of efforts that have been made. But the challenge, of course, remains, and the same focus on this issue, not only by us, but by our allies and neighbors, will be important. As long as there is demand, unfortunately, supplies will be—will come from someplace, and right now it is focused significantly in Afghanistan. But with that law enforcement, alternative livelihood, eradication, all these comprehensive strategies that we have been supporting, I believe we will continue to focus on this challenge.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator BOOKER. I want to thank you again for your service to our country and appreciate the opportunity to have this public conversation with you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Thank you, Senator.

The CHAIRMAN. And happy birthday to our colleague from New Jersey.

Senator BOOKER. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Next is Senator Hagerty on Webex.

Senator HAGERTY. Chairman Menendez—

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, sir?

Senator HAGERTY. —thank you very much. Senator Booker, happy birthday to you as well. Ambassador Khalilzad, it is good to see you again.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Good to see you, sir.

Senator HAGERTY. Ambassador, I would like to go to an area that definitely is in your wheelhouse, but I would like to put it into the context of what the Biden administration has recently announced. Earlier this month, the Administration has announced it is going to withdraw U.S. troops, which will also lead to the withdrawal of NATO forces there in Afghanistan. Yet at the same time, the Administration has said that it will continue diplomatic efforts there in Afghanistan, yet I note that today, the Administration has announced that it is going to be drawing down our diplomatic corps in Kabul. So I would like to ask you, Ambassador, what is the Administration's plan to continue our diplomatic efforts in Afghanistan in the absence of U.S. and NATO forces? Also, I would like to ask you to what extent we depend on U.S. and NATO forces today for our diplomatic efforts, and to what, if any, extent do you think those diplomatic efforts will be constrained by the removal of those forces?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, thank you very much, Senator. Of course we are committed to—the Administration is committed to maintaining strong diplomatic presence at our embassy and that we will take the necessary measures to protect that embassy. With regard to the announcement or the leak that happened, yes, there will be some small number of diplomats and right-sizing the embassy, that those who are not necessary to be there, they can do their job from elsewhere, that will happen, but it will not affect the operation or the capabilities of the embassy. We are very much committed to that.

As to the negotiations, well, we had already agreed as part of the agreement with the Taliban to withdraw forces, part of which was also the commitments they made on terrorism, the commitments to start inter-Afghan negotiations, historic negotiations that have started, that the military, if we had not withdrawn, would have implied undermining diplomacy in terms of the peace negotiation that started based on the agreement to withdraw, and would have increased violence in Afghanistan, but also get us back in direct war with the Taliban, perhaps necessitating that we send more troops, while believing that there is no military solution, so, in other words, an indefinite war. So I think that the alternatives were difficult ones. I think after a lot of assessment and discussion, the President decided what he did, to go with a Condor-based withdrawal rather than a conditions-based withdrawal.

Senator HAGERTY. Ambassador, I think that our diplomatic efforts are going to be significantly challenged, and the drawdown from Kabul underscores my concern that our diplomatic efforts be effective. I hope that you will continue to monitor the situation closely. I know you are going to have a great deal of responsibility here. I thank you for your service, but I also encourage you to consider a detailed plan as things on the ground are going to change significantly, in my view, as we draw down our forces. Thank you.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, thank you, Senator.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair and Ranking Member Risch, and thank you, Mr. Ambassador. The question that we are grappling with in this committee and also another committee—so I am on Armed Services as well—is not whether the U.S. will stop

being a partner with Afghanistan. Obviously we will continue security assistance. We will continue diplomatic assistance. We will continue development assistance, humanitarian assistance, trade would be my hope, with regional partners. The question that we are grappling with is whether we should start a third decade of combat operations in Afghanistan with U.S. troops.

There are a lot of different possibilities for when the U.S. seeks—stops military operations in Afghanistan, and all have some legitimate chance of coming to pass. Some believe that the Taliban will take over Afghanistan. Some believe Afghans, having seen 20 years of improved life expectancy, electricity deployment, public health, education, will decide they want to fight to maintain that. Some believe it could continue to be sort of a frozen conflict without a clear winner, or there could be a peace negotiation that might produce any range of outcomes. But I support President Biden's decision because I think the consequences and the possibilities that I just put on the table are not, after 20 years, dependent upon the United States military. I think they are dependent upon Afghan desire, Afghan will. We spent 10 years finding and kill bin Laden, and we spent 10 years training half a million Afghan security forces, to include police, and I think at this point, those decisions are going to be made by Afghans with the U.S. as a continued partner.

What I would like to ask you about, Mr. Ambassador, because my colleagues have done a good job of looking at this from a number of angles, is the region. Afghanistan is bordered by six countries. So it is China and Iran. It is Pakistan, and then it is, I think, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. So six nations surround Afghanistan, and those nations are very different from one another, and some we have closer relationships with, and some we do not. But am I right in basically assuming that each, for their own reasons, they desire a stable Afghanistan, and they would view instability in Afghanistan occasioning refugees or Afghanistan becoming a haven for terrorists? They would view significant instability in Afghanistan as dangerous to their own national interest. Is that fair to say?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, thank you, Senator. You have painted a good picture of alternative futures for Afghanistan. But with regard to the question, I believe that while we have been there, they have all looked to us to solve their problem—the problem in their neighborhoods, so to speak. Now our hope and expectation is that they will rise to the occasion, that a stable Afghanistan requires a broad-based agreement among Afghans, that no single element can, by force, dominate the country and create stability. The last 40 years, that is what demonstrates that. The effort by Communists in the eighties to force their will produced the war, then efforts by various mujahideen groups to dominate produced another war, the Talibs trying to dominate produced another war. So these are lessons the leaders have learned.

