

1

2

3

4

5 COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,

6 U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

7 WASHINGTON, D.C.

8

9

10

11

12 INTERVIEW OF: CAROL Z. PEREZ

13

14

15

16

Wednesday, November 15, 2023

17

18

Washington, D.C.

19

20

21

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

22

Building, commencing at 9:59 a.m.

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18

Appearances:

For the COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED], SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED], SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

1

2 For the U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE:

3

4 [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED], OFFICE OF THE LEGAL ADVISOR

1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25

██████████ This is a transcribed interview of Ambassador Carol Z. Perez. Chairman McCaul has requested this interview as part of the committee's investigation of the Afghanistan withdrawal.

Would the witness please state her name for the record?

Ambassador Perez. Carol Z. Perez.

██████████. On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you for appearing here today to answer our questions. The chairman also appreciates your willingness to appear voluntarily.

My name is ██████████, and I am ██████████ on Chairman McCaul's staff on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. And I'm leading the investigation into the Afghanistan withdrawal.

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

██████████ I am ██████████, from the majority.

██████████. ██████████. I'm ██████████ for the majority.

██████████. ██████████, ██████████, on the minority.

██████████. ██████████ for the minority.

██████████, minority staff.

██████████ Thank you.

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

Our questioning will proceed in rounds. The majority will ask questions first for 1 hour. Then the minority will have an opportunity to ask questions for an equal period of

1 time if they choose. We will alternate back and forth until there are no more questions  
2 and the interview is over.

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

5 As you can see, there is an official court reporter taking down everything we say to  
6 make a written record, so we ask that you give verbal responses to all questions.

7 Does that make sense?

8 Ambassador Perez. I just nodded, so now I know.

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

12 Please try and speak clearly so the court reporter can understand and so everyone  
13 can hear you.

14 It is important that we don't talk over one another or interrupt each other if we  
15 can help it, and that goes for everybody present at today's interview.

16 Witnesses who appear before the committee have the opportunity to freely  
17 consult with counsel if they so choose. It is my understanding that you're appearing  
18 today with agency counsel. Is that correct?

19 Ambassador Perez. That is correct.

20 [REDACTED]. Ambassador Perez, you understand that agency counsel  
21 represents the State Department and not you personally, correct?

22 Ambassador Perez. That is correct.

23 [REDACTED]. Could the agency counsel and note-taker please identify  
24 yourselves and state your names for the record at this time?

25 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], from L.

1 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], from Legislative Affairs.

2 [REDACTED]. And I'll afford my minority colleagues who just joined an  
3 opportunity to introduce themselves as well.

4 [REDACTED]. Hi. Welcome, Ambassador Perez. I'm [REDACTED]. I'm the  
5 [REDACTED] for the minority side of the committee.

6 [REDACTED]. And [REDACTED].

7 Ambassador Perez. I'm sorry. I didn't hear.

8 [REDACTED]. My name is [REDACTED], and I'm the [REDACTED].

9 Ambassador Perez. Okay. Thank you.

10 [REDACTED] We want you to answer our questions in the most complete and  
11 truthful manner as possible, so we'll take our time.

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

15 If you do not know the answer to a question or do not remember, it's best not to  
16 guess. Please give us your best recollection -- and that would be your personal  
17 recollection.

18 If there are things you don't know or can't remember, just say so, and please  
19 inform us who, to the best of your knowledge, might be able to provide a more complete  
20 answer to the question.

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

24 If you are uncertain of the classification, please consult with your counsel. We'd  
25 be happy to go off the record to afford you the opportunity to do so.

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

4 Once you have identified the requisite classification, please respond with as much  
5 unclassified information as possible.

6 Does that make sense?

7 Ambassador Perez. Yes.

8 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

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

11 Does that make sense?

12 Ambassador Perez. Yes.

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

15 Does that make sense?

16 Ambassador Perez. Yes.

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

20 Do you understand this?

21 Ambassador Perez. Yes.

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

24 Ambassador Perez. No.

25 [REDACTED]. Finally, I'd like to make note that the contents of what we

1 discuss here today, per Chairman McCaul's terms, is confidential. We ask that you not  
2 speak about what we discuss in this interview to any outside individuals to preserve the  
3 integrity of our investigation.

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

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

9 [REDACTED] Yes. Thank you.

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

14 Ambassador Perez. Okay.

15 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

16 The clock now reads 10:05, and we'll start the first hour of questioning.

17 EXAMINATION

18 BY [REDACTED]:

19 Q Ambassador, before proceeding, we wanted to define a couple of key terms,  
20 in the interest of clarity.

21 A Uh-huh.

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



1 Does that make sense?

2 A Yes.

3 Q We'd be happy to repeat that should you have any questions in the future.

4 Second, when referencing the term "evacuation" or "emergency evacuation," the  
5 majority is referencing the evacuation of U.S. citizens and nationals, civilian personnel,  
6 and designated persons in August 2021, resulting in the noncombatant evacuation  
7 operation initiated on August 16, 2021.

8 This includes related planning by the State Department and other agencies and  
9 the decision-making processes.

10 Does that make sense?

11 A Yes.

12 Q Thank you.

13 Ambassador, now moving on with the questioning, can you please give us a brief  
14 overview of your career at the State Department?

15 A Absolutely.

16 So I started in 1987 -- probably before some of you were born, but that's  
17 okay -- and joined as a management-coned officer -- so somebody very much interested  
18 in, sort of, management issues -- and served 35 years, retiring in December of last year.

19 I had an opportunity to be a Presidential appointee twice, once for Obama as the  
20 U.S. Ambassador to Chile and then for President Trump as the Director General of the  
21 Foreign Service.

22 So, again, spent most of my career working a lot on the seventh floor in staff  
23 Secretariat jobs, you know, sort of, staff jobs as we have in many agencies, but also spent  
24 time overseas, serving in Spain and Italy, in those countries twice, and then in Chile.

25 My husband is a retired FSO. That's actually how I got interested in joining the

1 Foreign Service.

2 But, as I said, I did just over 35 years and retired in December of last year.

3 Q And that would be December of 2022, correct?

4 A That is correct.

5 Q Thank you.

6 And what was your position when you formally retired from the Department?

7 A I was on something called "over-complement." So, when you don't actually  
8 have a specific position to sit in, you remain on the rolls, and I was working on, sort of,  
9 special projects for the Department, on a women's health group. There was a lot of  
10 concern about how do we deliver women's health, especially in very austere  
11 environments, so I led a working group on that. I was leading a working group on sexual  
12 assault.

13 You know, these are things that I felt pretty passionately about, and I thought  
14 that, given my background, especially as the Director General, I could really bring a group  
15 together to do that.

16 But that was my position when I retired.

17 Q Thank you.

18 Do you currently hold any position at the State Department or WAE status?

19 A Yeah. REA, retired -- let's see. Retired employed annuitant?

20 [REDACTED]. Reemployed annuitant.

21 Ambassador Perez. Reemployed annuitant. Thank you.

22 That's why you have agency counsel, because they know.

23 So I am an REA. I started in March. And I work at the Foreign Service Institute.

24 And I do mentoring for classes, so DCM, principal officers; the NSELS, National Security  
25 Executive Leadership Seminar. And I am studying to be a coach, though I'm not quite

1 done with that process.

2 Q That's very helpful. Thank you. And to whom do you report to in that  
3 role?

4 A Well, this is the wonderful thing about it. There is -- you know, I have -- I  
5 work for the deputy dean, but there are no evaluations anymore, there is no -- nothing.  
6 So it's this really perfect job. They bring me in to work on specific projects.

7 But I'm in the division that does executive development. So, you know, they call  
8 me in when they want me to help mentor a class. The teachers that work at FSI are not  
9 necessarily people that have worked at the Department for a very long time, so I'm sort  
10 of there to take whatever they are teaching, in terms of, you know, substance, into what  
11 exactly it looks like to be a diplomat.

12 Q Thank you.

13 A Uh-huh.

14 Q And what was your position at the time of the Afghanistan withdrawal?

15 A I was the Acting Under Secretary for Management.

16 Q And when did you assume that position?

17 A January 21st of 2021.

18 Q Thank you. And who selected you for that position?

19 A The administration asked me to take it on a temporary basis, the State  
20 Department.

21 Q Was there anyone in particular that made that request?

22 A Yes. Uzra Zeya was the one who asked me.

23 Q Thank you. And when did you leave that position?

24 A December 26 or 27 -- I don't remember exactly -- of that same year, 2021.

25 Q And why did you leave the position?

1 A I was not the nom.

2 Q And to whom did you report to as Acting Under Secretary for Management?

3 A To the Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources, and to the  
4 Secretary, but my daily was with -- or, not "daily," but, you know, more constant was with  
5 the DMR.

6 Q Was that DMR McKeon?

7 A Yes.

8 Q Thank you.

9 And how many people reported to you overall, both indirectly and directly, in your  
10 role as Acting Under Secretary for Management?

11 A In my office, we were nine.

12 Q And were those your direct reports, in your office?

13 A Only two were my direct reports. And then the others reported to my chief  
14 of staff and, through them, to me.

15 Q Thank you. And who were your direct reports in particular? What were  
16 their positions within --

17 A They were special assistants. We had office management specialists, one  
18 staffer to handle paper.

19 Q Is it fair to say that the assistant secretaries under the M family also reported  
20 to you?

21 A Oh, yes. But I'm talking about the internal office. You asked me about --

22 Q Of course, yes.

23 A Yes. And then I had, I don't know, maybe a dozen bureaus and offices.

24 Q And can you, sort of, identify what those bureaus and offices were?

25 A Sure. I'm not sure I remember them all, but --

1 Q To the best of your ability, of course.

2 A Yeah.

3 So Diplomatic Security; Consular Affairs; Overseas Buildings; the DG; CGFS, which  
4 are the folks that pay us; the Aid Bureau.

5 Oh. The folks that take care of the eighth floor, so the folks that have the  
6 diplomatic rooms.

7 Oh. Budget and Planning, right? So the people that work with Congress on  
8 getting our budgets done.

9 The management of Med. How could I forget Med during the pandemic?

10 I don't know. How many is that? That's eight?

11 MSS, Management Solutions.

12 I'm trying to think if there was anybody else.

13 Q And we can walk through some of these as we get to any --

14 A Sure.

15 Q -- applicable questions.

16 A Absolutely.

17 Q That was very helpful.

18 A I mean, those are the big ones, right? There may have been another  
19 smaller one, but that seems to be about what I remember.

20 Q No, that's helpful. Thank you.

21 And, Ambassador, what was your role in the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan  
22 specifically?

23 A Specifically? My role was actually not about the withdrawal but to help  
24 maintain a safe platform for the ongoing presence, diplomatic presence.

25 Q Uh-huh. And so, the ongoing, sort of, U.S. mission at Embassy Kabul,

1 correct?

2 A Correct.

3 Q And when did you first become involved with work relating to the  
4 Afghanistan withdrawal and maintaining the U.S. diplomatic presence in Afghanistan?

5 A So the first time -- well, that's two separate questions.

6 Q Uh-huh.

7 A So the question, what I did, was -- as I said, my focus was on, how are we  
8 going to keep our people safe, right?

9 Q Uh-huh.

10 A Because you used the term "withdrawal of military," and both  
11 President Trump and President Biden recommended a military withdrawal, but there was  
12 an agreement that we would keep a diplomatic presence.

13 Q Uh-huh.

14 A Didn't know for how long, but, I think, with all best intent. So my focus was  
15 on making sure that we had what we needed to keep people safe.

16 So I took a trip out to Kabul in April of that year, and that's when I started to really  
17 focus on that role.

18 Q And is it fair to say that's when you became involved on issues  
19 pertaining to --

20 A Yes. Yes.

21 Q And at whose request did you become involved during that period?

22 A I wouldn't say it was a request, but when the President made an  
23 announcement, I had a conversation with Brian McKeon and said, you know, we should  
24 go out -- somebody should go out and just make sure that the embassy has what they  
25 need for the future. And I was the person, so I went out, traveled there.

1 Q And what were your responsibilities in that role specifically relating to the  
2 withdrawal and that mission?

3 A As I said, to make sure that we had whatever we needed to be safe; that as  
4 the military started to draw down, that we had the capability to pick up whatever, you  
5 know, safety and security support we needed.

6 Q Uh-huh.

7 Which bureaus and offices within the M family were involved on matters relating  
8 to the withdrawal?

9 A So, again, on withdrawal for the military?

10 Q So, when we --

11 A I'm sorry. I'm not sure I understand the question.

12 Q -- when we speak to "withdrawal," given the sheer nature and its  
13 implications for the U.S. mission, the majority's understanding is, that necessarily  
14 implicates the U.S. mission in Afghanistan, given that, when the withdrawal was initiated,  
15 announced by President Biden, there was consideration as to whether the diplomatic  
16 presence could continue and there was a coordinated effort between the State  
17 Department and other agencies throughout the interagency process to assess what the  
18 U.S.'s plan would be. And, of course, we'll get to the interagency process at a later  
19 point.

20 But so, when we speak to "withdrawal," it's as much as the period and its broader  
21 implications for the diplomatic mission as it is the military withdrawal, if that makes  
22 sense.

23 A Okay. I just want to make sure that I have that clear. So I think of it,  
24 actually, as I said, what do we need to keep safety and security going forward? And the  
25 big players in that would be Office of Overseas Buildings, right, because they help to keep

1 our facilities hardened and safe; Diplomatic Security, of course, because they do security;  
2 and then, you know, too, perhaps Med, because we wanted to make sure we had a  
3 medical presence there; and then maybe to a lesser degree some of our folks from  
4 IRM -- but, by the way, that was another bureau that I completely forgot about -- you  
5 know, to make sure we had the right IT structure.

6 Those would be the primary people that would be engaged in, you know, that  
7 transition from what military was doing to support security to what we could pick up.

8 Q And were there any key individuals within those bureaus and offices that you  
9 were working with on those issues?

10 A You know, again, I talked to, generally, leadership --

11 Q Uh-huh.

12 A -- but, you know, there was not, like, you know, this person doing A or B or  
13 C, you know.

14 Let me just put this into context. You know, the Under Secretary -- again, I had,  
15 like, a dozen offices, as I said, so this was one of many things I was working on at the  
16 time.

17 COVID was raging, and, in fact, we were trying to get vaccines out to all of our  
18 diplomats and their families overseas. And there were other kinds of really important  
19 things that were going on at that time.

20 So, you know, I would work with the individuals out of senior leadership that I saw  
21 on a regular basis, but I was not, like, pulling into individuals in those bureaus.

22 Q The reason I ask is that we mentioned a few bureaus and offices, such as DS,  
23 Med, IRM, specifically --

24 A Uh-huh.

25 Q -- who were working on these. Were there individuals within those



1       bureaus, offices, that you were working with? Was it the assistant secretary of those  
2       offices? Or who in particular were you engaging with?

3             A       Well, at this point, there were not very many assistant secretaries, because,  
4       unfortunately, you know, when there's a transition, we have a lot of acting.

5             Q       Uh-huh.

6             A       But, you know, for example, the Acting Director of OBO would be somebody  
7       that I would talk to; the Acting Director of DS or his deputy. Again, those level of people  
8       are the people that I would engage with.

9             I mean, I'm sure you're aware that I did travel out to Afghanistan with the  
10       number-two from Diplomatic Security, just to make sure we had somebody with me that  
11       really understood, you know, what we could do and what we should do.

12            Q       Of course. And we'll be sure to get to that meeting so you have an  
13       opportunity to, sort of --

14            A       Okay.

15            Q       So we can walk through that specifically.

16            Can you please speak to the relationship between the M family and the U.S.  
17       embassy in Kabul?

18            A       So the M family is there to support everybody in the Department. I mean,  
19       they are support bureaus, right?

20            So, just like any other embassy, you interface with all M bureaus on a regular  
21       basis, more some than others. As I said, you know, maybe you're not talking to  
22       Budget/Planning very often because, at that level, you know, at a mission, you wouldn't  
23       be doing that, but you're going to work with Diplomatic Security; you're going to work  
24       with the Aid Bureau on logistics; you know, as I said, depending on where you are in the  
25       world, you'll work with OBO. It really depends on where you are.

1 But, you know, they are there as service bureaus.

2 Q And how about your relationship with the embassy specifically?

3 A With the embassy in Kabul?

4 Q Correct.

5 A Prior to, you know, that trip in April, I had not served there and I didn't have  
6 a very close relationship with them. So that was an opportunity for me to go there and  
7 put eyes on.

8 Q Thank you.

9 And who were your main points of contact at the embassy for matters relating to  
10 the withdrawal and the diplomatic mission that you referenced?

11 A Yeah. So both the charge, Ross Wilson, and Scott Weinhold, who was  
12 the -- I think we called him the assistant chief of mission.

13 Q Thank you.

14 And can you please speak to the relationship between the M family and the  
15 Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Khalilzad, and his team?

16 A None.

17 Q There was -- was there any engagement?

18 A No. Not that I'm aware.

19 Q Did you engage with SRAR Khalilzad at any point throughout that period?

20 A No.

21 Q Can you please describe the State Department's process for planning relating  
22 to the Afghanistan withdrawal?

23 A So you want -- I'm sorry. You want me to talk about what now?

24 Q The planning. So the State Department's planning. You mentioned that  
25 the key issue that you were focused on was questions surrounding the continuance of the

1 U.S. diplomatic mission. I imagine there was some planning involved in assessing that  
2 inquiry and whether that would be possible or not. Can you speak to how the State  
3 Department's planning surrounding the Afghanistan withdrawal was structured?

4 A Well, I wouldn't characterize as what I was doing as questioning. Can you  
5 repeat what you just said? You said that I was questioning --

6 Q No, that you were assessing how that would be able to continue, how the  
7 diplomatic mission would be able to continue in Afghanistan when there was no more  
8 military presence.

