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5 COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,

6 U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

7 WASHINGTON, D.C.

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12 INTERVIEW OF: SUZY GEORGE

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Thursday, December 14, 2023

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Washington, D.C.

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The interview in the above matter was held in Room 2255, Rayburn House Office

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Building, commencing at 8:00 a.m.

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2 Appearances:

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5 For the COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS:

6

7 [REDACTED]

8 [REDACTED], SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND

9 ACCOUNTABILITY

10 [REDACTED], SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

11 [REDACTED]

12 [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]

15

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17 For the U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE:

18

19 [REDACTED], OFFICE OF THE LEGAL ADVISOR

20 [REDACTED] FOR LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

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2 For SUZY GEORGE:

3

4 NICHOLAS MCQUAID, ESQ.

5 MOLLY ROSEN, ESQ.

6 Latham & Watkins LLP

7 555 11th Street NW

8 Washington, D.C. 20004

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2 [REDACTED]. This is a transcribed interview of Chief of Staff to the Secretary  
3 of State Ms. Suzy George.

4 Chairman McCaul has requested this interview as part of the committee's  
5 investigation of the U.S. Afghanistan withdrawal. He thanks you for being here today  
6 and appearing voluntarily.

7 Would the witness please state her name for the record?

8 Ms. George. Suzy George.

9 [REDACTED] On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you for appearing  
10 here today to answer our questions.

11 My name is [REDACTED]. I am [REDACTED] on Chairman McCaul's  
12 staff on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and I'm leading the investigation into the  
13 Afghanistan withdrawal.

14 I will now ask committee staff present from the majority and minority to introduce  
15 themselves as well.

16 [REDACTED] [REDACTED], from the majority.

17 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]. I'm [REDACTED] for the majority.

18 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for  
19 the minority.

20 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]. I'm the [REDACTED] on the minority side.

21 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]. I'm the [REDACTED] for the minority.

22 [REDACTED] Thank you.

23 I'd like to now go over the ground rules and guidelines that we will follow during  
24 today's interview.

25 Our questions will proceed in rounds. The majority will ask questions first for 1

1 hour. Then the minority will have an opportunity to ask questions for an equal period of  
2 time if they choose. We will alternate back and forth until there are no more questions  
3 and the interview is over.

4 Typically, we take a short break at the end of each hour, but if you'd like to take a  
5 break apart from that, please just let us know, and we'd be happy to accommodate.

6 Ms. George. Thank you.

7 [REDACTED]. As you can see, there's an official court reporter taking down  
8 everything we say to make a written record. So we ask that you give verbal responses  
9 to all questions.

10 Does that make sense?

11 Ms. George. Yes.

12 [REDACTED] So the court reporter can take down a clear record, we will also  
13 do our best to limit the number of people directing questions at you during any given  
14 hour to just those people on the staff whose turn it is.

15 Please try and speak clearly so the court reporter can understand and so everyone  
16 can hear you. It is important that we don't talk over one another or interrupt each  
17 other.

18 Witnesses who appear before the committee have the opportunity to freely  
19 consult with counsel if they choose.

20 Ms. George, you're appearing today with private counsel, correct?

21 Ms. George. Correct.

22 [REDACTED] Can counsel please identify yourselves and state your names for  
23 the record?

24 Mr. McQuaid. Nick McQuaid from Latham & Watkins, on behalf of Ms. George.

25 Ms. Rosen. Molly Rosen from Latham & Watkins, also on behalf of Ms. George.

1 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

2 It's my understanding that agency counsel from the State Department is also  
3 present today.

4 Ms. George, you understand that agency counsel represents the State Department  
5 and not you personally, correct?

6 Ms. George. I do.

7 [REDACTED]. Could the agency counsel and note-taker please identify  
8 yourselves and state your names for the record?

9 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], of the Legal Adviser.

10 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for  
11 Legislative Affairs.

12 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

13 We want you to answer our questions in the most complete and truthful manner  
14 as possible, so we will take our time.

15 If you have any questions or if you do not understand one of our questions, please  
16 let us know. Our questions will cover a wide range of topics, so if you need clarification  
17 at any point, just say so.

18 If you do not know the answer to a question or do not remember, it's best not to  
19 guess. Please give us your best recollection. If there are things you don't know or  
20 can't remember, just say so, and inform us who, to the best of your knowledge, might be  
21 able to provide a more complete answer to the question.

22 Ms. George, this portion of the interview is unclassified, so if a question calls for  
23 any information that you know to be classified, please state that for the record, as well as  
24 the basis for the classification and the original classification authority.

25 If you're uncertain of the classification, please consult with your counsel. We'd

1 be happy to go off the record to afford you the opportunity to do so.

2 In the interest of transparency and open access to the Federal Government, we  
3 ask that your asserted basis for classification adhere to the uniform system prescribed by  
4 Executive Order 13526.

5 Once you've identified the requisite classification, please respond with as much  
6 unclassified information as possible.

7 Do you understand?

8 Ms. George. Yes.

9 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

10 You should also understand that, although this interview is not under oath, that by  
11 law you are required to answer questions from Congress truthfully.

12 Do you understand?

13 Ms. George. Yes.

14 [REDACTED] This also applies to questions posed by congressional staff in an  
15 interview.

16 Do you understand?

17 Ms. George. Yes.

18 [REDACTED]. Witnesses that knowingly provide false testimony could be  
19 subject to criminal prosecution for perjury or for making false statements under 18 U.S.C.  
20 section 1001.

21 Do you understand this?

22 Ms. George. Yes.

23 [REDACTED]. Is there any reason you are unable to provide truthful answers  
24 to today's questions?

25 Ms. George. No.

1 [REDACTED]. Finally, I'd like to make note that the content of what we discuss  
2 here today is confidential, as per Chairman McCaul's terms. We ask that you not speak  
3 about what we discuss in this interview to any outside individuals to preserve the  
4 integrity of our investigation.

5 For the same reason, the marked exhibits that we will use today will remain with  
6 the court reporter so that they can go in the official transcript, and any copies of those  
7 exhibits will be returned to us when we wrap up.

8 That is the end of the majority's preamble. Is there anything that my colleagues  
9 from the minority would like to add?

10 [REDACTED]. Yes.

11 We note that, notwithstanding any agreement made between the majority, the  
12 witness, her private counsel, and/or the State Department for this transcribed interview,  
13 there is no provision governing or mandating confidentiality of investigations and/or  
14 transcribed interviews in the House or committee's rules for the 118th Congress.

15 Thank you.

16 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

17 The clock now reads 8:08 a.m., and we will start the first hour of questioning.

18 EXAMINATION

19 BY [REDACTED]:

20 Q Ms. George, before proceeding, the majority wants to define a couple of key  
21 terms in the interest of clarity.

22 First, when referencing the term "withdrawal," the majority's referencing the U.S.  
23 military retrograde, i.e., the Go-to-Zero order, which was officially announced by  
24 President Biden on April 14, 2021. This includes related planning by the State  
25 Department and other agencies and the decision-making processes.

1 Does that make sense?

2 A Yes.

3 Q Second, when referencing the term "evacuation" or "emergency  
4 evacuation," the majority is referencing the evacuation of U.S. citizens and nationals,  
5 civilian personnel, and designated persons in August 2021, resulting in the noncombatant  
6 evacuation operation initiated on August 16, 2021. This includes related planning by the  
7 State Department and other agencies and the decision-making processes.

8 Does that make sense?

9 A Yes.

10 Q Thank you.

11 Now, I know this will be a difficult question to answer in a brief overview, but can  
12 you please provide us sort of brief overview of your career in public service?

13 A Sure.

14 I spent the majority of my career working for Madeleine Albright. So I spent 20  
15 years working for her, 6 years at the State Department and then 14 years in the private  
16 sector.

17 Then worked in the Obama National Security Council as the Chief of Staff and  
18 Executive Secretary.

19 Worked at ONE Campaign, a nongovernmental organization working to alleviate  
20 poverty in Africa primarily.

21 I then worked on the Biden transition.

22 And then came into the State Department as the Chief of Staff in January of '21.

23 Q And do you recall which day you started as the Chief of Staff in January of  
24 2021?

25 A January 20th.

1 Q Oh, the 20th. Okay.

2 A Yeah.

3 Q And when did you first discuss the position of Chief of Staff to Secretary  
4 Blinken, and with whom?

5 A I spoke to Secretary Blinken about it. And it was a few days after he was  
6 nominated, early December of 2020.

7 Q Thank you. And did Secretary Blinken recommend you for the position?

8 A Yes.

9 Q Or, select you for --

10 A Select me, yes.

11 Q And how many people report to you as Chief of Staff to the Secretary?

12 A The Secretary's immediate office reports to me, so at any given time it's  
13 between 10 to 12 people.

14 Q And what are your major duties and responsibilities as Chief of Staff?

15 A Chiefs of staff to Secretaries, to Cabinet principals, can come in any variety  
16 of forms. For me, I work primarily to support the Secretary both to structure his office,  
17 to facilitate communications across the agency, to help bring together people across the  
18 agency as needed on a variety of projects and issues.

19 I coordinate with the interagency; I work with the White House. I work primarily  
20 on personnel and management, supporting the work of the Deputy Secretary for  
21 Management and Resources, the work of the Under Secretary for Management.

22 Q Thank you.

23 And you noted your prior role on the transition team for the incoming Biden  
24 administration, correct?

25 A Yes.

1 Q At whose request did you assume that role?

2 A Who offered me the position?

3 Q Correct.

4 A Jeff Zients, who was the chair of the transition.

5 Q And what was your role in the transition team?

6 A I headed up the personnel team for the transition under the sub-Cabinet  
7 level. So there were two personnel teams; one worked on Cabinet and  
8 sub-Cabinet -- one worked on Cabinet, and I worked on every- -- the appointments team.

9 Q That's helpful. Thank you.

10 And sort of fast-forwarding a bit to now, your role as the Chief of Staff, could you  
11 please speak to your working relationship with Secretary Blinken?

12 A Uh --

13 Q Overbroad question. But, in terms of your engagement, as you noted, the  
14 role of Chief of Staff can vary a bit depending upon who the Secretary of State is.

15 Can you speak to, sort of, your engagements? Are these regular engagements,  
16 on a daily basis? More generally, do you have a more pivotal role as to the policymaking  
17 processes that he engages in?

18 So, to the best of your understanding, if you could speak to that.

19 A Yep.

20 So my job is to make sure the Secretary is supported as needed so that he is able  
21 to do his job. I interact with him on a daily basis when he is in D.C. I travel  
22 occasionally but not often with him.

23 My role is not as a policymaker. I am there to, as I said, primarily support on  
24 personnel and management issues.

25 Q Thank you.

1           And you noted that you work with other members of the Department's senior  
2 leadership, such as the Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources. How  
3 frequently did you engage with Deputy Secretary Sherman in a professional capacity?

4           A    Deputy Secretary is different than the Deputy Secretary for Management  
5 and Resources. Sorry. Wendy Sherman was the Deputy Secretary.

6           Q    Of course. Yes, we're going to be going --

7           A    Oh, okay. Sorry.

8           Q    I was going through, sort of, the leadership.

9           A    Yep. So I engage with her probably on a daily basis, as well -- with most of  
10 the senior leadership on a daily basis.

11          Q    And now for DMR, so Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources,  
12 how only did you engage with DMR McKeon?

13          A    Generally on a daily basis. We had a series of senior staff meetings where,  
14 depending on who is present in the building on any given day, we meet regularly.

15          Q    And how about Counselor Derek Chollet?

16          A    Same. Again, when we are both in the building, usually on a daily or  
17 couple-times-a-week basis.

18          Q    Thank you.

19          Go ahead.

20                BY ██████████:

21          Q    Could you discuss the division of labor that you have with your colleague  
22 Mr. Sullivan?

23          A    The division of labor?

24          Q    Tom Sullivan.

25          A    Uh-huh. The division --

1 Q Or, how do you divide your duties and responsibilities?

2 A Yeah.

3 So, as I mentioned, the Secretary's office has a team of about 10 to 12 people.  
4 We have two deputy chiefs of staff. We have an executive assistant, who's a career  
5 Foreign Service officer, and then have an assortment of special assistants and staff  
6 assistants, schedulers, and -- I guess that's it -- and personal aides.

7 Secretary; two deputy chiefs of staff -- one for operations, Jessica Wright; one for  
8 policy, Tom Sullivan; and then I oversee the office.

9 BY [REDACTED]:

10 Q That's helpful. Thank you.

11 A Sure.

12 Q What was your involvement with respect to the Department's equities in the  
13 U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan?

14 A I'm sorry. Say that again.

15 Q Your involvement with respect to the Department's equities in the U.S.  
16 withdrawal from Afghanistan. So how involved were you on issues pertaining to that?

17 A Not particularly involved, given that it was a policy process.

18 Q Did you appear on behalf of the Secretary in that capacity at any point?

19 A Appear?

20 Q On issues pertaining to the Afghanistan withdrawal, did you engage in  
21 meetings or appear on behalf of the Secretary or partake in any of the interagency  
22 meetings that you had noted?

23 A I did not attend any of the interagency meetings. That's part of an  
24 interagency process which the deputies and other subject-matter experts participated in.  
25 I was in meetings related to Afghanistan, but I did not appear on behalf of the Secretary.

1 I'm not sure I quite understand the difference, but --

2 Q And did you oversee any work pertaining to Afghanistan in your capacity as  
3 Chief of Staff?

4 A I did not lead any work on Afghanistan.

5 Q And when did you first become involved -- understanding that you were not  
6 involved in the policymaking or decision-making processes thereto, but when did you first  
7 become involved with work relating to the Afghanistan withdrawal?

8 A There was work related to the Afghanistan withdrawal from -- to the  
9 Afghanistan policy review almost immediately upon when we arrived at the Department.  
10 I do not recall specifically being involved in -- I don't recall being involved in specific  
11 meetings, but there was ongoing work which the Department and the Secretary were  
12 involved in from the beginning of the administration.

13 Q That's helpful. Thank you.

14 And, of course, we're learning to sort of better understand your role as Chief of  
15 Staff. So could you speak to what your responsibilities were with respect to the  
16 Afghanistan withdrawal and ultimate evacuation, just so we better understand what level  
17 of involvement you did have?

18 A I had no particular responsibility for the policymaking or the planning for the  
19 evacuation or the withdrawal.

20 Q Did, for example, the individual leadership you spoke of, DMR McKeon, for  
21 example, or Deputy Secretary Sherman, Counselor Chollet -- and we're happy to go  
22 through additional individuals -- but did they report to you in any capacity with respect to  
23 the Afghanistan withdrawal and brief you on developments on that issue?

24 A They did not report to me in a, sort of, structural hierarchy way. I  
25 participated in briefings where they briefed other colleagues and the Secretary on their

1 roles leading in both the policy and the withdrawal planning.

2 Q And did this continue into the August 2021 emergency evacuation from  
3 Afghanistan -- the briefings and the meetings with these individuals?

4 A Yes. The briefings continued throughout.

5 Q And were you involved in planning for the possibility of an emergency  
6 evacuation from Afghanistan throughout 2021?

7 A Again, I did not lead any of the planning. I was involved in briefings and  
8 meetings about the planning.

9 Q Of course. And we'll just level-set. It's our understanding, as well, that  
10 you did not lead any of the planning or anything like that. So we obviously want you to  
11 speak to your personal capacity and what you engaged in.

12 Was there a senior leader at the Department exercising overall responsibility for  
13 the Department's equities and planning for the withdrawal and potential emergency  
14 evacuation?

15 A I'm so sorry. Can you -- that's a long one. Can you repeat that?

16 Q Of course. Was there a senior leader at the Department exercising overall  
17 responsibility for the Department's equities in the Afghanistan withdrawal and ultimate  
18 evacuation?

19 A Yes.

20 Q And who was that individual?

21 A So Brian McKeon, as the Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources,  
22 was responsible for the planning for the withdrawal.

23 Q And can you speak to which other senior leaders at the Department were  
24 most involved in matters relating to the withdrawal? And what were their roles?

25 A Carol Perez, who was the Acting Under Secretary for Management, was also

1 involved. Derek Chollet led on the policy work. Um --

2 Q Ambassador Khalilzad, I imagine, as well --

3 A Yes.

4 Q -- as the Special Representative. And did you engage with him at all in any  
5 capacity throughout this period?

6 A I did not engage with him on the Afghanistan work.

7 Q What did you engage with him on?

8 A There were management and personnel-related issues that I engaged with  
9 him on.

10 Q Thank you.

11 Did you at any point engage with military figures working with the Department on  
12 issues pertaining to Afghanistan?

13 A Not that I recall.

14 [REDACTED]. Did you engage with Ambassador Ross Wilson during this time  
15 period?

16 Ms. George. I did not engage with him regularly. I recall, I engaged with him  
17 when we traveled to Kabul in the spring of '21. I may have had a phone conversation or  
18 two with him at some point during the spring. And I'm confident I was in briefings  
19 where he might have participated.

20 [REDACTED]. I would just add, when you say "this time period," if you could --

21 [REDACTED]. Absolutely. I was talking about the time period from January to  
22 August 2021.

23 Ms. George. Thank you.

24 BY [REDACTED]:

25 Q And what were the White House and National Security Council's role

1 throughout this period on issues pertaining to the Afghanistan withdrawal?