But it also means the neighborhood, the region has to rise to the occasion because sometimes Afghanistan's war has been a proxy war of different neighbors supporting different elements. But if Afghanistan could become stable, it is an opportunity for the region in terms of trade for Central Asians to be able to export their products or import. It would be a great opportunity, which is a vision

that we share and support, increased trade, increased connectivity, increased integration on the economic front.

So they have their own moment of big decision of choice, but we are working with them. And I believe there is consensus that the Taliban taking over Afghanistan is not in anyone's interest because that would mean a continuing war besides other threats that that could produce for refugees, as you mentioned. So we are working very closely with those that we can. We obviously—as you point out, we do not have the best of relations with some of them, but I think this is the defining moment not only for Afghans to rise to the occasion, but for the region as well.

Senator KAINE. I think the region has benefited tremendously at the American taxpayers' expense—

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Right.

Senator KAINE. —in terms of the stability that we have been able to bring—the degree of stability we have been able to bring.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Right.

Senator KAINE. They have much more existentially at stake with instability in Afghanistan than the United States does.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Right.

Senator KAINE. And, like you, we hope that they recognize that and they step up. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador. I yield back, Mr. Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Is Senator Young with us virtually?

[No response.]

The CHAIRMAN. Senator Young?

[No response.]

The CHAIRMAN. If not, Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ambassador, thank you being here today, for testifying. Since you were appointed as special representative for Afghan reconciliation, I have repeatedly raised concerns about the inclusion of women in the Afghan peace process and, of course, about the preservation of women's rights in Afghanistan. I appreciated your acknowledging that in your comments today. Under the previous Administration, these concerns really seemed to fall on deaf ears. I am disappointed to say that my concerns still have not been sufficiently addressed.

I did appreciate your referring to the rights of women and your commitment to that in your opening statement, and I also very much appreciate the fact that the chair, and ranking member, and my colleagues on this committee, both Republican and Democrat, have almost all raised concerns about what is going to happen. But what I really want to do is put a face on what we are talking about in Afghanistan. When you say the level of violence is too high, I want to put a face on that. When you say what Taliban values look like, I want to put a face on that, too.

Last month, the State Department posthumously honored seven women who were killed in 2020. These women were given the Department of State's International Women of Courage Award. They are pictured here. They were murdered for choosing to live their lives outside of the narrow confines of what the Taliban and other extremist groups deem acceptable for women. Mr. Chairman, I would like to enter for the record the State Department statement on these women and what they devoted their lives to.

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection, it shall be included.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The information referred to above can be found in the "Additional Material Submitted for the Record" section at the end of this hearing.]

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. I also want to highlight them, and they reflect, I think, thousands of other women in Afghanistan who have been the targets of violence. We can call them courageous, and certainly we do, but they should not have to be courageous to do what they tried to do. It should not require courage to be a journalist like Malala Maiwand, who is right here. It should not require courage to stand up for basic human rights like Fatima Khalil or Freshta Kohistani both did. The two of them are at the top there. All those women were killed by the Taliban.

And unfortunately, that is exactly what is required of women in Afghanistan today, and I worry that this reality is only going to escalate after our departure. So I hope everyone who is watching this hearing today will remember these women, remember these seven women and the women like them, remember the girls in Afghanistan, the girls who should have the opportunity to grow up in a world with the freedoms that their mothers fought to secure. They are watching, and we should be watching.

And I just want to also acknowledge the other four women who are pictured here. In the middle is Fatima Rajabi. She was a 23-year-old prison guard who was on her way home on a civilian bus stopped by the Taliban. She was kidnapped, tortured, murdered, and 2 weeks later, her body was sent to her family. At the bottom is Freshta. She was a 35-year-old prison guard, who was killed on our way to a taxi to get to work, again by gunman. At the bottom is General Sharmila Frogh. General Frogh was the head of the gender unit in the National Directorate of Security and one of the longest-serving female NDS officers in Afghanistan. She was assassinated in an IED explosion targeting her vehicle in Kabul. And finally, for me, the most horrific of all of these barbarous acts is Maryam Noorzad in the corner. Maryam was a midwife. She was killed when the hospital in Kabul where she was helping a woman trying to deliver a baby was attacked by three Taliban gunmen. They not only killed her when she refused to leave the woman who was delivering her baby, they killed the woman and they killed the baby.

These are the Taliban who we are being asked to join at the negotiating table to support. I will not support any efforts that will allow them to continue to commit these horrific acts without any accountability for their behavior. What we do over the next 4 months is going to impact the lives of women for generations to come, and I believe we have to do everything in our power to support the women of Afghanistan. We have worked for 2 decades alongside our allies to advance the rights of not just women and girls, but other ethnic minorities in Afghanistan, and we cannot let those 2 decades of hard work be ignored in peace talks. We owe it to the women and girls to ensure that their hard-fought rights are preserved. Sadly, I believe an arbitrary deadline for withdrawal forces in Afghanistan risks those efforts.