9 So our question is: Can you speak to the State Department's planning  
10 surrounding that decision and, more broadly, assessing what the implications would be  
11 for the diplomatic mission?

12 A So, again, I was very much focused on keeping our people safe. My team  
13 and I were not engaged in any other kind of planning in terms of evacuation -- I'm not  
14 going to use "withdrawal" -- evacuation, right? Those generally rest with the post and  
15 with the bureau.

16 So my efforts were that, if the military was going to leave -- and, at that point, it  
17 was going to be in September. That didn't give us very much time to make sure that we  
18 could do whatever we needed to do. And where we had holes or gaps, you know, we  
19 had to come up with a plan with DOD to make sure that we kept everybody safe.

20 Q Uh-huh.

21 A That was, I mean, 100 percent of what I was doing.

22 You know -- and sometimes what happens, as you know -- because I know you  
23 were briefly at the Department -- you know, you've got the world, and everybody is  
24 coming at you as a service bureau, you know, you want to make sure that people stay  
25 laser-focused on what's important.

1           So that trip there was an opportunity for me to see with my eyes -- you know,  
2           because you know how -- and say, "Hey, what are we dealing with here? And what do  
3           you need me to help with? Do I need to go and kick my bureau to go ahead and help  
4           you a little bit," you know?

5           So it was more that kind of thing. But I was not engaged with any planning that  
6           the bureau was doing in terms of evacuation.

7           Q    Thank you for that clarification.

8           BY [REDACTED]:

9           Q    And when you say "any planning that the bureau was doing in terms of  
10          evacuation," what bureau or which bureaus are you referring to that were engaged in  
11          planning for a potential evacuation?

12          A    Well, it would've -- I mean, again, because I wasn't involved, I don't know  
13          100 percent, but I would say, it would be the South Asia Bureau.

14          So, as a former ambassador, I was responsible for whatever happened at my  
15          mission, right? And so that planning for any kind of disaster was on me. And I would  
16          work with my regional bureau to make sure that we had what we needed. That's why  
17          we have executive offices there, right? I mean, this is it.

18          So, again, for me, doing a transition, once military leaves, to having the  
19          Department pick up additional responsibilities on safety and security and medical care  
20          was something new and different. And I thought that's where I needed to be, and that's  
21          where I was.

22          BY [REDACTED]:

23          Q    And I want to redirect us back to what you were doing. Can you speak to  
24          the planning surrounding that -- specifically, keeping our people safe?

25          A    Yeah. I mean, I took the trip back in April, and, you know, it really was

1 good for me to understand where they were and to make sure that, you know, were they  
2 thinking about what needed to be done next, and what I could help with.

3 So, for example, you know, we had people that were living outside the Kabul  
4 compound in something called the West Villages. So it became apparent, let's try to  
5 move everybody in. So what does that look like, right? Where are we going to put  
6 them? Can we have them in hardened facilities? You know, we wanted to make sure  
7 that people are safe, that where they sleep at night is hardened, where they work during  
8 the day is hardened, those kinds of things.

9 So I was really focused on those kinds of issues.

10 Q Uh-huh.

11 A And then I had a series of meetings -- actually, I had dozens of meetings after  
12 that, internal to State but also with DOD, to say, "Hey, what are you doing? What about  
13 this? What about that?" and, where we had issues, you know, to sort of put those out  
14 there, to say, "Well, maybe we can't do this."

15 Q And were those regularly scheduled meetings, or did they happen sort of --

16 A I mean, I tried to do them as frequently as required. Yeah.

17 Q And was Diplomatic Security also involved in those meetings as well?

18 A Yeah, uh-huh. And the embassy.

19 Q Thank you.

20 Was there a senior leader at the Department exercising overall responsibility for  
21 the Department's equities in planning for the withdrawal?

22 A So the way it works at the Department is not generally a senior leader.  
23 When we have -- as I said, when we start to plan for any kind of contingency, that is the  
24 responsibility of a bureau working with the post. We don't, sort of, take one senior  
25 leader and do that.

1           So the answer is, not really. I mean, you know, again, I was doing one part of  
2 this, and I'm sure there were others -- you know, DMR or others -- who were focused on  
3 some other things. But because when you have 275 posts, it's impossible, right?  
4 You've got a very small, you know, seventh floor. So the bureau's really got to run that  
5 show.

6           And that's what we -- you know, they work, again, with the particular post. And  
7 when they need support, they ask for support.

8           Q     From our understanding, there were sort of parallel efforts, as there was the  
9 SRAR team as well as the regional bureaus and then, of course, the embassy, who was  
10 sort of captured by the regional bureau.

11          Was there one person responsible for sort of coordinating those varying efforts?

12          A     What was the first thing you said?

13          Q     Was there one person --

14          A     No, no, no. You said SR team?

15          Q     SRAR. So the Special Representative for --

16          A     Oh, S- -- I'm sorry.

17          Q     No problem.

18          So the reason why I asked this question is that, with respect to Afghanistan, there  
19 were various considerations and issues that the various teams were addressing. Was  
20 there one person within the Department who exercised responsibility for coordinating  
21 those parallel efforts?

22          A     It's more done at the post level, right? Because if you're an ambassador  
23 and you have an envoy -- which, you know, we happen to have fairly frequently -- that  
24 envoy has to work very carefully with that ambassador to make sure that everything stays  
25 in shape.

1 I was not privy to any of the discussions from Zal and his team. Really not  
2 relevant, I guess, to what I was doing. Maybe others, but you'll have to ask. I'm sorry.  
3 I don't want to speculate, because I don't know, because I was not in those discussions,  
4 right? I wasn't in policy discussions.

5 Q Do you work closely with Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources  
6 Brian McKeon --

7 A Uh-huh.

8 Q -- with respect to Afghanistan?

9 A Yes.

10 Q Did he exercise overall responsibility for these efforts that we've discussed?

11 A I can't answer that.

12 Q Do you know what his role was with respect to the Afghanistan withdrawal?

13 A He and I did work together. Again, I had a conversation with him about  
14 somebody going out to post, and we agreed it would be me, so I would keep him  
15 informed of my efforts. But if he was doing other kinds of work with them, I just can't  
16 comment.

17 Q And can you speak to what bureaus and/or offices within the Department  
18 were most involved with work relating to withdrawal?

19 A So, for me, I would say the big three were Diplomatic Security, the OBO, and  
20 Med.

21 Q Okay. And how about Consular Affairs?

22 A Consular Affairs sort of runs on a different track, okay?

23 Q Uh-huh.

24 A So they, obviously, take care of American citizens and they do visas and  
25 everything. But when you're talking about the safety and security response that I was

1 focused on, Consular Affairs doesn't really have a role in keeping people safe or secure,  
2 except as they try to reach Americans, but it's not quite the same.

3 Again, Consular Affairs is a service bureau but to the American public. I'm talking  
4 about everybody else in the M family as being a service bureau internal to State.

5 Q Uh-huh.

6 A So I think that's an important distinction.

7 Q Thank you for that clarification.

8 Let's start with Diplomatic Security. Which officials from Diplomatic Security  
9 were most involved on this issue?

10 A The Acting Director and his deputy.

11 Q And who was that?

12 A Todd Brown and Carlos Matus.

13 Q Thank you. And, to the best of your recollection, when did they get  
14 involved, understanding that you first became involved around April?

15 A I don't know.

16 Q When did you first start engaging with them on this issue?

17 A In April, when, you know, the decision was made that we needed to focus on  
18 this effort.

19 Q And how often would you say you communicated with Diplomatic Security  
20 on this issue?

21 A It depends. As I said earlier, as frequently as necessary. You know, if  
22 there was an issue, then we talked. And, you know, I tried to have phone calls where I  
23 could get everybody in and people could ask their questions -- gee, what about this, what  
24 about that. So --

25 Q And let's transition to Med, so Medical Services.



1 A Yeah.

2 Q Which officials were most involved on this issue in Med?

3 A Dr. Padget and his deputy, Dr. Otto.

4 Q And what were their roles within the Department specifically?

5 A The Chief Medical Officer and the Deputy Chief Medical -- or, Principal  
6 Deputy Chief Medical Officer.

7 Q Thank you. And, to the best of your recollection, when did they get  
8 involved?

9 A After I got back from Afghanistan.

10 Q Okay.

11 A Okay?

12 Q So would that be, sort of, end of April period?

13 A Yeah.

14 So, remember, January '21, massive COVID, right? Huge impact all over the  
15 world, where medical systems are not like they are in the United States.

16 There had been a promise, as I was told -- again, I was not in the meeting -- by the  
17 previous administration that there would be COVID vaccinations available within  
18 3 months of 2021 for everyone overseas, all employees under chief-of-mission authority,  
19 their families, local staff.

20 And I called HHS and said, "Okay, where's my 350,000 vaccines?" The guy I  
21 talked to said, "Excuse me?" And I said, "Well, I thought we were getting 350,000."  
22 And he said, "No, no. You're getting 13,500." And I went, "Uh."

23 So poor Med was just -- I can't tell you. I mean, it was -- it was life or death.  
24 You know, we lost diplomats. We lost over 50 local staff.

25 It was something I was really engaged with every day, in communicating what we

1 were doing, right? Being transparent. I mean, when I had to send the message out  
2 saying, "No, I'm sorry, it's not 350,000; it's 13,500." Trying to sort of figure out where  
3 the next outbreak is going to be and, you know, how could we get those vaccines there.

4 So, anyways, they were hyperfocused on that, which was the right thing. And  
5 when I came back, I said, "Look, you know, if military leaves" -- you know, they had a  
6 small, as I understand it -- I didn't see it, but -- a small medical facility in Kabul -- "we need  
7 to have you all step in." And that's when they said, "Yep, absolutely, we will help on  
8 that."

9 Q Thank you. And how often did you communicate with Med on issues  
10 pertaining to Afghanistan?

11 A Oh, I would invite them to whatever kinds of, you know, calls I had so they  
12 had an opportunity to, sort of, give us updates on what they were thinking and doing.

13 Q Would you say that was biweekly? Monthly?

14 A Oh, at least -- no. I would say, for all these things, at least weekly.

15 Q Weekly?

16 A Yeah, absolutely. I mean, sometimes it wasn't that, but, again, it really  
17 depended if somebody, you know, hit a roadblock or something.

18 Q Uh-huh. Thank you.

19 And how about the Office of Crisis Management and Strategy? Did you engage  
20 with them, with CMS?

21 A Yes, but later in the summer.

22 Q Would you say around June, July? Or was there a specific timeframe?

23 A Yeah, maybe July. Maybe July.

24 Q July of 2021.

25 A Yeah.

1 Q And which officials from CMS were most involved?

2 A I don't remember the guy's name. They had an acting. I don't remember  
3 the name of the person.

4 Q Can you please explain -- and I know you noted that you became involved in  
5 April. So, to the best of your ability, can you explain the interagency process relating to  
6 planning for the Afghanistan withdrawal?

7 A I was not in meetings, so I cannot.

8 Q And were you privy to the process at all and, sort of, how it was carried out  
9 at later points in time?

10 A Once the evacuation started, I was involved. You know, I was a  
11 backbencher on interagency meetings, but I don't remember -- I've been trying to  
12 think -- I don't remember if I went to any, you know, in the run-up to the actual fall of  
13 Kabul. I don't actually remember.

14 Q Did you have any of your subordinates or anyone within the M family  
15 to -- did you ask for them to engage on behalf of you in those meetings?

16 A No. They're very junior people, so that would not have been appropriate.

17 Q Uh-huh. Are you aware if Diplomatic Security was represented in those  
18 interagency meetings at any point?

19 A I am not aware. I don't know. I don't know the answer.

20 Q Okay.

21 Did you engage with any military figures throughout your efforts pertaining to  
22 Afghanistan?

23 A After April.

24 Q After April. Do you recall who those --

25 A Let's rephrase that. Not "military figures." DOD.

1 Q DOD figures.

2 A Correct.

3 Q Thank you. Who were the key DOD figures that you worked with?

4 A I don't remember their names. I was put in touch with some various  
5 components of DOD who might be able to help, like somebody on the contracting side.

6 So, for example, if DOD had a contract for, I don't know -- let's make it up, because  
7 I don't know -- C-RAMs, were we going to take it over? What was the contracting like?  
8 Could DOD continue to run that contract while we sort of figure out what we were going  
9 to do?

10 So I had a handful -- I had, you know, people on the DOD side. I'm sorry, I  
11 don't -- it's been 2-1/2 years and I've moved on. I don't remember their names. But I  
12 had people who could listen to where we were and say, "Yeah, we can help you on this,"  
13 you know.

14 Q Uh-huh.

15 A Again, I think that there was a commitment to have a seamless transfer.

16 Q Uh-huh.

17 A And everybody wanted to keep our diplomats safe.

18 Q Do you recall who you spoke to with respect to that, sort of, keeping the  
19 diplomats safe? As there were security functions that the DOD was performing, did you  
20 engage with anyone at the DOD pertaining to those abilities -- specifically, sort of, the  
21 keeping individuals safe, the security functions, et cetera?

22 A Well, exac- -- that's what I'm talking about.

23 Q Uh-huh.

24 A Like, you know, the C-RAM is this counter-rocket system which is supposed  
25 to stop, you know, if there are incoming. And we, the Department, don't do that, but

1 DOD does that. And if we're going to transfer this, you know, if DOD is going to leave  
2 and we need to take this on, well, what does that look like? Right? Do you have a  
3 contract? Who has the contract? Do you keep the contract? Right? Or do we just  
4 pick it up?

5 I mean, these are, sort of, nuts-and-bolts kinds of things, but, yeah, there were  
6 people on the DOD side who could help me get answers, because, you know, there's a lot.  
7 I mean, as I said, you know, there's a lot of these defensive capabilities that we, as a  
8 civilian agency, just don't have in our back garage.

9 Q Uh-huh. And do you recall how often you engaged with the Department of  
10 Defense?

11 A Yeah, I mean, like, at least -- I would say, at least every other week, but  
12 maybe -- at least every other week. I'm not sure I did it weekly, but at least every other  
13 week after April.

14 Q Thank you.

15 And do you recall what the White House and the National Security Council's role  
16 was in the Afghanistan withdrawal?

17 A I never spoke -- I was never on a call with the White House.

18 Q Did you at any point receive direction from or report to them?

19 A No.

20 Q Did you work with any foreign officials throughout this period relating to  
21 issues on Afghanistan?

22 A I had a meeting with ambassadors in Kabul, when I went there in April, to  
23 talk about what they were doing and, sort of, planning for, again, this extended  
24 diplomatic presence.

25 Q Who were the key Afghan officials that State Department was working with

1 on matters pertaining to the withdrawal?

2 A I was working with nobody. I think you would have to talk to SCA or you  
3 could talk to Ambassador Ross about who he spoke with. I was never in a meeting with  
4 an Afghan official.

5 Q Okay. Thank you.

6 Ambassador, did you or others in M ever engage with the Taliban at any point?

7 A No.

8 Q Thank you.

9 So we're going to transition now to, sort of, the withdrawal efforts specifically.  
10 And we'll go forward in chronological order.

11 A Uh-huh.

12 Q Ambassador, you were serving as Director General of the Foreign Service  
13 during the Presidential transition, correct?

14 A [Nonverbal response.]

15 [REDACTED]: You have to --

16 Ambassador Perez. Yes. Sorry. Sorry, I have a tendency to nod.

17 BY [REDACTED]:

18 Q That's okay. As do I.

19 How was the issue of a potential military withdrawal from Afghanistan  
20 approached during the Presidential transition from President Trump to President Biden?

21 A I have no idea.

22 Q Do you recall what bureaus and offices were involved in addressing a  
23 potential military withdrawal during the transition?

24 A I do not know.

25 Q What was the role of M and its bureaus in preparing information and

1 recommendations on the withdrawal during the transition period?

2 A I do not know.

3 [REDACTED]. Just for the record, she's testified to this, but she was not in M.

4 She was Director General during the transition --

5 [REDACTED]. Uh-huh.

6 [REDACTED]. -- and had no employment connection of any kind --

7 Ambassador Perez. Right.

8 [REDACTED]. -- to M.

9 [REDACTED]. Okay. Thank you.

10 BY [REDACTED]:

11 Q Of course, we only want you to speak to your own personal accounts --

12 A Yeah. No --

13 Q -- anything that you specifically witnessed yourself.

14 A Right.

15 Q And did you brief the incoming Secretary or senior leadership on any issues  
16 pertaining to Afghanistan during the transition period?

17 A No. Again -- thank you, [REDACTED] -- I was Director General. I had a big job. I  
18 had to -- I mean, narrow, but large, because so many people flow out and so many people  
19 flow in, and I was responsible for trying to make sure that happened.

20 I mean, one of my jobs was calling ambassadors, political ambassadors for the  
21 Trump administration, and, you know, telling them they had to leave, right? Because  
22 some people thought they could stay.

23 Q Uh-huh.

24 A I mean, I said, "No, actually" -- I did a lot of things like that. I mean, it  
25 sounds crazy, but people don't understand, right? When you've never done a transition,

1 they don't understand.

2 So I was very busy, but 100-percent focused on the personnel.

3 Q That's helpful context. Thank you.

4 [REDACTED]. After assuming the position of Acting Under Secretary for  
5 Management, did you get a readout, being that you were starting at the outset of the  
6 administration, on what had come in from the transition?

7 Ambassador Perez. No. I did not.

8 BY [REDACTED]:

9 Q Ambassador, when you took over as Acting Under Secretary in January 2021,  
10 where did things stand with respect to the potential withdrawal from Afghanistan?

