



Background:

Brian McKeon was sworn in as Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources (D-MR) on March 19, 2021, serving in that position until December 31, 2022. This position is the third in the State Department's chain of command. Prior to assuming his role as D-MR, McKeon was a senior director of the Penn Biden Center for Diplomacy and Global Engagement. McKeon served in various national security capacities in the Obama Administration and worked in the U.S. Senates for over 20 years.

Withdrawal Planning:

1. McKeon was the senior leader in the State Department who had overall responsible for planning the withdrawal and potential evacuation. (Page 18, Lines 13-17).
2. McKeon did not receive any briefing on Afghanistan during the transition or on the topic until April 2021. (Page 23, Lines 17-25; Page 24, Lines 1-10).
3. McKeon began to work on Afghanistan issues in March or April of 2021. McKeon testified he split duties with Counselor to the State Department, Derek Chollet. (Page 13, Lines 18-23).
4. McKeon worked closely with Chollet and regularly discussed matters. He described possibly having discussed the Taliban's adherence to the Doha agreement with him. He described such an interaction as: "I'm sure I had some incidental conversations with Derek Chollet about the whole issue, because his office was literally next to mine and we shared the use of a bathroom...I would often go in there and we would shoot the breeze on stuff, sometimes about nothing or gossip or sports and sometimes about work. So it may have come up in those conversations." (Page 31, Lines 21-25)
5. McKeon listed several individuals from the embassy in Kabul, SCA Bureau, and State who were involved in withdrawal planning.
 - a. "Well, the senior leadership at Embassy Kabul, for one: Ross Wilson; his deputy chief of mission, Ian McCary; and the assistant chief of mission, Scott Weinhold; and all the senior other people there. And in the State Department, the relevant bureaus would be the South Central Asian Affairs Bureau, Diplomatic Security. Within the Executive Secretariat, the Crisis Management and Strategy Office was part of the Operations Center. The Secretary was regularly briefed and wanted to know what was happening." (Page 18, Lines 21-25; Page 19, Lines 1-4).
6. McKeon communicated one-on-one and in group settings with Ambassador Wilson. There discussions revolved around when the next drawn down in embassy personnel would occur. (Page 39, Lines 17-25; Page 40, Lines 1-9).
7. McKeon testified he was not involved in any planning related to the decision to withdraw, intra-Afghan negotiations, or adherence to the Doha agreement. (Page 25, Lines 10-12).

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8. McKeon testified Ambassador Khalilzad did not share information on Afghanistan and that he did not communicate often with him, testifying “He [Ambassador Khalilzad] didn’t communicate a lot, at least that I saw. Maybe he communicated directly to the Secretary, but I’m not sure I had a good window into what 17 he was up to.” (Page 25, Lines 13-18). McKeon did not often communicate with Khalilzad. (Page 38, Lines 25; Page 39, Lines 1-16).
9. When asked about whether the Taliban was adhering to the provisions of the Doha Agreement, McKeon testified, “I don’t recall thinking much about it, because it was not my responsibility.” (Page 32, Lines 2-4).
10. When asked about providing input to Secretary Blinken regarding a conditions-based approach to the Doha Agreement, McKeon testified, “No. As I said, I was not involved in those conversations. I mean, it’s possible I was in meetings about other topics -- you know, we had senior staff meetings -- where this came up. And whether I opined on something, I don’t recall. I kind of doubt it. I tended to try to stay in my lane, which is not always, I realize, a skill I set that people in the State Department have.” (Page 25, Lines 21-25; Page 26, Lines 1-2).