These seven women did not deserve to die, and we owe it to them and to the generations that will come after them to do everything

to prevent any more Afghan women from the same fate. And, as we have heard, this is not a partisan issue. It is not a women's issue. It is a human rights issue, and it is a security issue for the future of Afghanistan. I want to point out, Mr. Chairman, and ask that this also be introduced for the record. This is a newly-declassified National Intelligence Council report on the fate of women in Afghanistan after we withdraw.

The CHAIRMAN. Without objection, it shall be included.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The information referred to above can be found in the "Additional Material Submitted for the Record" section at the end of this hearing.]

Senator SHAHEEN. A few things in this report stood out for me.

The CHAIRMAN. I would just say the Senator's—

Senator SHAHEEN. My time is over?

The CHAIRMAN. Yes, but it is very compelling, so I want to give her extra time, but I do want to recognize that there are some other members.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. I am almost finished, Mr. Chairman. I think what stood out in this report is that when the international community pushes for women's rights and pushed for women's rights in Afghanistan, we saw that that made a difference. I believe we have got to keep up this effort after the United States withdraws. Ambassador, I would urge you to do everything in your power to ensure that women are represented at the table and their rights are preserved in any future of Afghanistan. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Thank you for being a conscience in this committee and in the Senate on the rights and future of women in Afghanistan, and we appreciate it. I understand Senator Young is now with us on virtual. Senator Young.

Senator YOUNG. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. Please, 5 minutes.

Senator YOUNG. —Mr. Chairman, and welcome, Ambassador, to the committee. Thank you for your years of service. We have spent over two decades in Afghanistan. Have we achieved our core national security objectives in Afghanistan, Mr. Ambassador?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. As the President said, Senator, we went to Afghanistan to root out al-Qaeda, which was responsible for 9/11 attacks and the planning that happened in Afghanistan, and now we believe that that objective has been achieved. Al-Qaeda has been degraded significantly in Afghanistan, and the problem of terrorism has become more diffused, including al-Qaeda.

Senator YOUNG. Yes.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. And we need to posture ourselves to be able to deal with that threat differently than we have done in the past 20 years in Afghanistan.

Senator YOUNG. Right. Over a two-decade period, as someone who was a former military intelligence officer, it does not surprise me at all to know that the threat profile, the threat of terrorist activity, the threat to our homeland, has shifted not just in form, not just in terms of its level and its nature, but geographically it has shifted as well. Is that accurate, Mr. Ambassador?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. That is accurate.

Senator YOUNG. Okay. And did that inform this decision as well?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. The President made that clear, yes.

Senator YOUNG. Okay. Is—was it assessed that, as we look prospectively beyond the summer and into future years, that there would be a spike in violence targeting our forces, targeting other American personnel in the country of Afghanistan if we stayed?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Yes. The assessment was that if we stayed post-May 1, based on the agreement that the Talibs and us had, that they would not attack us during this period, that we would be back at war likely with the Taliban, yes.

Senator YOUNG. Right. So this is the decision whether or not we go back to war.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Right.

Senator YOUNG. I just want the American people and I want my constituents to know the underlying factors that went into this decision. Implicit in this withdrawal, Mr. Ambassador, is a recognition, I think, that the Afghan national security forces will soon be operating without the backstop of U.S. technical assistance and support. But will the Administration continue to request Congress provide substantial financial or material assistance to Afghan forces?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Yes, we will.

Senator YOUNG. And will those funds be able to be used to pay for American or foreign contractors?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Of course the issue of U.S. contractors staying, that is not part of the agreement that the contractors could stay, so the contractors are also leaving. But the Afghans are without help and are looking for others to be able to provide that service to them, and we are obviously very sympathetic to them to find alternatives to the needs that they have in terms of maintenance and other needs to be addressed.

Senator YOUNG. Last week, Mr. Ambassador, the commander of U.S. Central Command testified to Congress that conducting counterterrorism operations against threats in Afghanistan without a presence in Afghanistan would be, in his words, “extremely difficult to do, but it is not impossible.” He additionally commented that the gathering of intelligence would decline. He acknowledged that reality, but indicated that the United States will be able to continue to look into Afghanistan, comments that support the CIA director’s prior warnings. Mr. Ambassador, what is your assessment of this challenge, and how can we support the Afghan national security forces to manage these threats?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, we will continue to have a relationship with the Afghan security forces. We have a shared concern in that regard, and, besides, we believe that the Afghan national security forces are a national asset for the country, and, therefore, it is worth supporting. Besides, we obviously will have a presence in the neighborhood and the region that will compensate not completely, but compensate for the departure of U.S. forces in terms of assistance that that presence provided for intelligence capabilities to monitor, that it would be some diminution obviously with not having presence there. But, as I said before, the threat is also less—

Senator YOUNG. Yeah.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. —than it was at times in the past. It is the judgment of our President, of the leadership, that, yes, there will be more challenges in terms of both collection of intelligence and in terms of responding, but that given the gains that we make from withdrawal, given the nature of threat, that, on balance, it is the right strategy if you look at it in its totality of pluses and minuses of being there in an open-ended war without any prospects for success, given that we believe there is no military solution. So, on balance, it is not obviously ideal, but it is, on balance, better than the alternative of an open-ended war.