11 A I don't know.

12 I have to tell you, in January of 2021, I was 1,000-percent focused on trying to help  
13 the political appointees who had worked for President Trump to leave with dignity and  
14 then try to get the new people in. That was a full-time job. We got started late. Do  
15 you remember? So I spent that entire month on the phone, like, talking to people.  
16 Right?

17 And, by the way, this was COVID time. We had ambassadors -- we had political  
18 ambassadors working for President Trump who had COVID, who couldn't leave. Trying  
19 to help them stay safe.

20 So that's what I did. I mean, if there were things happening, I don't know.

21 Q And these are not trick questions. This is just, sort of, to have an  
22 understanding --

23 A No, I'm just trying to set -- but, like, you know, a transition is, like, a huge  
24 deal, right?

25 Q Uh-huh.



1           A    And I've seen both ways, right, you know, going from within the same  
2 party -- and then this is, like, a really big thing, obviously.

3           But, given the fact that we had a late start and I had so many people to take care  
4 of -- as I said, all the political appointees leaving, all the people trying to come in -- it was  
5 100 percent a full-time job.

6           Q    Thank you for that helpful context.

7           A    Yeah.

8           Q    Do you recall what planning had been done, if at all, pertaining to the  
9 potential military withdrawal?

10          A    I don't know.

11          Q    Once you did become involved and gained an understanding of, sort of,  
12 where we were at or specifically what the Department's position was with respect to  
13 Afghanistan, do you recall whether the Bureau of Diplomatic Security characterized the  
14 level of risk in maintaining embassy operations around April of 2021?

15          A    So I don't remember anything before April with Diplomatic Security.

16                Look, we all knew it was going to be tough.   And DS would sometimes say to me,  
17 "Oh, my God, this is going to be hard," and I said, "Yeah, it's going to be hard.   So we  
18 have to figure out what we can and cannot do and be realistic about what we can and  
19 cannot do.   That's all we can do, but, you know, try our hardest to do."

20                You know, there are things we couldn't do.   We couldn't, like, run the airport,  
21 right?   I'm sorry, that's just, like, too much.   But, you know, whatever we could do,  
22 tried to do the best job we could do.   And what we couldn't, really tried to work with  
23 DOD to make sure that we had some flexibility in terms of how that change occurred, so  
24 this -- again, I'm talking about the enduring presence, right?

25          Q    Uh-huh.

1           A    So I don't recall any conversations with them prior to that, but after that we  
2 were obviously very engaged.

3           Q    Can you speak to what, sort of, specifically, what DS's concerns were, to the  
4 best of your recollection?

5           A    I think DS was just concerned about scope, right?  Because it's a lot, and  
6 they wanted to -- you know, everybody wants to do the best they can do and make sure  
7 that they had the right people.

8                    You know, we also -- I mean, it was not our first time in a war zone, because we  
9 were in Iraq as well.  So the question is, could we have -- and most of these people, by  
10 the way, are contractors -- could we get enough contractors?  Do they have the right  
11 skills?  You know, that kind of thing.

12                   So I think it was more that than anything else, and just making sure that what we  
13 could do people knew and what we couldn't do -- you know.  But it was an ongoing  
14 process, right?

15          Q    Uh-huh.

16          A    I mean, we never -- you know, it sort of continues over time.

17          Q    And in April 2021, when you became involved on Afghanistan issues, what  
18 was your position on whether the U.S. should maintain its embassy following the military  
19 withdrawal?

20          A    What do you mean, my "position"?

21          Q    Did you believe that the U.S. could maintain its diplomatic presence in  
22 Afghanistan after the military withdrew?

23          A    I didn't have an opinion.  I, again, had not been out there; I had not taken a  
24 look at that environment until I went.  Who knew?  Right?

25                   When I went there in April, it was quiet.  In fact, the one thing that sticks in my

1 mind, as we were leaving the compound -- and we used to fly by helicopter. The good  
2 old days of driving down the road didn't happen any longer. And it was quiet enough  
3 that we sort of went around the town and I was able to get a little bit of an aerial view of  
4 Kabul, which I didn't really have.

5 So, you know, when you're able to take a helicopter ride that's more than, you  
6 know, 5 minutes to get you to and from an airport, to really have a chance to sort of see  
7 what it looks like, you know, that, to me, was a sign of, you know, this is okay for now.

8 Q And, at that time, the military was still there --

9 A Yeah.

10 Q -- in Afghanistan, correct?

11 A Absolutely.

12 Q And what was your assessment of the level of security risk that this would  
13 pose, after your trip, of course, after you had an opportunity --

14 A Again, Kabul itself was quiet, you know, relatively speaking. There were  
15 not attacks on Americans. And so, you know, it -- try to do the best we could do. If it  
16 stayed quiet, then perhaps, you know, work can continue.

17 Q Did your position or assessment of the security risk change during your  
18 tenure as Acting Under Secretary?

19 A You know, I would say that I think we all were very much surprised by what  
20 happened. Because the -- I'm not an expert, right? I mean, I'm dumped into this job,  
21 you know, with all due respect -- which, you know, I did. And, you know, we're talking  
22 about the Afghan Security Forces, and everybody thought that they would be there and  
23 that Kabul itself would stay safe.

24 So I, you know, relied upon the people who had more experience than I did and  
25 expertise to, you know, help me assess whether or not this was a good thing or not, right?

1 Q Uh-huh.

2 And, Ambassador, do you recall DS raising concern about -- sort of, heightened  
3 concern, given that I imagine there were characterizations of the level of risk throughout  
4 this period. But do you recall DS raising concern about the security situation in  
5 Afghanistan starting in the spring or summer of 2021?

6 A As I said, when we would have these calls and discussions, DS at times was  
7 very concerned about their ability to do the support necessary to keep people safe, but I  
8 don't recall there being, "Oh," you know, "this is terrible." Maybe I just don't  
9 remember, but I don't recall that.

10 Q Do you recall DS raising concerns about the significant reduction of security  
11 capabilities once U.S. troops withdrew?

12 A Well, that was what we were trying to avoid.

13 Q Uh-huh. And what was your reaction to their assessment or their  
14 concerns?

15 A Trying to make sure that we had lines of efforts so that if X went away, Y  
16 would replace it or be the same, you know, in the best scenario.

17 Q Were there any disagreements between DS and other offices and bureaus,  
18 including those within the M family, on the level of risk in maintaining a diplomatic  
19 presence in Afghanistan without military support?

20 A I don't know. I don't remember.

21 Q So is it your testimony that you were not aware of any such disagreements,  
22 or you don't recall any such disagreements?

23 A I think it's a bit of both. I don't recall, and, also, I am not aware. I'm not  
24 sure they would've had me in a conversation like that, necessarily.

25 But, look, we tried to be free and open, right? Like, "Hey, I'm really concerned

1 about this" -- again, let's use the airport as an example. Would we have taken over  
2 security for the airport? No. Was it discussed at one point? Yes. Couldn't do it.  
3 So we didn't do it. Right? I mean, so that's a very good example where DS was like,  
4 "No, this is too big." "You're right, so let's go someplace else." And, eventually, you  
5 know, the Department went to Turkiye. That was the right answer.

6 But, at the beginning, everything was sort of dumped on us, right? Because,  
7 here, DOD is doing this, DOD is doing this. So we were able to peel off, I thought  
8 successfully, those things that were just way outside our scope.

9 Q Did the State Department ever consider formally requesting that the DOD  
10 provide a stay-behind force?

11 A I don't think we got to the point of formally, but we were definitely working  
12 on having -- from my perspective -- again, I can't talk for everybody, but, you know, I  
13 got -- my colleagues at DOD -- "my colleagues," again, whose names I can't remember.  
14 Sorry. The people I worked with at DOD, I think, with us, wanted to make sure there  
15 was no loss of life.

16 So there were going to be things that we were not going to be able to do, and we  
17 would've had to have some sort of presence, whether or not that was uniformed military  
18 or was contractors or whatever it might be. You know, I think that we were driving  
19 towards that. But we were still in planning when it fell.

20 Q Uh-huh. And so you don't recall if that request was ever formally issued?

21 A I do not know the answer.

22 Q Did any bureaus or offices within the Department oppose that request?

23 A I would not know. I had no -- I do not know.

24 Q The reason we ask is that, in the course of reviewing the AAR narrative, it  
25 came to our attention that there were disagreements between offices within the State

1 Department, including Diplomatic Security, SRAR -- so the Special Representative's  
2 office -- and SCA, on whether to initially request a stay-behind force.

3 Do you recall any of this?

4 A I do not recall.

5 Q And was a plan for a stay-behind force ultimately formed, even if not  
6 formally requested?

7 A No. It was -- as I said, we were still in the process of trying to define what  
8 we could and could not do. So it was not, I would say, formed.

9 Q And, Ambassador, were you privy at all to discussions surrounding the  
10 decision to remain in the Doha Agreement or to adhere to the Doha Agreement?

11 A I know nothing about the Doha Agreement. Sorry.

12 Q No, that's helpful. Thank you.

13 At the time of the President's decision to withdraw in April 2021, what was the  
14 Department's position on continued embassy presence in Afghanistan?

15 A We were focused on an enduring diplomatic presence -- again, for both  
16 Presidents, withdrawal of troops, enduring diplomatic presence.

17 Q Were there any actions underway to reduce embassy staffing in anticipation  
18 of the military withdrawal?

19 A Yes.

20 [REDACTED]. Could you elaborate, please?

21 Ambassador Perez. Yeah.

22 So one of the things that happened when I went out in April was a decision to  
23 move to ordered departure, for two reasons.

24 One, as I mentioned, my concern was that I wanted everybody in hard housing,  
25 right, with something over their roofs. And we did -- and the compound is just so big.

1 So to move those functions offshore, that could be done there. But, also, we needed  
2 space to bring in people to help us, right? Whether or not we were constructing new  
3 top cover or putting more Mylar on windows or whatever it might be, I needed to get  
4 those -- we needed to have room for them.

5 So there was an ordered departure that came into effect right about the time that  
6 I went out there. It didn't necessarily take the numbers down too much, by the way, but  
7 that was because we needed to get -- ultimately, it would have, but we needed to surge  
8 people in to do that, sort of, you know, work that needed to be done to keep those  
9 facilities safe and hardened.

10 BY [REDACTED]:

11 Q And, at that time, how sustainable did you believe the embassy's presence  
12 following the military withdrawal would be?

13 A I mean, you hope for the best, right? So, you know, if Kabul could've held, I  
14 think it would've been okay.

15 You know, you look at Iraq, it's another thing, right? You could have war raging  
16 outside your doors, and yet you're on a compound and you can continue to operate.

17 Q Ambassador, are you familiar with the annual fighting season in  
18 Afghanistan? It's okay if you're not, but --

19 A No. I'm --

20 Q -- just to clarify.

21 A Sorry. I'm not an expert.

22 Q The reason I ask this is that, ultimately, the planned date for the military  
23 withdrawal was to happen during what was known as -- well-known as the annual fighting  
24 season.

25 A Oh.

1 Q Do you recall any consideration being given -- sort of, security consideration  
2 being given to that?

3 A I'm sorry, but you're talking about something I really don't have any -- I  
4 mean, not "knowledge," but I don't understand it.

5 Q Uh-huh.

6 A So I can't answer. I'm sorry.

7 Q No. And that's an answer in and of itself, so --

8 A Okay. Okay.

9 Q So I want to focus now on the trip that we've discussed briefly, specifically in  
10 April 2021.

11 A Yeah.

12 Q You led that trip, correct?

13 A Yes.

14 Q And I believe you noted this. You mentioned this trip -- or, the need for  
15 this trip to DMR McKeon. Is that how it was initiated?

16 A Yes.

17 Q And how long was the trip?

18 A Two nights maybe? I don't remember. A couple nights.

19 Q Okay. And which bureaus and offices were involved in the preparations for  
20 your trip?

21 A So SCA -- you know, the regional bureau always has the pen when you go  
22 anywhere, so SCA would've had the pen.

23 Q And which individuals within your office were involved in the preparation?

24 A I had a special assistant who helped me get the paper together.

25 Q Did any other officials from the Department accompany you during this trip?



1           A    Well, I mentioned I had Carlos Matus, the deputy, from DS. I had Dean  
2 Thompson, who was the acting. I had a guy on my staff, a junior staffer. And we had  
3 somebody from the NSC.

4           Q    Was there anyone else who was considered but did not ultimately join you  
5 for the trip?

6           A    I don't think so. When you --

7           [Interruption in the hallway.]

8           ██████████: Do you want to take a pause?

9           ██████████: Let's take a pause briefly.

10          [Recess.]

11          ██████████: We'll just go back on the record.

12          Ambassador Perez. Yeah. Okay.

13          BY ██████████:

14          Q    So let's get back to trip itself. And the question I asked: Was there  
15 anyone else, to the best of your recollection, that was considered to join you for the trip  
16 but did not ultimately come?

17          A    I don't think so. You know, you want to keep them small. You know,  
18 again, there's a lot going on at those posts. They don't have a lot of space for visitors.  
19 So I wanted DS there, obviously, and I wanted the bureau there because they were, you  
20 know, responsible for --

21          Q    Of course.

22          A    -- working at the embassy.

23          Q    Do you recall what meetings took place during the course of that trip?

24          A    Not entirely. As I mentioned, I met with some of the like-minded  
25 ambassadors. I attended a couple of EAC meetings. I obviously met with the

1 Ambassador and his team.

2 I did a lot of walking around, right, just trying to understand what the compound  
3 looked like. Went out to Camp Alvarado, which is out of the airport, to take a look at  
4 that. Met with the management team.

5 I'm trying to think if I did anything else. I mean, that was the majority of it.

6 Q Did you meet with the RSO's office, as well, there?

7 A Yes, we had meetings with the RSO. They showed me a lot of what they  
8 were doing, you know, whether or not it was drills or whatever they had. So they  
9 accompanied me a lot of this, because there were so many of them. Like, I would go  
10 look at one facility, and they'd be -- you know, they had a team responsible for that or for  
11 that function.

12 Q Thank you.

13 BY [REDACTED]:

14 Q I want to return to something you mentioned. You mentioned that an  
15 individual from the NSC accompanied you on your trip. Can --

16 A Yes.

17 Q -- you please elaborate on that?

18 A Yeah. It was -- they just -- we offered to have them have somebody come  
19 with us. Because, again, this was going to be the Department's effort, to keep people  
20 safe. And, you know, rather than me having to come back and back-brief, you know,  
21 bring somebody along who could be there. So --

22 Q Okay. And what was the role?

23 A The person never said a word. He's a very quiet individual.

24 Q And who was that?

25 A Michael Adler. But he never talked. If you know him, he doesn't talk

1 much anyway.

2 That'll be in the record. That's too bad. You should probably strike that.

3 [REDACTED] Ambassador, I'd like to introduce exhibit 1 into the record.

4 [Perez Exhibit No. 1

5 was marked for identification.]

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q This was produced to us by the State Department. And I believe it reflects  
8 a meeting between yourself with the senior RSO and RSO leadership on April 24, 2021 --

9 A Okay.

10 Q -- at 8:00 a.m. for 90 minutes. And it says "Day 2," so I imagine this is day 2  
11 of your trip to Afghanistan.

12 I'll give you an opportunity to take a look.

13 And, Ambassador, I'm just going to read in some of the key objectives that are  
14 outlined in this document.

15 A I haven't finished reading it yet. Can I finish reading it first?

16 Q Of course. Please.

17 A Thank you.

18 Okay.

19 Q Thank you.

20 So I'm just going to read in, sort of, the overarching key objectives in this  
21 document, the first being "U.S. Military Withdrawal and the Loss of Key Enablers."

22 A Uh-huh.

23 Q Second, "Note that Embassy Kabul's security enterprise is sized and  
24 structured based on the longstanding support of Resolute Support Mission-Afghanistan  
25 and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan. With the ending of RSMA, Embassy Kabul is pursuing a

1 U.S. military security force to support the diplomatic mission until Embassy Kabul can  
2 adjust to fill these gaps organically."

3 "Express support to increase the number of security personnel and maintain  
4 flexibility of RSO contract staffing."

5 "Note that support of IZ security is of critical importance to Embassy security."

6 "Controlling RS and Physical Security."

7 "Express support to pursue 'field expedient' hardening of existing structures and  
8 security systems to protect post personnel."

9 And then, of course, the "Notable Challenges" are included as well.

10 Ambassador, I know you touched upon some of these issues --

11 A Yeah.

12 Q -- in your testimony, but can you please describe this meeting to the extent  
13 you haven't already touched upon some of the issues?

1

2 [11:01 a.m.]

3 Ambassador Perez. I honestly -- I don't remember what -- I don't remember the  
4 meeting itself. But as you note, these are the things I was going to talk to you about, the  
5 hardening of the structures. Thank you for reminding me. The word was "enablers,"  
6 right? That's what we were trying to do, was to make sure that whatever enabled them  
7 we were able to pick up.

8 And, you know, I had failed -- I forgot, actually, until seeing this. The RS, which  
9 was the compound adjacent, you know, to get that, because, you know, it had hardened  
10 buildings. It would've allowed us more flexibility to bring people outside the walls,  
11 inside the walls, that kind of thing. So, you know, discussion about that.

12 You know, obviously, as I said, you know, we would have done whatever  
13 necessary to support. I said that's why, working with my DOD colleagues, we were  
14 thinking, you know, we're going to need people to stay. It was not going to be a clearcut  
15 everybody's out the door. But, as I said, we hadn't gotten to the point of making a  
16 recommendation yet just because we were still in discussions.

17 But I think this pretty much covers what the visit was about, right? It really was  
18 about this. Although this takes it through the lens of DS. And I would say there was a  
19 medical component to this as well.

20 And it makes references to this and to hardening buildings. But that's an OBO  
21 responsibility. And to get them to think a little bit more about, you know, what do you  
22 do when you're in a crisis zone and you need to move quickly?