2 A So the White House ran the Afghan policy review process, National Security  
3 Council process. That went on through -- started in January of '21 and went on through  
4 the spring.

5 Q And who were the key individuals at the White House and the NSC on  
6 matters relating to withdrawal?

7 A Given that it was a National Security Council process, I assume it was the  
8 National Security Advisor and the Deputy National Security Advisor, but I wasn't -- did not  
9 participate.

10 Q And who were your main points of contact at the White House and the NSC  
11 on issues pertaining to Afghanistan?

12 A Again, I didn't focus on Afghanistan, so I didn't have regular contact with the  
13 National Security Council on it.

14 Q That's helpful. Thank you.

15 And to what extent did you engage and coordinate with foreign governments in  
16 any capacity on issues pertaining to Afghanistan?

17 A I did not.

18 Q And did you coordinate with the United Nations at all?

19 A Nope. I did not.

20 Q Can you speak to how the potential military withdrawal from Afghanistan  
21 was approached during the Presidential transition from former President Trump to  
22 President Biden?

23 A No. That was not something I worked on during the transition.

24 Q Were you privy to any meetings relating to this issue?

25 Mr. McQuaid. Could we go off the record for a second?

1 [REDACTED]. Of course.

2 [Discussion off the record.]

3 [REDACTED]. I want to be clear, on the record, that --

4 [REDACTED]. Can we go back on the record?

5 [REDACTED]. Can we go back on the record?

6 Mr. McQuaid. Sure.

7 [REDACTED]. -- they need to deal with these issues, which they are free to do  
8 directly, with people who hold certain rights.

9 The Department of State is not at this time and has not, as you know, asserted any  
10 privileges on anything. We have simply raised potential implications where we will not  
11 allow waiver of a potential privilege.

12 [REDACTED]. That's helpful clarification. Thank you, [REDACTED]

13 BY [REDACTED]:

14 Q Can you speak to what your impression was of why Ambassador Khalilzad  
15 was retained as a Special Representative by the new administration, given the personnel  
16 implications?

17 A The transition -- the State Department agency review team gave a series of  
18 recommendations, personnel recommendations, to the incoming landing team, of which I  
19 was part, and one of the recommendations was to retain Ambassador Khalilzad in his  
20 position.

21 Q And do you recall the reasoning or, sort of, justification for --

22 A I don't.

23 Q -- his retainment?

24 Mr. McQuaid. Make sure you let [REDACTED] finish the question.

25 Ms. George. Oh, sorry.

1 BY [REDACTED]:

2 Q That's no problem.

3 And what was your impression of why Ambassador Ross Wilson was retained by  
4 the new administration?

5 A Same. The State Department agency review team made a  
6 recommendation on a series of personnel issues, one of which was retaining Ross Wilson  
7 as charge.

8 Q And can you speak to what the Secretary communicated to you on this  
9 issue?

10 A So, in my job, I have a regular series of confidential and trusted  
11 conversations with the Secretary, as I never talk about them in any context, because that  
12 is the nature of my job. So I don't -- I'm not comfortable talking about my conversations  
13 with him. If you're asking if he was briefed on these issues, yes, he was.

14 Q Let me reframe the question.

15 A Sure.

16 Q Now, we, of course, don't want you to answer anything that would pertain  
17 to, sort of, your private, personal conversations, and we only want you to answer what  
18 you feel comfortable answering.

19 But, ultimately, let's sort of shift the focus on official conversations or official  
20 justifications that were provided. What was your impression of why Secretary Blinken  
21 chose to retain Ambassador Ross Wilson and Ambassador Khalilzad? Was there any  
22 official justification or reasoning that was provided throughout the Department?

23 A Again, so the agency review team provided a series of personnel  
24 recommendations, of which retaining Ambassador Khalilzad was one of those.

25 Q Thank you.

1           And when you assumed the position of Chief of Staff in January 2021, where did  
2 things stand with respect to the potential withdrawal from Afghanistan?

3           A     Again, the policy process was not part of my responsibility, so I don't  
4 remember specifically. There was an agency -- an Afghanistan review process that was  
5 set up within the first few days of the administration.

6           Q     Do you recall what planning had been done at the time pertaining to the  
7 Afghanistan withdrawal?

8           A     I do not.

9           Q     Had a decision been made about whether troops would be drawn down to  
10 zero? Do you recall that element of the process?

11          A     I don't recall.

12          Q     Would you be able to describe what the prudent planning process was for  
13 the Afghanistan withdrawal?

14          A     Are you asking what it was or -- what the planning process was?

15          Q     Do you recall -- I believe it's specifically titled the "prudent planning  
16 process," in which options were formulated on issues pertaining to Afghanistan. Do you  
17 recall what that was?

18          A     I don't recall.

19          Q     Ms. George, I would like to enter --

20           ██████████. Again, I would just ask that you -- we've had this before  
21 here -- specify the time periods, because the prudent planning process could have been  
22 2020 --

23           ██████████. So --

24           ██████████. -- or 2021.

25           ██████████. -- it was identified at the outset what planning had been done,

1 so when she assumed the position as Chief of Staff.

2 [REDACTED]: On January 20th.

3 [REDACTED]: So January -- I limited it to, more broadly, January 2021. So  
4 what planning had been done at that time.

5 [REDACTED]: But that's my point, because you said "when she took office."  
6 And on January 20th, when she took office, she couldn't have had any role in any  
7 planning because she didn't work there.

8 So, if it's the whole month, just -- I am concerned that we get time periods  
9 confused.

10 [REDACTED]: So let me -- the question is not what planning the new  
11 administration had done. The question was, what was the status of the planning at the  
12 time, and had options been formulated by the prior administration. So, when you  
13 assumed your role, had there been any plans in place relating to Afghanistan. So that  
14 was the question.

15 Mr. McQuaid. So you're asking whether she recalls, in January --

16 [REDACTED]: Correct.

17 Mr. McQuaid. -- of 2021, being aware of something that was called the "prudent  
18 planning process."

19 [REDACTED]: Correct. Yes.

20 Ms. George. Thank you for clarifying it.

21 I don't recall specifics. I recall that there was concern that there was not  
22 sufficient planning, that sufficient planning had not been done. But I don't recall  
23 specifics.

24 [REDACTED]: That's helpful. Thank you. I know it took some  
25 back-and-forth --

1 Ms. George. Sorry.

2 [REDACTED]. -- but I appreciate it.

3 I would like to enter exhibit 1 into the record.

4 [George Exhibit No. 1

5 was marked for identification.]

6 [REDACTED]. Oh, thanks.

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q So this is a "Statement by NSC Spokesperson Emily Horne on National  
9 Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's Call With National Security Advisor Hamdullah Mohib,"  
10 dated January 22, 2021.

11 Based on this statement, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan informed his  
12 Afghan counterpart, Hamdullah Mohib, that the U.S. would review the February 2020  
13 U.S.-Taliban agreement, i.e., the Doha Agreement, including to assess whether the  
14 Taliban was living up to its commitments.

15 Ms. George, do you recall if the interagency process review commenced around  
16 this time period?

17 A I don't remember specifically when it commenced, but, yes, I remember it  
18 commencing early in the administration.

19 Q And roughly how long did this review last?

20 A I'm not aware.

21 Q And can you speak to how the review was conducted? Like, namely, were  
22 there regular interagency meetings that took place, and who led those? Who led the  
23 review?

24 A Again, I don't know the specifics of the review process. I was not part of it.  
25 I am aware, generally, that there was a robust and active review process through the

1 interagency, so led by the National Security Council.

2 Q And are you aware of what the State Department's role was in that review?

3 A Again, I'm not aware specifically, but the State Department in any National  
4 Security -- from my experience, in any National Security Council process, the State  
5 Department is a principal actor in the process and in the review.

6 Q And do you recall what course of action Secretary Blinken urged the  
7 President to take at the conclusion of this interagency review?

8 Namely, did he encourage the President to, for example, amongst the options,  
9 adhere to the Doha Agreement? Did he encourage, for example, as another option,  
10 conditionality?

11 Ultimately, I don't want to testify for you, so if you don't recall specifically what he  
12 recommended, then that's fine. But it'd be helpful to us to better understand what took  
13 place and what the Department's conclusion was at the end of this review.

14 [REDACTED]: So --

15 Mr. McQuaid. So --

16 [REDACTED]: Sorry.

17 Mr. McQuaid. No, you go.

18 [REDACTED]: So what the Department's conclusions or processes were I'm not  
19 concerned with. But the manner in which the question was phrased, as to a specific  
20 recommendation from the Secretary directly to the President, implicates an answer that  
21 may be subject to executive branch confidentiality terms.

22 And, therefore, without knowing the exact details of the answer, I would ask -- in  
23 order to avoid waiver of any rights that might be involved, I would ask the witness not to  
24 answer the question in that exact form.

25 [REDACTED] Okay. It might be helpful if I enter the next exhibit, just as sort

1 of a guiding role.

2 I'd like to introduce an excerpt from the not-yet-final transcript of Ambassador  
3 Khalilzad's transcribed interview conducted on November 8, 2023.

4 [George Exhibit No. 2  
5 was marked for identification.]

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q I apologize in advance for any typos reflected in the transcript. This is still  
8 in draft form.

9 So, if you could please draw your attention to what is marked as page 156, line 4.

10 Mr. McQuaid. Sorry, which page?

11 [REDACTED]. 156. It's marked at the top right-hand corner. Line 4.

12 So, here, the majority asks, "So, Ambassador, I'd like to go to, sort of, the next  
13 question."

14 The typos that I mentioned.

15 And line 8, if you skip down a few lines, outlines that question. Quote,  
16 "Specifically about the decision to remain in the Doha Agreement. You noted  
17 previously, sort of, these distinctions between conditionality, the three different options  
18 that were presented, and that, from my understanding, you and Secretary Blinken  
19 recommended a conditional approach or conditionality approach."

20 He then responds -- and "he" being Ambassador Khalilzad -- "Right. That's my  
21 judgment."

22 To which the majority states, "That's your judgment based on your firsthand  
23 account and interpretation."

24 To which he responds, "Yeah."

25 The majority then asks, "What was the ultimate decision made by the President?"

1 It was not conditionality, correct?"

2 To which he responds, "It was not conditionality with regard to the withdrawal.  
3 Only -- I think it's possible that a definition would have been made if the Talibs had said,  
4 'You should stay until we reach a political agreement.'"

5 I imagine by "definition" he meant "decision."

6 Were you aware that --

7 [REDACTED]. So I would just note, before you go on -- because we've had this  
8 before -- part of this is, we do not have Ambassador Khalilzad to say, well, did that have  
9 some meaning other than is being attributed to it.

10 And I believe that the answers and questions that follow it are extremely relevant  
11 to exactly what you're asking, because Ambassador Khalilzad testified he had no idea who  
12 had made the recommendation to the President.

13 BY [REDACTED]:

14 Q Were you aware that Ambassador Khalilzad and Secretary Blinken made a  
15 recommendation of conditionality?

16 [REDACTED]. That question is phrased in a way that is actually rebutted by  
17 Ambassador Khalilzad's direct testimony that he does not know who made the  
18 recommendation to the President. You have embedded an assumption that is  
19 contradicted by the transcript you've added as an exhibit.

20 Now, I'm going to defer to Nick to -- you know, for his client, but from the point of  
21 view of the Department, that presents a problem.

22 BY [REDACTED]:

23 Q So let me reframe the question and just focus specifically on the language  
24 outlined on line 8.

25 It states here, "... from my understanding, you and Secretary Blinken

1 recommended" -- we ask, the majority, "... from my understanding, you and Secretary  
2 Blinken recommended a conditional approach or a conditionality approach," to which he  
3 responds, "Right. That's my judgment."

4 Let's just focus on that specifically. Are you aware if Secretary Blinken had  
5 sentiments or opinions pertaining to conditionality of the Doha Agreement?

6 Mr. McQuaid. Are you aware of whether he had views on that?

7 Ms. George. Can I ask a question before? I don't really understand what he's  
8 saying here. "That's my judgment." It's his judgment of what?

9 [REDACTED]. I can't speak for Ambassador Khalilzad on that.

10 Ms. George. I just -- I can't follow the structure.

11 Mr. McQuaid. I mean, I think --

12 [REDACTED]. Exactly.

13 Mr. McQuaid. I think, if you're asking about whether -- he says, "That's my  
14 judgment." So I think -- what I read this answer to say is, did he have a view on  
15 conditionality, and I guess the question is, do you know whether --

16 [REDACTED]. So that's why my question --

17 Mr. McQuaid. -- the Ambassador --

18 [REDACTED]. -- was not whether Ambassador Khalilzad's statement is true.

19 My question is, can you speak to Secretary Blinken's view on the conditionality of the  
20 Doha Agreement, if he had expressed any such views to you, personally, from your  
21 firsthand account.

22 Mr. McQuaid. But --

23 [REDACTED]. Not whether what Ambassador Khalilzad is saying is true.

24 Mr. McQuaid. Okay. So I think Ms. George has been really clear on her -- that  
25 she's not going to read out conversations with the Secretary.

1 But, again, I think this is a little bit of a -- you're creating a confusing record,  
2 because this is a transcript of another witness, who is referencing their judgment, which I  
3 would read to be the Ambassador's.

4 And if you want to ask a question about what she knew about the Ambassador's  
5 views at that time -- you know, if you know specific information about that, I think you  
6 can --

7 Ms. George. I don't.

8 BY [REDACTED]:

9 Q So we spoke to the interagency process, the Department's role in that  
10 interagency process more generally, given its equities and jurisdiction as the Department  
11 of State.

12 Did Secretary Blinken, to Department leadership, did he make a recommendation  
13 on the Doha Agreement? Namely, at the end of that interagency review, did he assert  
14 that we should adhere to the Doha Agreement? That we should enforce the  
15 conditionality provisions? Did he state any opinion or any -- in any official capacity on  
16 the Doha Agreement?

17 [REDACTED]. Is this in her presence, or to her, as to her personal --

18 BY [REDACTED]:

19 Q Were you privy to any recommendation made by Secretary Blinken?

20 A As part of an interagency and National Security Council process, every  
21 department weighs in with an opinion.

22 Q So what was the Department's opinion on this?

23 A That is -- it is not something that I have the specifics on. I know it was  
24 done, but it is not -- I do not --

25 Q So, as the Chief of Staff to the Secretary of State, you are not aware of what

1 the Department's recommendation on the Doha Agreement was?

2 A It's an interagency internal process that -- no. It is not something that I  
3 recall specifically.

4 Q Let's fast-forward to April 14, 2021. President Biden announced the U.S.  
5 would withdraw from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. When did you first learn that  
6 would be the President's course of action?

7 A I'm so sorry. Can you repeat that question?

8 Q Of course. We're fast-forwarding to April 14, 2021, when the President  
9 made his announcement --

10 A Uh-huh.

11 Q -- that the United States would withdraw from Afghanistan by September 11,  
12 2021.

13 Given that we can't focus on the elements of the Doha Agreement, I'd like to now  
14 fast-forward to the decision that was made.

15 When did you first learn that that would be the President's course of action?

16 A I don't recall exactly when I understood that would be the decision, but I  
17 imagine it was within a few days before the announcement was made.

18 Q And how did you learn of it?

19 A I don't recall.

20 Q Can you please address the decision to remain in the Doha Agreement, to  
21 the best of your abilities, as you understood them?

22 A The process of the decision?

23 Q Namely, what -- ultimately, it appears, based on President Biden's  
24 announcement, that the Doha Agreement was being adhered to by the United States.  
25 Can you speak to the process underlying the decision to remain with respect to the

1 Department's equities?

2 So what led the United States to ultimately adhere to the Doha Agreement, as you  
3 understood that, from the Department's perspective, given its jurisdiction over foreign  
4 policy matters?

5 Mr. McQuaid. I think Ms. George has tried to give you the information that she  
6 can. You're asking about the input of the State Department into a national security  
7 process. As, again, my understanding is, that is the kind of apex of executive branch  
8 confidentiality, and so -- and so --

9 [REDACTED]. My question was not about the input with respect to the  
10 interagency process. My question is: The American public would like to understand  
11 what was the Department's recommendation or what did the Department believe -- let's  
12 rewind.

13 We're not asking about conversations that took place in the interagency process.  
14 But what was the Department's official recommendation, as it was communicated to the  
15 American public, on the Doha Agreement? I think that's a pretty fair question.

16 [REDACTED]. So, to the best of my recollection, the Department didn't disclose  
17 to the, quote, "American public" its recommendations.

18 [REDACTED]. That's why we're asking. So what would be --

19 [REDACTED]. No, what you -- okay.

20 [REDACTED]. That's why we're asking.

21 Mr. McQuaid. If you're aware of a statement that the State Department made to  
22 the American people apart from the administration position on the Doha Agreement,  
23 that's fine if you want to share that, if you're aware of any such independent statement.

24 Ms. George. I am not aware of any statements outside of the interagency  
25 process.

1 BY [REDACTED]:

2 Q Is there a justification that we should defer to to better understand what the  
3 Department's position on that was? Would it be the administration's justification,  
4 specifically President Biden's explanation?

5 A Yes.

6 Q Okay.

7 So I'd like to enter exhibit 3 into the record next.

8 [George Exhibit No. 3  
9 was marked for identification.]