Senator YOUNG. Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ambassador Khalilzad, thank you for your long and good service to our country.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Thank you.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. As you have said and others, no one knows exactly what the future holds in Afghanistan once U.S. forces leave, and you have said rightly that the future depends on choices made by the people of Afghanistan, including the Taliban. We clearly have limited leverage with respect to those choices that are being made, but we are not without tools. You have mentioned some of them: security assistance, development assistance, other economic engagement on a conditions-based basis, including some of the issues Senator Shaheen eloquently raised: women's rights, a political process, peaceful resolution.

Another tool that many of us have proposed over the years is increasing the amount of trade that could take place between Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan and the United States. Years ago, the House passed something called the Reconstruction Opportunity Zone legislation that would allow a limited segment of goods from Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan to come to the United States duty free, and we will be reintroducing that as a bipartisan bill soon. Is that the kind of tool that you believe could be useful in shaping some of the decisions about the future of Afghanistan that may be made by the parties there? Again, this would be a condition-based tool. The President of the United States would have the authority to calibrate it based on conditions on the ground, but what do you think of providing that kind of tool going forward?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, thank you very much, Senator. I want the record to show, if I might, that I share Senator Shaheen's concerns about—I did not get a chance to comment on her presentation or her statement—that I share those concerns. With regard to what you said, Senator Van Hollen, that we support the idea of increased trade between Afghanistan and Pakistan, between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia, and that we support increased trade between us and Afghanistan and Pakistan, and that I look forward to a detailed discussion of the proposal that you have referred to. It seems, to me, that it is a very worthwhile concept, proposal, to explore, and look forward to detailed discussion.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Well, I thank you, Mr. Ambassador. I look forward to working with the Chairman of this committee as well. My guess is this is going to go to the Finance Committee as much as I would like it to come to this committee, but I do look forward to working with you. I know other parts of the Administration are

taking a look at it as a positive tool that we can deploy in trying to shape the future of this region.

There are obviously lots of countries that neighbor on Afghanistan, but probably the one that has the most direct potential influence here is Pakistan. As you have said, Pakistan has an interest in stability in Afghanistan. If you see chaos and full-blown war re-erupting, you have refugees coming to Pakistan. Of course Pakistan fought its own war with the Pakistani Taliban, did it not?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. It did.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Right. You have pointed out in your public comments that the Government of Pakistan has helped to facilitate your negotiations with the Taliban in Doha. Is that right?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. It has.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. How would you characterize the support to the effort of the Government of Pakistan now in terms of our goals of trying to bring about a stable situation in Afghanistan?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. They have been supportive of our effort to press the Taliban to reduce violence, to enter negotiations with the Government of Afghanistan, to be an active participant in peace negotiations, including in Istanbul, Turkey, that planned conference that the Turks have, in cooperation with the U.N. and Qatar, have been working on. Pakistan has a special responsibility given its influence over the Taliban, and so we appreciate what Pakistan has done so far. But we are not there yet, and, of course, we look forward to working with them to get to a peace agreement between the Taliban and the Afghan Government in the coming weeks and months.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. No, I appreciate that. I think it is important to continue to pressure the Government of Pakistan to be a constructive player in this. But I think you would agree that after the Soviets left Afghanistan, right, after the Government of Pakistan and others supported our efforts against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the United States disengaged totally from the region. What was left was a vacuum that the Taliban filled and that al-Qaeda then took advantage of. So I hope as we withdraw our forces, which I support and understand, we remain engaged.

I will just leave you with this, Mr. Ambassador. I really hope the President—President Biden—will call Prime Minister Khan. My understanding is that phone call has not been made, at least as of the other day. It seems to me that if we are going to ask and rely on Pakistan to be an important player here, that that dialogue should happen as soon as possible.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Yes.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. And I hope you will take that back.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. The dialogue with Pakistan is very important. I agree.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. I just want to check. Are there any Republican members of the committee seeking recognition? I haven't been told of any. If not, I understand Senator Schatz is with us virtually.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Ambassador. We have got 2,500 troops, about 450 U.S. Government staff. We kind of know what is going to happen with respect to that. I

want to talk about the total sort of footprint of United States citizens. We have got 6,150 U.S. national contractors and a total of almost 17,000 U.S.-employed contractors. Can you talk to me about what we need to do to protect everyone else? The 2,500 being withdrawn is sort of the headline maker, but what is the presence going to be like, and are we going to see a corresponding reduction in U.S. presence in terms of contractors and others?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. I believe that there would be a corresponding reduction in the number of contractors as well.

Senator SCHATZ. Who drives that decision, and can you give us a little bit better fidelity on what that is going to look like in terms of a drawdown?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. The withdrawal of contractors who supported the Afghan security forces, that is part of the agreement that we have with the Taliban. And so that reduction has been there since we signed the agreement last year.

Senator SCHATZ. I am sorry. So we have got 6,150 U.S. nationals and a total of 16 or 17,000 employed by the United States.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Right.

