



Background:

Mr. Price serves as the Senior Advisor to Secretary of State Antony Blinken. He entered this position on May 1st, 2023. Mr. Price served on President Biden’s transition team, assisting policy experts with their messaging. Price served as the Department’s Spokesperson starting January 2021, holding that position during the Afghanistan withdrawal and evacuation.

Duties as State Department Spokesperson

1. Price relied on Secretary Blinken’s guidance when performing his duties as spokesperson, testifying, “To the extent that he’s the Secretary of State and he provides his opinion and ultimately his guidance on issues across the waterfront. It was always helpful for me to be in meetings with him, because I knew that he was a constant presence in interagency discussions. He had and has a good sense of where the President is on any given issue. And I found his guidance helpful in that regard as I considered messaging and communications.” (Page 14, Lines 21-25; Page 15, Line 1).
2. As Spokesperson, Price engaged with high-ranking State Department officials on a daily basis, including Secretary Blinken, Deputy Secretary Sherman, and DMR McKeon. (Page 11, Lines 12-25; Page 12, Lines 1-3).
3. As Spokesperson, Price engaged with the White House, but most frequently with President Biden’s National Security Council. Price engaged daily with the NSC. When Admiral Kirby transitioned from the White House to the NSC, Price engaged with him daily. (Page 13, Lines 18-25; Page 14, lines 1-12).
4. Price purportedly first became involved in the withdrawal in July 2021.
 - a. “Well, I wouldn’t say I became directly involved in the withdrawal process. I certainly, in July and August of 2021, as the cadence of activity increased, attended a number of meetings. I, as appropriate, participated in those meetings, offering my thoughts, again, as I recall, primarily if not exclusively on messaging and communications issues vis a vis what was at the time contingency planning, what developed into the withdrawal, and what then developed into the evacuation.” (Page 16, Lines 14-19).
5. According to Price, his role during the withdrawal concerned contingency communications planning, testifying, “Of course, there are planning elements, there are contingency elements that take place on the comms side. There’s a unit within the broader office that is responsible for contingency planning, for thinking through and considering crisis communications. I spoke with them quite frequently as July and August approached.” (Page 16, Line 25; Page 17, Lines 1-3).
6. Price claimed he worked on planning the communications for a potential evacuation and that planning intensified in August 2021.

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- a. “I was involved in planning for the communications and public facing aspects once the prospect [of an evacuation] became more of a realistic prospect. . . . So certainly, I was engaged in these conversations in August of 2021.” (Page 19, Lines 11-16).
7. Price rarely communicated with Ambassador Wilson or others at U.S. Embassy Kabul, and instead received most of his Afghanistan information through the State Department’s South and Central Asian Bureau, or other relevant bureaus in Washington, DC. (Page 21, Lines 10-25; Page 22, Lines 1-6).
8. Price engaged with Counselor Derek Chollet and Ambassador Khalilzad on issues pertaining to Afghanistan. (Page 22, Lines 8-13).
9. Price attended NATO meetings with Secretary Blinken and coordinated with his foreign counterparts to prepare joint public statements. (Page 25, Lines 2-16).

Interagency Review

1. According to Price, the Biden Administration’s interagency review of the Doha Agreement began in January 2021 and ended in April 2021. (Page 34, Lines 18-24).
2. The State Department’s role during the interagency review was to represent its viewpoint, as informed by the assessment of diplomats on the ground.
 - a. To represent, of course, the prerogatives of the Department, but then, based on the considered advice and judgment of our diplomats on the ground, of our experts within the Department, to represent a viewpoint within those discussions. (Page 60, Lines 3-5).
3. During the interagency review, the State Department coordinated with the White House and NSC via a daily call. Substantive experts across agencies developed the press guidance. Preliminary messaging points would be sent to the DoD and NSC before publication. Price could not remember specific messaging points. (Page 62, Lines 1-23).
4. During the interagency review, the State Department main struggle was its approach to the May 1st withdrawal deadline. (Page 65, Lines 2-25; Page 66, Lines 1-7).
5. According to Price, he never received a formal briefing on whether the Taliban adhered to the Doha Agreement. Price asserted that the Taliban’s adherence to the Doha Agreement was immaterial to decision makers in the Biden Administration. He testified that their main issue was the degree of risk involved in maintaining a U.S. military presence in Afghanistan.
 - a. “I -- if you are asking if I asked for, or ever received a formal briefing on that very subject, the answer is no, at least I don’t recall that. With that said, I recall having a number of conversations around the fact that in some ways, Taliban adherence was immaterial.” (Page 67, Lines 2-6).