10 BY [REDACTED]:

11 Q This is an excerpt of a report by SIGAR dated January 30, 2021.

12 Have you seen this?

13 [Bells ringing.]

14 Mr. McQuaid. It's just votes.

15 Ms. George. Oh.

16 Mr. McQuaid. I think stuff's happening.

17 [REDACTED]. It's a bit alarming.

18 Mr. McQuaid. Yeah. It's not --

19 Ms. George. I'm not a frequent Hill visitor.

20 Mr. McQuaid. It's not time to get under the table. That's nine sirens really  
21 loud.

22 Ms. George. Good to know.

23 BY [REDACTED]:

24 Q This is the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. Have  
25 you seen this document before?

1           A    I have seen it. Thank you for sharing it with me. I only saw it yesterday  
2 for the first time.

3           Q    Thank you. Of course. It's our pleasure.

4           So this is dated January 30, 2021. I'd like to direct your attention to the bottom  
5 of page 47, into 48.

6           A    I'm just going to need some glasses.

7           Q    Of course. Please take your time.

8           A    I don't have them.

9           Q    I'm happy to read it into the record. Counsel can, of course, interrupt me if  
10 I'm?

11          A    Okay.

12          Q    -- misstating anything.

13               Quote, "Peace negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban  
14 continued this quarter amid sustained high levels of insurgent and extremist violence in  
15 Afghanistan. The Taliban's participation in the talks provides them an opportunity to  
16 fulfill one commitment in the February 2020 U.S.-Taliban agreement -- to discuss the date  
17 and modalities of a permanent and comprehensive cease-fire and complete an  
18 agreement over the political future of Afghanistan. However, several Taliban actions  
19 continue to belie other commitments in the agreement, including continued affiliation  
20 with terrorist groups, high levels of overall violence, and attacks on major population  
21 centers and on U.S. and Coalition personnel."

22               Can you speak to this last statement -- namely, that the Taliban's actions with  
23 respect to ties to terrorism, violent attacks on population centers, and on U.S. and  
24 coalition personnel belie the commitment to the Doha Agreement?

25               If you're not aware of any discussions, any decision-making, et cetera, in the

1 Department surrounding this issue, that's fine. Please say so for the record. But to the  
2 extent you do have any knowledge, we'd like for you to speak to this issue in particular.

3 Mr. McQuaid. And, [REDACTED] are we right to assume that you're referencing what  
4 she knew about that statement at the time this was released, which was January of 2021?

5 BY [REDACTED]:

6 Q Correct. We'll start with that and sort of move temporally as to -- because,  
7 obviously, engagement with the Taliban continued until August 2021. But let's start  
8 with the time period of this report.

9 A January 30th of 2021, I was not aware of this.

10 Q And throughout from January onward, into August of 2021, can you speak to  
11 this issue in particular, the Taliban's relations and cutting ties with terrorist groups?

12 [REDACTED]: So I just want to be clear. When you say -- and you said it earlier  
13 correctly -- when you say "speak to," meaning what you would've heard or been aware  
14 of.

15 Because I think she's testified clearly she couldn't speak to it because she wouldn't  
16 be doing that direct, substantive work.

17 BY [REDACTED]:

18 Q Yes. And for clarity of the record, it's just helpful to have that. I  
19 apologize. Some of this may be redundant, but there are questions we have to ask.

20 So, if you aren't aware, that's fine, but we just need to know for ourselves rather  
21 than assuming.

22 A So, from January of 2021 through August, I did not work on this issue, so I  
23 was not aware of the specifics. I did receive intelligence briefings and other U.S.  
24 Government briefings and participated in meetings where these topics were discussed, so  
25 I was aware in broad stroke of these issues.

1 Q And can you speak to, understanding that we're in an unclassified space,  
2 what you were aware of through these briefings, et cetera, in broad strokes?

3 Mr. McQuaid. I'm going to direct the witness not to answer. I don't want her  
4 to have to try to navigate, you know, as Chief of Staff her -- asking her on the fly to  
5 distinguish between what was classified and what wasn't classified, I think, isn't  
6 something that she should be asked to do. We're happy to address it when we go into  
7 the secure space, what she remembers, if anything.

8 [REDACTED]: Okay.

9 BY [REDACTED]:

10 Q And are you aware of what Secretary Blinken's assessment was of whether  
11 the Taliban were living up to its commitments to cut ties with terrorist groups?

12 A Again, I was not involved in the specific conversations. Regular policy  
13 process and anything that I am aware of that came from private conversations I'm not  
14 comfortable discussing.

15 Q Okay.

16 I'd like to introduce exhibit 4 into the record next.

17 [George Exhibit No. 4  
18 was marked for identification.]

19 BY [REDACTED]:

20 Q This is an excerpt from a report by a U.N. Sanctions Monitoring Team dated  
21 May 27, 2020, so in the prior administration, under former President Trump.

22 And have you seen this document before?

23 A Again -- thank you for sharing it with us -- I saw it last night. But I did not  
24 have a chance to review it in detail.

25 Q I'd like to direct you to what is marked page 3 in the bottom right-hand

1 corner of the excerpt and, specifically, the fifth paragraph in the "Summary" box. I'll  
2 give you an opportunity take a look, but the relevant language here will be read into the  
3 record.

4 Just let us know when you're ready.

5 A Okay.

6 Q To quote, "The senior leadership of Al-Qaida remains present in Afghanistan,  
7 as well as hundreds of armed operatives, Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent, and groups  
8 of foreign terrorist fighters aligned with the Taliban. A number of significant Al-Qaida  
9 figures were killed in Afghanistan during the reporting period. Relations between the  
10 Taliban, especially the Haqqani Network, and Al-Qaida remain close, based on friendship,  
11 a history of shared struggle, ideological sympathy, and intermarriage. The Taliban  
12 regularly consulted with Al-Qaida during negotiations with the United States and offered  
13 guarantees that it would honour their historic ties. Al-Qaida has reacted positively to  
14 the agreement, with statements from its acolytes celebrating it as a victory for the  
15 Taliban's cause and thus for global militancy."

16 Ms. George, can you speak to this? And I know we've previously defined how we  
17 interpret "speak to this." But in your personal capacity and professional capacity, can  
18 you speak to whether you were aware of this issue?

19 A In what time -- in the spring of '21?

20 Q Correct. Did this issue subsist when the Biden administration took power  
21 and you joined the State Department again?

22 A Again, I was not -- I did not participate in policy briefings or the policy  
23 process on this.

24 Q Uh-huh.

25 A In broad stroke, I was aware of reporting such as this.

1 Q Okay.

2 I'd like to introduce exhibit 5 next.

3 [George Exhibit No. 5  
4 was marked for identification.]

5 BY [REDACTED]:

6 Q This fast-forwards a bit in the timeline to the current administration.

7 Mr. McQuaid. It gets smaller and smaller.

8 [REDACTED]. The font is incredibly small.

9 Mr. McQuaid. This could be the entire novel of "War and Peace."

10 [REDACTED]. That's why it's called the Long War Journal.

11 Mr. McQuaid. Yeah.

12 BY [REDACTED]:

13 Q So, as exhibit 5, this is an article from the Foundation for Defense of  
14 Democracies, so FDD's Long War Journal, dated April 8, 2021, written by senior fellow and  
15 editor Bill Roggio.

16 So this was published on April 8th, and this was about a week, then, prior to  
17 President Biden's Go-to-Zero announcement, correct?

18 A April 8th was about a week before the announcement, yes.

19 Q And I'll just read some of the language here into the record. This is about  
20 halfway through the page. I know the font is very small.

21 It states here, quote: "Al Qaeda and its regional branch, Al Qaeda in the Indian  
22 Subcontinent, continue to operate across Afghanistan despite repeated Taliban claims  
23 that the group has no presence in the country.

24 "Al Qaeda's enduring presence in Afghanistan is visible both through press  
25 reporting on Coalition operations against the terror group, and Thabat, Al Qaeda's own

1 media arm that has noted the group's operations in 18 provinces. Afghan security  
2 forces have targeted Al Qaeda operatives in two additional provinces. In all, Al Qaeda is  
3 operating in at least 21 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces."

4 Are you able to speak to this issue, given the April 2021 timeline? Did you  
5 partake any discussions, briefings, meetings on this issue?

6 A I'm not able to speak to the specifics of it. Again, I was likely in briefings  
7 and meetings where related topics were discussed. But, no, I'm not aware -- I wasn't  
8 aware of the article until I saw it last night, nor the specifics.

9 Q Are you able to speak what the related topics were?

10 [REDACTED]. Again, I think Nick's point is that she could but it's going to -- it runs  
11 the risk of being classified.

12 [REDACTED]. Of course. And, again, going back to my earlier point, if that is  
13 the case, we just want to note it on the record and we'll move on to the next question.

14 Mr. McQuaid. So, yeah, just for the clarity of the record, I'm not comfortable  
15 having Ms. George try to answer questions about briefings that would've included  
16 classified information in a general sense. And I'm happy to have her provide, you know,  
17 any further recollection in a classified setting so that she is not being asked to navigate  
18 the distinction --

19 [REDACTED]. Okay.

20 Mr. McQuaid. -- without the material in front of her a year and a half or 2 years  
21 later.

22 [REDACTED]. Thank you. Noted.

23 BY [REDACTED]

24 Q Did the Department assess the Taliban to be a reliable and trustworthy  
25 partner?

1 A Did the Department --

2 Mr. McQuaid. Can you give a time period?

3 BY [REDACTED]:

4 Q Of course.

5 When you assumed the role as Chief of Staff -- let's fast-forward through the  
6 interagency process -- and there was a decision to remain in the Doha Agreement, as  
7 evidenced by the President's April 14, 2021, announcement, it's our understanding that  
8 engagement with the Taliban ensued via Special Representative Khalilzad.

9 Can you speak to whether there was a formal assessment of whether the Taliban  
10 was a reliable and trustworthy partner?

11 A I am not aware of a formal assessment.

12 Q Was there an assessment as to the sustainability of the Afghan Government  
13 without a U.S. military presence in Afghanistan?

14 A Those were part -- to Nick's point, those were part of ongoing briefings and  
15 conversations at that time.

16 Q Can you speak to the Department's decision to continue its embassy  
17 operations despite the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan?

18 A Speak to in --

19 Q The decision-making processes in the -- the decision-making processes that  
20 surrounded the contemplation of whether a U.S. embassy would continue to subsist in  
21 Afghanistan despite the military retrograde.

22 Mr. McQuaid. So, [REDACTED] just to be precise, are you asking about that decision in  
23 April of 2021? Or what's the time period?

24 [REDACTED]. To be honest, we're trying to better understand the time  
25 period, because we don't actually, at this point, know when the decision was made

1 whether the embassy would be kept open, if there was a decision made for the embassy  
2 to be kept open.

3 BY [REDACTED]:

4 Q So it'd be helpful to us to have some clarity as to that, sort of,  
5 decision-making point of whether the U.S. embassy would be kept open and, if so, when  
6 was that decision made.

7 A In the spring of 2021, there was an ongoing process, parallel to the policy  
8 process, to plan for the withdrawal. Within that planning process, there were ongoing  
9 discussions about the ability to keep the embassy open post-withdrawal.

10 Q And was a decision ultimately made on that issue of whether the U.S.  
11 embassy would be kept open or not?

12 A During the planning process, there was a series of -- my recollection is that  
13 there were a series of discussions about under what circumstances the embassy would be  
14 able to remain open.

15 Q Can you speak to what those circumstances were?

16 A I can't speak in specifics to them, no.

1

2 [9:00 a.m.]

3 BY [REDACTED]:

4 Q Do you recall how the Bureau of Diplomatic Security characterized the level  
5 of risk that result from maintaining embassy operations in the absence of a military  
6 presence?

7 A I don't recall specifically.

8 Q Do you recall if there were disagreements within the Department regarding  
9 the risk surrounding maintaining a diplomatic presence?

10 A Sorry. Can you say that -- there was one word in there that was important.

11 Q Of course. No problem.

12 My question was whether there were disagreements in the Department, so  
13 between bureaus and offices, surrounding the risk in maintaining a diplomatic presence  
14 in Afghanistan.

15 A I don't recall specific disagreements, nor do I recall the specific substance of  
16 the debate, but there were many sessions where various offices related to the planning  
17 would share their opinions and assessments. So I don't -- I don't know that there were  
18 disagreements.

19 Q Did Secretary Blinken ever consider formally requesting that the Department  
20 of Defense provide a stay-behind force for the U.S. Embassy in Kabul?

21 A Again, I don't remember -- recall specifics.

22 Q Are you aware, or do you recall if the State Department believed the Taliban  
23 would permit the U.S. to leave behind troops in country to protect Hamid Karzai  
24 International Airport and Embassy grounds?

25 Mr. McQuaid. I'm going to just -- I'm going to -- given that you're asking -- what I

1 think you're asking is their assessment of the Intel that they would have been receiving.

2 I'm going to ask that if we want to discuss that question we do it in the classified setting.

3 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q Are you familiar with Secretary Blinken and then-spokesperson, now Senior  
6 Advisor Ned Price's visit to Afghanistan in April 2021?

7 A I am.

8 Q Were you part of that trip?

9 A I was.

10 Q Were you involved in preparation, planning, or any other aspects of that  
11 trip?

12 A Yes.

13 Q Can you please speak to your role on that trip, in particular.

14 A On the actual trip or in the planning?

15 Q So surrounding the trip, including the planning. On the trip and the  
16 planning therefor too.

17 A So one of my responsibilities is on certain travel to engage in the planning  
18 process. I was part of the planning. I participated in the planning process for this trip  
19 specifically, and then I traveled with the Secretary and the team to Kabul.

20 Q And can you please detail the trip, to the best of your abilities.

21 A Trip to -- the visit to Kabul? We departed Brussels, flew overnight into  
22 Kabul, spent probably 6 hours on the ground. I don't remember exactly. More than 5,  
23 and less than 10.

24 Did government, Afghan Government meetings. Did briefings with our Embassy  
25 colleagues as well as other Embassy engagements with the team. Visited with some civil

1 society and departed.

2 Q That's a quick turnaround. What was the purpose of the visit?

3 A To the best of my recollection, it was important to -- to visit the team on the  
4 ground, and get an assessment of the facts on the ground and to -- for Secretary Blinken  
5 to conduct diplomatic engagement with the government.

6 Q And the government, you mean the Afghan Government?

7 A The Afghan Government.

8 Q And do you recall who from the Afghan Government the Secretary met  
9 with?

10 A We met with President Ghani and much of his Cabinet. I don't remember  
11 the specifics.

12 Q What was your understanding of the outcome of the trip? So what were  
13 the takeaways from the trip?

14 Mr. McQuaid. You say "outcome." Are you asking what she recalls learning on  
15 the trip or can you be a little more precise on outcome?

16 [REDACTED]. Of course, no problem.

17 BY [REDACTED]:

18 Q So I asked you initially what the purpose of the visit was, and ultimately, I'll  
19 sort of refine this question.

20 After being on the ground and engaging with civil society, the Afghan Government  
21 and the Embassy personnel, were there any key takeaways that were formulated from  
22 that trip?

23 A I don't recall the specific key takeaways. I think the diplomatic engagement  
24 with the Afghan Government was -- as is often in diplomatic engagement, was an  
25 opportunity for the Secretary to share the U.S. Government's perspective and point of

1 view, to learn about the Afghan Government's point of view.

2 The same for our engagement with our Embassy colleagues and with the civil  
3 society participants as well.

4 [REDACTED]. So I'd like to now introduce exhibit 6.

5 [George Exhibit No. 6

6 was marked for identification.]

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q This is an excerpt of a report dated August 2022 that was published by the  
9 United States Institute of Peace and written by Steve Brooking.

10 Are you familiar with this report?

11 A I am, because you were generous enough to provide it last night. I had not  
12 seen it before last night.

13 Q Thank you.

14 So I'd like to direct your attention to what is marked page 25 under the "End  
15 Game" subheading, and I'll just read the relevant language into the record.

16 Quote, "President Biden announced on April 14, 2021, that all remaining U.S.  
17 troops would depart Afghanistan by September 11, thus adhering to the withdrawal  
18 component of the U.S.-Taliban deal, but pushing back the deadline by four months. The  
19 announcement had an immediate impact on the negotiations as well as affecting events  
20 in Afghanistan: It emboldened the Taliban; seriously damaged the morale of the  
21 Republic's security forces; and persuaded many Afghans to think about switching sides to  
22 the Taliban, who were now perceived as likely winners.

23 Moreover, the actual withdrawal of contractor and U.S. military support had  
24 practical impacts on Republic military capabilities in terms of Afghan aircraft (needed to  
25 evacuate wounded troops and to support beleaguered ground troops) and accurate close

1 air support from the United States."

2 Can you speak to what impact President Biden's Go-to-Zero order had on the  
3 stability of the Afghan Government?

4 A No.

5 [REDACTED]. I think we are 42 seconds, so I'd rather stop the clock now  
6 rather than ask another question.

7 [REDACTED]. You -- I want to be clear. No because you don't know, or because  
8 you can't -- I know what no means, but I want the record to indicate that it's because you  
9 don't know.

10 Ms. George. I don't know.

11 [REDACTED]. Thank you, [REDACTED]. That's helpful, yes. No, no, no, much  
12 appreciated. So we'll stop the clock and go off the record.

13 [Recess.]

14 [REDACTED]. We'll now be asking questions on behalf of the minority.