Senator SCHATZ. Should we expect a drawdown, and, if so, over what period of time and—

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, the drawdown, of course we—as far as the diplomats are concerned and people working for the embassy, including protecting the embassy, that is one category. We will maintain a strong embassy presence. If your question is with regard to contractors that serviced the Afghan security forces, as part of the agreement, they will draw down as retrograde as the military forces do.

Senator SCHATZ. At the same pace?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Because their numbers are larger, yes, in terms of the contractors, but they will be out as the security forces are out, those who provide services for the security forces, the 2,500 or so that remain.

Senator SCHATZ. Okay. I am going to also submit that for the record so that we can get some precision on the numbers and over what—

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Sure. If you have more specific questions, we will get back to you, Senator, yes.

Senator SCHATZ. Sure. I want to talk to you about divesting equipment. We have got a number of agencies—DoD, USAID, DOJ, DHS, Treasury, UNICEF, WHO, the World Food Program—and a lot of them have stuff that they are going to be leaving behind, and I understand that we plan to sell a lot of the equipment. But we have got a lot of good NGO partners on the ground, and I am wondering whether there is any plan to give these NGOs access to any non-combat equipment so that they can use it to support our work in delivering education, development, and aid for the Afghan people.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. I will take that question for the record to respond since it involves various agencies, if you do not mind, Senator.

Senator SCHATZ. Absolutely. Final question. Can you talk to me about what the—how we are working with U.N., and our European

partners, and our—and neighbors in the region to prepare for a possible refugee problem or refugee crisis?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, we are working ourselves to develop humanitarian plans for a possible increase in the number of Afghan refugees, and we are also working interagency here and with partners. We can—I can take that question for the record, too. We are in the process. We do not have finalized plan, but we will make sure to provide an update as to where we are.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you. And we will need to know what the resource requirements are—

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Right.

Senator SCHATZ. —for this and other things.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. I understand.

Senator SCHATZ. Thank you.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The information referred to above can be found in the “Additional Material Submitted for the Record” section at the end of this hearing.]

The CHAIRMAN. Well, thank you. I understand there are no other colleagues seeking recognition, so I have some final questions. Ambassador, you referred to the reduction at the embassy in Kabul as “right sizing”. “Right sizing” suggests that that’s a change. Since we are changing our mission, we are bringing it down to a different size. My understanding is that the reduction at the embassy is because of increased violence in Kabul. Is that correct?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, I have been a chief of mission myself in Iraq and Afghanistan, and ambassador, depending on its needs and the overall circumstances and if the country requests adjustment. And I believe that our charge d'affaires made a request, taking all these factors into account, but it is a small number in terms of reduction that he has requested.

The CHAIRMAN. Taking all these things into account, including increased violence in Kabul?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. I suspect that he has included all factors, and that must have been one of them.

The CHAIRMAN. I would be interested to find out exactly why we are at this particular time, reducing mission because we haven't quite reduced troops yet, so I'm not quite sure. It is compelling to understand why so that, therefore, we can also deduce other elements from that. Let me ask you, how many Afghan security forces are there today?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. We believe—as I said in my testimony, I think it is about 300,000.

The CHAIRMAN. And we've trained over time over 600,000, right?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Probably, because, you know, people—it is a voluntary force. Some leave, so I do not know for sure that the number is 600,000, but substantially more than the 300,000, yes.

The CHAIRMAN. I agree. Now, how many Taliban fighters do we estimate exist?

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Well, that estimate has changed over time. I do know, but inadvertently, I do not want to say the number that I have gotten, that I can disclose in another setting, but it is less than 100,000. Let us put it that way.

The CHAIRMAN. Yeah. I mean, I think there are published reports that suggest there are around 80,000.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. I have seen those numbers.

The CHAIRMAN. So let us say that those are the numbers. So we have 300,000 Afghan security forces up against 80,000 Taliban forces, with most of those security forces largely within the Kabul area and in some provincial capitals. So one has to wonder, for lessons for the future, what is it that we have done that 300,000 versus 80,000, which almost a 4-to-1 ratio, still leaves us at risk that the Taliban can overrun the country. It is a serious question as we not only look at Afghanistan, but also as we think about our engagement any place in the world in the future. You know, if we—for example, the question was raised about their air force abilities, which are rather hindered because we have not really held them—helped them to fly, so to speak, fully on their own. So that means every time we roll out of a place, if we cannot have a standing army of that nation be able to sustain its own future and security, then I am not sure what we accomplished after so many lives and national treasure.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. I think, Senator, you raise an important question, and that is why I myself, personally, I am not as pessimistic as some others are. But I think the broader question that you raise is a legitimate one as to what lessons learned are there. From the way that this—the Afghan forces were created, were trained and equipped and maintained, those—there are, I think, important lessons to be learned.

The CHAIRMAN. I hope that your optimism is rewarded, and that at a future hearing, we will be looking at that, that the Afghan security forces were able to sustain the nation and, therefore, create a chance for a pathway towards a diplomatic solution. I fear that at some point in the future we may be having a hearing that that isn't the ultimate reality, and then we'll have some real serious decisions to make from that. Finally, who is leading contingency planning within the United States Government, particularly at the State Department, I would say, but within the United States Government, in the event that Afghanistan implodes into a civil war, the Taliban takes over, and there is a humanitarian crisis? I think it is fair to say that being prepared for any of those eventualities, while we hope none of them ultimately comes to pass, but it would be a smart thing to do.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Yeah. Well, I think it will be both smart and prudent. Of course, the National Security Council leads the interagency process, and we will take your message back that there needs to be a lead person is your concern, or lead institution for future contingency planning for Afghanistan.