23 BY [REDACTED]:

24 Q And, Ambassador, I want to look to page 2 of this document, the notable  
25 challenges. It specifically states here: Certain functions currently provided by

1 USFOR-A cannot be recreated post-withdrawal. Specifically -- one line which is  
2 redacted -- and, The loss of this intelligence would create significant knowledge gaps  
3 moving forward. Hostage rescue, while RSO can provide a coordination capability for  
4 personnel recovery, it lacks legal authorities and resources to proactively recover  
5 American citizens.

6 A Right.

7 Q Were these issues ever resolved, understanding that one of the sort of -- one  
8 of the issues are, you know, redacted, but --

9 A Yeah, I don't know what the first one is. I don't remember. On hostage  
10 rescue, we were working with DOD to pick this up because they do have capabilities as  
11 well.

12 Q And what were your takeaways from this meeting?

13 A We had a -- it was a challenge, right. But, again, in a time when it was  
14 relatively quiet, I put that into context because, you know, as I said, it's like being in, you  
15 know, Islamabad or Baghdad or someplace else; a sea of calm almost in a country where  
16 there's quite a bit of turmoil. And a commitment to the mission. You know, I think  
17 that -- I never served in Afghanistan, but the people, they were very much committed to  
18 the Afghan people. So we were going to try our hardest.

19 Q Thank you for that.

20 [REDACTED]. Were the issues raised here in this document, in this meeting,  
21 were these issues resolved by August 15th?

22 Ambassador Perez. No. A hundred percent involved, no. You know, we were  
23 just -- and again, I'm sorry, I don't remember details. But, you know, we would sort of  
24 try to pluck apart. I'll give you an example. This is sort of a silly one, but I remember it.  
25 You know what mylar is? Do you know what mylar is? Okay. So we had buildings at

1 the compound that didn't have mylar on the windows. And so I was like, this is so  
2 stupid. Let's go -- you know, let's get the mylar out here tomorrow, and let's start to get  
3 this stuff done, you know.

4 So some things like that, yeah, small things that could be done, trying to, as I said,  
5 move people out of housing off the compound, put them inside the walls, yes. That's  
6 why that order departure to get, you know, what we could offshore out was so important  
7 because I could get those folks who could work on this in. But everything, no.

8 [REDACTED]. Is that just because -- like, a timeframe like from April to August is  
9 just too short a timeframe?

10 Ambassador Perez. It's a lot, yeah. Because, again, even DOD doesn't do this  
11 themselves. They're not people in the military doing it. It's contractors. And it talks  
12 about this. So the whole -- I mean, it makes my head explode, and I am not a contract  
13 expert. But, you know, you own the contract. Now we need to do so something.  
14 Who's going to take it over? Who knows how to run this? Who's the COR? Those  
15 are the kinds of things that --

16 [REDACTED]. Give them the COR.

17 Ambassador Perez. What a COR is? Oh, a contracting officer. Right. Who's  
18 the contracting officer. It's not that easy because of Federal acquisition regulations.  
19 So we were very much -- I mean, it sounds sort of picayune, but those are the kinds of  
20 things that sort of break or make things, and we were trying to work on those kinds of  
21 things where we could. Yeah.

22 [REDACTED]. Thank you, Ambassador. And we're at 30 seconds of our time,  
23 so we'll stop the clock now and go off the record.

24 [Recess.]

25

EXAMINATION

1 BY [REDACTED]:

2 Q Thank you very much for testifying here today. I'll be asking questions on  
3 behalf of the minority, along with some of my colleagues.

4 Before we get started, we want to level set a little bit on terminology. We take a  
5 bit of a different approach than the majority as related to the withdrawal and evacuation.

6 So we understand the "withdrawal," that term, to describe the retrograde of U.S.  
7 troops, equipment, and personnel from Afghanistan. And to unpack that a bit further,  
8 we understand the U.S. military personnel withdrawal was initiated in the February 2020  
9 Doha deal, involved partial troop drawdowns prior to 2021, and was completed by  
10 August 31st, 2021, to include the withdrawal of both U.S. military and diplomatic  
11 personnel.

12 And one more nuance here. U.S. troops and equipment are primarily the  
13 domain of DOD and military leadership.

14 A Correct.

15 Q Is there anything you would amend related to this definition?

16 A So I also think of it in three buckets. As you mentioned --

17 Q Okay.

18 A -- the withdrawal is the military withdrawal, period.

19 Q Okay.

20 A Evacuation is, to me, U.S. direct hires, those we would normally evacuate in  
21 an emergency; American citizens, LPRs, and those that we might have an obligation to  
22 under MOAs. And then what happened was we had a humanitarian airlift, which is  
23 completely different. And I have no experience in that. I wasn't around the last time  
24 we did this, which was in Vietnam. So I always think of it in those three ways.

25 Q Okay. And just to clarify, in terms of the evacuation, our understanding is



1 that it describes the removal of American citizens --

2 A Correct.

3 Q -- their eligible family members, lawful permanent residents and their family  
4 members, SIVs and their eligible family members, and certain other Afghan allies. Does  
5 that comport with your understanding?

6 A You know, I don't know about the Afghan allies piece, but -- I mean,  
7 obviously that's what happened. But I don't know if that's what I would have -- we  
8 would have considered under -- I'm lumping it more generically, not just specific to  
9 Afghanistan.

10 Q Okay. Fair enough. And then the evacuation encompassed the  
11 civilian-led Operation Allies Refuge that began in July 2021, and subsequent military  
12 noncombatant evacuation operation that occurred from August 16 to 31, 2021. Does  
13 that time period make sense to you?

14 A I'm sorry, can you just repeat that again?

15 Q Sure. The evacuation began with the civilian-led Operation Allies Refuge.  
16 Are you familiar with the program?

17 A This is the SIV program?

18 Q Correct.

19 A Okay. I forgot the name. Okay.

20 Q Fair enough. That began in July 2021. Does that timeframe sound  
21 familiar to you?

22 A Moving them to Doha, processing, and getting them out, yeah.

23 Q Exactly. And then the subsequent military NEO that occurred from  
24 August 16th to 31st, 2021?

25 A Correct, yeah. That's right.

1 Q Sounds like we're tracking here. Great.

2 A Okay.

3 Q Wanted to pivot back a little bit to your background. Have you received  
4 any awards for your contributions related to foreign affairs or the Foreign Service?

5 A I have.

6 Q Can you describe those for the record?

7 A I have had -- I received two Presidential Rank Awards. I have received two  
8 Distinguished Service Awards, Distinguished Honor Award. I don't know, 15-plus years  
9 of performance pay. Yeah.

10 No, I've had a very incredible career. So I worked hard, but I think that  
11 I've -- people have appreciated what I've done and I -- you know, especially I think as the  
12 director general, I just really felt I got to my sweet spot, a place I wish I had an  
13 opportunity to start earlier in my career. So, yes, I've had a number of awards, dozens.  
14 I don't like to take about it, but yes.

15 Q That's fantastic. You should. Congratulations.

16 A Thank you.

17 Q And when you retired, what was the rank in which you retired at?

18 A Minister consular.

19 Q Is that a senior ranking?

20 A It is.

21 Q How does that stack in the hierarchy of State Department rankings?

22 A It's the second highest or the third lowest. So we have consular, minister  
23 consular, career minister, and career ambassador. I was the second level minister  
24 consular.

25 Q Okay. Fair enough.

1 Fair to say you're a distinguished State official?

2 A I'm a retired State official.

3 Q A retired State official?

4 A Yeah. Yes, absolutely. Distinguished?

5 Q And what would you describe your specialties as?

6 A You know, I think what I'm doing now -- I mean, I would say that most of my  
7 experience, especially recently, was working on human resource issues, global talent. I  
8 have been the principal deputy assistant secretary in that bureau for about a year and a  
9 half before I went to Chile. And then I came back as the director general.

10 So understanding personnel systems, you know, really trying -- and trying to take  
11 care of the workforce. Actually, I was -- I think I've grown into somebody who really  
12 thinks about the nexus of leadership and public service. So I do a lot of my own little  
13 TED Talks and things like that now, you know, sort of best practices how people should  
14 work together and treat each other and, you know, try to make sure that we have the  
15 best possible leadership in our organization.

16 Q Okay. Fair enough. And were you in the same cone the entire time at  
17 State?

18 A I was. So as I said, I came in as a management coned officer. Most  
19 people want to be political officers who are all about the policy. I didn't. I had actually  
20 worked in healthcare administration at a local hospital here. And when my husband  
21 joined, I didn't have a job. And I was like, oh, I took the exam, I passed.

22 I can talk. So I was able to talk. I can talk. So I was able to talk. And I knew  
23 a little bit about the embassy at that point because we had served overseas. But I really  
24 wanted to see results, so I chose management cone because it's more results oriented.

25 But having said that, I spent a lot of time, you know, working, as I said, in staff

1 jobs, whether or not I was director of the secretary of staff office, you know, who will  
2 support the secretaries on trips, or working in the executive office. I worked, you know,  
3 for Condi Rice for 4 years. I worked for Colin Powell as the executive director. So  
4 doing a lot of logistics for both of them and, you know, really loved that.

5 Q Fair enough. And you mentioned prior to coming to the State Department  
6 you worked in healthcare administration. Is that correct?

7 A I did. Yeah.

8 Q Were you also serving in HR-related roles during that time?

9 A No.

10 Q What was the --

11 A I would say -- my title was administrative manager, and I worked in  
12 Suburban Hospital, so I had various departments that I was responsible for overseeing.

13 Q Would you describe that as management?

14 A Oh, yeah.

15 Q Okay. So 35 years of management experience?

16 A Management experience.

17 Q Plus --

18 A Plus, yeah.

19 Q -- how many years before the 35 at State?

20 A At least three and maybe longer. I have to -- look, we're going way back,  
21 right. I joined in 1987. Trying to remember when I got my graduate -- so I graduated  
22 with a degree in healthcare administration. Did an internship at Suburban Hospital and  
23 stayed for 3 or 4 years before my husband joined the Foreign Service and went overseas.  
24 I wasn't able to work -- this was back in the day. You know, taking a degree in a U.S.  
25 facility, taking it overseas, trying to find a job was impossible. There was no internet, for

1 those of you younger in the room. You know, so it is just really, really hard, and that's  
2 when I took the exam and decided to join.

3 Q Fair enough. All right. Have you participated in a crisis-related task force  
4 at State?

5 A Yeah. Actually, early in my career, I worked in the crisis management  
6 office. Again, this is my second tour, so we're talking about 1989. It was just getting  
7 stood up back then. I mean, literally, when we think about how far we've come, we  
8 didn't really have much of a great -- we had an operation center. We hadn't been  
9 around for --

10 Q And which year was this?

11 A I went there in 1989.

12 Q 1989?

13 A July of 1989. I was there for a couple of years, but I got pregnant, and I was  
14 out and, you know, I took leave because of the baby and everything. But the whole idea  
15 was to set up some sort of crisis management capacity within the Department. But it  
16 was very, very nascent. I mean, we never done anything like this. So way before the  
17 days of, you know, post working on emergency action plans and -- you know, the  
18 structures that we have in place now, when you think back 35, 40 years, we didn't have  
19 that much.

20 Q What is your assessment of CMS in 1989, in the eighties, versus today?  
21 How is it even --

22 A Oh, my gosh. So first of all, it's much larger, which is great. When I was  
23 there, we were just a handful of people. And by the way, we were also doing continuity  
24 of government, right. So the domestic stuff, not just looking at overseas, and there  
25 were a handful of us. I was one of, I think, three FS -- four FSOs, you know, and a couple

1 of other civil service there. And it's much bigger.

2 I think it grew over time, you know, as, you know -- the world became more  
3 complicated, right. And there's just so much more, and now that we have access -- you  
4 can see everything on TV and you can -- you know, there's the communication flow, it's  
5 just necessary to have something bigger.

6 Q Fair to say that CMS is currently more robust compared to --

7 A Oh, yeah, absolutely.

8 Q Fair to say it's more robust?

9 A Yes.

10 Q And can you talk a little about any additional crisis-related activities you've  
11 participated in outside of CMS?

12 A So I've also -- we have a very robust program to do crisis management  
13 training overseas. It is run by the Foreign Service Institute, and they go out to post on a  
14 regular basis. I'm not sure what the cycle is now. Maybe every 3 years or so. So I  
15 had participated in those exercises when I'd been overseas, when it's -- it's corresponding  
16 with the time that I was overseas.

17 Q And so when you say you participated, were you acting in a leadership role  
18 or participating as a participant?

19 A Both.

20 Q Both?

21 A Yeah. Well, I -- for example, one where I did when I was the principal  
22 officer in Barcelona was relatively small. We only had like five Americans, so we all  
23 participated. And it's a role-playing exercise. And then when I was the ambassador in  
24 Chile, we did one on what would happen if there was -- we had cruise ships starting to  
25 come, what would happen if there was a problem with a cruise ship that sank, there was

1 a fire.

2 So that was more my team, my consular team, my management section, you  
3 know, the folks who were military at the embassy. And I would sort of go in and out,  
4 but they were the ones who actually participated.

5 Q Okay. Would you characterize yourself as having a specialty in crisis  
6 management?

7 A I have experience. I wouldn't say I have a specialty in crisis management.  
8 I have experience.

9 Q Is your experience also related to your time in the M bureau in D.C. versus  
10 when you were abroad?

11 A Yes. I mean, you know, I have to say, having worked in CMS way back in  
12 the day, I, you know, had an understanding of, you know, the importance of centralized  
13 communication and getting notice out to the field about, you know, what's going on,  
14 those kinds of things. But, you know, I spent long periods of times at other types of jobs  
15 where I wasn't actually working on the crisis itself. So maybe compared to some -- some  
16 people come into the Department and they spend, you know, tours in very dangerous  
17 places. I did not do that. I always thought that Washington was my hardship tour.  
18 So --

19 Q Oh, fair enough. Do you have experience engaging in interagency planning  
20 and policy formation?

21 A Within the confines of what I did in terms of a management officer, yes.  
22 And I also worked in INL where I was engaged on policy issues at the IPC level.

23 Q Okay. What about developing contingency plans outside of Afghanistan?

24 A Me myself? I never wrote a contingency plan. I would approve them.  
25 For example, where the action plans at embassies and a consulate have to be approved

1 by leadership, and I would approve those.

2 Q Okay. Do you have experience analyzing intelligence relevant to a specific  
3 topic?

4 A I have no experience with intelligence.

5 Q Okay. What about developing and making policy recommendations for  
6 department or administration leadership in Washington?

7 A Within the context of the kinds of jobs I had, absolutely. As you become  
8 senior, that's what you do.

9 Q Okay. Conducted security drills or exercises with embassy staff?

10 A Yes.

11 Q Oversaw partial or full drawdowns of embassy staff?

12 A I was never in a post that had a drawdown.

13 Q Fair enough. Have you ever contributed to an After Action Review or  
14 similar post-crisis review?

15 A I'm not -- this is really going way back. So when we were standing up CMS  
16 back in the late eighties, we did after crises try to get people in to talk about it. It was  
17 not a real formal process. But, again, I was junior officer. I was a second-tier officer.  
18 I was not in charge. But I do remember that we would bring in people to have this kind  
19 of After Action Review.

20 Q Okay. Do you feel like your background, considering all that we've just  
21 discussed, made you qualified to step into the role as acting under secretary for  
22 management?

23 A I mean, I think that my experience, given who was available in the  
24 Department, you know, I think I absolutely could step in. It's not just about crises, right.  
25 I think this is what people forget. Yes, crisis is very, very important. But we have



1 people. People are the most important thing, you know. We have nothing. We have  
2 no money. We have people. So we got to take care of our people, number one. And  
3 I understood that coming out of the director general's office.

4 And I had spent about 8 months as a M staffer way back in the day, 1992, '93ish, I  
5 think. I don't remember the exact years. So I understood the connected tissue part  
6 having worked there, right, that it's not just -- again, the office is sort of this little  
7 oversight, small. The bureaus do the work, you know, and then you're there.

8 I mean, as you get more senior, you really learn how to solve problems that  
9 nobody else can solve, right. There are senior officers and political appointees in all  
10 these jobs, and they are doing an amazing job every day. But sometimes they're in  
11 their -- I would call their silo of excellence. And you can perhaps see something a little  
12 bit better, and you can say, well, look, so-and-so's working on this, and you should really  
13 talk to them.

14 [REDACTED]. You just testified that people were, in your view, the most important  
15 resource that you needed to manage. I believe you also said, quote, "We have no  
16 money." Can you unpack a little bit what you meant by that?

17 Ambassador Perez. So, you know, every time we start to think about what the  
18 priority should be for as -- for me, okay? This is just me. And, again, I'm not a -- I don't  
19 have a degree in international relations. I did not join the State Department because I  
20 wanted to be the biggest policy brain in the world. A lot of people do.

21 I came in from a very different perspective, which is you need good managers and  
22 you need good -- a good platform to execute. And there's a lot of space to do that in the  
23 State Department, right. Because everybody else has got their eye on that shiny brass  
24 ring, which is to be the policy experts and hopefully be an ambassador. I mean, I got  
25 selected. You know, again, I was one of like 16 career people the year it happened,

1 so -- you know, I had done some policy work, obviously, in INL, working on those things.

2 But I was really focused on, you know, we've got to take care of our people, with  
3 the exception of bureaus like INL. There's not a lot of money there. Our money is  
4 money for operations, right. We're not USAID and we're not DOD and, you know, we  
5 don't have that kind of thing. So I think that there is an obligation to take care of  
6 people, which is why in this context I was hyperfocused, what can I do to maintain safety,  
7 security, health? Oh, by the way, we have a pandemic going on and more people will  
8 die there, right.