Security Risk Planning and Assessments:

1. McKeon’s assessment of the security situation in Kabul began to change in July/August 2021, testifying, “Well, it changed insofar as, in July and August, as we could see the Taliban making some progress in some of the outer districts, we were constantly assessing, both within the Department and in the interagency, the degree to which we could sustain and maintain an embassy and what the size of that footprint would be.” (Page 27, Lines 5-8).
2. When asked when he first got the impression the situation on the ground in Afghanistan was deteriorating and the Taliban was making significant terrorist gains, McKeon testified “I don’t remember when some of the districts started falling. I think in early August you could certainly see that it was happening at a faster pace. And in the interagency, we were certainly looking at that all the time and having conversations about the decision points in the embassy’s emergency action plan and whether, you know, those necessitated a smaller footprint. And then, as I said, the embassy was working on a plan for a further drawdown of personnel in August when Kabul fell.” (Page 33, Lines 9-17).
3. McKeon testified he suspects there were disagreements among different State Department offices regarding the level of risk with no U.S. military presence in Kabul.
 - a. “I suspect there were. I’m not sure I’m recalling any that were brought out to me. You know, I think both the main bureaus, SCA and DS, plus Carol Perez and I were all in these conversations. There might’ve been some degree of disagreement about how much DOD assistance we would need or how much risk we were taking on in maintaining the security at the green zone. Because we were and the Afghans were manning the gates of the green zone, but we were taking on more of the burden of the security technology and, you know, mentoring the Afghans who were at the gates.” (Page 28, Lines 11-18).

4. McKeon recalled that a stay-behind force of 650-700 U.S. military personnel was estimated as necessary for embassy security to maintain U.S. Embassy Kabul. (Page 28, Lines 22-25; Page 29, Lines 1-4).
5. McKeon stated he and Secretary Blinken advocated for a stay-behind force during the interagency meetings. McKeon does not remember any bureaus or offices in the State Department opposing that request. (Page 30, Lines 3-6).

Americans in Afghanistan:

1. According to McKeon, at no time did the State Department ever confirm the number of Americans in Afghanistan. (Page 75, Lines 10-13).
2. McKeon made no effort to change or improve the State Department's ability to track Americans in Afghanistan (Page 75, Lines 14-16).
3. McKeon testified no extra efforts were made to identify how many U.S. Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs) were in Afghanistan in 2021. (Page 77, Lines 8-12).

SIV Operations:

1. McKeon testified he was responsible for all SIV operations, stating, "I was lead on the SIV issue and the anticipated flow of refugees out of Afghanistan if the Taliban started taking over parts of the country" (Page 14, Lines 1-2).
2. McKeon was nevertheless unaware of the number of potential SIV applicants, testifying, "I don't remember the number. Potentially eligible, you know, that would've been very hard to forecast, because there are so many people who might have worked for the Department of Defense, in particular, that we would not necessarily have a sense of that universe." (Page 81, Lines 21-25).
3. McKeon does not remember the exact number of SIV applicants left behind in Afghanistan but recalls it being in the tens of thousands. (Page 87, Lines 4-9).
4. Evacuation flights began on July 29th, 2021, and not sooner due to the lack of completion of the required logistical planning. (Page 83, Lines 1-9).
5. The biggest impediment to the SIV verification process came from SIV applicants who had been employed by DOD contractors. (Page 91, Lines 2-8).
6. McKeon does not know why the State Department did not request assistance from the DOD in verifying SIV employment records prior to June 2021 t. (Page 89, Lines 23-25; Page 90, Lines 1-14).
7. In response to the State Department's Inspector General's report from October 2022 that highlighted the lack of interagency coordination during the SIV process, McKeon responded that State, DOD, and DHS coordinated at regular meetings, but that the DOD

and DHS sent lower-level officials to the meetings that were not as helpful as more senior officials.

- a. “I think the report says this, but it doesn't then contain a sentence that it probably should, which is, the officials at DOD and DHS were, shall we say, several levels down from the Deputy Secretary and not people I would typically interact with. ... So, to me, it's -- sure, there's a statutory requirement that we're supposed to coordinate, but the report doesn't reflect the realities of how the government operates.” (Page 95, Lines 6-23).