The CHAIRMAN. I appreciate that the NSC often plays that role. I am not sure that they are in this particular case. I am not particularly sure that anyone at this moment is. My point is that we should start that process of creating those abilities to know the contingencies so not—so that we are able to respond in real time versus scratching our head and thinking about what do we do now.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. And hopefully to preclude them to the maximum extent possible.

The CHAIRMAN. I agree. Well, with the thanks of the committee for your long service and your particular knowledge here, the hear-

ing will—the record will remain open until the close of business tomorrow.

Again, with the thanks of the committee, this hearing is adjourned.

Ambassador KHALILZAD. Thank you.

[Whereupon at 4:34 p.m. the committee was adjourned.]

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

RESPONSES OF AMBASSADOR ZALMAY KHALILZAD TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BEN CARDIN

Question. The humanitarian demining sector in Afghanistan has succeeded in employing thousands of Afghans in remote and contested regions to clear IED's and landmines which threaten civilians, while operating with the consent of both the Government and the Taliban. Given the Administration's commitment to increase foreign assistance for Afghanistan as U.S. troops depart, and the need to build confidence and stability in contested areas, do you foresee a role for expanding U.S. investment in the mine clearance sector?

Answer. The continued support of the Mine Action Program for Afghanistan (ensuring critical programming for clearing landmines, unexploded ordnance, and other explosive remnants of war throughout the country remains operational) is necessary and will be provided as security conditions allow. The Department of State will coordinate with Congress on future mine action needs, support, and opportunities.

RESPONSES OF AMBASSADOR ZALMAY KHALILZAD TO QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY SENATOR BRIAN SCHATZ

PERSONNEL ACCOUNTING

Question. How many U.S. nationals are currently in Afghanistan? Please provide a total personnel inventory indicating the U.S. Government agency and/or intergovernmental organization they are affiliated with and their status as a government employee or contractor.

Answer. As of May 5, 2021, there were 1,275 U.S. nationals physical present in Kabul under Chief of Mission Authority in support of Mission Afghanistan, consisting of:

- Department of State: 283 U.S. direct hires and 920 third-party contractors
- U.S. Agency for International Development: 33 U.S. direct hires and zero third-party contractors
- Department of Defense: 18 U.S. direct hires and zero third-party contractors
- Department of Justice: 11 U.S. direct hires and four third-party contractors
- Department of the Treasury: zero U.S. direct hires and zero third-party contractors
- SIGAR: 6 U.S. direct hires and zero third-party contractors

In addition, according to the Department of State's recent estimates, there are approximately 16,184 private U.S. citizens in Afghanistan.

Question. Of the U.S. nationals currently in Afghanistan, how many can we expect to stay beyond the September 11, 2021, drawdown date to support our enduring defense, diplomacy, and development missions? Please provide your best estimate of the projected U.S. nationals that will remain to support the Afghan people, indicated by: (1) their function; (2) the U.S. Government agency or intergovernmental organization with which they are expected to be affiliated; and (3) their status as either a government employee or contractor.

Answer. In light of increasing violence and threat reports in Kabul, the Department has approved Ordered Departure status affecting a relatively small number of employees at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul April 27. The exact number of staff remaining in-country will depend in large part on the security situation on the ground, which continues to evolve.

All the agencies and diplomatic functions presently at our Embassy will remain, consistent with the Administration's commitment to stay fully engaged on behalf of U.S. interests in Afghanistan and our commitment to the Afghan people.

The U.S. Embassy in Kabul is closely monitoring the security situation on the ground and will recommend additional staffing adjustments as conditions warrant.

DIVESTING EQUIPMENT

Question. How, if at all, are we coordinating across the U.S. Government and with our Coalition partners to divest non-combat equipment directly to NGOs, including local Afghan organizations, so that they can use this equipment to support their work to meet the needs of the Afghan people as it relates to economic development, humanitarian assistance, and governance?

Answer. Embassy Kabul is not currently divesting equipment and has not focused donations on NGOs. However, if a further drawdown occurs, it will begin donations, some of which could go to NGOs. For example, INL may divest equipment as it did during the summer of 2019 drawdown when INL consolidated onto the Kabul Embassy Compound from the International Zone. Embassy Kabul would coordinate among the agencies at Post.

Question. Who is the point person in the U.S. Government responsible for coordinating our refugee response plan for Afghanistan?

Answer. The Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) is the State Department's lead on humanitarian policy and protection of refugees, asylum seekers, conflict victims, stateless persons, and vulnerable migrants. In coordination with Embassies, the interagency, and other State Department offices, PRM provides assistance to meet humanitarian needs according to international standards and supports durable solutions for refugees, including voluntary return and reintegration, local integration, and resettlement in the United States or another third country.

Question. How are we working with U.N. agencies, our European partners, and Afghanistan's neighbors to assess their capacity to support regional refugees and meet their needs to ensure that they can safely host Afghan refugees who may be too afraid to stay behind or that may be displaced as result of escalating violence?