15 However, your counsel has informed me you'd like to clarify an answer you provided in  
16 the last round.

17 Mr. McQuaid. Thank you. And to begin, just -- Ms. George will clarify the  
18 answer. This respects, this is in response to the question about the official position of  
19 the State Department in connection with the policy process that led to the Go-to-Zero  
20 order. As I'd said before, we view that formal process as being covered by executive  
21 branch confidentiality interests. And I think her answer was, in part, shaped by that  
22 decision, but do you want to just clarify?

23 Ms. George. Yes. So I was aware of the policy process, and in meetings and  
24 briefings where the views of the Department were discussed, but I was not in the -- I did  
25 not participate in the National Security Council meetings themselves where the State

1 Department's views were expressed. And any views that I am aware of I would not be  
2 comfortable sharing, given that it was part of that process.

3

BY [REDACTED]

4

Q Understood. Thank you.

5

6

7

8

And on that note, we'd like to encourage you to testify to firsthand information received, gleaned, reviewed, et cetera, in furtherance of objective fact-finding. We'd ask that you refrain from characterizing or inferring another's experiences, perspectives, opinions, statements, or work product that you have not personally reviewed.

9

10

We'd also like to introduce our definitions of the terms "withdrawal" and "evacuation." I'd like to point you back to majority's exhibit No. 3, the SIGAR report.

11

12

13

14

From the minority's perspective, we understand the withdrawal to describe the retrograde of U.S. troops, equipment, and personnel from Afghanistan. As such, from our perspective, the withdrawal was initiated in the February 2020 Doha deal, involved partial troop drawdowns prior to 2021 and was completed by August 31st, 2021.

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We'd like to refer you to paragraph one on page 47. I'd like to read into the record. It says: "On November 17, Acting Secretary of Defense, Christopher Miller, announced another reduction in U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan from the 4,000-5,000 reached in November, to 2,500 as of January 15, 2021. Acting Secretary Miller and President Donald Trump had made the decision in order to bring the war to, quote, 'a successful and responsible conclusion,' end quote, and to either bring service members home or reposition them."

22

23

24

I'd also like to note that this document is dated at the bottom of January 30, 2021.

Would you agree with the sentiment that the withdrawal from Afghanistan began in 2020?

25

A I'm sorry, will you repeat that?

1 Q Looking to paragraph number one, would you agree that November 17  
2 refers to 2020?

3 A Yes.

4 Q And that's because this document is, indeed, dated January 30th, 2021, so  
5 November 17th would predate 2021. Is that correct?

6 A That is my understanding of reading this, yes.

7 Q And would you also agree that this paragraph points to a reduction of  
8 troops?

9 A Yes.

10 Q Does it, therefore, follow that the withdrawal began in 2020, because troops  
11 were being taken from Afghanistan in that time period?

12 A Yes, it appears from this that troops were withdrawn in 2020.

13 Q Okay, thank you.

14 Would you also agree with the sentiment that U.S. troops and equipment are  
15 primarily the domain of DOD and military leadership?

16 A Yes, I agree.

17 Q Okay. In terms of evacuation, we understand this to describe the removal  
18 of American citizens, lawful permanent residents, SIVs and certain other Afghan allies.  
19 As such, this encompassed the civilian-led Operation Allies Refugee that began in July  
20 2021 and the subsequent NEO that occurred from August 16th to 31st, 2021.

21 Do you take issue with this term?

22 A No.

23 Q We'd like to discuss your background in a bit further detail. Is it correct  
24 that you served twice for the Secretary of State, a past Secretary and a current Secretary  
25 at the State Department?

1 A Yes, that is correct.

2 Q Okay. Have you received any awards for your contributions related to  
3 foreign policy or national security?

4 A No.

5 Q Have you received any in relation to management or operations?

6 A No.

7 Q Okay. Have any of your insights on Foreign Affairs or national security been  
8 published or included in public reporting?

9 A No.

10 Q Okay. Fair to say, however, that you're a distinguished State and national  
11 security official?

12 A That's for others to judge, but I hope so.

13 Q Okay. Have you ever participated in a crisis-related task force in the  
14 Federal Government?

15 A Participated? I have not participated. I have not been a member of a task  
16 force. I have participated in -- my work has brought me to working on crisis-related  
17 issues.

18 Q And in what capacity have you worked on crisis-related issues?

19 A So, when I was previously at the State Department, when I worked for  
20 Secretary Albright as her deputy chief of staff, there were ongoing crises that our work  
21 related to. When I was at the National Security Council as the chief of staff and  
22 Executive Secretary, there were, on occasion, crises.

23 Your question was only about U.S. Government?

24 Q We can also expand it. Do you have crisis management experience outside  
25 of the Federal Government?

1           A     In my position -- in my position at the One Campaign, there were  
2 crises -- different sorts of crises.    But yes, as a chief operating officer, that is one of the  
3 primary responsibilities.

4           Q     Okay.   And what percentage of your career have you worked on  
5 management- and operations-related tasks?

6           A     My entire career.

7           Q     How many years would that be?

8           A     Thirty-three.

9           Q     Fair to say you have a specialty in operations and management?

10          A     Yes.

11          Q     Okay.   Have you ever worked in or on a complex evacuation situation?

12          A     Prior to --

13          Q     Prior to the NEO.

14          A     No.

15          Q     Is it fair to say that NEOs are rare?

16          A     Yes, it is fair to say NEOs are rare.

17          Q     Okay.   And so in your 33 years of experience, you've only worked on one  
18 NEO.   Is that correct?

19          A     This was -- yes.

20          Q     Okay.   Have you ever contributed to an After Action Review or similar  
21 post-crisis review?

22          A     I contributed to the after -- this -- the Afghan After Action Review.   I'm not  
23 certain if during my previous State Department -- I just need a second to reflect on that.

24                 I don't think -- I did not officially participate in any other After Action Review.

25          Q     Are you aware of other After Action Reviews in the State Department?

1 A I'm aware of previous After Action Reviews, yes.

2 Q Okay. Speaking to your role as chief of staff when you began in January  
3 2021, what did you understand your job responsibilities to include?

4 A When I began my job?

5 Q Uh-huh.

6 A So, as I stated previously, my -- my role is to facilitate and coordinate, both  
7 to support the Secretary's work, build him a team that supports his work, to facilitate  
8 communications across the agency, to enable teams throughout the agency to conduct  
9 the business of the Department.

10 Q Okay. I believe you also testified that your role included supporting the  
11 Secretary, structuring the office, facilitating communication within the agency, bringing  
12 people together on projects, et cetera.

13 Is all of that encompassed in your responsibilities?

14 A All of that is encompassed in my --

15 Q And who communicated these responsibilities to you when you began your  
16 role?

17 A It was -- it was an agreement when I took the position.

18 Q An agreement with whom?

19 A With the Secretary.

20 Q Okay. Did you agree with these responsibilities?

21 A Yes.

22 Q Do you agree that the responsibilities we just discussed are typical for a chief  
23 of staff?

24 A They're often the role of a chief of staff, but, as I mentioned, they're not  
25 always -- chiefs of staff come in lots of different shapes and sizes.

1 Q Okay. Did you have any concerns about what your job responsibilities  
2 would include?

3 A No concerns.

4 Q Okay. Are your responsibilities fixed or dynamic?

5 A Dynamic.

6 Q Would you agree with the sentiment that management is dynamic, by  
7 nature?

8 A Management is dynamic, by nature.

9 Q Why?

10 A Because management, by definition, is about dealing with humans and  
11 dealing with facts and circumstances of evolving events. And so both of those are  
12 dynamic by nature.

13 Q Would you also agree that management work, particularly at State, is driven  
14 by policy and real-time policy developments?

15 A Can you say that again?

16 Q Speaking to the dynamic nature, which you agreed, is the dynamic nature  
17 informed not only by human actors, but also by policy as it develops?

18 A Yes. As policy is developed, you often need to make management changes  
19 in order to implement or effectuate that policy.

20 Q Okay. Did your job responsibilities, as communicated to you in January  
21 2021, include Afghanistan specifically?

22 A It did not.

23 Q Why not?

24 A Again, I was hired for my management and operations personnel leadership  
25 capabilities. I was -- the Department is filled with extraordinary subject matter experts.

1 And so -- and I was not a subject matter expert on Afghanistan, so --

2 Q So, in fact, it would have been odd for you to be tasked with Afghanistan  
3 policy as part of your responsibilities in your role of chief of staff?

4 A Yes.

5 Q Okay. During -- so the relevant time period for us is April to August 2021.  
6 During the time period, what activities took up the most significant percentage of your  
7 time?

8 A Afghanistan-related activities or activities generally?

9 Q Generally.

10 A From April to August of 2021 -- sorry.

11 Q That's okay. Go ahead.

12 A From April to August of 2021, we were still doing an enormous amount of  
13 personnel-related work for a new administration. So I spent a great deal of time on  
14 that, on making sure that the Secretary's office was up and functioning and fully running.  
15 We were working to confirm nominees across most of the Department. The majority of  
16 the confirmed positions were still in process.

17 And so that's what I probably spent most of my time. As we got closer to the  
18 withdrawal or the events of the summer of '21, I likely -- I don't recall specifically, but I  
19 likely spent time working on Afghanistan.

20 Q Okay. Specifically in January 2021, what was the largest chunk of your time  
21 devoted to?

22 A Once we entered the Department?

23 Q Right.

24 A Was primarily focused on personnel.

25 Q Personnel, okay. Fair enough.

1           In terms of personnel, were you given the freedom to develop your own team in  
2 the chief of staff role?

3           A    My own team being the Secretary's?

4           Q    Yes.   So reporting to you, you said you had two deputies, and then there  
5 were folks underneath that who support the Secretary.   Did you select those  
6 individuals?

7           A    So the Secretary's office is comprised of three different types of employees:  
8 Foreign Service officers, civil servants, and political appointees.

9           Foreign Service officers, both our Foreign Service officers and my recollection is  
10 we had one civil servant at that point were in their positions when we arrived on January  
11 20th, and they remained in their positions.   There's a natural cycle.

12           And for our political appointees, we worked with the Office of Presidential  
13 Personnel to fill those positions.

14           Q    When you stepped into your role in January 2021, what did you assess the  
15 skill set and the quality of the individuals who supported the Secretary?

16           A    Having worked at the State Department previously, I entered with both  
17 experience and relationships with many career colleagues.   And so, I was quite  
18 impressed by the -- the strength and the expertise and the dedication of our career  
19 colleagues.

20           Q    Okay.   Speaking to Mr. Sullivan specifically, what is his character?   Is he  
21 capable?

22           A    Oh, highly capable.

23           Q    Qualified?

24           A    Very qualified.

25           Q    Hard worker?

1 A Very hard worker.

2 Q The same questions as to Ms. Wright.

3 A Very capable, very hardworking, very qualified. I did not know either of  
4 them before I started the job. I had met them during the previous few months.

5 Q Have they remained with you since you started in January 2021?

6 A Yes, both continue to serve as deputy chiefs of staff.

7 Q And what is the professional reputation of the Secretary?

8 A The Secretary has been a foreign policy expert for over 30 years. He has a  
9 reputation of great integrity and skill.

10 Q Does that comport with your experiences with him?

11 A It does.

12 Q It does.

13 You testified that you're tasked with managing often broad and dynamic needs of  
14 the Secretary and the State Department, in effect, serving as operational support and  
15 management as an infrastructure for him, and by extension, the Department.

16 Does this infrastructure continue even in times of crisis?

17 A The infrastructure?

18 Q Of management and operations.

19 A Yes.

20 Q Why is that the case?

21 A Can we go -- I just want to make sure I understand -- can you define what you  
22 mean by infrastructure in that?

23 Q You testified that your skill set and what you do at State is primarily  
24 management and operations, correct?

25 A Uh-huh.

1 Q So even when, for example, a NEO or the NEO that we're talking about  
2 occurs you continue to support in operations and management. Is that correct?

3 A Yes.

4 Q So you don't divert your time and skill set to focus on the crisis and the crisis  
5 only. Is that correct?

6 A My time may -- I may spend more time working on the crisis, but I do  
7 not -- my responsibilities continue on the other issues that I need to continue working on.

8 Q And why is that important?

9 A Because the Department is responsible for the entire world. So we need to  
10 make sure our work continues in the rest of the world.

11 Q And so, you had mentioned when there are times of crisis, for example the  
12 NEO, perhaps more of your time is devoted to that, correct?

13 A Yes.

14 Q What happens to the other duties that you're not able to take care of when  
15 your time is diverted? Does someone else pick up that slack?

16 A Occasionally, someone else picks up the slack. Occasionally you just work  
17 more hours. You do your best to cover it as best you can.

18 Q So during the NEO, for example, how many hours a day were you working?

19 A Eighteen to 20.

20 Q Is that typical for a chief of staff?

21 A No.

22 Q So I believe you previously testified that you're not a policymaker. Is that  
23 correct?

24 A Correct.

25 Q Why are you not a policymaker?

1           A    It is not my background or my expertise.  And so, the work I do reflects the  
2 experience and strengths that I bring to the position.

3           Q    Okay.  And you also testified that's because there are subject matter  
4 experts who work on policy, right?

5           A    Exactly.

6           Q    And their expertise is, in fact, foreign policy, developing, implementing, et  
7 cetera, correct?

8           A    Correct.

9           Q    Would it, therefore, follow that during the time in which you've been chief  
10 of staff, you have not developed foreign policy within State or the interagency?

11          A    Yes, I have not developed foreign policy within the State or the interagency.

12          Q    And drafted internal or deliberative policy papers or positions?

13          A    No, I don't recall ever drafting.

14          Q    Implemented Department foreign assistance programs?

15          A    No, I don't implement foreign assistance programs.

16          Q    So fair to say that your work of chief of staff was distinct and continues to be  
17 distinct from policymaking and the policy implementation process?

18          A    Yes, that is correct.

19          Q    But, however, you support the policy creation and implementation through a  
20 management and operations lens.  Is that correct?

21          A    That is correct.  You aim to create an enabling environment for the policy  
22 to be executed.

23          Q    Okay.  It, therefore, follows -- let me know if you agree or disagree with  
24 these statements:  With respect to Afghanistan specifically, is it correct that you have  
25 not personally negotiated with the Afghan Government?

1 A I have not personally negotiated with the Afghan Government.

2 Q You have not negotiated with the Taliban?

3 A I have not negotiated with the Taliban.

4 Q You have not incorporated yourself into interagency planning to implement  
5 a U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan?

6 A I did not participate in interagency planning.

7 Q You have not screened or issued special immigrant visas for Afghan  
8 applicants before, during, or after the withdrawal?

9 A I have not screened or approved --

10 Q You have not implemented the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program before,  
11 during, or after the withdrawal?

12 Mr. McQuaid. [REDACTED], just make sure you're letting her finish the answer.

13 Ms. George. I have not -- can you say it again? I'm sorry.

14 BY [REDACTED]:

15 Q You have not implemented the U.S. refugee admissions program before,  
16 during, or after the withdrawal?

17 A I have not implemented --

18 Q Is there anything you wanted to say before the prior answer?

19 A No.

20 Q Okay.

21 A I have not done SIVs. I have not done the refugee program.

22 Q And you have not prepared for a U.S. Embassy presence in Kabul post  
23 withdrawal?

24 A I have not prepared for a U.S. Embassy presence. I have participated in  
25 meetings related to those topics, but they are not my responsibility. There are very able

1 subject matter experts at the Department who lead that work.

2 Q And you have not ensured the security of U.S. personnel in Kabul before,  
3 during, or after the withdrawal?

4 A I have not.

5 Q Okay. How did the request you received to appear for this transcribed  
6 interview strike you?

7 A Unusual.

8 Q Why?

9 A Because I was not part of the policymaking process.

10 Q Okay. Thank you.

11 Are you aware that we've interviewed several policymakers and implementers as  
12 part of this investigation?

13 A Yes, I'm aware of that.

14 Q Okay.

15 Mr. McQuaid. [REDACTED], can I ask one -- going back to some of the previous  
16 questions just one clarification?

17 [REDACTED]. Sure.

18 Mr. McQuaid. You had asked about Ms. George's experience with AARs, and just  
19 being -- I want to make sure that you're distinguishing an AAR specifically from ARBs or  
20 other kind of after-action policies which --

21 Ms. George. I confused that.

22 BY [REDACTED]:

23 Q Yes, so an AAR specifically within the Department of State.

24 A So -- thank you. No, I think what I was referring to was ARBs during the  
25 Clinton administration.

1           ██████████: Can you define for the record what ARBs are?

2           Ms. George. Accountability Review Board.

3           ██████████: Accountability Review Board, a statutorily mandated process when  
4 Department personnel are injured, killed, or property lost.

5           BY ██████████:

6           Q    So with respect to the After-Action Review that you were asked about  
7 previously, that's distinct from the ARB?

8           A    That is distinct.

9           Q    And are you familiar with whether the After Action Review process is  
10 common or had occurred prior to this Afghanistan After Action Review?

11          A    My understanding is it is not common. So I'm not aware of it  
12 having -- of after action -- earlier after-action review.

13          ██████████: Okay.

14          BY ██████████:

15          Q    Would you be surprised to hear that it's the first of its kind?

16          A    No. I think -- I don't know that I knew that specifically, but I think we  
17 understood at the time that -- that it was unusual.