9 BY [REDACTED]:

10 Q Okay. Pivoting to your time as acting under secretary, you described a little  
11 bit about your leadership team. I believe you testified that there were nine individuals  
12 with you in the office. Is that correct?

13 A Uh-huh.

14 Q Did you pick these individuals?

15 A Right.

16 Q Did you select these individuals yourself?

17 A Yes and no. So the no is, when I assumed that role, the people were there,  
18 I did not select them. Over time, people rotated out, and I was able to then make two  
19 selections, and it was for my chief of staff position.

20 Q Okay. And what were the backgrounds of the individuals on your team?

21 A Two of them were office managers, so secretaries. One was a long-term  
22 staff assistant that handled paper. The four sort of midlevel special assistants either  
23 were management officers or consular officers -- again, they were not selected by me. I  
24 had the team that I had -- but had some experience working overseas in either  
25 management or consular operations.

1           The first executive assistant, my chief of staff was from Diplomatic Security. She  
2 left. I took a former colleague of mine, Jonathan Mennuti, who was a management  
3 front officer, as my second. He left. And then another woman, Jennifer Johnson, came  
4 in after that.

5           Q    Okay. And I believe you had testified that at least some of these individuals  
6 were junior. Is that correct?

7           A    Yeah. So the special assistants are generally FSO3s, which is, after you're  
8 tenured, that's the first sort of mid rank that you get.

9           Q    Okay. In your assessment, even though they were junior, do you feel that  
10 they were capable?

11          A    I mean, generally, yes.

12          Q    Okay. Do you feel that your team and its structure was performing its  
13 duties to the best of its abilities?

14          A    Yes. I mean, it was COVID times.

15          Q    Right.

16          A    So one of the things that really did hinder us -- because, again, this is before  
17 we had vaccinations -- the office is incredibly small. It has like maybe five rooms,  
18 maybe. Five. So we could -- people shared offices, so we couldn't have two people  
19 during the pandemic sitting this close. So we had people that rotated in and out, and  
20 so, you know, you didn't want to have people two people in an office. That hindered  
21 things a little bit, but, you know, we did the best that we could do. And they were very  
22 diligent about doing handoffs.

23          Q    Okay. I'm speaking to M specifically and your time there. What are M's  
24 general mandates?

25          A    Well, again, I think that I see it as the responsibility for the service bureaus of

1 the Department taking care of the Department. And as I said, the outlier to me would  
2 be consular affairs, which is a service organization to the American people.

3 You know, as I said, we got the office that ran the eighth floor, which I didn't quite  
4 understand why it was there and not in the A bureau, but whatever. So that was  
5 something that was a little bit odd. But generally, you know, if you had an IT problem,  
6 you came to the M family, right. I don't know how to work my IT, I need more IT.  
7 Whatever it might be, right. The A bureau, whatever.

8 So the CGFS, which is the payroll, which also crashed that summer, by the way,  
9 and people stopped getting paid -- I mean, there was a lot going on. So anybody who  
10 needed something in order to do their jobs, that's what the M family did.

11 Q Okay. I'd like to make a couple of statements. Let me know if you agree  
12 or disagree with the sentiment.

13 M is tasked with managing broad and often evolving needs of State?

14 A Yes.

15 Q And what about the statement: M serves operational support and  
16 management for the Department?

17 A Yes.

18 Q Okay. Does this infrastructure continue even in times of crisis?

19 A Yes.

20 Q Could you describe for us why you had such an emphatic yes?

21 A And it's why being an assistant secretary is the best job ever. So, you  
22 know, Afghanistan happened in a very complex time. I mean, I say that as we sit here  
23 today, and it's another complex time, right. We've got Israel and Gaza and, you know,  
24 that kind of crisis.

25 So, first of all, we control nothing beyond our borders, because countries do what

1 they do and we have to support because we are the United States. So you have that.  
2 I'm going to put that to the side. But I came up to M. And, you know, what do we  
3 have? As I mentioned, I talked about COVID. I talked about trying to get vaccines out  
4 to as many people as quickly as possible because people were dying, that day. We're  
5 not talking about 8 months and a teacher. That day people were dying. And it was  
6 Americans. We had nobody die overseas, but we got people back, and then they died in  
7 the U.S. So I was very much aware of that. And we had walls in the Department  
8 where we have all the stars for the people that died. But I don't want anybody else's  
9 name on that wall.

10 We had cyber attacks. I had no idea. I dealt -- I mean, as a director general,  
11 98 percent of my work is unclassified, maybe 99, right. I'm dealing with personnel  
12 issues that are sensitive but they're not classified. So all of a sudden, you know, there's  
13 ongoing cyber attacks. I talked about our -- the CGFS. That's the payroll system.  
14 Well, they had been on old mainframe computers, and they had a plan they had been  
15 working on, for God knows how many years, to move to a new system. And guess what,  
16 it crashed. So people stopped getting paid. So where did they go? You know, they  
17 go to people like me. People I never even heard of. Oh, you know, Dear Carol, I can't  
18 get paid. Help me. I don't know these people, right.

19 But this is what happens. So all these things happen all the time. And so, you  
20 know, it's really just sort of making sure that -- as I said, you know, when you're one  
21 person with one senior chief of staff and some great talented, middle-level officers, you  
22 know, that are, again, junior mid-level officers, just sort of keeping on top of everything,  
23 listening, giving advice as you can. They're often the experts; you're not. But to make  
24 sure that, you know, if they're working on something that doesn't seem to be a priority,  
25 you can shift it or vice versa, you know, whatever that might be, was really the role. It's

1 just there's a lot. There's a lot that goes on at one time.

2 Q So what I'm hearing you say is, in effect, M has to be nimble and pretty  
3 flexible to adapt to changing needs?

4 A Absolutely.

5 Q Okay.

6 A And I think that's the thing about, you know, when you try to go back and do  
7 these retrospective reviews, you know, with all due respect, I mean, you know, they're  
8 important, I think, especially if we are going to leave a guidebook for the future, which I  
9 think we just, you know, generally, if the government don't do so well. And I put  
10 everybody in this room in that bucket. You have what you have at that moment, and  
11 you have to adjust at that moment with the information that's available to you.

12 Q Right.

13 A And it changes. And one minute you're doing one thing because that's  
14 what you have, and the next minute you're not. Or it's moving up. Like, there's  
15 something new, right. So you wake up and everything's fine.

16 You know, early on, there was a -- we had a crisis in Burma, right. We had a  
17 military coup. Well, everything was fine until it wasn't, right. And then all of a sudden,  
18 there was a problem in Burma, and so we had to deal with that. I think about Ethiopia.  
19 You know, Afghanistan wasn't the only crisis country that we were working on that year.  
20 You know, there was obviously very long simmering tensions between, you know, the  
21 Tigrayans and the Ethiopian Government, which was okay until it wasn't.

22 So I think that's the thing that, you know, sometimes these things get pushed over  
23 to a new level and you have to be able to respond.

24 Q Okay. Can you describe the extent to which M folded withdrawal-related  
25 tasks into its day-to-day management of State?

1 A You're using withdrawal as the military withdrawal?

2 Q I would say focusing more on getting embassy personnel --

3 A Out.

4 Q -- out in the event of potential crises via the evacuations.

5 A Right. So the way the system works, and this works for every departure  
6 status that we put a post on, they always have to be approved by M, and so that would  
7 be me. So they would come to me in spreadsheets. You know, these 50 people are  
8 going to leave and these 25 people are going in. So once you declare that status or  
9 departure, whether or not it's authorized or ordered, then M does have the responsibility  
10 to approve people going into post.

11 Q Okay. In the lead-up to the withdrawal, the Afghanistan withdrawal, did M  
12 continue with tasks related to its broader directives and mandates?

13 A Oh, yeah.

14 Q Can you describe for us in a little more detail?

15 A Well, as I said -- you know, you're talking about the things outside of  
16 Afghanistan, right?

17 Q Correct.

18 A Yeah. So the launch of the payroll system was in June, and by July, it was  
19 apparent that people were not getting paid, or they were getting paid at significantly  
20 lower levels and people weren't happy. And this was actually happening in some of our  
21 crisis zones, right. So people in Baghdad, people in Kabul and others. So people were  
22 pretty frustrated, and I had to pivot and spend quite a bit of time on that.

23 And as I mentioned earlier, you know, there -- we know there've been a number  
24 of cyber attacks against the Federal Government. State is not unique. And, you know,  
25 really making sure that we could get the funding we needed and put in place the right

1 kind of, you know, remediation, and just to make sure that we also had teams that were  
2 able to work on this took, you know, time.

3 And I just can't underemphasize how much we spent on COVID. So going from  
4 13,500 to 350,000, I was negotiating with other agencies to actually get some of their  
5 vaccine that they were not going to use. But that all took time, right. And then getting  
6 it out and trying, as I said, to get ahead of the next wave of outbreaks, which were  
7 everywhere. And also in Kabul, by the way, you know, they had two massive outbreaks.

8 And trying -- one of the things I was doing was working with the White House just,  
9 you know -- at that time, there was no rule that private industries, private companies had  
10 to vaccinate their people. But we wanted to vaccinate our contractors at the embassy  
11 because they were not vaccinated and bringing, you know, COVID into the compound.  
12 And you can't have that. I mean, it's closed, right. So just trying to work through those  
13 things. Just take, like, hours and hours, and then communicating. Oh, and, by the way,  
14 still the DG job, right. I mean, we had an acting DG.

15 You know, we were also, unfortunately -- I mentioned staffing. So we did  
16 staffing in person until we could get people vaccinated. But Secretary Tillerson, you  
17 know, unfortunately, very successfully downsized the Department. Now, that changed  
18 under Secretary Pompeo. But destruction is easy and reconstruction is hard. And you  
19 just -- when you decide to stop hiring for a year and a half, it just dries up. So we had to  
20 start hiring, and it's not automatic. And by the way, how do you hire during a pandemic,  
21 right? How do you take an oath in office, which by law says it has to be done in person?

22 I mean, these were all these things that we were working through that  
23 mean -- you know, they sound like, oh, that's like a simple thing. It wasn't. Because  
24 we really had -- I think for us -- and I take pride in what my team did. You know, we had  
25 to be creative. We had to just think of like what's the goal, and then try to get there.



1 But it was across everything, right. It was just -- it was just not easy.

2 Q And to be clear for the record, what we're discussing occurred during the  
3 2021 timeframe. Is that correct?

4 A The hiring issues remained during 2021, because it took us -- so COVID  
5 started. So, you know, I always think of it being March of 2020. We had to -- we  
6 delayed A-100 classes, that's our entry class for the Foreign Service, because we didn't  
7 know how to bring people in. Like, how are we going to do this? We'd never done it.  
8 You know, how do we -- can we fly people? Not sure it's safe. Our first one, we let  
9 everybody stay wherever they were, even around the world, and then we put them  
10 together, no matter what their time zone was, into a class. That took months.

11 So 2021 rolls around, and we are just now trying to systematize starting an A-100  
12 class, starting the whole board of examiners process again, you know, having a test,  
13 bringing people in. The test facilitators we used at the time stopped offering tests  
14 because they did them in big rooms. You know, you couldn't have people sit together.  
15 So we were really hyperfocused on trying to get staffing up, which, again, it started -- with  
16 all due respect, Secretary Pompeo was like, go for it, but we weren't there.

17 Q Okay. So turning back to Afghanistan specifically, I'd like to be really clear  
18 for the record in your response. So what would have happened, in your opinion, if M  
19 only focused on the withdrawal in the months leading up to the NEO?

20 A Most of the Department would have collapsed. I mean, I hate to say that.  
21 It's not me. But there's -- you know, it's this idea of the cyber attacks maybe would have  
22 brought down the Department's systems, right. Because at this point, DS had a role,  
23 IRM had a role. But I started a working group where we sat down once a week. What  
24 are you doing? What are you doing, right? What's the plan? We started these little  
25 sprint teams. We didn't have that before. Trying to get ahead of it. You notice

1 something, we're going to start the sprint team. Bringing in private sector as well,  
2 Microsoft and others, to come and talk to us about what they could do to help us. I  
3 think because we had a lot of actings as well, just somebody who's going to say, you  
4 know, we're going to do this.

5 You know, I don't know. I mean, people, I assume, would have done what they  
6 would have done. But sometimes the world of M is to give people a kick in the pants.  
7 I'm sorry, but, you know, it's like -- you know, again, I go back to the payroll, which really  
8 got worse before it got better. You know, they were sort of -- and again, they are all  
9 good people trying to do the right thing. But you get so focused on your issue, whatever  
10 it is, and what you think you need and the processes. And I was like, no, let's lift our  
11 head up, right.

12 Q Is it fair to say that it was absolutely a necessity for M to continue with its  
13 functions --

14 A Absolutely.

15 Q -- outside of Afghanistan?

16 A Absolutely.

17 Q Okay. And would it also be fair to say it was an expectation of you to  
18 continue M operations in tandem with preparing for a potential withdrawal --

19 A Yes, absolutely.

20 Q -- related to the embassy?

21 A Absolutely.

22 Q Okay. And that being said, how did, in effect, your time and focus on  
23 Afghanistan change over 2021, and specifically with the onset of your trip in April  
24 of 2021?

25 A So the big thing after the trip was I started these meetings, right, these

1 conference calls, internal with State, and then, of course, with my DOD colleagues. As I  
2 said, I don't remember how frequently I did the DOD ones. I don't remember if it was  
3 weekly or biweekly. But for sure the -- you know, the ones internally, as frequently as  
4 required, generally at least once a week. That was something new.

5 As I said, a lot of our tasks were smallish, but when you put them together, they're  
6 obviously quite big, right. So, okay. Here's contractual issues we have with DOD.  
7 Let's start to pluck those apart. What can we and cannot do? Equipment, we could  
8 never purchase in time. Is there something that DOD could give to us to manage?  
9 What's OBO going to do? You know, OBO had plans, notified to Congress, to build  
10 another big building. They had all these great plans.

11 [REDACTED]: For the record, by OBO you mean Overseas Building Operations?

12 Ambassador Perez. I do. Overseas Building Operations.

13 But they were going to do, you know, yet -- like save, I don't know, whatever, five  
14 there. No, let's have you start thinking more about what is needed. What can you do  
15 quickly, today, right? How can you make sure that people -- again, my focus, it seems  
16 very simple, work in a space that's safe. Sleep in a space that is safe. And then if I said  
17 I wanted additional medical support, there was a hospital at the airport. They had  
18 clinics, but I wanted something more than that just so that we had that capability both on  
19 the compound and at the airport.

20 [REDACTED]: Thank you.

21 I'd like to introduce into the record exhibit No. 2.

22 [Perez Exhibit No. 2

23 was marked for identification.]

24 BY [REDACTED]:

25 Q Exhibit No. 2 is a draft transcript of the transcribed interview of Jonathan

1 Mennuti, dated Thursday, July 20th, 2023. This is an unclassified transcript.

2 No need to review in full, Ambassador.

3 A Okay.

4 Q But if I could draw your attention to page 48. Forty-eight is in the top  
5 right-hand corner.

6 A It helps that he says that was my top priority.

7 Q You beat me to the --

8 A Yeah, I see that. Okay.

9 Q Before we get started on reviewing the transcript, who is Jonathan Mennuti?

10 A So Jonathan Mennuti was my chief of staff for a few months. He started in  
11 April and he left in July, early July.

12 Q And you hired him. Is that correct?

13 A I did.

14 Q And what is his professional reputation?

15 A Oh, he's an except- -- he's a management-coned officer. He's probably  
16 done more management work than I have. So he's worked overseas as a management  
17 officer. And he also worked in the executive office for a regional bureau, which really  
18 gives a different perspective on supporting embassies around the world. I didn't do  
19 that. I was the executive director for the Secretary of State, but I was very much  
20 focused, I think I mentioned, on personnel issues for the Secretary, but also on travel and  
21 logistics, and things like that. It's a different type of job.

22 Q Okay. Thank you.

23 I'd like to draw your attention to line number 2. We're going to read some of  
24 this into the record. Q stands for question.

25 So the question reads, on line 2: You testified -- you referring to Mr.

1 Mennuti -- that during your tenure, Afghanistan was the single biggest focus of the Office  
2 of Under Secretary of Management. Is that correct?

3 Mr. Mennuti responds: That's right. I mean, if I think about the time that  
4 Ambassador Perez personally dedicated to meetings on this subject, I can't think of  
5 another subject that took up as much of her schedule. And to be honest, some of the  
6 other things that I mentioned, I took responsibility for advancing.

7 Continuing on line 8. Question: And just to be clear, did any of the other  
8 duties that the Under Secretary for Management's Office was responsible for cease  
9 during the time that you were dedicated primarily to working on Afghanistan issues?

10 Answer, on line 11: I can't think of anything that we just stopped doing because  
11 of Afghanistan. At the same time, I can't think of anything else that we -- allowed us to  
12 stop a focus on Afghanistan, if that makes sense.

13 And finally, on line 15, the question reads: So if I understand correctly, you are  
14 saying that none of the duties stopped, but what happened, in fact, was you took on  
15 more duties in order to free up space for Ambassador Perez -- not Ms. Perez -- to focus on  
16 Afghanistan-related tasks.

17 Line 18 says, answer: You know, it's hard for me to judge because I don't really  
18 know how that office ran before I was there or after I left. But there were plenty of  
19 issues that I felt empowered to act on her behalf.

20 Does this testimony comport with your understanding of that time?

21 A Yeah. So he got there right before I went to Afghanistan, and I think, for  
22 him, this was the big piece that didn't exist prior, right. I didn't have meetings dedicated  
23 to one country until I traveled to Afghanistan. And there was a lot, right. As I said, the  
24 constant questions or the queries about what to do; a lot of it very detailed, just -- as I  
25 said, I'm not that person doing those things generally. But, you know, I had dozens of

1 meetings between April and August.