Answer. The United States is coordinating with international organizations, including the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and International Organization for Migration (IOM) to monitor the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, including potential increases in displacement and cross-border movements. The United States and our partners, including likeminded donors, are conducting contingency planning in the event of increased conflict or natural disasters that would exacerbate existing humanitarian needs in Afghanistan and the region.

JOINT STATEMENT FROM THE AFGHAN PARLIAMENT'S STANDING COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND WOMEN'S AFFAIRS, AND THE PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS ON WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE PEACE PROCESS, DATED APRIL 19, 2021



Joint Statement of House Standing Commission for Human Rights, Civil Society and Women's Affairs, and Women Parliamentary Caucus on Women's Role in Peace Process

Over the past two decades, Afghanistan has proven to be the greatest ally of the United States in the fight against terrorism. The Taliban and other terrorist groups have intensified the war because of the United States' presence in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, today, as the people of Afghanistan look forward to the prospect of peace, the United States and its allies are giving the Taliban the privilege of an unconditional withdrawal and signing an agreement. These decisions will negatively affect the Afghan people and the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANSDF).

Without a doubt, in the last two decades, the people of Afghanistan have made great sacrifices to preserve human rights values and institutionalize the values of democracy and women's rights. The ANSDF has lost nearly 100 people a day, and no other army in the world has sacrificed as much in the fight against terrorism. We bravely stood on the front lines of the war, fought against global terrorism, and made countless sacrifices.

Due to their bitter experiences in the past, Afghan women have the right to question the decisions that will lead the country to a crisis. Therefore, the Human Rights, Civil Society, and Women Affairs Commission and Women Parliamentary Caucus proclaim that:

First: As Afghanistan enters a new chapter in its history, unconditional, irresponsible, and hasty withdrawal of NATO in coming September will cause suffering and hardship to Afghan people, particularly Afghan women.

Second: If war intensifies, the Afghan security forces will need more troops, financial support, and equipment. We call on our international partners to support the people of Afghanistan with financial aid, equipment, and intelligence assistance.

Third: The world shall know that the Taliban are a part of the reality of Afghanistan. However, they do not represent the overall picture of all aspects of the Afghan nation and the history and values of this country.

Fourth: If the Taliban would like the people to believe that they have changed their policies and behavior, then we call on them to practically show human and women's rights in their actions and start with reopening girls' schools in the areas they have under control.

Fifth: Afghan women see the peace process as a process that would put an end to their concerns and worries. This is only practical in a transparent and inclusive process with meaningful and quality participation of women. At such a critical historical juncture, the world must stand with the people of Afghanistan, especially with the women of this country.

Sixth: We call on the United Nations to assist Afghanistan in the fight against global terrorism and uphold democratic values, women's rights, and human rights during the peace process.

Seventh: If the Taliban think that they can take control of Afghanistan through war after the NATO forces leaves, they are wrong. The people of Afghanistan will stand with all their means alongside the defense and security forces against this blatant violation of their values.

With respect,

**House Standing Commission for Human Rights, Civil Society and Women's
Affairs, and Women Parliamentary Caucus**

April 19, 2021

House of Representatives

STATEMENT SUBMITTED BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN, REGARDING: THE POST-HUMOUS AWARDING OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT'S INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE AWARD TO SEVEN AFGHAN WOMEN

Mr. Chairman, I would like to note the following women who, on March 8, 2021, were award the U.S. Department of State's International Women of Courage award. These women were murdered for daring to live their lives as they chose. They were activists, reporters, security officers, midwives and government officials. They were also mothers, daughters, sisters. But at the heart of it, they were women who did not deserve to die, and no woman does, simply for doing what they believed in.

Fatema Natasha Khalil, an official with the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission who was killed, along with her driver, in June 2020 by an IED in Kabul, on her way to her office.

General Sharmila Frough, the head of the Gender Unit in the National Directorate of Security (NDS) was one of the longest-serving female NDS officers, having served as chief of the anti-kidnapping division and working undercover combating criminal networks. General Frough was assassinated in an IED explosion targeting her vehicle in March 2020 in Kabul.

Maryam Noorzad, a midwife who served remote locations in Wardak and Bamyan provinces before working for Médecins Sans Frontières Kabul PD13 hospital. On May 12, 2020, three gunmen attacked the maternity ward of the hospital, but Maryam refused to leave her patient, who was in labor. Maryam, her patient, and the newborn baby were killed in the delivery suite.

Fatima Rajabi, a 23-year-old police officer originally from Ghazni province and a member of the anti-narcotics division. She was traveling to her home village in Jaghori district in a civilian minibus in July 2020 when the Taliban stopped the vehicle and took her captive. Two weeks later, the Taliban killed her and sent her remains, which had gunshot wounds and signs of torture, to her family.

Freshhta, daughter of Amir Mohamed, a 35-year-old prison guard with the Office of Prison Administration. She was walking from her residence in Kandahar City to a taxi on her way to work when she was murdered by an unknown gunman on October 25, 2020.

Malalai Maiwand, a reporter at Enikas Radio and TV, was shot and killed, along with her driver, by a gunman on December 10, 2020, in an attack on her vehicle in Jalalabad. Malalai was not the first in her family to be targeted. Five years earlier, her mother, an activist, was also killed by unknown gunmen.