18          Q    Speaking to the withdrawal planning, in terms of the --

19          BY ██████████:

20          Q    Before we get into the withdrawal planning and questions related to that  
21 during your tenure, I want to just go back to January 20th itself. I think you testified  
22 previously in response to questions from our majority colleagues that you didn't recall  
23 specific plans related to withdrawal when you set foot in the building on day one, January  
24 20th.

25               And you testified that there were concerns that sufficient planning had not been

1 done. Can you elaborate on those concerns that you were made aware of when you  
2 started in the building?

3 A I can't elaborate specifically. I remember the issues being raised.

4 Q By whom?

5 A I don't recall specifics, but I recall in early meetings as we began our work in  
6 the State Department it being an issue.

7 Q You were hearing this from career officials who had been in the Department  
8 prior to your arrival?

9 A Again, I don't recall specifically, but the meetings that we regularly attend  
10 include both career and political colleagues.

11 Q And did you hear from multiple sources concerns that there had not been  
12 sufficient planning done prior to your arrival with respect to an Afghanistan withdrawal?

13 A It was a -- it was a point that was frequently made by a variety of people,  
14 yes.

15 BY [REDACTED]:

16 Q Understanding that your role may have been coordination versus policy, to  
17 what extent were you aware of State seeking to maintain a diplomatic presence in  
18 Afghanistan after the military withdrawal when you began in January 2021?

19 A I don't know that I was aware of that issue specifically in January of 2021. I  
20 know that it was part of conversations in the spring of '21, and that it was -- it was a part  
21 of the ongoing discussions and planning.

22 Q Okay.

23 A But I don't recall, and I think it's unlikely that I knew it was specifically an  
24 issue in January.

25 Q Okay. So in the spring, you did become aware of it, correct?

1 A Yes.

2 Q Were there multiple meetings discussing that plan?

3 A Again, I don't know specifically, because I wasn't leading the planning  
4 process, but my recollection is the folks who were leading the process were meeting  
5 frequently on that issue.

6 Q Did you ever sit in on any of those meetings?

7 A Not that I recall.

8 Q Not that you recall. Okay, fair enough.

9 To the extent you have any insight, did you find the meetings to be robust?  
10 Were there ever minutes or notes that came from the meetings related to maintaining a  
11 diplomatic presence?

12 A Again, I wasn't in any of the meetings, so I don't want to speak to the details  
13 of them. I know there was broad participation from experts within the Department, and  
14 that when we were in meetings where updates and briefings were shared about that  
15 work, the process sounded robust and active, but I don't know any more specificity than  
16 that.

17 Q Okay. What about general planning as to a military withdrawal, were you  
18 privy to those meetings?

19 A I was not.

20 BY [REDACTED]:

21 Q Is that because those meetings were --

22 A I would assume those meetings --

23 Mr. McQuaid. Let her finish. Let her finish the question.

24 BY [REDACTED]:

25 Q So let me rephrase the question. Were you aware of any meetings related

1 to the military -- the mechanics of the military withdrawal occurring inside the State  
2 Department?

3 A I was aware of meetings that -- where those topics were discussed, but the  
4 military withdrawal is a responsibility of the Defense Department. So it is -- we were  
5 not having meetings -- I do not expect that we were having meetings on those topics.

6 Q Thanks.

7 A But they may have -- the topics may have been discussed, but not --

8 Q So your testimony is that the responsibility for the military withdrawal lay  
9 outside the State Department?

10 A Yes, that is my testimony.

11 BY [REDACTED]:

12 Q You were, however, aware that conversations of this nature were occurring  
13 within that time period, the time period being the spring of 2021?

14 A Yes, I was aware that those conversations were occurring within the  
15 interagency.

16 Q Were you aware of those conversations happening prior to the spring of  
17 2021?

18 A I was not aware, but I was not in government prior to the spring of 2021.

19 BY [REDACTED]:

20 Q So I think you've spoken previously to both our colleagues, and in this  
21 question round, the awareness you had of planning within the State Department for  
22 maintaining a U.S. Embassy after the U.S. military withdrawal, correct?

23 A Yes.

24 Q And you were asked questions about the Bureau of Diplomatic Security and  
25 other actors within the Department, what their views were on various aspects of that

1 Embassy continuity planning.

2 Did you have any particular, or firsthand visibility, into the discussions around  
3 planning for Embassy continuity post withdrawal?

4 A Again, I wasn't in the planning meetings, so I do not have firsthand  
5 recollections of those meetings or those discussions.

6 Q Were you aware -- based on your observations or what you heard at  
7 meetings you did attend, were you aware of whether the Department had reached  
8 consensus on a plan for Embassy operations post withdrawal?

9 A My understanding is the Department had reached a consensus. My  
10 understanding is that's what we were informed.

11 Q Okay. Thank you.

12 A My recollection.

13 [REDACTED]. This concludes our rounds of questions. Thank you. We can go  
14 off the record.

15 [Recess.]

16 [REDACTED]. The time is now 10:09, and we're back on the record. Start the  
17 clock.

18 BY [REDACTED]:

19 Q So near the end of the last round --

20 [REDACTED]. The majority's last round.

21 BY [REDACTED]:

22 Q -- the majority's last round, I believe we had asked if you were aware of  
23 whether President Biden's Go-to-Zero order had an impact in destabilizing the Afghan  
24 Government. And correct me if I'm wrong, but your answer was no, you did not know.  
25 Is that right?

1 A I did -- I'm so sorry. Can you repeat the question?

2 Q Your answer at the end of the majority's last round was that you did not  
3 know whether President Biden's Go-to-Zero order had an impact in destabilizing the  
4 Afghan Government. Is that correct?

5 Mr. McQuaid. I think the last round was -- what we answered was that we didn't  
6 want to address what information she was getting about intelligence in a nonclassified  
7 setting.

8 I mean, you'll answer for yourself, but I think that was -- I just don't want to have  
9 the record mischaracterized. We can read it back if you want, if there's a specific  
10 answer that you recall, but there was said no --

11 [REDACTED]. Yes, near the end.

12 [REDACTED]. Can we go off the record for a second?

13 [REDACTED]. Of course.

14 [Discussion held off the record.]

15 BY [REDACTED]:

16 Q Were you aware of whether President Biden's Go-to-Zero order had an  
17 impact in destabilizing the Afghan Government?

18 A So I -- this is referring to one of these exhibits?

19 BY [REDACTED]:

20 Q It's in reference to -- let's backtrack a bit.

21 I'm referencing exhibit 6, which is the report dated August 22 that was published  
22 by the United States Institute of Peace and written by Steve Brooking. I believe we had  
23 read a passage of that excerpt into the record. I'm happy to read that passage again.

24 A That's okay. Sorry. Go ahead.

25 Q Of course. This is on page 25 under the "End Game" subheading. And the

1 question here was -- first, I'll just -- I'll just read a portion of the passage in and then just  
2 restate the question for clarity of the record.

3 A Thank you.

4 Q So "President Biden announced on April 14, 2021, that all remaining U.S.  
5 troops would depart Afghanistan by September 11, thus adhering to the withdrawal  
6 component of the U.S.-Taliban deal but pushing back the deadline by four months. The  
7 announcement had an immediate impact on the negotiations as well as affecting events  
8 in Afghanistan: It emboldened the Taliban; seriously damaged the morale of the  
9 Republic security forces; and persuaded many Afghans to think about switching sides to  
10 the Taliban, who were now perceived as likely winners."

11 So I'll just restate the question.

12 A Thank you.

13 Q And the question here is, can you speak to the impact of President Biden's  
14 Go-to-Zero order, so the troop drawdown from 2,500 to zero on the stability of the  
15 Afghan Government?

16 A I cannot speak to that. I cannot speak to the impact on the Afghan  
17 Government of the President's Go-to-Zero.

18 Q Is that because you are unaware of what that impact was or you were not  
19 privy to conversations surrounding that impact?

20 A I am familiar with conversations about these issues, but I am not familiar  
21 with the specifics of it nor did I have any firsthand knowledge of this.

22 Q Do you believe that it would have been helpful to your role to have an  
23 understanding of this, yes or no?

24 Mr. McQuaid. So I'm not going to answer. You just changed the question.

25 [REDACTED]. No. This was the follow-up question that my colleague wanted

1 to ask.

2 Mr. McQuaid. So he started with a statement that she said that she had no  
3 understanding. She didn't say she had no understanding. She said -- you asked  
4 whether she had knowledge of those conversations.

5 She just said that she had -- was privy to conversations generally about it. But  
6 you're now asking -- you just changed that to no understanding. So I think -- so be clear  
7 on what you're asking and what she's previously said.

8 BY [REDACTED]:

9 Q So let me reframe, and my intention is not to misstate.

10 Do you believe it would have been helpful to have knowledge of these  
11 conversations as it pertained to your role as chief of staff to the Secretary?

12 A Again, I was likely in meetings and briefings where these issues were  
13 discussed. So I don't want to say that I was not aware of these issues. I was not aware  
14 of the specificity of them or the -- or the details.

15 Q Thank you. And to the extent you are able to speak in an unclassified space  
16 on this issue, can you speak to what you were aware of or what was discussed in those  
17 meetings?

18 Mr. McQuaid. Again, I'm not -- if we want to go in a classified space then you  
19 can ask the question. I'm not going to have her trying to recall what was classified and  
20 what was not classified about what she heard about that.

21 [REDACTED]. Thank you. And again, I'm not forgetting the prior statements.  
22 This is just for the record. Thank you for stating that.

23 So now I'd like to enter exhibit 7 into the record. This is an excerpt of the State  
24 Department press briefing transcript dated April 1st, 2021.

25 [George Exhibit No. 7

1 was marked for identification.]

2 BY [REDACTED]:

3 Q This is a press briefing provided by then-Department Spokesperson Ned  
4 Price, now senior adviser, dated April 1st, 2021. Here, Spokesperson Price is asked -- if  
5 you look to the page marked 17, the first question on that page, "On Afghanistan,  
6 Ambassador Khalilzad has been in the region meeting with, as I understand it, the Afghan  
7 Government as well as the Taliban. I wondered if you had any readouts of those  
8 meetings. And then can you provide any further details on the meetings between these  
9 groups in Turkey and will the Secretary have any participation in that meeting?"

10 If you look to the next paragraph, as part of his response, Spokesperson Price  
11 states, quote, "Special Representative Khalilzad recently traveled to Turkey, as you also  
12 alluded to, to meet with Turkish counterparts on the upcoming international conference  
13 on the Afghanistan peace process to be held in Istanbul in the coming days. Building on  
14 recent international gatherings in support of the peace process, the Istanbul conference is  
15 meant to help Afghan negotiators make progress in their negotiations and will  
16 complement peace talks currently ongoing in Doha. During his visit, Ambassador  
17 Khalilzad and Turkish officials agreed that an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned gathering  
18 supported by high-level attendance from the international community provides the best  
19 means to accelerate that peace process. They also agreed to urge the Afghan parties to  
20 prepare for constructive participation in that conference."

21 Ms. George, are you aware that the Taliban refused to attend the Istanbul  
22 conference after -- temporally, after President Biden announced his Go-to-Zero order on  
23 April 14th, 2021?

24 A I am aware that they did not attend. I'm not actually sure -- I don't recall if  
25 I knew it at this exact moment or if I came to know it later.

1 Q Thank you. And was there any concern voiced within Department  
2 leadership at this time that the Taliban was not genuinely interested in the peace  
3 process?

4 A Again, I recall conver -- that there were meetings and conversations on this  
5 issue. I don't recall the specifics.

6 Q Do you recall what steps, if any, the Department took in response to the  
7 Taliban walking away from the conference?

8 A I do not recall.

9 Q Thank you.  
10 When the did the Department first get the impression that the situation on the  
11 ground --

12 When did the Department first get the impression that the situation on the  
13 ground in Afghanistan was deteriorating, and that the Taliban was making significant  
14 gains?

15 A I don't recall specifically.

16 Q Were you aware of the rapid Taliban gains in country, so in Afghanistan, in  
17 the May, June, and July time period?

18 Mr. McQuaid. I'm going to state the same concern is -- again, we've talked about  
19 this. You're asking about reports of events in Afghanistan where, you know, as Ms.  
20 George has made clear, she's privy to intelligence briefings on a regular basis, including  
21 classified and unclassified information. So I'm not comfortable with her having to  
22 navigate what's not classified about that to try to answer your question in this setting.  
23 Happy to answer it in the classified setting.

24 [REDACTED]. Of course.

25 BY [REDACTED]:

1           Q    So let me just clarify something for the record. My understanding is  
2   that -- and please feel free to correct me if I'm mistaken -- there's, of course, the  
3   intelligence reporting and there's the interagency process, which we've already  
4   established, but there is also the Regional Bureau within the Department of State as well  
5   as Department of State employees, such as Special Representative Khalilzad and the at  
6   the time Acting Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs as well as other  
7   bureaus, like DRL, PRM.

8           So I'd like to have an understanding of the Department's process. There's this  
9   interagency process, but I want to understand between Department employees and  
10   decision-making processes that were internal to the Department in addition to others,  
11   such as responding to the Embassy's needs, et cetera, and demands, were there steps  
12   taken within the Department to address the Taliban's territorial gains?

13           This could pertain to Embassy personnel. This could pertain to security of the  
14   Embassy. I can't limit it to just specific factors, but I want to better understand the  
15   Department's response. I'm not asking about the interagency communications or  
16   intelligence briefings.

17           I'm speaking to the Department of State as an agency, as it becomes increasingly  
18   difficult to get an understanding of the Department if each time we defer to the  
19   interagency process. That's not what we're interested in here.

20           So can you please speak to the Department's response internally, as the State  
21   Department, to the Taliban's territorial gains in May, June, and July of 2021.

22           A    Let me try. I think, to my counsel's point, there are probably pieces of it  
23   that are -- would veer into classified material, for one.

24           There is -- there are ongoing -- as with any policy issue, there are ongoing process  
25   and reviews, daily work within the Department that the responsible bureaus manage.

1 That is not something in my role that I would have firsthand knowledge of.

2 I am aware that those -- that work is ongoing, and it occasionally gets reported out  
3 in senior staff meetings, but it is not something in my role that I would be -- that I would  
4 participate in.

5 Q I believe this is a question my minority colleagues touched upon, and it was  
6 about -- it was with respect to sort of attributing percentages, the amount of time  
7 dedicated to X issue. I want to focus in particular on Afghanistan, and I'll space this out  
8 temporally so in terms of timing.

9 Can you please speak to what percentage of your time was spent on Afghanistan  
10 from the January 2021 period to the April 2021 period. And if it's not possible to  
11 generalize, that's fine as well, but it would be helpful for us just to have an understanding.

12 A I don't know that I have a percentage, but I would say not a significant  
13 amount of time.

14 Q And how about from April to August of 2021?

15 Mr. McQuaid. And, [REDACTED] just to be clear, you're talking about her personal time  
16 on these issues?

17 [REDACTED]. Correct.

18 Ms. George. Again, my personal time on -- both from January to April and from  
19 April on was I did not participate in either the policy process or the planning process. So  
20 I was not -- my participation was related to senior-level meetings and updates where the  
21 information about the ongoing work was being shared.

22 There were occasional meetings specifically about Afghanistan that I participated  
23 in. But, again, I was not playing a leading role in either the policy process or the  
24 planning. You're talking prior to --

1

2 [10:23 a.m.]

3 BY [REDACTED]:

4 Q The evacuation, correct.

5 A -- the evacuation.

6 Q And my question here is not focused on, sort of, the policymaking but more  
7 so speaking in generalities. Like, how much of your time was occupied by issues  
8 pertaining to Afghanistan, whether those be meetings that took your time, whether those  
9 be -- we've already established you were not involved in policymaking, but if you  
10 were -- policymaking, et cetera? How much from that April to August time period was  
11 occupied by issues pertaining to Afghanistan?

12 A Again, it varied depending on, sort of, circumstances. As we talked about  
13 earlier, when we planned travel that was related to Afghanistan, I was involved in that.  
14 When there were personnel- or management-related issues, I was involved in those.

15 Q And how about from August onward? So this is focusing on the evacuation  
16 period, understanding that the NEO wasn't requested until August 15th. Can you speak  
17 to how much of your time was occupied by Afghanistan, so throughout the month of  
18 August?

19 A So, throughout the month of August, I spent the majority of my time focused  
20 on Afghanistan.

21 Q Thank you.

22 And now speaking as to the Secretary, to the extent you're able to answer these  
23 questions, how much of his time, to the best of your abilities, was occupied by  
24 Afghanistan issues from January to April 2021?

25 A So, again, I don't have the specific details of it, but Afghanistan was a priority

1 policy issue from the moment the Secretary was confirmed in his position. And so both  
2 within the Department -- internally within the Department and within the interagency, he  
3 spent a great deal of time working on it.

4 Q Okay. And is it fair to say that's from April to August as well as from August  
5 onward as well?

6 A From January --

7 Q Correct.

8 A -- to August? Yes. Yep.

9 Q Thank you.

10 Through 2021, once you assumed the role of Chief of Staff, to the ultimate  
11 evacuation and complete withdrawal of U.S. troops at the end of August, when did -- to  
12 the best of your recollection, when did the possibility of a noncombatant evacuation  
13 come up internally within the Department?