Directions from NSC:

1. Even though McKeon claimed responsibility for the SIV program, when asked if he played any role in determining which populations were eligible to be evacuated by the U.S., McKeon testified that “those decisions were made collectively in the interagency” which was led by the NSC (Page 148, Lines 15-19).
 - a. The broad latitude regarding who was eligible for evacuation, according to McKeon, came from an NSC decision, “You know, there's essentially guidance given that anybody -- obviously anybody with a passport, people who can prove that they were in the SIV pipeline, and other people who could show some nexus to our commitment and the American program and projects, there was more latitude given in the guidance to the field... I mean, this was a decision led by the NSC. (Page 174, Lines 12-17).
2. When describing the planning process which led to the recommendation for a residual military force to stay in Kabul to protect the embassy and the NSC's role in that process, McKeon testified, “I don't remember whether the NSC had a position going into these conversations. In theory they shouldn't because they should be brokering agreement not steering decisions, but that's not always how it works.” (Page 113, Lines 24-25; Page 114, Lines 1-3).
3. McKeon asserted an NSC-led process resulted in the decision to close the chancery and move the embassy to HKIA, testifying “There was a decision made across the government, led by the NSC, on the 12th of August I think that was the date that by the end of August the embassy would be reduced in size such that it could fit in the facilities out at the Kabul airport, and we would close the chancery.” (Page 33, Lines 18-21). McKeon stated further, “it's an interagency decision led by the NSC and the White House that we should close the embassy.” (Page 123, Lines 9-11).

NEO Planning:

1. McKeon does not remember the date NEO planning began, but that it occurred before August 2021. (Page 101, Lines 12-15).
2. McKeon stated that planning considered all possibilities, but no discrete part of the plan addressed the Taliban seizing Kabul, testifying, “Yeah, I don't think -- as we discussed the evacuation and the NEO, I think we considered all possibilities. I don't think there were discrete elements of the plan, Taliban in Kabul or not. I don't remember.” (Page 79, Lines 23-25).

3. The plan executed on August 16, 2021, was not the same plan that was being drafted leading up to the execution of the NEO. (Page 105, Lines 19-21).
4. According to McKeon, the State Department did not implement any triggers necessitating a NEO, and instead the NEO plan called for a “totality of the circumstances” approach:
 - a. “The decision points that were in the emergency action plan, they got refined in the course of July, early August too, as we watched the progress of the Taliban for it was focused on the embassy presence, but it sort of follows naturally that the possibility of a NEO might be there. And as I understand the practice of decision points, the Department, I think after Benghazi, got away from the practice of specific tripwires where if X happens, Y must happen, and rather adopted what as a lawyer you might understand, a totality of the circumstances test of multiple decision points and that some combination of them might lead to a decision.” (Page 106, Lines 5-14).
5. According to McKeon, no one at the State Department raised concerns about conducting a NEO through the civilian airport, Hamid Karzai International Airport. (Page 141, Lines 3-12).

NEO on the Ground:

1. McKeon was surprised at the speed with which the Taliban took Kabul. His surprise arose from a lack of intelligence that Kabul would fall in 11 days (Page 118, Lines 18-25).
2. According to McKeon, in determining which populations were eligible to be evacuated – an NSC led process – no list was ever finalized as to who was eligible for evacuation existed. The list constantly evolved based on situations on the ground. (Page 149, Lines 4-23).
3. When asked about cooperation between U.S. military and civilian personnel during the NEO, McKeon claimed he had a good impression, testifying “My impression was that it was good...given the circumstances, my understanding was it was good.” (Page 137, Lines 18-23).
4. According to McKeon, during the NEO, State and DOD argued about “who was going to pay for what”:
 - a. “And there were also, as is usually the way in these things, arguments between us and the DOD about who was going to pay for what. I think some of that got deferred -- some of the litigation on that got deferred until after August 31, but some of it was in real-time, where DOD was signaling, you know, ‘State’s going to pay for that.’ And, you know, at certain times, my staff recommended and I agreed that we needed to jump on it right away before it became a reality and all of a sudden we were getting a \$10 billion bill for reimbursement for something that we believed under the MOU was DOD’s responsibility.” (Page 169, Line 5-12).