Freshhta Kohistani, a 29-year-old women's rights and democracy activist, was assassinated by unknown gunmen near her home in Kapsia province on December 24, 2020. Kohistani regularly organized events advocating for women's rights in Afghanistan and used social media as a platform for her messaging.

NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE COUNCIL REPORT ON AFGHANISTAN: WOMEN'S ECONOMIC,
POLITICAL, SOCIAL STATUS DRIVEN BY CULTURAL NORMS, DATED APRIL 2, 2021



NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE COUNCIL
SENSE OF THE COMMUNITY MEMORANDUM

2 April 2021

SOCM 2021-04038-A

Afghanistan: Women's Economic, Political, Social Status Driven by Cultural Norms

Afghanistan's progress since the end of Taliban rule toward meeting broadly accepted international standards for the conditions of women has been uneven, reflecting cultural norms and conflict. The Taliban regime barred girls from attending school and prohibited women from working outside the home or being in public without a male relative. Although the Taliban's fall officially ended some policies, many continue in practice even in government-controlled areas, and years of war have left millions of women maimed, widowed, impoverished, and displaced.

- Roughly 3.5 million of the 9 million Afghans enrolled in school are female. However, only 17 percent of rural girls attend secondary school, compared to 45 percent of their urban peers, and more than 80 percent of Afghan women over age 15 are illiterate. The number of schools rose more than tenfold after 2001, but many have been shuttered in recent years by rising insecurity.
- Afghan women have less access than men to capital, struggle to own property, and face obstacles to operating in mixed-gender workplaces. As of 2017, approximately 16 percent of working-age women were employed—compared to 41 percent of men—and just 5 percent of business owners and mid- and upper-level managers were women.
- Progress is concentrated in cities and ethnic minority enclaves, where violence is lower and women had more freedom before Taliban rule. Gains are less pronounced in rural areas, where roughly 70 percent of Afghans live.

Progress probably owes more to external pressure than domestic support, suggesting it would be at risk after coalition withdrawal, even without Taliban efforts to reverse it. After decades of intensive international focus and funding, Afghanistan still ranks at or near the bottom of multiple UN and other global indices of conditions for women.

- In some rural Pashtun areas, tribal codes that predate the Taliban require women's full-body covering or seclusion in their homes as a means of protecting their perceived virtue and their families' honor. Nationwide, child marriage and stoning for adultery persist, and rape victims are killed by relatives for shaming their families.
- A UN study in 2019 found that only 15 percent of Afghan men think women should work outside the home after marriage, and two-thirds complained that women have too many rights.

Taliban Maintains Rigid Views

The Taliban remains broadly consistent in its restrictive approach to women's rights and would roll back much of the past two decades' progress if the group regained national power. The Taliban has seen minimal leadership turnover, maintains inflexible negotiating positions, and enforces strict social constraints in areas that it already controls.

- Some Taliban officials publicly say that the group will respect women's rights, but they caveat that these protections must align with Taliban interpretations of *sharia*. The group also claimed

during its previous regime that it afforded women all of the rights that Islam guaranteed them.

- Since the current peace process started in 2019, Taliban officials have issued statements opposing “alien-culture clothes worn by women” and have accused women’s rights advocates of promoting immorality, indecency, and non-Islamic culture.

If the Taliban were again Afghanistan’s dominant power, we assess that any prospect for moderating the group’s policies toward women would lie with ethnic minorities’ ability to maintain local variation and technological development since the Taliban’s previous rule. International pressure could play a reinforcing role.

- Successive Kabul governments’ struggles to extend their writ countrywide and previous resistance to Taliban rule in ethnic minority areas could lead to inconsistent implementation of Taliban edicts, whether by lack of capacity or local accommodation. Thus far, the Taliban’s effect on girls’ education in areas under its control has ranged from total shutdown to negotiated agreements on which subjects are taught.
- The proliferation of Afghan cell phone accounts—about 27 million in 2020—would offer Afghans greater access to the broader world and could make extreme Taliban behavior more visible than it was in the 1990s. International attention to Afghanistan probably would also be greater, at least for a few years after coalition withdrawal.
- The Taliban’s desires for foreign aid and legitimacy might marginally moderate its conduct over time. However, in the early days of reestablishing its Emirate, the Taliban probably would focus on extending control on its own terms.

Previous Reforms Faced Pushback

Efforts to raise Afghan women’s status began long before the Taliban’s fall but have met strong rural and religious resistance.

- King Amanullah Shah (1919-29) advocated for girls education, abolished forced marriage, and restricted polygamy. His wife famously removed her veil in public and was regularly photographed wearing European fashion. However, backlash to his reforms’ pace and scope contributed to him being forced into exile amid violent demonstrations.
- King Zahir Shah (1933-73) took a more cautious approach to change, including abolishing gender segregation and enacting women’s suffrage. His wife and daughter also appeared unveiled, igniting condemnation from clerics, but many urban women followed suit.
- The Communist era brought compulsory co-ed schooling and expanded female employment, but after rural protests, the government focused reform efforts on cities. The anti-Soviet *mujahidin* period that followed saw the return of mandatory veiling and the closure of most girls’ schools.