14 A Again, I don't remember specifically. My recollection is that it was  
15 sometime in the spring.

16 Q The spring of 2021?

17 A Uh-huh.

18 Q Were you involved in discussions about the possibility of a NEO?

19 A I was involved in briefings and updates about the ongoing work related to it.

20 Q And understanding that you were not involved in the policymaking and, sort  
21 of, decision-making processes surrounding the NEO, when did the planning for the NEO  
22 begin? Was that also in the spring of 2021?

23 A I don't recall specifically.

24 Q And do you recall who at the Department led the NEO preparations?

25 A The Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources, Brian McKeon.

1 Q Thank you. Do you recall who else was involved in that planning at the  
2 Department?

3 A My recollection is that Carol Perez, who is the Acting Under Secretary for  
4 Management; Diplomatic Security; Consular Affairs; other bureaus.

5 Q Were there any decision points that were identified by the Department that  
6 would need to trigger a NEO?

7 A There are tripwires --

8 Q Yeah.

9 A Is that what they're called?

10 Q Yeah.

11 A -- that are the decision points for making recommendations on the NEO.

12 Q Can you --

13 A So I don't know specifically what they were for Afghanistan, but that's how  
14 the process works.

15 Q Generally speaking, if you're able to, what are these tripwires? And if  
16 you're not aware, that's fine as well, but it'd be helpful to just understand.

17 A I don't know the specifics.

18 Q Do you know how these tripwires are generally developed? Is it as a  
19 matter of Department policy, or is there a specific bureau within the Department that is  
20 responsible for assessing based on the situation?

21 A I don't know. I don't think it's a specific bureau -- repeat the question, if  
22 you would.

23 Q Of course. My question was, do you know how these tripwires are  
24 developed? Is it something that's established more generally as Department policy, or is  
25 it on a case-by-case basis as determined by the relevant bureau or office?

1           A    My understanding is that it is Department policy that is then reviewed by the  
2 post on the ground --

3           Q    That's helpful. Thank you.

4           A    -- by the emergency action committee.

5           Q    That's helpful. Thank you.

6           So it's been our understanding, so from the course of the investigation -- and  
7 please feel free to correct us if you believe this is mistaken -- that there were two parallel  
8 tracks in the Department, one which was focused on maintaining the U.S. diplomatic  
9 presence in Afghanistan and another which was focused on contemplating the possibility  
10 of a NEO.

11           Is that an accurate representation?

12           A    I don't recall that specifically. I know those were two lines of work that  
13 were ongoing. I don't know that they were separated in the way you described.

14           Q    When did it become clear that the U.S. would not be able to maintain a  
15 diplomatic presence in Afghanistan?

16           A    I don't recall the specific date, but -- yeah.

17           Q    Do you recall the time period more generally?

18           A    August of '21.

19           Q    And when did you first learn that a NEO would be requested?

20           A    I don't remember the specific time, but I expect that it was sometime in  
21 early August.

22           Q    Was there ever discussion of requesting a NEO at an earlier point than  
23 August 15, 2021?

24           A    Was there a discussion of, or was there a request?

25           Q    Discussions within the Department. So deliberations or discussions within

1 the Department contemplating requesting a NEO earlier than August 15, 2021.

2 A I don't recall a specific -- NEOs are requested by the post, and I don't recall a  
3 specific request coming in. There were extensive discussions related to the planning of  
4 the NEO.

5 Q That's helpful. Thank you.

6 So I'd like to enter as exhibit 8 the State Department's publicly release and  
7 unclassified After Action Review, or AAR, dated March 2022.

8 [George Exhibit No. 8  
9 was marked for identification.]

10 BY [REDACTED]:

11 Q Ms. George, do you recall who drafted the AAR's overall -- or, had overall  
12 responsibility for the After Action Review?

13 A Yes. It was Dan Smith.

14 Q And what was Ambassador Dan Smith's reputation at the Department -- or,  
15 what is his reputation at the Department?

16 A Dan Smith has an excellent reputation as a long-serving, very senior Foreign  
17 Service officer who has done extraordinary work for the -- on behalf of our country.

18 Q So is it safe to say he's someone you trust and hold in high esteem?

19 A Yes.

20 Q So, if I could just direct your attention to page 12 in the "Findings" section of  
21 the AAR, I just have some questions as to the findings within. And then if you need any  
22 clarification, I'd be happy to follow up.

23 If we look to bullet point 9 of the findings, the AAR states, "U.S. military planning  
24 for a possible NEO had been underway with post for some time, but the Department's  
25 participation in the NEO planning process was hindered by the fact that it was unclear

1 who in the Department had the lead."

2 Can you speak to why this was unclear? We don't want you to speculate, but to  
3 the extent you're able to respond to this, it'd be helpful to us.

4 A I can't speak to it, why it was unclear.

5 Q Have steps been taken within the Department to address this finding in the  
6 AAR?

7 A There were a series of recommendations at the end of there, which were  
8 then -- we have worked to -- Under Secretary for Management John Bass has led an  
9 implementation process to ensure that we are addressing both the concerns that were  
10 raised in the findings and the recommendations that were made by the AAR.

11 Q That's helpful. Thank you.

12 And if you look to bullet point 10, another finding, it states, "A major challenge  
13 facing NEO planning was determining the scale and scope of the operation, especially  
14 when it came to how many at-risk Afghan nationals would be included, how they would  
15 be prioritized, and how long their evacuation might take. Senior administration officials  
16 had not made clear decisions regarding the universe of at-risk Afghans who would be  
17 included by the time the operation started, nor had they determined where those  
18 Afghans would be taken. That added significantly to the challenges the Department and  
19 DoD faced during the evacuation."

20 Do you know who the senior administration officials were or who would generally  
21 be responsible for this?

22 A I don't know who it refers to.

23 Q Can you speak to why it may have taken so long to make these decisions?

24 A I don't want to speculate on conversations or a process that I was not part  
25 of.

1 Q So I want to transition now to specifically your involvement in the  
2 evacuation. Can you please walk us through your involvement, as you understood it, in  
3 the emergency evacuation as events unfolded in Afghanistan?

4 A So, similar to my role as I've described, I prioritize in my job facilitating the  
5 Department's work and helping to respond to the crisis at hand.

6 So, given that the evacuation quickly became a body of work that was larger than  
7 anything the Department had ever worked on, I very quickly became very involved in  
8 supporting and helping wherever I could.

9 Q That's helpful. Thank you.

10 And did leaders from nonprofit organizations and other private citizens conducting  
11 evacuation operations communicate directly with you regarding their efforts to evacuate  
12 American citizens and Afghan allies during the evacuation?

13 A Yes.

14 Q What did they report regarding the challenges that they were encountering?

15 A So we were receiving outreach from both the interagency, from Members of  
16 Congress, from members of the press corps, from stakeholders, nonprofits, academic  
17 institutions, who were working under the challenging circumstances on the ground to try  
18 and get folks -- as many folks out as possible.

19 Q And what kind of assistance did they ask for, these nonprofit and private  
20 citizen groups?

21 A Different ones asked for different help.

22 Q Were there efforts to evacuate American citizens and Afghans that were  
23 impeded by not being able to get relevant reviews and clearances from U.S. Government  
24 officials?

25 A I'm sorry. Can you say that again?

1 Q Of course. Were there efforts -- were efforts to evacuate American citizens  
2 and Afghans impeded at any point because these organizations were not able to get the  
3 relevant reviews and clearances from U.S. Government officials?

4 A During the August evacuation?

5 Q Correct.

6 A I don't know. I don't know the answer to that.

7 [REDACTED]. And what about in the period following the withdrawal, in, say,  
8 September 2021?

9 Mr. McQuaid. So my understanding was that, other than the AAR, the purpose  
10 of this was to focus on the period until the end of August and not the post period, so --

11 [REDACTED]. I think that it's directly related to the subject, the immediate  
12 consequences of withdrawal.

13 Mr. McQuaid. [REDACTED] I don't know how you've been drawing the line.

14 [REDACTED]. So this one is a little -- with a different witness, who worked in that  
15 period with actual operational responsibilities, subject to my H colleague, I would be  
16 inclined to say there is a direct connection. But you're asking a question of somebody  
17 who didn't have operational responsibility on these issues, so it does seem a little further  
18 afield.

19 [REDACTED]. If the individual was contacted directly by organizations?

20 [REDACTED]. Well, but organizations contacting the State Department, which  
21 they're still doing today -- I'm not clear how that connects.

22 You may be aware that we have a separate investigation from a separate  
23 committee on these exact issues, meaning the CARE operation. And so, if the two  
24 committees want to coordinate how they slice up the time period, we would try to  
25 accommodate that.

1 But the chairman's letter is pretty clear --

2 [REDACTED]. Our intention is not to address the CARE operation, nor is that  
3 part of our -- at least, I don't want to speak on behalf of the chairman, but it's not my  
4 understanding that that's part of the investigation.

5 We just want to better understand in terms of the, sort of, evacuation population  
6 what issues were encountered more broadly in trying to get, you know, these vulnerable  
7 individuals, Afghan allies as well as Americans, out of the country.

8 So, to the extent you're able to speak to any of that, that'd be very helpful to us.  
9 If you don't feel comfortable answering that, then we will, of course, accept your answer  
10 and bring it back.

11 [REDACTED]. So, just to be clear -- which you've already asked and you can ask  
12 again -- but I'm assuming, and I may be wrong, that if they encountered problems, the  
13 problems they encountered weren't different in August than on September 1. Which, if  
14 they were different, then that's kind of a different topic. But, anyway, I don't know.

15 Suzy, does that help?

16 Mr. McQuaid. If you're aware of issues that were happening in August that  
17 extended past that period about clearances, then --

18 Ms. George. I'm not aware of issues specifically related to clearances. There  
19 were issues related to people's paperwork, which --

20 [REDACTED]. That's essentially what this is getting at. "Clearances" shouldn't be  
21 interpreted as a term of art, but things like, for example, getting flights, you know, getting  
22 evacuees out of the country.

23 [REDACTED]. So I just want to -- you're right, but I want to note, getting flights is  
24 not the same as paperwork. So all of these are legitimate, you know, impediments,  
25 which, if she knows about them, I'm happy to have her talk about them, but we just need

1 to be precise. Because the inability to purchase an airline ticket is not the same as not  
2 having a DOD --

3 [REDACTED]. These include charter flights that were reliant on U.S. Government  
4 approvals and --

5 [REDACTED]. But they were not U.S. Government charter flights, were they?

6 [REDACTED]. How about we separate it out --

7 [REDACTED]. Okay.

8 [REDACTED]. -- and focus on the paperwork first? Because I think that's the  
9 one that's most germane to our inquiry here.

10 BY [REDACTED]:

11 Q Can you speak to, sort of, that issue in particular, starting in August and if it  
12 extended beyond that period? We just want to better understand what problems were  
13 encountered.

14 A Uh-huh.

15 So one of the issues post-August 15th as people were trying to make their way to  
16 the airport and get out was paperwork related and whether they had papers that they  
17 were able to -- that allowed them to get through to the airport.

18 That was not the only challenge that people had getting to the airport, but it was  
19 extraordinarily dynamic and dangerous circumstances on the ground, so it was evolving  
20 from day to day.

21 Q That's helpful. Thank you.

22 And how did the Department determine which Afghan populations were eligible  
23 for evacuation and what documentation would be acceptable? Are you aware of that  
24 process?

25 [REDACTED]. So I do just want to note that you'd already asked -- and it's in an

1 exhibit that who was eligible was determined by senior leadership, which -- leadership  
2 she testified she didn't know who it was.

3 So, if I've misunderstood the question, if it's different than that -- but that  
4 question you sort of answered in your own exhibit, as to who decided eligibility at a large  
5 level -- or high level.

6 [REDACTED]. So my question was within the Department, because I imagine  
7 the Consular Affairs Bureau had a significant role. If I'm mistaken, that's acceptable --

8 [REDACTED]. No, no. CA would have role in the implementation, but there  
9 wasn't a senior leadership decision made which Consular Affairs then altered or  
10 countermanded or made up new stuff.

11 So how they would determine -- given the eligibility, as you pointed out here, was  
12 already decided, how they verified that eligibility, I think, goes to what Ms. George is  
13 talking about as to paperwork that would be necessary.

14 [REDACTED]. So --

15 [REDACTED]. I'm sorry, I don't mean to testify, but, as you know, this has come  
16 up in a variety of our --

17 [REDACTED]. No. And I appreciate the clarification, because that just leads  
18 me to the next question.

19 [REDACTED]. Sure.

20 BY [REDACTED]:

21 Q So was this decision made outside of the Department? That would be  
22 helpful. If so, we can move on.

23 A The decision --

24 Q As to who which populations were eligible to be evacuated.

25 A My recollection is, there was an interagency process that led to who would

1 be eligible.

2 Q Thank you.

3 And are you aware of when the U.S. was able to secure agreements from foreign  
4 countries to serve as lily pads for the evacuation?

5 A Am I aware of when that happened?

6 Q Correct.

7 A Generally, yes. It happened in the few days around the August 15th  
8 withdrawal, but I'm not sure of the specific date for the specific countries.

9 Q Had planning been done prior to that to secure those lily pads?

10 A Planning was ongoing, yes.

11 Q Can you speak to why -- and I don't want to characterize it, but can you  
12 speak to why it took until that few-days-before time period to secure those lily pads,  
13 what difficulties were encountered in that effort?

14 A I wasn't specifically involved in the conversations, so I am not aware of the  
15 details.

16 Again, given the dynamic situation on the ground and response of many other  
17 countries, there were ongoing conversations throughout the summer, and many of those  
18 conversations were finalized in the first few days of the evacuation.

19 Q Thank you.

20 And are you aware of any deals and/or agreements the U.S. reached with the  
21 Taliban as the situation deteriorated in August of 2021?

22 A Deals or --

23 Q I'm happy to sort of narrow it. Specifically relating to security  
24 arrangements or securing the perimeter of Kabul, are you aware of any deals or  
25 arrangements that were made with the Taliban during that period?

1           A    I'm aware of there were -- those were issues that were being discussed.  
2 I'm not aware of the specifics.

3           Q    And were they being discussed internally within the Department?

4           A    They were being discussed within the interagency.

5           Q    Do you know who at the Department was responsible in presenting the  
6 Department's equities on those issues?

7           A    Within the interagency?

8           Q    Correct. So who was representing the Department within the interagency  
9 on that issue?

10          A    It would depend on the level of the interagency meeting.

11          Q    So, ultimately, who did represent the Department? And it's fine if there  
12 were multiple individuals. It'd be helpful to us just so we know we're directing our  
13 questions at the correct person.

14          A    My recollection is, obviously, Ambassador Khalilzad was actively involved;  
15 both Deputy Secretaries; Derek Chollet.

16          Q    That's helpful. Thank you.

17                And Ambassador Bass, now Under Secretary Bass, was sent to Afghanistan around  
18 mid- to late August 2021, correct?

19          A    Uh-huh.

20          Q    Why was he sent there?

21          A    He was sent -- I don't remember the exact date, but he was sent within the  
22 first few days of the evacuation.

23                It became clear very quickly, given the scale and complexity of the evacuation,  
24 that we would need to have Ambassador Wilson focused on the diplomatic engagement  
25 and Ambassador Bass focused on the evacuation piece. There were so many

1 components and dynamics to both that they required senior-level attention.

2 [REDACTED]. Was the State Department surprised by the scale and complexity  
3 of the evacuation?

4 Ms. George. We had done a lot of planning for the withdrawal, but I think as is  
5 publicly noted in many sources, the evacuation was unprecedented, yes.

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q Did Department leadership at any point during this time period -- "this time  
8 period" being the evacuation period -- convey concerns about Ambassador Wilson being  
9 able to conduct the evacuation on his own?

10 A Can you repeat? Did the Department --

11 Q Did Department leadership, so members of --

12 A Have concerns?

13 Q Yeah. Correct.

14 A I don't have any recollection of the Department leadership having concerns  
15 with Ambassador Wilson's leadership. It was more because of the scale of the operation  
16 and the level of the complexity that we thought it was critical to provide additional  
17 resources.

18 Q Do you recall who recommended that Ambassador Bass go to Afghanistan to  
19 assist Ambassador Wilson with the operation?

20 A My recollection is that Ambassador Sherman -- Deputy Secretary Sherman  
21 recommended him initially.

22 Q Thank you.

23 Transitioning gears a bit, after the Taliban took over Kabul, did the Department  
24 ever press the Taliban to extend the withdrawal date beyond August 31st to facilitate the  
25 evacuation?

1 A I'm not sure I would be aware of specific conversations with the Taliban.

2 Q Okay.

3 So I'd like to enter exhibit 9 into the record.

4 [George Exhibit No. 9  
5 was marked for identification.]

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q So this is an article titled "State Department: Thousands of U.S. Residents  
8 Still Stuck in Afghanistan," published in Foreign Policy magazine on Wednesday,  
9 November 3, 2021.

10 I'd like to direct your attention to the first paragraph on the first page.

11 The article states, "The State Department believes as many as 14,000 U.S. legal  
12 permanent residents remain in Afghanistan, Foreign Policy has learned, as the agency  
13 faces increasing scrutiny from Congress about the status of U.S. citizens and green card  
14 holders that are still stranded in the Taliban-controlled country."