6. According to Price, Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources McKeon held the responsibility for leading the State Department's contingency planning.
 - a. "Brian McKeon tended to be the Department's point person when it came to the contingency planning and contingency operations that were initiated in the early days and weeks of the administration. Brian, as I recall, was most involved in the interagency discussions. He would be involved in the tabletop exercises. He would be involved in the contingency planning discussions that took place at the White House, at the Department, with the Department of Defense, with other interagency partners." (Page 20, Lines 13-20).

Communicating Crisis to the American People

Lead up to "Go to Zero" Announcement

1. Price was unable to speak to a formal assessment or determination by the Administration of whether the Taliban continued to support terrorist groups.
 - a. "I couldn't speak to the context of the formal assessment. I can speak to my knowledge predicated on conversations on discussions over the course of months. But I think the word uneven applies here as well when you talk about the terrorist landscape that exists in Afghanistan. Of course, al Qaeda is what we were primarily concerned with in October of 2001 when we went in. It has evolved to incorporate ISIS K and other groups. . . . It is certainly accurate that they continued to host al Qaeda into at least 2022." (Page 69, Lines 11-24).
2. When asked about the Doha Agreement's requirement for the Taliban to reduce violence, Price described the Taliban's adherence as uneven.
 - a. "Again, there was a period, where I think during this period, it was uneven, I think, again, is the right word. The Taliban had made a commitment not to attack U.S. servicemembers, that was our primary concern, NATO, provincial capitals. I think during this period, by this period I mean up until May 1, I think the adherence to that had been effective in at least some areas." (Page 70, Lines 2-6).
3. Price conceded that in a February 22, 2021, he stated the best way to advance America's interest was to press all parties to adhere to the Doha Agreement. Price testified that "all parties" included the Taliban. (Page 73, Lines 13-25; Page 74, Lines 1-3).
4. Price repeatedly noted in his interview that the U.S. government did not trust the Taliban. (Page 80, Lines 10-19; Page 81, Lines 17-18).

"Go to Zero" Announcement

5. Price acknowledged that the Taliban pulled out of the Istanbul conference – a key event during negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban – after Biden's April 2021 announcement of the U.S. military's withdrawal. (Page 90. Lines 8-10).

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6. When asked why President Biden announced his Go-to-Zero order despite the State Department's the February 22, 2021 recognition that the best way to advance U.S. interests was to enforce Taliban compliance with the Doha Agreement, Price explained that the conditionality of the Doha Agreement was immaterial; what mattered to the Administration was how the Taliban interpreted the Doha Agreement:
 - a. "[W]hat mattered most was the way the Taliban chose to interpret the agreement that the last administration struck with them. And if they were to have made the decision to resume pursuing U.S. servicemembers, official Americans on the ground, NATO forces, that was, in some ways, dispositive, or close to it." (Page 74, Lines 8-10).
 - b. "Q Despite the conditionality that we have been discussing. A Again, it is, in some ways, that was immaterial. And you can tell just from moving the particular context -- you can imagine a scenario where an agreement had been struck, again, we weren't the ones that negotiated this agreement, but we were the ones that inherited it. And so, you could have gone to, in this case, the Taliban, and said we know you -- we know the United States struck this deal with you but they have a veto, and it was our distinct impression that they would have used their veto had we decided to remain militarily engaged." (Page 75, Lines 6-12.)
7. Price stated the State Department planned to maintain its Embassy in Kabul after President Biden's April 2021 announcement. (Page 92, Lines 24-25).
8. Price recalls the Taliban making significant territorial gains beginning in June to July 2021. (Page 99, Lines 9-13).
9. Price stated the Department did not soften any language when discussing the deteriorating security conditions. (Page 100, Lines 12-14).
10. From June 2021 to August 2021 Price continued to say the Afghan army was 300,000 strong, Price cited this figure in nine separate press briefings during this time. When asked about his source for the 300,000 number Price responded he could not remember what report, or who told him, but he said it came from experts within the Department or the DoD.
 - a. "As I've said before, I don't make up facts and figures out of thin air. These figures are provided to me -- were provided to me -- by the career experts in the Department. I can't speculate as to precisely where this figure came from, but what I can say is that, going back to that issue of coordination, when there's a DOD equity in a fact or figure or an assessment, our teams will work closely with their counterparts at the Department of Defense. It may well be that the Department of Defense provided this figure. It may well be that our team had this figure from another source. I couldn't say. But it was the figure that was provided to me by the experts." (Page 111, Lines 21-25; Page 112, Lines 1-5).