2 Q Okay.

3 BY [REDACTED]:

4 Q I just want to follow up. You testified earlier your belief that M needs to be  
5 nimble and flexible to solve problems that crop up across the management sphere in the  
6 Department. This pivot or intensifying of your time spent on Afghanistan after April, is  
7 that an example, in your mind, of such flexibility and nimbleness?

8 A Absolutely. There's only so many hours in a day. So when something new  
9 starts, you have to give it the appropriate amount of time. I was very lucky. I had a  
10 very talented senior officer to help me. So he did sort of take some of the things off my  
11 plate. But that's what you have to do. I mean, there's no -- there's no -- there's no  
12 choice.

13 Q And did you have any impediments at that time, beginning in April 2021, to  
14 exercising such flexibility?

15 A No, I don't think so. Oh, time. Time and people. But that's always the  
16 case, right.

17 Q And just so we're clear for the record, you reported to the Deputy Secretary  
18 for Management and Resources Brian McKeon?

19 A Yes.

20 Q And did he direct you to increase your focus on Afghanistan?

21 A When I came back from my trip and I explained to him that we  
22 needed -- there's a lot to be done, I wouldn't say he directed, he's not that kind of  
23 personality, but we concurred that it would be -- I should continue to lead this  
24 Department effort, along with post and with DOD, to get what we needed.

25 Q Okay. So if I'm understanding your testimony correctly, you had the

1 latitude you needed from your superior, Deputy Secretary McKeon, to pivot, to be  
2 nimble, to be flexible with respect to the work that you've been doing in Afghanistan?

3 A Yes, yes.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q You just testified that there was a lot to be done in Afghanistan when you  
6 got there in April of 2021. From that visit, would you have expected or would you  
7 know -- let's say this -- would it have appeared that anyone else had done a similar visit  
8 6 months prior to prepare for a withdrawal that was supposed to have occurred in May  
9 of 2021?

10 A You know, I don't know the answer. Honestly, I -- I apologize, but I was  
11 pretty busy, so I don't know if anybody went out.

12 Look, I'm not criticizing what had been done but, you know, I wanted to make sure  
13 that it was as perfect as possible. I thought that Diplomatic Security at post was doing  
14 an absolutely amazing job under the direction of the charge and his team. As I said,  
15 they accompany me -- again, I spent a lot of time just walking around, physically seeing  
16 what the compound looked like, what we might need to do, particular actions.

17 It was not that it was bad, but it needed, to me, to be as perfect as possible to  
18 keep people safe, right. I didn't want to be the one who, you know, oh, that missile -- if  
19 you remember, Kabul was attacked in 2011, I believe. Was it 2011? I think so. And  
20 this just went sideways, right. There was a building across the street that was not  
21 finished. So I didn't want somebody to be the one person with the rocket coming in  
22 sideways but then kill somebody because we didn't put the mylar on the windows, or we  
23 didn't do this, or we didn't think about that. So, again, a lot of it was small, but the hope  
24 was that, when you put it all together, we were giving them a better structure for it.

25 But I have to apologize. I was definitely in my DG world, you know, up until

1 January 21st, and I'm not aware if anybody went out or not. It was just that the  
2 announcement's made, time to go. Let's make sure that we're doing all we can as a  
3 department -- and, again, with the service bureaus that I oversaw -- making sure that  
4 we're doing everything we can.

5 Q Thank you.

6 Do you know who preceded you as the under secretary of management?

7 A Brian Bulatao.

8 Q Brian Bulatao. Thank you.

9 BY [REDACTED]:

10 Q Do you recall when he left the Department?

11 A January 20th at noon.

12 Q And when were you approached to take the acting under secretary role?

13 A Late, like maybe 10 days before.

14 Q Did you have any conversations with Mr. Bulatao --

15 A I did not.

16 Q -- as far as overlapped about that role?

17 A I did not, no.

18 BY [REDACTED]:

19 Q And you started on the 21st. Is that correct?

20 A That is correct.

21 Q So there was no vacancy in that role?

22 A No. He left, and then I had to get a delegation from the President because  
23 of this first deputy -- I was not a first deputy, so I had to get a delegation.

24 Q Okay. During your trip and thereafter, what factors did you identify that  
25 would enable the United States to continue to operate its embassy post-withdrawal?



1           A    Could you just repeat that? I'm sorry.

2           Q    Sure. What criteria did you identify that would enable the U.S. to continue  
3 to operate its embassy post-withdrawal?

4           A    So, you know, first of all, we talked about there was a compound, right. So  
5 there was a grooming zone, as we called it, which was secure. But there were also  
6 security forces that the U.S. Government had been working with, but also our partner  
7 nations.

8           I mentioned I had a meeting with like-minded ambassadors since I was in Kabul,  
9 and among them were the -- representatives, not necessarily ambassadors, but  
10 representatives from like the Australian Embassy, the U.K. Embassy. And they had also  
11 been working with Afghan Security Forces and agree that, you know, they would stay and  
12 they would provide necessary security. So that was a good thing. And Diplomatic  
13 Security themselves were very positive about the relationships that they had built over  
14 time with security forces.

15          Q    Okay. So is it fair to say that, in your assessment, it would be viable to keep  
16 a presence at the embassy post-withdrawal?

17          A    At the time of that, absolutely.

18          Q    Okay. And what really informed that opinion?

19          A    What informed it was talking to people like Diplomatic Security and embassy  
20 personnel -- embassy leadership about what we believed were the commitments from  
21 the Afghans to continue coming off of a time of quiet in Kabul itself. We had hardened  
22 structures, but I was trying to make them as hardened as possible.

23          So, you know, there's risk, right. There's always risk. When you look at Iraq,  
24 there's terrible risk there, and -- but, you know, wanting to ensure that, you know, the  
25 presence continued as best it could. Was it going to be tough? Yeah. Was it

1 possible? I thought so.

2 Q Okay. And how long was the trip?

3 A I don't remember. I was there at least a couple of nights, but I don't know.  
4 Just two or three nights.

5 Q Okay. And while you were there, you spoke with multiple individuals at the  
6 embassy itself?

7 A I did. I didn't do any external meetings, so I did not meet with the Afghans,  
8 but met with, you know, a number of people within the embassy for sure.

9 Q Okay. I'd like to draw you back to exhibit No. 2, the Mennuti testimony,  
10 page number 12. Focusing on line 23 down at the bottom there. I'd like to read Mr.  
11 Mennuti's testimony on line 23.

12 A Right.

13 Q When she -- referring to you, Ambassador Perez -- came back from that trip,  
14 she was very energized to make sure that the Department, in cooperation with the  
15 interagency, was able to do whatever was necessary to ensure that the embassy could  
16 continue to operate after the military withdrew.

17 And then on page 13, turning over, line 1: That there were a lot things that the  
18 U.S. military was doing in Kabul, and I wouldn't say on behalf of, but that made it possible  
19 for the embassy to operate.

20 These were things like operating the airport, maintaining a medevac capability.  
21 They operated the hospital. The physical security of the embassy compound was, in  
22 part, handled by the U.S. military.

23 Continuing on line 6: And there were a lot of things -- there were a lot of gaps  
24 that the Department was going to have to fill after the military withdrew.

25 Do you agree with this general assessment?

1 A I think "energize" is the right word.

2 Q Okay.

3 A I probably came back a bit loaded for there. Like, let's make this a priority,  
4 right. I don't want to hear that you've got other things going on, let's make this a  
5 priority.

6 Q Okay. And can you describe when and how that energy and confidence  
7 about the withdrawal changed?

8 A When I got a call the morning of whatever day it was to say the embassy's  
9 being evacuated.

10 Q And can you speak to why the embassy was evacuated?

11 A The Taliban reached Kabul.

12 Q Okay. So in your assessment -- I don't want to mischaracterize. But in  
13 your assessment, is it correct that the evacuation of the embassy was precipitated by the  
14 Taliban takeover?

15 A I was not on the phone call. I was called after the decision had been made  
16 that the embassy was being evacuated.

17 Q And do you remember the date of that?

18 A I want to say it was a Saturday morning, but I don't remember. Whatever  
19 that date was. August 16th? Was that the 16th, a Saturday?

20 Q It was in August 2021.

21 A Yeah. Yeah, yeah, it was August 2021, but I don't know the exact date.

22 Q The exact date.

23 [REDACTED]: The middle of August.

24 Ambassador Perez. Yeah. Absolutely. Middle of August.

25 BY [REDACTED]:

1 Q And prior to that phone call, did you have any indication that a safe  
2 withdrawal would not be possible?

3 A No. The airport was open. And I think that was one of the things that,  
4 you know, we -- planes were flying in.

5 Q Okay. And is it fair to say that upon receiving this call, you quickly pivoted  
6 and were able to address the situation in real time?

7 A Yes.

8 Q Can you describe why that was the case?

9 A Well, we had to stop doing what we were doing, which was focused on the  
10 long-term presence. And now we needed to get people out as quickly as possible and as  
11 safely as possible.

12 Q So could you describe in further detail what tasks you engaged in upon  
13 receiving that call?

14 A So there were a couple of things that happened at the beginning of a task  
15 force. So that is not an M function. It comes from the Executive Secretariat, from the  
16 crisis management office that helps to physically set it up.

17 A couple of things. One, making sure that we had people to staff it, working  
18 with -- which was shared with the Executive Secretariat as well, but the director general's  
19 office was responsible for finding people that could help staff it.

20 The rule of M actually shrinks in some regards because my major focus was on  
21 logistics, which was getting people out. We have an incredible group of four retired  
22 military that work for the A bureau, and they contract aircraft. And we chartered  
23 dozens and dozens and dozens of aircraft to fly from Doha primarily, but from other  
24 places, from Kuwait and others, to get all the people that we were evacuating out to  
25 safety.

1           I worked with TRANSCOM. You know, we couldn't do it alone. So working with  
2 TRANSCOM to get their assistance and their support. In fact, they seconded a flag  
3 officer to assist us so that we could make sure that, you know, we were getting the  
4 people out of Kabul. And then from wherever, we had these things called lily pads,  
5 taking them to the lily pads where we could get them processed, and then taking them to  
6 the United States.

7           So I spent a lot of time on aircraft actually, which I knew something about from  
8 having, you know, flown with the Secretary of State for so many years. But just using  
9 that kind of, you know, former knowledge to say, okay, you know, how do we get the  
10 planes in. U.S. aircraft carriers, by the way, didn't really want to do it. We had to go to  
11 a lot of -- we often used and had the ability to use contract carriers from other countries,  
12 and that really helped us out a lot because, you know, United Airlines didn't want to have  
13 to fly in and start taking Afghans back to the United States. So I did a lot of that.

14           And we had a little management task force, but they would also see, is there  
15 anything that the embassy needs, you know, in that 2-week time period. Focusing on  
16 the people that came out. So let's not forget about the people that served there and  
17 now were either working on the task force or maybe had just left in this interregnum, and  
18 getting therapy dogs. And I know it sounds silly, but we got therapy dogs in. Asking  
19 the few psychiatrists that we have at the Department to start making rounds, talking to  
20 people, going and visiting people, just to show a face that senior leadership cares.

21           So not so much engaged anymore with that real focus, hyperfocus, we're going to  
22 do the sustainment, that's fine. And we pivoted completely to let's get everybody out as  
23 safe as possible.

1

2 [12:06 p.m.]

3 Ambassador Perez. One of the things that I did, which turned out to be, I think, a  
4 huge positive thing for us, was -- we had these lily pads all over. We had about, I think,  
5 nine of them or so, so they ranged from Doha to Germany. And I did a call. I was  
6 talking to the charge in Doha one day, and he's like, "I don't know what's going on in  
7 Kuwait." And I said, "I can fix that. I'm going to host a call."

8 And then I brought in other agencies -- DHS. Because we couldn't do this alone.  
9 People had to be vetted. If CBP wasn't doing their job, we had a problem. So I wanted  
10 CBP to come into our phone call so they could hear from the people on the ground what  
11 was going on in Kuwait or UAE or Germany or Madrid or Italy or wherever else they had  
12 these things.

13 But that was a call that sometimes would go 3 hours every day. But it was  
14 important, because we had to really flow people out and make sure that we could put  
15 them in as safe an environment as we were transitioning them as possible.

16 BY [REDACTED]:

17 Q Okay.

18 And who called you to deliver the information?

19 A That the embassy was closing?

20 Q Yes.

21 A I'm embarrassed to say I don't remember.

22 Q You don't recall?

23 A I honestly -- I don't know if I got an ops alert or if I got a call. Honestly, I  
24 don't remember.

25 Q Okay. Is it fair to say, however, once you received the information, you

1 immediately --

2 A I was in the office, like, in a half-hour, and I called my team.

3 Q Okay.

4 A And my -- actually, ops, I think, had done an alert. I had a team had just  
5 come in, because that's how good they were. They just came in. I came into the  
6 office, it was like 6 o'clock in the morning, and there were doughnuts and coffee, and I  
7 had, like, five people there. And I'm like, this is great. Let's go. We're going to do  
8 this.

9 Q So that really speaks to the flexibility and nimbleness we discussed --

10 A Oh, absolutely.

11 Q -- as well as to the commitment of your staff to --

12 A Absolutely.

13 Q -- ensure they acted quickly and with vigor to respond to the situation.

14 A And did whatever was needed, right? I mean, I didn't have to call and say,  
15 "I think you need to come in because, by the way, we have a little evacuation going on."  
16 No, they were there, and what did we need them to do?

17 And a lot of it is just that, you know, just setting it up and getting it coordinated  
18 and, you know, asking them to go check in with the various parts of the task force. Do  
19 they have what they need? Do they need more people to do this kind of thing? Is  
20 there something that's missing here? You know, is there an IT issue that I can fix?

21 And there were things. I mean, things like, there are babies at the airport; can  
22 we get boatloads of diapers in? Yeah, we can do that, I can get you diapers. Right? I  
23 mean, it sounds crazy, but there were babies that, you know, were waiting to get on  
24 planes to get out.

25 Getting more doctors in, right? The State Department wanted doctors there.

1 Surging people. That all happens.

2 And you pivot so quickly. And I think that's one of the things that we did really  
3 well. There was no script. I hope there's a script after this, a guidebook of what you  
4 should consider, but we didn't do it. We just did it. And people were incredibly  
5 creative and innovative. And we all worked 22 hours a day. I mean, you'd fall into bed  
6 and get back up and do it.

7 Q Thank you.

8 A word that -- I know we're just about out of time, but I wanted to put this at the  
9 end. A word we've been hearing a lot is an "entrepreneurial spirit," that people rose to  
10 the occasion and did their best to meet needs in a crisis.

11 A That we had never done before. And, honestly, one of the smaller agencies  
12 in Washington, you know, when you take out the Foreign Service nationals. I thought it  
13 was amazing, absolutely amazing.

14 Q Thank you.

15 That concludes our round. We can go off the record.

16 [Recess.]



1

2 [1:08 p.m.]

3 [REDACTED]. So we'll go back on the record now. I will start the clock at

4 1:09 p.m.

5 BY [REDACTED]:

6 Q So, Ambassador, in the prior round, majority's round, we were discussing  
7 your meetings in Afghanistan in April 2021 when you went to Kabul.

8 A Uh-huh.

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

10 [Perez Exhibit No. 3  
11 was marked for identification.]

12 BY [REDACTED]:

13 Q This pertains to what I believe is another meeting that you had during your  
14 stay there.

15 A Okay.

16 Q And this meeting is dated April 24, 2021. And it states, "Acting Under  
17 Secretary for Management Carol Perez Meeting with COMRS General Scott Miller," 2:00  
18 p.m., 60 minutes.

19 And this was produced to us, as well, by the Department as part of its rolling  
20 productions to the committee.

21 A Uh-huh.

22 Q I'll give you an opportunity to take a look.

23 A Thank you.

24 Q Of course.

25 A Okay.

1 Q Thank you. And we're not going to, sort of, delve into the nitty-gritty  
2 details of this specific document, but more so to serve as a refresher of the meetings that  
3 took place during that period, given that a couple of years have passed since then.

4 A Yeah.

5 Q Ambassador, do you recall this meeting with General Miller?

6 A I do.

7 Q Can you please describe this meeting to the best of your recollection?

8 A I do. I think we met for about -- it says 60 minutes; I don't recall it being  
9 that long. But I do remember meeting with him when I was on my trip.

10 Q And what was the purpose of this meeting?

11 A They wanted me to meet him. The big thing here was -- again, these  
12 points, you don't always use the points that somebody writes for you, because you don't  
13 see them in advance -- we really wanted to have the RS compound. And just to make  
14 sure that he was supportive of that, just to make sure that that would be available to us.  
15 I think, as it notes here, it was used under a NATO agreement, I think it says here. So  
16 wanted to make sure that would be available and have support for that.

17 Q What were your main takeaways from that meeting?

18 A That he was going to be supportive. In fact, we discussed whether or not  
19 we would offer space to other embassies, perhaps, who might want to co-locate with us.  
20 So we talked a little bit about what that might look like, you know, and just to make sure  
21 that we continued to be very much lashed up as they were moving out, you know, and we  
22 were moving in. Right? Because, as you know, it's complicated. You need as of time  
23 as you possibly can to make sure that everything gets done.

24 And, you know, as I said, the one and only time I ever spoke to him, but just to  
25 make sure that he was truly, you know, continuing to work with us, so that it wasn't just

1 somebody in Washington, saying, "Oh, yeah, we're just going to shut off X service on X  
2 date," but that there was a plan in place.

3 Q Did he express any concerns in the course of that meeting -- of course, to the  
4 best of your recollection?

5 A What types of concerns?

6 Q Specifically about the ability for the embassy to continue without the  
7 military presence, or did he provide any specific guidance to the Department?