15 And if you go to the third paragraph, Representative Chris Smith is quoted asking  
16 former DMR Brian McKeon, quote, "Isn't the operating assumption about 14,000?" to  
17 which DMR McKeon responds, quote, "We don't track [legal permanent residents]. It's  
18 a good question why we don't."

19 The article then proceeds, stating Mr. McKeon's response suggests, quote, "the  
20 lack of clarity might be because the State Department does not require Americans and  
21 legal permanent residents traveling abroad to report their whereabouts."

22 The article states further, quote, "The new number sheds light on the extent to  
23 which the United States' chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan left U.S. citizens, residents,  
24 and important Afghan allies in the lurch as a lightning-fast Taliban offensive swept across  
25 the country."

1           And, lastly, the article states that Mr. McKeon, quote, "revealed 289 U.S. citizens  
2 remain in Afghanistan as of Tuesday and a further 81 Americans are ready to depart" and  
3 that "140 Americans have departed in the last week."

4           Can you speak to what efforts the State Department made to identify the number  
5 of Americans in Afghanistan prior to August 2021?

6           A    I don't know specifically about the efforts that were made, given that it  
7 wasn't my area of responsibility.

8           There are a variety of data that comes to our Consular Affairs Bureau which helps  
9 them try and have some sense of what the number is.   But given, as Brian states here,  
10 we don't track Americans anywhere around the world, so it is a very hard thing to know  
11 how many Americans are in any one country at any time.

12           Q    Have there been any policy changes within the Department since  
13 Afghanistan to try to mitigate or remedy this issue -- "this issue" being the inability to  
14 know how many Americans are overseas?

15           Mr. McQuaid.   Just, again -- because I think she -- I think what Suzy talked about  
16 was knowing how many Americans were in any one country at any time.   I guess you  
17 could add that up and that would be how many Americans were overseas, but just trying  
18 to make sure the record is clear.

19           BY ██████████:

20           Q    Let me rephrase:   in any one country at any time.   Have there been efforts  
21 to mitigate this issue specifically?

22           A    I am not certain.   There have -- from the lessons learned from the work of  
23 the After Action Review, we have worked in situations that came after Afghanistan to  
24 improve our data and our ability to communicate with Americans overseas.   But the  
25 basic premise of the United States does not require people to share their whereabouts

1 with the U.S. Government at any time, that has not changed.

2 Q And, during the NEO, who was in charge of making efforts to determine how  
3 many U.S. citizens were in Afghanistan?

4 A better question: Was anyone responsible for that task?

5 A The task of engaging with American citizens in a situation like that falls  
6 generally to our Consular Affairs Bureau, but they work with others within the  
7 Department on it.

8 Q Are you able to speak to the universe of Afghans who were eligible for  
9 Special Immigrant Visas by August 2021?

10 A Am I able to --

11 Q So are you aware of what the universe of Afghans who were eligible for  
12 Special Immigrant Visas by August 2021 were? So, sort of, the number in particular.

13 A I am not.

14 BY [REDACTED]:

15 Q Do you know if that number of potentially eligible Afghans had been  
16 determined by the State Department before August 2021?

17 A If there was a -- are you asking if there was a confirmed number of SIV  
18 applicants?

19 Q Confirmed or assessed, projected, estimated.

20 [REDACTED]. I want to note that he is asking about apples (ph). You used the  
21 word "applicant," which is technically more correct.

22 So you can answer however you want, but we need to be aware that we're talking  
23 about two very different things.

24 [REDACTED]. So my question was in terms of potentially-SIV-eligible Afghans.

25 Ms. George. I'm sorry. So now restate the whole question.

1 BY [REDACTED]:

2 Q Had the State Department come up with an estimate of how many Afghans  
3 were potentially eligible for SIVs -- had they determined that number prior to the NEO in  
4 August 2021?

5 A Again, it's not something I would've worked on on a day-to-day basis. My  
6 recollection is, there were -- there was very active work going on on the SIV portfolio  
7 throughout the spring of 2021 once we arrived -- once the administration began. So I  
8 don't know if there was a specific -- I don't know what the specific number was.

9 Q So you don't know what the specific number was, but do you know if a  
10 number had been determined or estimated by the State Department?

11 A I don't.

12 BY [REDACTED]:

13 Q I'd like to delve into the numbers surrounding the U.S. airlift from Hamid  
14 Karzai International Airport during the NEO. To the extent you're able to answer these  
15 questions, it'd be helpful. If not, please just state so for the record.

16 Would you be able to provide a breakdown of how many -- how much, by  
17 percentage or speaking more in broad generalities, of that airlift was comprised of U.S.  
18 citizens?

19 So the percentage of individuals who were evacuated, are you able to speak to  
20 what percentage of those individuals were U.S. citizens?

21 A I don't know the specific percentage. I know in broad numbers around  
22 where the numbers were.

23 Q That would be helpful if possible.

24 A So approximately 100,000 -- anywhere be- -- 100,000-plus were evacuated.  
25 And the number of American citizens was between 6,000 and 8,000.

1 Q And how about legal permanent residents, or LPRs, or green card holders?

2 A I don't know the breakdown of that.

3 Q And how about third-country nationals?

4 A I don't know the breakdown of that.

5 Q And how many were SIVs? So not just potentially eligible, et cetera, but  
6 actual holders of Special Immigrant Visas.

7 A Yeah, I don't know the specifics on that.

8 Q And were you involved in efforts to communicate with American citizens and  
9 Afghans trying to escape Afghanistan after our military was drawn down to zero, so after  
10 August 30, 2021?

11 Mr. McQuaid. Can you -- sorry, [REDACTED] Can you repeat the question? I think I  
12 have the same concern about going past the scope of what --

13 [REDACTED]. It's more of a foundational question. I'm not going to be  
14 delving into the specifics. But I'll just get right to the question.

15 BY [REDACTED]:

16 Q Did the State Department have a plan for getting Americans and allies out  
17 after August 2021?

18 A Is there a plan?

19 Q Was there a plan in place dedicated to getting Americans and Afghan allies  
20 out of Afghanistan after August 2021?

21 Mr. McQuaid. I'm going to just -- she can answer, I think, but as long as you just  
22 keep it to what you knew as of August of 2021.

23 Ms. George. As of --

24 Mr. McQuaid. If you recall.

25 Ms. George. Yeah. As of August 2021, I was not involved in the planning, so I

1 don't know the details of the plans to continue for American citizens to continue leaving.  
2 The Department has continued to help Americans and others depart.

3 BY [REDACTED]:

4 Q Was planning underway in August of 2021 or prior to that, just for us to  
5 better understand the timing of that planning? Was planning underway for that  
6 objective?

7 A Again, I wasn't part of the planning process. So I was privy to conversations  
8 where the issues were discussed, so leads me to believe that planning was ongoing. But  
9 I don't know the specifics.

10 Q Thank you.

11 BY [REDACTED]:

12 Q In your role as the Chief of Staff at the State Department, were you aware of  
13 Secretary Blinken taking a vacation in August 2021?

14 Mr. McQuaid. I think, again, my understanding is that specific travel plans of the  
15 Secretary is something that the State Department doesn't comment on. So I don't know  
16 whether that's something that she's allowed to answer.

17 [REDACTED]. So I'm a little unclear that -- that specific factual question raises  
18 operational security issues. Does it connect to some other question related to the  
19 investigation, as opposed to just standing alone, providing dates of when any Secretary is  
20 on travel?

21 [REDACTED]. It does connect to a followup question.

22 [REDACTED]. Okay. But why don't we hear the followup question?

23 Because, also, you characterized -- we protect Secretarial travel. We also do not  
24 characterize travel as to the purpose of the travel, whether it's emergency sick leave or  
25 annual leave or -- I mean, whatever.

1           If he was on travel, the dates and times of that travel remain subject to  
2 operational security concerns. I know it's in the past, but we don't release any of it  
3 because it presents patterns over the course of time, particularly with a currently sitting  
4 Secretary.

5           ██████████: Ask your question.

6           BY ██████████:

7           Q Do you know why the Secretary did travel out of D.C. in August 2021?

8           ██████████: Again, I'm a little un- -- this is a little different, but what -- so are  
9 you asking did he travel to Kabul, or did he travel to NATO, to Brussels? Why an  
10 unspecified travel, not known as to how it relates to Afghanistan -- I'm having a problem  
11 with any relevancy of any kind.

12          ██████████: I think what he's trying to get at -- and please correct if I'm  
13 mistaken; it's not my question.

14          But I think what he's trying to get at is, it's our understanding the Secretary went  
15 on travel. We don't know the purpose. And, quite frankly, it's already been  
16 established, we're not going to delve into the purpose of that, as it may be personal, and  
17 if it's not, it's not part of our inquiry. He went on travel in the mid-August timeframe as  
18 the events were unfolding in Afghanistan.

19          I want to better understand -- I assume ██████████ is asking, he wants to understand  
20 why did the Secretary leave for travel during the period in which Afghanistan was falling  
21 into the hands of the Taliban, to the extent you're able to answer that question. If not,  
22 we're happy to move on.

23          Mr. McQuaid. I think if -- to the extent that it impacted your response to it, you  
24 know, if there was issues, you know, if there was something substantive that impacted  
25 how you were responding it, you can share that. But I don't know. I think Ken's been

1 clear that we're not going to talk about, you know, whether or why he was traveling.

2 [REDACTED]: So, again, I want to point out that that is true, that if there was an  
3 impact on the ability to communicate or a response, that's a very relevant question. But  
4 that's unrelated to why someone was on travel.

5 And so I'm not trying to ask the question for you, but if there was a different  
6 question, about capabilities or availability or communications or negative impact based  
7 on travel, that I understand. But --

8 [REDACTED]: That would be a followup question, so why don't we just go to  
9 the followup question. Let's just get at that.

10 Did it negatively impact the ability to conduct the evacuation to have the  
11 Secretary on travel during this period, during the mid-August timeframe?

12 Ms. George. Whenever the Secretary travels for any reason, he is accompanied  
13 by Diplomatic Security professionals as well as mobile communications professionals.  
14 So he is in constant communication, both classified and unclassified. So none of his  
15 travels impact our ability to communicate with him or his ability to do his job.

16 But, as Secretary of State, he is responsible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for his  
17 tenure. So he has -- one of our jobs is to make sure he always has the ability to conduct  
18 the business of the State Department regardless of where he is.

19 [REDACTED]: Thank you.

20 And I know we're sort of winding down our time. I don't know if you have more  
21 substantive questions, but that wraps up my substantive questions -- our substantive  
22 questions. I'm going to defer to my minority colleagues and then just have some sort of  
23 closing questions.

24 Ms. George. Okay.

25 [REDACTED]: We'll stop the clock and go off the record.

1

[Recess.]

1

2 [11:23 a.m.]

3 [REDACTED]. The minority's round will also be focusing on the NEO.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q Before we get into our questions, I wanted to ask for further clarity on your  
6 testimony regarding the fact that the U.S. does not track its citizens.

7 Why does the U.S. not track its citizens?

8 A It's -- I don't want to speculate on why the U.S. does not track its citizens, but  
9 it seems to me that it is not in our values to -- as a democracy, to track your citizens  
10 around the world.

11 Q And would you agree with the sentiment that one of the United States'  
12 values is freedom of movement for its citizens?

13 A Absolutely.

14 Q Okay.

15 BY [REDACTED]:

16 Q And privacy?

17 A Yes, absolutely.

18 Q So you were asked -- sorry. Before I move on, is this also the reason, as you  
19 understand it, for why we -- the U.S. wouldn't track legal permanent residents as well and  
20 their movements?

21 A Yes, that is my understanding.

22 Q Okay. You were asked previously about figures, numbers of LPRs and  
23 Amcits in Afghanistan at various times.

24 Is it fair to say that any such data is based on people voluntarily making  
25 themselves known to the U.S. Government on their whereabouts?

1           A    That is my understanding that's how we collect the data, yes.  It is  
2 volunteered.

3           Q    And people making themselves known to the U.S. Government as to their  
4 whereabouts is informed by their own personal desires and sentiments, yes?

5           A    Absolutely informed by their own personal desires and sentiments.  And, as  
6 we have seen, those personal desires and sentiments can change from day to day.

7           Q    So is it fair to say that the numbers estimating the number of American  
8 citizens or LPRs in a place at a given time are inherently dynamic?

9           A    Yes, they are inherently dynamic.

10          Q    Okay.

11               BY ██████████ :

12          Q    Thank you.

13               Turning to the NEO in particular, do you agree with the sentiment that State's rule  
14 in calling for a NEO is calling it only, but that DOD is, in effect, the operational lead?

15          A    Yes.  That's my understanding of how the NEO process works.

16          Q    Is my understanding correct that you did not play a role in standing up the  
17 NEO?

18          A    I did not play a role in standing up the NEO.

19          Q    And, in fact, I believe you testified that your work related to the NEO was  
20 coordination-based.  I believe you said you supported wherever you could.  Is that  
21 correct?

22          A    That is correct.

23          Q    And the mandate, as you saw it, as you previously testified, was something  
24 along the lines of responding to the crisis at hand?

25          A    Yes, that's correct.

1 Q And you characterized the crisis as unprecedented. Is that correct?

2 A Correct.

3 Q Okay. What did you understand your top priorities to be during the NEO as  
4 related to coordination efforts?

5 A Was to support the Secretary as best as possible, and make sure he was able  
6 to perform his duties; was to facilitate communication and response between our various  
7 bureaus that were working on this issue; to engage with the White House, the  
8 interagency, Members of Congress, press, key stakeholders, all of whom were reaching  
9 out on various issues related to the crisis.

10 Q Okay. And you had previously testified that there was, in fact, a lot of  
11 planning related to the withdrawal and contingency plans, et cetera, that was done prior  
12 to the NEO. Is that correct?

13 A That is correct.

14 Q And the NEO occurred pretty suddenly due to a precipitous change in the  
15 environment in Kabul. Is that correct?

16 A That is correct.

17 Q How quickly did you respond to focusing on the NEO after you were first  
18 apprised of it occurring?

19 A Again, there were really extraordinarily capable colleagues whose main  
20 responsibility it was to -- to work on the NEO. So I -- in my -- in the work that I did in the  
21 response to the evacuation, I touched on that work, but it was not my primary  
22 responsibility.

23 Q Okay. Is it your understanding that, once the NEO was set into motion, the  
24 response was quick from the Department of State?

25 A Yes, that's my understanding.

1 Q Are you aware of what the Afghanistan Task Force was?

2 A Yes, I'm aware.

3 Q Where was it located?

4 A Physically located?

5 Q Yes.

6 A In Washington, D.C., in the State Department.

7 Q Can you briefly describe your understanding of what the task force was?

8 A The task force brought together many colleagues who were trying to do  
9 crisis management and respond to the crisis as best as possible and focused on different  
10 work streams, so some focused on American citizens; some focused on people departing  
11 the country, lily pads, whole variety of things, charter flights.

12 Q Did you have any direct coordination or management tasks related to the  
13 task force?

14 A I was not responsible for managing the task force, no.

15 Q But you were aware that it was stood up and --

16 A I was --

17 Q -- proceeding?

18 A -- absolutely aware that it was stood up and proceeding and worked to  
19 support the work of the task force as best as possible.

20 Q How did you support the work of the task force?

21 A Again, it was a fairly dynamic situation, so on different days, it was different  
22 activities, but much, similar to the basis of my job, was related to personnel and  
23 management, making sure we had the staff available to work on the task force, making  
24 sure there was clear communication between the task force and other parts of the  
25 building, making sure there was clear task force -- communication between the task force

1 and the interagency as necessary.

2 Q What's your assessment as to the quality of that communication? Was it  
3 good?

4 A The communication was very good under really, really challenging  
5 circumstances.

6 Q And how large was the task force?

7 A I don't know the specifics of the number, but it was fairly large.

8 Q Fairly large?

9 A Yeah.

10 Q Okay. What is your assessment of the overall effectiveness of the task  
11 force?

12 A The task force was effective in the sense that 120,000-plus people were  
13 evacuated safely from Afghanistan. But, as the after-action review notes, there were  
14 many lessons learned from this unprecedented activity and from how we hopefully will  
15 do crisis management going forward.

16 Q Okay. And, relating to coordination and management, did you have  
17 interaction with the interagency during the NEO?

18 A I did, yes.

19 Q How frequent was it?

20 A The interagency is large, so I was speaking to various colleagues at other  
21 agencies and within the NSC on a daily basis during the evacuation.

22 Q Fair to say that the communication was constant during this time period?

23 A Absolutely constant, yeah.

24 Q What was the quality of that communication?

25 A Everybody was very focused on the task at hand, and on executing the

1 response as best as we possibly could under, again, dynamic and changing circumstances.

2 Q To the extent you were exposed to it, was this communication robust?

3 A Communication was robust, yes.

4 Q Was there healthy debate and dialogue related to policy?

5 A I wasn't part of the policy process, so those were not conversations I was a  
6 part of.

7 Q But you're aware that there were constant meetings and communication  
8 related to the NEO?

9 A Absolutely constant, ongoing work, yeah. As I mentioned, I think people  
10 were working 18 or 20 hours a day, so --

11 Q Including yourself. That's correct?

12 A Yes.

13 Q Right. What is your impression regarding the effectiveness of interagency  
14 coordination during the evacuation?

15 A My personal experience was, again, we coordinated very well given a very  
16 dynamic and changing situation, but --

17 Q Okay. How much interaction in terms of management and coordination  
18 did you have with folks on the ground in Kabul?