The August Evacuation

11. In an August 2, 2021 press briefing, Price responded to a reporter's concerns of atrocities committed by the Taliban in Afghanistan by pointing to talks in Doha as proof that the Taliban was willing to change. During the interview, when pressed why the Department viewed the Doha negotiations so highly, Price stated the following:
 - a. "I think it goes back to the broader point I was making. It doesn't indicate any degree of trust of the Taliban. I think what it indicates is our dogged pursuit of what would undeniably have been in the interest of the Afghan people, of the region, and of the United States of America. To have even the possibility, remote as it might have been, of a just and durable peace that would have led to an arrangement in Afghanistan that could have quelled rising levels of violence, that would have been an unmitigated good thing and good outcome. I think, from the senior most levels of the administration, it was not an opportunity that we wanted to squander, even as the prospects of it dimmed as the Taliban encroached on Kabul." (Page 130, Lines 22-25; Page 131, Lines 1-6).
12. In an August 10, 2021, press briefing Price defended the withdrawal, stating a stay behind force of a few thousand troops would have been too small on its own to ensure security. Price's assessment challenges public testimony provided by top U.S. military generals. When asked what informed his position in the interview, Price testified:
 - a. "I think a couple things undergirded this assertion. Number one is that the previous administration negotiated an agreement with the Taliban that called for the withdrawal of U.S. forces and for that process to start on May 1. . . . And I think this goes back to our last exchange. I previously described the Taliban's adherence to the U.S. Doha Agreement as uneven. I think that that modify -- that adjective applies here as well. But this wasn't just based on analysis or conjecture. It was based, as I understood it, on diplomacy with the Taliban. Because, again, as I understood it, the possibility of going beyond that May 1 deadline without beginning this phase of the U.S. military withdrawal in earnest, we determined, based on discussions, direct discussions with the Taliban, that they would not continue to uphold their agreement not to target U.S. servicemembers and coalition forces. And, again, that really made the question a binary." (Page 103, Lines 9-25; Page 104, Lines 1-2).
13. In an August 4, 2021 press briefing, Price stated that the Taliban's ceasefire with U.S. forces proved that they were interested in a political settlement, not a military takeover. When pressed in his interview why he did not view that as the Taliban biding their time, Price stated:
 - a. "I was pointing to that element, not as necessarily reflective as to what would happen prospectively, but to make the point that, looking back on the course of nearly 2 years, the Taliban had engaged in diplomacy that had meant something. And we can all argue as to how much the U.S. Taliban agreement was actually worth, as to their adherence to that. But, to go back to the term 'uneven,' there were elements that -- their behavior did change in some ways after the U.S. Taliban agreement went into force. I was using that broader point to hold out at

least the possibility that the past could be prologue in terms of what we might find in Doha going forward.” (Page 132, Lines 22-25; Page 133, Lines 1-5).

14. According to Price, as late as August 14, 2021 – one day before the Taliban surrounded Kabul – the State Department’s plan was to maintain a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan. (Page 136, Lines 20-22).
15. In an August 27, 2021 press briefing, Price said that the Taliban and Haqqani Network were separate entities, and that the U.S. was not cooperating with the Haqqani Network. (Page 141, Lines 15-25; Page 142, Lines 1-6). According to multiple sources, the Haqqani Network and the Taliban are deeply intertwined, with the Haqqani Network comprising key leadership positions within the Taliban. When pressed further if the U.S. worked with the Haqqani Network during the evacuation, Price responded with the following:
 - a. “My understanding is that, because of the FTO label attached to the Haqqani Network, that we were scrupulous, to the best of our ability, not to engage with Haqqani Network in some of the ways in which we engaged with the Taliban. But I was not on the ground, so I was not steeped in those operations.” (Page 142, Lines 9-14).

Americans Left Behind

16. Price stated he did not know the exact number of Americans that wanted to leave after August 30, 2021, because the number fluctuated. However, he stated that the Consular Affairs Bureau did have the numbers of Americans who wanted to leave after August 30, 2021. According to multiple sources, this is not correct. (Page 151, Lines 8-14).