8 A I don't -- well, I don't know if he did anything to the Department. You  
9 know, we -- again, there was this idea that the Afghan Security Forces would continue to  
10 stand strong, but, I think, you know, recognition that once you have less people on the  
11 ground to engage with them, it becomes more complicated.

12 Q Of course.

13 A Yeah.

14 Q Thank you. That's very helpful.

15 And I know we talked about your takeaways from each of these meetings. Can  
16 you speak to your overall takeaways from that trip in particular?

17 A Well, first of all, I was glad I went, for a couple reasons. One, I think it's  
18 important to show, like, senior leaders, even somebody like me exactly, you know, we do  
19 care, right, we do want to be there.

20 But, also, I think especially for me, the big one for me was to make sure that OBO  
21 was really thinking a little bit outside the box, just to make sure that they, you know,  
22 were doing the kinds of things that -- because I think we were concerned about physical  
23 security -- that they were really thinking through what that might be.

24 And then, obviously, to start working with DOD, getting back and saying,  
25 okay -- again, as I know I've repeated myself, a lot of it was contractual and just, how are

1 we going to get through that thicket of contracts?

2 Q That's helpful. Thank you.

3 And, at the time, was it your understanding that the Department was committed  
4 to keeping Embassy Kabul open?

5 A That was the plan, right, to have a continued presence.

6 Q Did anyone disagree with this position within the Department or at the  
7 embassy more specifically?

8 A I didn't talk to anybody at the embassy who disagreed. I never had any  
9 conversations with people who said, "Oh, we gotta get out tomorrow." But I think I was  
10 just sort of in my lane, you know, which was quite different. I wasn't in policy  
11 discussions where people might've talked about it.

12 You know, again, a very clear, "Here's what we're going to do, and here's who's  
13 going to do that" -- there's a little bit -- I mean, even for us who are not military, you  
14 salute and you say, "Great. If that's what we're going to do, we're going to try our  
15 hardest to do it."

16 Q Thank you.

17 [REDACTED]. Who gave you that direction, then, that made you salute?

18 Ambassador Perez. It wasn't a "who." It's the President's statement that, you  
19 know, we were going to withdraw but there would be, you know, a remaining diplomatic  
20 presence. That, to me, was signaled, right?

21 And, again, I never talked to the President in my life. But, you know, that  
22 statement was, like, "Okay. So now what do we do?" Right?

23 BY [REDACTED]:

24 Q Following your trip to Afghanistan, what worst-case scenarios were  
25 contemplated specifically as to, sort of, the security situation on the ground in

1 Afghanistan?

2 A Well, again, I wasn't working on this. You know, SCA was working on a  
3 variety of scenarios. I was not brought into that in any big way. I became aware of  
4 them later; I don't remember when. But they had a number of scenarios, from full, you  
5 know -- not full staffing; obviously reduced, but -- full embassy to something quite small  
6 at HKIA.

7 Q Do you recall any conversations contemplating what would happen to the  
8 embassy if the Taliban took over?

9 A I don't think we ever thought -- you know, nobody ever talked about, "Well,  
10 what's going to happen when the Taliban come over the wall?"

11 You know, what we did do -- what they did at the end is, you know, the shutdown  
12 of an embassy, which we do in other places as well. We've done it in the past in places  
13 like Somalia and others, right? You have destructions, and you make sure that there's  
14 no sensitive equipment left, and you get people out. And that's sort of the standard  
15 practice -- I hate to say it, but that's sort of the standard procedures for closure.

16 Q And "at the end," that being in August when the embassy ultimately  
17 shuttered?

18 A Correct. Yeah.

19 Q Thank you.

20 BY [REDACTED]:

21 Q What was the first time that you contemplated the Taliban taking Kabul?

22 A I never -- I never contemplated the Taliban. I'm not saying -- I didn't say  
23 that. I was saying that, if an embassy closes, there is always a procedure to go through.

24 I, personally -- I'm not an expert, right? So I think I have mentioned to you, I  
25 didn't have anything -- I've never worked on Afghan policy. I don't know the Taliban. I

1 mean, if they were sitting in the room, you'd have to say to me, "These are Taliban,"  
2 right? I've seen the pictures --

3 [REDACTED]: You might recognize them --

4 Ambassador Perez. I might recognize --

5 [REDACTED]: -- without the need to --

6 Ambassador Perez. -- them if, you know, they've got the hats on, but that's  
7 about it. But I wouldn't know anybody.

8 So I just want to be clear here, you know, it wasn't that I thought, oh, the Taliban  
9 are going to do this or that. But we do have procedures for closing embassies. And it  
10 happens, unfortunately, more than you would think, right?

11 And so part of it's the destruction of documents, it's destruction of classified  
12 equipment, those kinds of things. You have a checklist that you go through.

13 BY [REDACTED]:

14 Q And do you think that closing an embassy because the Taliban had taken  
15 over a country and a capital -- would that be a unique reason to close an embassy?

16 A Embassies close for lots of different reasons, and sometimes they're  
17 short-term and sometimes they're not. Right? So sometimes they're suspended  
18 because there is a crisis of a moment in a country and you can't really exist there.  
19 Sometimes there is a natural disaster. So there are lots of reasons to do it, and it really  
20 depends.

21 I think we Americans are always positive. You know, we don't want to admit  
22 defeat. And, again, I'm not an Afghanistan expert, but as a diplomat, you want to say, "I  
23 want to be in this country as long as possible," because you forge relationships with those  
24 people and you want to continue that. I mean, it's all Pollyannaish, but it is what it is,  
25 right?

1           And I think that especially -- again, I had never been to Afghanistan. I've talked  
2 to people that served there. There was such a bond. That doesn't happen all the time.  
3 Many people did multiple tours. I didn't, you know, for a variety of reasons, but many  
4 people did, and there was that bond there. So you don't want to give that bond up.

5           But I also think we're optimists, right? I want this to work. I want that -- the  
6 military comes and goes. That's not how you want to have a relationship, based on the  
7 military. You want to have a relationship based on diplomatic engagement. Me,  
8 personally.

9           BY [REDACTED]:

10          Q Thank you, Ambassador.

11           So it's our understanding that Secretary Blinken also visited Afghanistan in April of  
12 2021. Were you aware of that trip? Or were you at any point involved in that trip?

13          A No. I don't remember that. I don't remember that, honestly.

14          Q To the best of your knowledge, did any other senior Department leaders visit  
15 Afghanistan between President Biden's April 14th announcement and the start of the  
16 emergency evacuation in August 2021?

17          A I don't know. Honestly, I don't remember. I don't know.

18          Q Can you -- or did you -- first question -- have any meetings with Afghan  
19 officials before mid-August 2021, whether remotely or in person?

20          A I never met with an Afghan official.

21          Q By phone either?

22          A Nothing.

23          Q So I want to transition now to the meetings and touchpoints. I know we  
24 briefly discussed this earlier today, specifically about regularly scheduled meetings or  
25 briefings --

1 A Uh-huh.

2 Q -- with respect to the withdrawal. But can you speak a bit more, sort of  
3 elaborate on who the participants in those regularly scheduled meetings within M were?

4 A Uh-huh. So I think we mentioned I could have -- you know, DS would be on  
5 the line; OBO, Overseas Business Operations. I just got reminded by looking at this, the  
6 aid bureau, because a lot of it was contracts we were trying to figure out. The bureau.  
7 The post.

8 Q Uh-huh.

9 A I tried to keep them relatively small. I didn't want to have -- like, you know,  
10 you find when you start having a thousand people on the phone, nobody's got anything  
11 to say. So I just didn't have, like, a huge number of people. It was mostly internal to  
12 State.

13 Med, of course. Maybe somebody from the IRM Bureau, if I had an IT issue that  
14 we were trying to, you know, work through.

15 Q Uh-huh.

16 A Probably that was it. And I had my -- one of my special assistants on, you  
17 know.

18 And then on the interagency, pretty much the same crowd.

19 Q And was the regional bureau represented in the interagency as well --

20 A Yes.

21 Q -- so SCA?

22 A Yeah. I just wanted to make sure the regional bureau and the post was on  
23 those calls, you know, because it's a lot easier than me trying to, like, back-brief  
24 everybody. So I wanted the right people on the call, but not everybody on the call,  
25 right? So --



1 Q That makes sense.

2 A Yeah.

3 Q And in terms of the interagency, do you recall how often those meetings  
4 happened?

5 A So that's what I'm trying to remember. I mean, at least every other week,  
6 but maybe more frequently.

7 For example, when we started -- I hate to say this, but -- going down the rabbit  
8 hole on contracting, then the people I was working with said, "Oh, no, you need to go talk  
9 to this part of DOD. They do contracting." So then we had a couple of phone calls with  
10 those people where I could get the contracting experts on my side into the call with the  
11 people on their side. Again, I'm not a contracting expert, but I knew enough that I had  
12 to have them talking to each other.

13 So some of them were bigger and, you know, broader, but then some of them got  
14 down to these more narrow areas that we really needed to sort of sort out.

15 Q That makes sense.

16 A Yeah.

17 Q And when did those meetings start at the interagency level, to the best of  
18 your recollection?

19 A Shortly after I came back. Like, once I came back, I was like, gotta go.

20 Q And when did they continue until? I imagine --

21 A Until I got the phone call, which -- again, I think it was Ops Center that called  
22 me and said, you know, the embassy is being evacuated. So we continued. There was  
23 a lot of work to do, right? And we were working hard to get it done.

24 Q Do you recall any tabletop exercises taking place during that period, so  
25 between April 14th until August?

1           A    So DOD hosted two tabletop exercises -- one in, like, May, and one in  
2 August.

3           Q    Thank you.   And did you participate in those?

4           A    I attended.   I wouldn't say "participate" is the right word.

5           Q    Do you recall who else from the Department attended those meetings?

6           A    Yes.   Brian McKeon, Mark Evans, and somebody from Consular Affairs.   I  
7 don't remember who, but I do remember somebody from Consular Affairs, at least on the  
8 second one, maybe not on the first one.

9           Q    That's helpful.   Thank you.

10           A    Ambassador, I know we also briefly touched upon this in your testimony earlier  
11 today, but it's our understanding that, over the course of 2021, prior to the emergency  
12 evacuation, there was discussion and deliberation in the Department about reducing  
13 Embassy Kabul's footprint, correct?

14           A    [Nonverbal response.]

15           Q    Can you speak to who provided this direction or where this came from?

16           A    Well, I'm not aware of discussions internal to the Department.

17           A    So this is normally how it works, and this is how I saw it, but with the  
18 understanding, I approve it, but I'm not the one who initiates who goes and who stays.

19           Q    Uh-huh.

20           A    So generally what happens:   Any time we do a departure status, embassies  
21 are supposed to have lists set up in advance.   They're supposed to be -- and there's  
22 levels.   There's, like, an authorized departure, where you want to maybe to get family  
23 members out, children -- obviously not relevant in this case -- and those who are really  
24 not needed, as determined by the Ambassador.   And then we have ordered departure,  
25 where you go down to slightly smaller staff.   So that's normal.

1           So generally what happens is, post decides who they want to keep or not. And  
2 then that goes back to the Department, through the bureau. And then those come  
3 up -- then they get looked at, and then they come up to me to sign, not who leaves but  
4 who gets to go in. So they'll go ahead and take people out.

5           And, then, if somebody wants to come in, as I mentioned earlier, they have to  
6 come and get approval to go in.

7           Q    Uh-huh.

8           A    So I'm not aware if there were other discussions internally about this one  
9 gets to stay and this one gets to leave. But there was recognition that, if we were going  
10 to get the right people in to do the kinds of safety stuff we needed, there weren't enough  
11 beds. We're not going to have people sleeping on the floor. So that sort of drove a lot  
12 of this, was to get anything offshore, if possible, out so we could get people in.

13          Q    Yeah, that's helpful. Thank you.

14          Do you recall what Diplomatic Security's position was on reducing the embassy's  
15 footprint and/or staffing?

16          A    I do not remember having a conversation with them.

17          By the way, generally, when we talk about who's included and who's not, DS stays,  
18 right? We're talking about a budget officer or -- you know, I mean, we're talking about  
19 that kind of thing.

20          Also, we were very much focused on SIVs, so we didn't want to let consular people  
21 go, because we wanted to continue to process as many SIVs as we could.

22          Q    Right.

23          And when speaking about the reduction, we of course understand, you know,  
24 there are multiple, sort of, stages, one of those being the initiation of the discussion, and  
25 then the actual, sort of, who stays, who goes. So I think our focus is more on, sort of,

1 the idea of reducing the footprint and the discussions that followed, not necessarily, you  
2 know, which individuals.

3 A Right.

4 Q Do you recall what Ambassador Wilson's position was on reducing the  
5 footprint?

6 A He wanted to do it, because -- and we talked about it when I was there. I  
7 mean, this ordered departure happened right after I came back.

8 Q Okay.

9 A But he was the one that initiated it, because he -- you know, when we talked  
10 about what we would need to do to enhance security, he's like, "Well, I don't have  
11 space." And I'm like, "Well, let's do a departure," right, "and you can start to decide  
12 who gets to go," right?

13 Q That's helpful. Thank you.

14 A Yeah.

15 Q And when did you first get the impression that the situation on the ground in  
16 Afghanistan was deteriorating and that the Taliban was making significant gains?

17 A So I think I have to -- we always talked about Kabul, right? I was not  
18 engaged with what was happening elsewhere in the country because we didn't have  
19 diplomatic presence there. So, you know, if the Taliban was making some gains  
20 someplace, that wasn't part of the discourse, because the discourse I was having was  
21 about Kabul. And Kabul continued to be safe and quiet.

22 Q Was there consideration given to the fact that the safety of Kabul would be  
23 impacted by the sustainability of, sort of, the Afghan Government? And given the fact  
24 that the government expanded to the whole country, I would imagine that, you know, the  
25 Taliban's gains would necessarily impact the host country, so the host government in that

1 instance.

2 A Again, I am not an expert. I was focused on the security forces that were  
3 in --

4 Q Kabul.

5 A -- Kabul. And my recollection is that there was no diminution of those  
6 security services in Kabul. Again, that's all I recall. I -- so --

7 Q That's completely fair.

8 A Okay.

9 Q When did your impressions of that calm in Kabul change?

10 A It didn't sink in until it fell. I mean, I've got to admit, I think we were all  
11 like, how did this happen?

12 Q Were you aware --

13 A You know -- yeah, I mean, but -- but this happens, right?

14 Q Of course.

15 A I mean, like, everything's fine, and then there's, like, one -- that's what  
16 makes them a crisis, because, you know -- anyways.

17 Q And I apologize, I interrupted you.

18 A No, that's okay.

19 Q Were you aware of an early-May Kabul school bombing at the hands of the  
20 Taliban? Was that ever discussed?

21 A Yes. That was -- it was raised on a call.

22 Q Did this change your impression of the calm in the city at all?

23 A We had a discussion about it. It was sort of the one time that there was an  
24 incident. The embassy at the time said, you know, this was not directed at any  
25 foreigners. It was quite a ways away from where the green zone was, relatively

1 contained to that area. Very tragic, but people there, they believed it was more of an  
2 outlier than a harbinger for something for the future.

3 Q And in terms of the territorial gains in May, June, and July in 2021, did that  
4 impact the assessment further in Kabul throughout -- as, sort of, this expanded  
5 throughout the summer months?

6 A Whose assessment?

7 Q I believe these territorial -- so the mapping of the Taliban's territorial gains,  
8 did that impact the Department's assessment of the mission's sustainability?

9 A For what I was working on, no. Again, Kabul itself, very specific. So far, so  
10 good, right --

11 Q Uh-huh.

12 A -- at that time.

13 Q Did you at any point become aware of the Taliban's attack against the  
14 Afghan Minister of Defense in early August 2021?

15 A No. What happened? I don't remember.

16 Q I believe that the Taliban attempted to carry out an attack against the --

17 A Oh, really? Okay.

18 Q -- Afghan Defense Minister.

19 Throughout the period, what was your impression of the Afghan Government?

20 A From the outside, like, an American citizen, I mean, working with us -- you  
21 know, look, I didn't ever talk to them. We didn't really discuss the workings of the  
22 Afghan Government.

23 I hate to say it, but my calls were a little bit more tactical than they were strategic  
24 or anything. So it wasn't really something to be discussed. We just sort of got into,  
25 "When are you getting those trucks? When's that stuff going to fly in so we can do X, Y,

1 and Z? How's that hospital going, Joe?" That kind of thing, right?

2 Q Operational issues.

3 A Operational issues. Yeah.

4 Q Ambassador, are you familiar with the July 2021 Dissent Channel cable sent  
5 by State Department employees within Embassy Kabul?

6 A I read about it in the press.

7 Q Are you aware of any specific action the Department took in response to the  
8 Dissent Cable?

9 A I wouldn't, because the way the Dissent Channel is supposed to work is, it  
10 comes in, it goes to very few people, and the action that's taken is in private channels.  
11 That's the way it's supposed to work.

12 Q Of course, given the sensitivity and --

13 A Exactly. And I think we saw it abused, to be perfectly frank, at the  
14 beginning of the Trump administration, when a thousand people signed on to some  
15 stupid what they called a "dissent channel" that got publicized. That's not the way it  
16 works. I'm pretty old-school. It comes in, it gives you a line to the Secretary, and then  
17 they decide. And if you don't need to know, you don't know.

18 Q Were you ever briefed on it, sort of, the overarching --

19 A Again, I didn't know it existed --

20 Q Uh-huh.

21 A -- until the press said it existed. And I don't remember when that is.

22 Q So I want to come back to engagement between M and the DOD during  
23 State Department's withdrawal planning.

24 A Uh-huh.

25 Q We talked about some of the functions that DOD was performing. Can you

1 please elaborate on what those functions were that the State Department had to take  
2 over, to the best of your ability?