19 A Limited interaction, but some regular interaction with specific folks who  
20 were on the ground to try and streamline the coordination between the State  
21 Department and the folks on the ground.

22 Q And how was the quality of that coordination-related communication  
23 between you and those few individuals on the ground?

24 A It was excellent.

25 Q What was your assessment of their work ethic while they were on the

1 ground?

2 A Our colleagues who were on the ground did truly extraordinary work in very,  
3 very challenging circumstances.

4 Q Is it fair to say they were hardworking?

5 A They were hardworking.

6 Q Reliable?

7 A Reliable.

8 Q Smart?

9 A Very smart.

10 Q What is your impression regarding the effectiveness of Consular Affairs  
11 during the evacuation?

12 A Consular Affairs Assistant Secretary was confirmed within days of the -- of  
13 the evacuation, and the new Assistant Secretary and her team performed, again, just  
14 extraordinary work over the course of the evacuation.

15 Q Did you have any interaction related to coordination and management with  
16 foreign countries or diplomats?

17 A I'm sorry. Repeat that question.

18 Q Did you have any interaction during the NEO with foreign countries or  
19 diplomats?

20 A I did not have any direct interaction.

21 Q Okay. State Department officials have testified to our committee during  
22 hearings and transcribed interviews that the efforts of the Department and its personnel  
23 on the ground in Kabul were dedicated, entrepreneurial, and admirable under challenging  
24 circumstances, to your point.

25 Do you agree with this assessment?



1           We previously touched upon your experience in crisis management. Given that  
2 experience, do you agree with the assessment about the NEO as set forth in the AAR  
3 here?

4           A    Yes. That was my experience of observing the work of closing the embassy  
5 compound and the evacuation.

6           Q    Is there any further color that you'd care to share for the record?

7           A    Again, just the extraordinary nature -- the extraordinary work that went on  
8 in order to facilitate the closing of the embassy compound and in the evacuation  
9 was -- was very gratifying to get to observe and participate in.

10          Q    Thank you.

11                And one final passage, paragraph 12 on the same page: "The Department and  
12 Embassy Kabul sent clear and consistent messages to private U.S. citizens in Afghanistan  
13 about the risk of travel to and residency in the country. Afghanistan had long been  
14 listed as a category 4 country, and U.S. citizens were strongly discouraged from traveling  
15 to or remaining there."

16                Are you aware of any such clear and consistent messages sent to private U.S.  
17 citizens in Afghanistan during this time?

18           A    My understanding is there were close to 20 messages over the  
19 preceding -- I'm not certain how many years, but several years, about the security  
20 situation in Afghanistan and the risk to U.S. citizens on the ground, yes.

21          Q    Are you aware of what category 4 means?

22           A    It's a security -- it's a level of security warning.

23          Q    Is the level low, or high?

24           A    High.

25          Q    Is it the highest?

1 A It is the highest.

2 Q Okay. Thanks.

3 BY [REDACTED]:

4 Q So, during the NEO, were you aware of any situations where other USG  
5 agency officials or outside groups or Members of Congress pushed the State Department  
6 to evacuate specific people from Afghanistan?

7 A Yes.

8 Q Could you describe these sorts of requests as you understood them?

9 A As mentioned earlier in my testimony, we were receiving incoming from the  
10 interagency, from Members of Congress, from members of the press, from key  
11 stakeholders, from academic institutions, all looking for help facilitating the evacuation of  
12 people connected to those entities.

13 Q And what percentage of your time, your 18 to 20 hours a day, during the  
14 NEO, was spent responding to or dealing with these sorts of special requests for  
15 evacuation?

16 A Again, I don't want to speculate on percentages, but I spent a good portion  
17 of every day engaged in the incoming and trying to respond to those requests, in part  
18 because they fell outside of the sort of natural system, which, as somebody who supports  
19 the system, that's the kind of work you end up doing.

20 Q Were you the only person working on these special requests?

21 A Absolutely not, no.

22 Q So can you help us understand how many other people might have been  
23 working on aspects of these special requests?

24 A There were an enormous number of individual requests coming in, and so I  
25 don't expect that -- I know that I was not the only person receiving the incoming. And

1 then, for anybody receiving the incoming, the goal was to move them into the normal  
2 process to be able to try and facilitate assistance, if possible.

3 Q So, given the enormous number of requests that were incoming, what  
4 impact did attending to these special requests have on your overall ability to accomplish  
5 all of your duties during the NEO?

6 A They were my duties during the NEO, so -- or they were a portion of my  
7 duties during the evacuation. And, as I said earlier, I spent the majority of my time  
8 during those weeks primarily focused on this work. They were not the only part of  
9 Afghanistan that I was focused on, and also, there are many other issues going on at any  
10 time around the world that we worked to make sure we were continuing to support and  
11 address as best we could while this -- while the evacuation was going on.

12 Q But you testified previously that you sought to work on these special cases  
13 as a way to support your colleagues because these may have fallen outside the normal  
14 channels. Was there a concern that you had that, if these special cases fell to your  
15 colleagues, that would impede their ability to get their other job responsibilities done in  
16 this time?

17 A I think it was, given that the nature of the requests were so varied and came  
18 from so many different levels, that it may be challenging -- it would be really disruptive to  
19 an already challenged process.

20 Q Okay. Were you worried it would have been distracting?

21 A Yes.

22 Q Okay. Were you aware of any situations where these special requests  
23 resulted in individuals being evacuated who otherwise might not have been considered  
24 eligible, or would have been prioritized -- wouldn't have been prioritized for evacuation?

25 A I'm not aware of a specific case, but given the -- the numbers of folks who

1 were moving around, it -- you know, I don't want to attest to the credibility of every  
2 person who got on those planes.

3 Q Is it fair to say, then, that there was -- that these special-priority cases  
4 presented heightened challenge in terms of responding to them, understanding them,  
5 and ensuring that they could be brought into the normal system and individuals could go  
6 through the necessary process?

7 A They may have. I don't -- I don't know for certain that they did.

8 BY [REDACTED]:

9 Q You previously testified that you were, in fact, involved in the After Action  
10 Review. Is that correct?

11 A I was -- yes.

12 Q Were you interviewed?

13 A I was interviewed.

14 Q Okay. And have you read in full the unclassified portion of the After Action  
15 Review?

16 A I have.

17 Q Does it -- understanding you had a more limited management and  
18 coordination focus during the withdrawal and inevitable NEO, what is your assessment as  
19 to the findings of the AAR?

20 A It was -- the After Action Review was an extraordinarily important body of  
21 work which the Secretary requested to be done, and as mentioned, was led by Dan Smith.  
22 So I am confident in the credibility of the report, and the diligence with which he -- and  
23 seriousness with which he and his team created the report. From where I sit, I'm  
24 particularly focused on the recommendations and the -- our ability to learn from the  
25 experience of the evacuation.

1 Q Are there any findings that you take issue with, or feel different than your  
2 assessment?

3 A I don't -- I don't know that I have fully read it most recently enough to say  
4 that I agree in every specific finding, but, in general, I am comfortable and agree with  
5 the -- and am confident in the product.

6 Q Why do you think the After Action Review was important?

7 A I think it's -- I think it's always important to learn. The only way we get  
8 better at our jobs is to learn from things we might have done differently, knowing what  
9 we know now. So I think it's a really important tool to make the Department, the  
10 institution, the government, individuals as professionals, better.

11 Q In addition to conducting the After Action Review, were there resources to  
12 support State Department employees after the evacuation?

13 A Yeah, absolutely. There were -- there was a series of things, work we did to  
14 support our colleagues following the evacuation.

15 Q Could you speak to what those were?

16 Ms. George. I can as long as the timeframe is okay.

17 Mr. McQuaid. Yeah. No. I think she can talk to the period through the end of  
18 August, if there was things that you planned in that period. I think beyond that is  
19 beyond the scope.

20 Ms. George. So we began planning in -- during the evacuation how we would  
21 help support the workforce following the evacuation. The circumstances, particularly  
22 for those on the ground in Kabul, brought -- were both physically challenging as well as  
23 emotionally and psychologically challenging. So we began planning for a series of  
24 medical and mental health support as well as workforce management tools to help the  
25 workforce post the evacuation.

1 Many, many of our colleagues over 20 years had worked either on the ground in  
2 Kabul, or somehow connected to the Afghanistan work, so it impacted our workforce  
3 greatly.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q To the extent you can speak to it, did you hear of concerns from employees  
6 who returned from the NEO in Kabul about a lack of support from the Department?

7 A I didn't hear specific concerns about a lack of support. I heard very specific  
8 concerns about what people had experienced.

9 Q Uh-huh.

10 A And again, given the unprecedented nature, we needed to respond in a way  
11 that the Department sort of generally is not -- would not be planning to respond, but -- so  
12 many of our colleagues did -- did extraordinary work following the evacuation to help  
13 support folks.

14 Q So you did just testify that the planning on how to support  
15 returnees -- Department returnees from Kabul began even before they had returned. It  
16 began during the NEO.

17 A Uh-huh.

18 Q But it is your testimony that that planning then turned into operational  
19 efforts to support them after returning?

20 A Yeah.

21 Q Okay.

22 A Extensive operational --

23 [REDACTED]: Great. Thank you.

24 That concludes our formal questioning, but we would like to provide you with an  
25 opportunity to share any affirmative testimony, maybe touch upon something we haven't

1 asked, any further color you have as related to the withdrawal and/or the evacuation.

2 Ms. George. Yeah. I just have a couple comments I would love to share on the  
3 record.

4 First is, I appreciate the work you all are doing, and thank you for having me.

5 Second is, you know, as the administration made this decision to -- in April  
6 of 2021, I was not part of but witnessed a very robust and active interagency review and  
7 process to make the determination and to -- and to then implement the policy once it  
8 was made.

9 I am, as I have mentioned, just really extraordinarily proud of my colleagues, and  
10 feel really grateful to get to work with public servants who have dedicated their lives to  
11 serving the United States; very saddened by the loss of life of our military colleagues  
12 specifically at the -- during the evacuation, but also the loss of life of Afghans and many  
13 others throughout the 20 years of our engagement in Afghanistan.

14 The State Department and the Secretary in particular has an ongoing commitment  
15 on this issue. He has spoken about it publicly many times. That connects to both the  
16 policy work, but also our ongoing commitment to our Afghan partners and former  
17 colleagues that we continue to work to try and get out of Afghanistan.

18 And then, finally, just to the last point we were just talking about, which is just  
19 about the lessons learned from the AAR and more generally, I think we all learned an  
20 extraordinary amount, and I think it's really important that we use those lessons to make  
21 ourselves, as an institution, better. And so, from where I sit and my responsibilities and  
22 in my current job, I will continue to do that every day that I'm at the Department.

23 So that's all.

24 [REDACTED]. Thank you. On behalf of Ranking Member Meeks and the  
25 minority staff, we are grateful for your service, including for your voluntary testimony

1 here today.

2 Ms. George. Thank you.

3 [REDACTED]. Thank you very much. That concludes our round.

4 [REDACTED]. We just have some closing remarks.

5 [Pause.]

6 [REDACTED]. I promised closing questions, but I believe my colleague has one  
7 sort of follow-up, clean-up question --

8 Ms. George. Sure.

9 [REDACTED]. -- and then we'll proceed.

10 BY [REDACTED]:

11 Q During the NEO, did you understand and appreciate the efforts being  
12 undertaken by many of these private, outside groups to help evacuate Afghans who had  
13 worked with the United States?

14 A Did I understand and appreciate?

15 Q The efforts that they were undertaking?

16 A I became aware within the first few days of the efforts they were taking and  
17 ended up working fairly closely with several of them.

18 Q And did you appreciate the work that many of them were doing?

19 A I'm not sure what appreciate means in that -- I -- we were --

20 BY [REDACTED]:

21 Q Did you find it useful or helpful work that they were doing?

22 A I felt like it was an important part of the work that I was doing to partner  
23 with them as best as we possibly could.

24 [REDACTED]. Okay. Well, now we are getting to the closing questions, as I  
25 promised. I just want to briefly touch on your preparation for this interview.

1 BY [REDACTED]:

2 Q How did you first learn of the committee's interests in conducting your  
3 transcribed interview?

4 A I -- my recollection is it was from the letter that came from the chairman.

5 Q And I believe you touched upon this with my minority colleagues, but what  
6 was your reaction to that request?

7 A I was surprised.

8 Q And what kind of preparations did you take for this interview?

9 A I prepared with my colleagues here.

10 Q And that would be [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], and, of course, counsel --

11 A Yes.

12 Q -- from the Latham law firm?

13 A Thank you.

14 [REDACTED]: And, now, I just want to thank you -- we want to thank you on  
15 behalf of the chairman. I know you had reflected some surprise, but it's not our  
16 intention -- you know, we know you're incredibly busy, and it's not our intention to  
17 occupy your time more than necessary, so we appreciate you appearing voluntarily today  
18 and answering our questions.

19 Ultimately, this investigation is a top priority for the chairman, so we just want to  
20 do our diligence, but thank you again for appearing. We appreciate your candor, your  
21 engagement, and look forward to moving this investigation forward.

22 I know you had some closing remarks for my colleagues, but I want to offer you an  
23 opportunity if there is anything else you would like to state for the record.

24 Ms. George. No. I'm, again, as I said, just grateful for the opportunity to try  
25 and help.

1           ██████████. Well, thank you for your public service and your engagement  
2    today.

3           That concludes the majority's round.

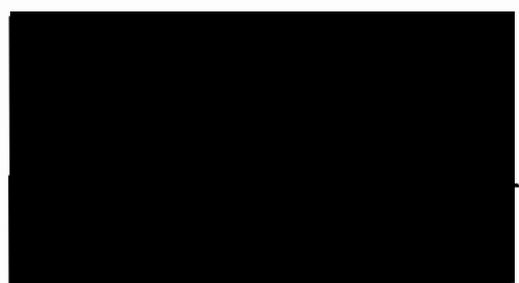
4           We can go off the record.

5           [Whereupon, at 11:59 a.m., the interview was concluded.]

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Certificate of Deponent/Interviewee

I have read the foregoing 109 pages, which contain the correct transcript of the answers made by me to the questions therein recorded. *with enafa*



2/27/24  
Date

**Errata Sheet for the Transcribed Interview of Suzy George**  
**dated 12/14/2023**

1) majority errata, (2) minority errata, (3) State/agency counsel , (4) private counsel (as applicable) and witness errata

Page	Line	Change	Reason
2	7	Change to [REDACTED]	
2	8	Change to [REDACTED]	
2	10	Change to [REDACTED]	
8	22	Change "the majority's" to "the majority is"	
9	17	Change "Then worked in the Obama National Security Council" to "Then I worked in the Obama National Security Council"	
10	15	Change "Chiefs of staff" to "Chiefs of Staff"	
11	6-8	Revise to "'I headed up the personnel team for the transition for the sub-Cabinet level appointments. So there were two parts of the personnel teams; someone else worked on Cabinet appointments and I worked on sub-Cabinet appointments, as part of the larger – appointments team."	
12	12	Change "only" to "often"	
13	14	Insert "?" after "again"	
19	11	Change "as I" to "and I"	
30	2-5	Insert "?" after "Yes"	
31	10	Change "I'm?" to "I'm —"	
43	18	Strike "this respects"	
45	24	Change "a current" to "the current"	
49	25	Strike " ,which you agreed"	
50	5	Change "time period for us is April to August 2021. During the time period, what activities" to "time period is April to August 2021 – what activities"	
50	10	Strike "—sorry"	
51	5	Change "were folks underneath that who support the Secretary" to "were additional folks who supported the Secretary directly"	
51	9	Change "Foreign Service officers and" to "Foreign Service officers, and"	

51	10	Change "were in their position" to "who was in their position"	
52	15	Change "management as an infrastructure for him" to "management infrastructure for him"	
53	1	Strike "or the NEO that we're talking about"	
54	6	Change "foreign policy" to "foreign policy making"	
54	16	Change as "work of chief" to "work as chief"	
63	24	Insert "have her" before answer	
74	4	Change "speak to it, why it was unclear" to "speak to why the AAR found that it was unclear"	
78	15-17	Change "post-August 15th as people were trying to make their wait to the airport and get out was paperwork related" to "post-August 15th — as people were trying to make their way to the airport and get out — was related to paperwork,"	
82	24	Change "August 31st" and "August 31st"	
84	10	Strike "so"	
85	20	Change "apples" to "eligible"	
85	25	Change "now restate the whole question" to "now can you restate the whole question?"	
88	21	Change "followup" to "follow-up"	
88	22	Change "followup" to "follow-up"	
89	17	Change "if its not, its not part of" to "if it is, its not part of"	
90	8	Change "followup" to "follow-up"	
90	9	Change "followup" to "follow-up"	
92	23	Change "Amcits" to "American Citizens"	
93	13	Change "State's rule in calling for a NEO is calling it only, but that DOD is, in effect, the operational lead?" to "State calls for a NEO and DoD is a NEO's operational lead?"	
93	16-18	Change "standing up" to "requesting or executing"	
95	15	Change "stood up" to "set up"	
95	18	Change "stood up" to "set up"	
97	15	Strike ",but"	
101	9	Change "incoming" to "inquiries"	
101	17	Change "incoming" to "inquiries"	