3 A So they had equipment. I think we talked about the C-RAMs out at the  
4 airport. They had -- I don't remember what it's called -- one of those [REDACTED].  
5 [REDACTED]: So anything more than that, if you want more details, to the extent  
6 you know them, we should be in a classified setting.

7 Ambassador Perez. Okay.

8 [REDACTED]: As to those two specific things.

9 Ambassador Perez. Okay.

10 So all I will say is, they had equipment that we didn't have, and we had to figure  
11 out how we could maintain that.

12 BY [REDACTED]:

13 Q That's helpful. Thank you.

14 And I think this next question hopefully doesn't touch upon that. Where did  
15 things stand by mid-August 2021 in terms of, sort of, being able to replicate or perform  
16 those functions?

17 A I think on some of the contracting things we were in a pretty good place to  
18 go, right? If I recall, DOD was willing to let the contracts -- you know, trying to work  
19 through the modalities of sort of getting through that. Again, this is not -- we're not  
20 talking about uniformed military doing this. We were in pretty good shape to go.  
21 Because those are, I think -- it was more the hardware that we needed, more than  
22 anything else.

23 Q Do you believe that the process should've started sooner?

24 A You know, I just -- I don't know.

25 You know, I think that the embassy was in a good place to begin with. Again, this



1 is an embassy who for decades had been in a war zone. This is not like, you know, we  
2 were living in housing with pools in the backyard, you know? I mean, they were in  
3 hardened facilities that, over time, had been made more safe --

4 Q Uh-huh.

5 A -- to meet threats, which had gone up and down over the years.

6 So it wasn't as if we started from scratch. It was just more, now that a decision  
7 has been made -- which was made in April -- and then, you know, now we had a deadline,  
8 which was September, now's the time to really kick it into gear.

9 Because, otherwise, you don't really -- what do you talk about? "Oh, we might  
10 go, we might not go," you know. I don't know. I mean, maybe. But maybe that's  
11 also -- people are busy -- taking up a whole lot of time on something that might never  
12 happen.

13 Q Uh-huh.

14 A So I think that, for where we were, we were starting at a high -- I think I  
15 mentioned earlier, this was a pretty -- this embassy team was functioning well. I  
16 thought the security people were doing -- they were drilling all the time. I was so  
17 impressed with the level of expertise and planning that was going on. This was just to  
18 get them that up, right?

19 Q Uh-huh.

20 A And, again, to me, it was getting people into the compounds, get rid of these  
21 offsite locations we have, let's get everybody consolidated. That was what was needed  
22 to be done. And I think we could've done most of that, you know, by September 11th.

23 Q Thank you.

24 A That's, like, a month. That's, like, a lot of time in diplomacy-land.

25 BY [REDACTED]:

1 Q What issues remained unresolved by mid-August?

2 A So, you know, the probably final modality -- like, no contracts were signed,  
3 right? We would've done that as it came time to do that. But we were working on  
4 getting those contracts signed.

5 We, you know, also were talking about things like, should there be some sort of a  
6 residual force, at least, you know, to help us out? We never came to -- that wouldn't  
7 have been only us, obviously. But just, you know, are there some people that we're  
8 going to need as advisors to help us as we rotate?

9 Q By "no contracts signed," what contracts were those that weren't signed?

10 A I'm sorry. I can't give you specific examples, but mainly we talked about  
11 who operated some of the equipment. It wasn't the military; it was contractors. And  
12 they owned those contracts, so getting them transferred to the Department, that process  
13 was ongoing, those discussions -- not at my level, but those discussions were ongoing.

14 I can't give you a direct -- I don't know. I don't remember, you know, which  
15 contracts were done and which weren't.

16 Q Do you recall, like, what type of equipment you're talking about?

17 A I'd have to be in the classified room.

18 BY [REDACTED]:

19 Q You mentioned that you believed that most of what was outstanding could  
20 be done by September 11th. At that time, wasn't the anticipated departure deadline  
21 August 31st?

22 A I thought it was originally September 11th.

23 Q Well, it was originally --

24 A My apologies.

25 Q -- originally. But by mid-August, wasn't it August 31st?

1           A    I don't remember that, but -- I don't remember that. We were trying to  
2 work as hard as we could, right? Again, I -- there was a commitment from DOD that  
3 they were going to help us as much as they could to make sure this transition was  
4 seamless. We were working very hard.

5           I don't know what else to say. Maybe it was. I don't remember.

6           Q    Do you believe it could've been executed within 2 weeks, what was left to be  
7 done at that point?

8           A    Honestly, I don't know now, because I don't have it in front of me and I don't  
9 remember what was left.

10           And I think that we had a commitment from DOD that they would help us with the  
11 areas that still needed more work. So, as I said, it wasn't going to be like the switch is  
12 turned on day one and it's all yours. It doesn't work that way.

13           I mean, I was dealing with -- realistic people were like, "Look, again, we get it.  
14 You want to keep people safe. We want to keep people safe. So, if this thing can get  
15 done quickly and we're going to do it, great, we're going to do it."

16           I'm talking in generalities. I mean, I have to tell you, I don't remember the  
17 specifics. But there were things that they said, "Yeah, okay, you need us to keep that for  
18 another 15 days, 30 days while you sort this out? That's what we're going to do."  
19 They were not going to abandon us, I didn't think.

20           BY ██████████:

21           Q    That's helpful context. Thank you.

22           I want to transition a bit to the Bureau of Contingency and Crisis Response.

23           Ambassador, can you please explain what CCR, as the acronym, was?

24           A    So CCR, in my understanding, was going to be -- this is, by the way, as a  
25 Director General, not M, because I didn't really deal with it as M -- was a new bureau that

1 was going to be set up to deal with crisis response.

2 Q Uh-huh.

3 A The original idea was, it was going to take people from the Bureau of  
4 Medical Services and hive off this new bureau that would deal with crises.

5 Q And where did things stand with the bureau at the time you assumed the  
6 position of Acting Under Secretary?

7 A So the bureau had been notified to Congress. There was one individual  
8 assigned. And the rest of it was still sort of in process, right? This happened very, very  
9 late in the administration and had not actually gotten fully set up. There's a whole lot  
10 that goes -- you just don't, like, say, "Oh, here's a new bureau" and it automatically  
11 happens. There's quite a bit of, you know, work that needs to be done.

12 Q And in "the administration," you're referring to the Trump administration,  
13 correct? Is that when it was formed?

14 A Correct. Yes.

15 Q And who was the one individual that was assigned to it?

16 A Dr. Will Walters.

17 Q Okay. And did you oppose or support the creation of this new bureau?

18 A So, as the Director General, I opposed.

19 Q Why?

20 A So, when I first became aware of this idea of forming a crisis response  
21 bureau -- which, I had no opinion on whether or not that was good or bad -- the idea was  
22 to take most of the positions out of Med.

23 Q Uh-huh.

24 A So Med is a small bureau. By the way, before the COVID, Med was  
25 probably one of the forgotten bureaus, I would say. You went to them to get your

1 clearance when you came into the Foreign Service; you need shots for travel. That's  
2 what they did.

3 Q Uh-huh.

4 A But they do something more important, and that is, they are the  
5 primary-care physicians for every single one of our diplomats and their families in 275  
6 locations overseas. Many, many, many of them are [inaudible]. They're small, a  
7 couple hundred people.

8 So I had a problem, because there was not -- they were going to take the positions  
9 from Med and leave Med with, like, 90 people, in the middle of a pandemic, thank you  
10 very much.

11 Like, if this was that important, why wasn't this, like, the whole building? Why  
12 wasn't -- you know, where was -- I mean, I get this thing, and I'm like, where are the  
13 positions coming from? Well, they're coming from Med. I'm like, why? It makes no  
14 sense.

15 Q Uh-huh.

16 A So, as the Director General, from an HR perspective, I said no. No. I think  
17 this is wrong.

18 And, you know, with all due respect, somebody who's been working on medical  
19 crises -- that's not what Afghanistan was. We didn't have a crisis in Afghanistan because  
20 of COVID, right? We had a long-simmering, you know, issue among various factions  
21 there.

22 So it shows up on my desk. You know, it's sometime in the fall of 2020. I said,  
23 "Look, don't you think we need to, you know, really sort of make this bigger?" And  
24 people said, "No." And I said, "Okay. Well, I don't clear it."

25 It didn't stop it.

1 Q Uh-huh.

2 A I don't have the ability to do that. I just thought that we were really going  
3 to put our medical team at risk and, ultimately, you know, 15,000 diplomats and their  
4 families. And it just didn't seem fair to me.

5 Q And was it that CCR was taking the FTEs from Med? Or was it --

6 A Yeah.

7 Q And CCR was ultimately canceled under the Biden administration, correct?

8 A Yes.

9 Q And --

10 [REDACTED]: I'm sorry. Did you nod to one of her questions?

11 Ambassador Perez. I did say "yes."

12 [REDACTED]: Oh, you did? Okay.

13 [REDACTED]: She said "yes," yeah.

14 Ambassador Perez. It was. I was not part of that process, by the way. I  
15 recused myself --

16 [REDACTED]: Okay.

17 Ambassador Perez. -- because I, as the Director General, had an issue with how  
18 the FTE were being identified, and I said, "Look, take a look at it." There was one other,  
19 which was the cyber bureau. There had been a proposal about doing cyber. So these  
20 could be the best things since sliced bread, I don't know, but you all should take a closer  
21 look at it, and I recused myself from CCR.

22 BY [REDACTED]:

23 Q That's completely fair.

24 Then, the next question, to the best of your abilities, of course, given that you  
25 weren't involved in the ultimate decision-making, do you recall who made the

1 recommendation or decision against keeping CCR within the Department?

2 A I believe it was DMR, but I think it was a recommendation to the Secretary  
3 perhaps. I think he may have led the review. Don't quote me on that, but I think so.

4 Q In hindsight, do you think it would've been beneficial for the bureau to have  
5 been cleared?

6 A Actually, I think it probably would've been more chaotic.

7 So, you know, it's just like this starting up something fresh. Nothing starts, like,  
8 day one, right? So you get this new bureau with people who worked in Med, don't  
9 really understand the Department maybe as well as they should or could. I don't know  
10 how much they worked with the regional bureaus, don't know how much worked across  
11 the interagency. And, all of a sudden, we've got a brand-new bureau that's now  
12 responsible?

13 Like, not coined out of whole cloth -- I mean, I think it would've been -- at the time  
14 of this -- at this horrible catastrophe, I don't think they would've been ready. Right?  
15 Who knows? Maybe from 5 years from now. But I think it would've been more  
16 complicated if they had been in charge, just because you've got people who are going  
17 from a relatively small -- again, I'm talking about silos of excellence here, right? I'm not  
18 disparaging anybody -- really doing a good job at crisis responses that are met with a  
19 medical perspective now doing the world? I don't agree.

20 Q Uh-huh.

21 BY [REDACTED]:

22 Q While you were recused from the process, did you get an understanding of  
23 why the decision was made to cancel the bureau?

24 A [REDACTED], I don't remember. I tried to stay out of it, again, because I am on  
25 record for not supporting it.

1 Q Right.

2 A I just felt --

3 Q Sure.

4 A -- you've got to make your own decisions.

5 And, look, if the new -- if this administration had come in and said, "Yeah, we're  
6 going to keep it," well, then, okay, great. And then, if I had been DG, I would've said, "So  
7 let's talk about how we're going to staff it in a way that makes sense and not decimate  
8 the Medical Bureau, you know, while we're trying to do this."

9 BY [REDACTED]:

10 Q Ambassador, among officials within the Department, were there differing  
11 views on the Department's role in the Afghanistan withdrawal?

12 And when I say "differing views," I mean specifically as to whether, you know, the  
13 Department should be focusing on, you know, expanding its operational capabilities  
14 versus, you know, we're a diplomatic entity, we should be focusing on diplomacy first.

15 A You know, [REDACTED] I was not in meetings where those kinds of discussions  
16 happened. So, no, I personally didn't participate in those broader discussions about let's  
17 do this or do that.

18 Q Uh-huh.

19 I'm going to introduce exhibit 4 into the record.

20 [Perez Exhibit No. 4  
21 was marked for identification.]

22 BY [REDACTED]:

23 Q It's a longer document, but I'll point you to the specific page. Not all of it is  
24 relevant to our discussion here.

25 [REDACTED]. Just a question. This has been an exhibit previously, correct?



1 [REDACTED]. Correct. Yes.

2 [REDACTED]. Okay. So I just want to remind, I think this has unauthorized,  
3 purportedly unauthorized -- you don't have to -- if you're not going to go into those, that's  
4 fine, but I'm just going to raise this thing.

5 [REDACTED]. I don't plan on going into it.

6 [REDACTED]. Okay. Okay. Yeah.

7 [REDACTED]. It's a very small portion pertaining to who you mentioned, Doc  
8 Walters -- or Will "Doc" Walters.

9 Ambassador Perez. Dr. Walters.

10 [REDACTED]. Dr. Walters, yeah.

11 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], could you clarify what's unauthorized within it?

12 [REDACTED]. So, as I recall, there is a purported quote from a senior official of  
13 the Department, unidentified, to Wendy Sherman and then a quote attributed to Wendy  
14 Sherman. And, therefore, that -- any observation on that --

15 [REDACTED]. That might be a different one.

16 [REDACTED]. I believe that's a different article.

17 [REDACTED]. A different one? All right.

18 [REDACTED]. That's a different article.

19 [REDACTED]. That's the Atlantic article.

20 [REDACTED]. Oh.

21 [REDACTED]. That's a different article, yeah.

22 [REDACTED]. You'll have to forgive me. Atlantic, Vanity Fair, I mean -- Zal and I  
23 confused the two.

24 [REDACTED]. You're not getting invited to the Vanity Fair party this year.

25 [REDACTED]. All right. I apologize.

1 [REDACTED]: This was published in Vanity Fair. And I didn't want to make  
2 any assertions --

3 [REDACTED]: Oh, yes. Okay.

4 [REDACTED]: -- as to the entire document, because --

5 [REDACTED]: Yep.

6 [REDACTED]: -- you don't have the opportunity to read all of it, but I'm  
7 focusing specifically --

8 [REDACTED]: Thank you, [REDACTED].

9 [REDACTED]: Thank you.

10 [REDACTED]: -- on page 14, paragraph 2.

11 Ambassador Perez. Uh-huh.

12 BY [REDACTED]:

13 Q And, apologies, by "paragraph 2," I meant the second paragraph to the  
14 bottom --

15 A Oh.

16 Q -- so where it starts, "But OpMed did not stay quiet." That was my mistake.

17 A Oh.

18 So Dr. Walters, a man who I never met until I became M, by the way -- I didn't  
19 know him from anybody else in the Department -- I used to meet with him on a regular  
20 basis, maybe twice a month. And we met a handful of times between May and July,  
21 then he went on leave, and eventually resigned.

22 We talked about medevacs. I mean, the idea that -- I was familiar with what his  
23 capabilities were in terms of airlift. They had, I think, one or two 747s that they had  
24 available, and then they had a bunch of small planes, you know, G5s kind of thing. And  
25 we used those smaller planes as medevac options, and we also had access, if required, to

1 those planes.

2 You know, for him to talk to me about contingency planning, it would've been in  
3 the context of medevacs. And we ended up with a hybrid, actually, which was to keep  
4 some helicopters on the ground in Kabul and then have his aircraft stationed in Dubai so  
5 we could have a little bit of both.

6 Q Uh-huh.

7 A And it was redundant, but I thought it was important that we have  
8 redundancy.

9 So I don't recall this being about contingency planning per se, but more on the -- it  
10 was the medevac stuff. That's what he did for me.

11 And, initially, he also helped to deliver vaccines, until we figured out a way to do it  
12 commercially at much less cost.

13 Q So was it your understanding that when we was warning the Department  
14 that it needed to, quote, "ramp up its contingency planning," that he was limiting it to,  
15 sort of, the medevac functions or that it was --

16 A I don't recall a conversation that I had with him about ramping up  
17 contingency --

18 Q Okay.

19 A -- as it appears to be here, State planning.

20 Q Do you recall anyone issuing these warnings to you within the Department  
21 about the need to ramp up contingency planning?

22 A Again, I was in a very different part of this. Even the fact that -- I notice, in  
23 the previous paragraph, they talk about this NEO Working Group. I never attended a  
24 NEO Working Group meeting.

25 Q Uh-huh.

1 Focusing, sort of, on the Office of Operational Medicine, so OpMed, that was the  
2 office that Dr. Walters came from, correct?

3 A Uh-huh. It was a subset of Med.

4 Q And can you speak to what its functions were, of OpMed for short?

5 A As much as I knew, again, not that I had the opportunity of working with  
6 them, OpMed was a directorate within Med. They have one for psychiatric services, and  
7 they have one for clinical services, and they had OpMed.

8 They did a couple of things. They dealt with biohazards, so, you know, making  
9 sure that that was managed. They had the contract with the aircraft, so, again, our  
10 medevac program.

11 During the pandemic, they were instrumental in getting the vaccines out, the  
12 refrigerators for the vaccines prior to getting the vaccine itself.

13 And they also were embedded with Diplomatic Security in a program where they  
14 sent what they call "mobile security details" out to the field to help posts in crisis.

15 Q Do you recall OpMed communicating any real or perceived deficiencies  
16 pertaining to Afghanistan to you specifically?

17 A Efficiencies?

18 Q Deficiencies, in terms of planning.

19 A Oh, deficiencies. I don't recall him ever saying anything to me about that.

20 Again, we talked about -- so his aircraft, for example, could not be stationed in  
21 Kabul because the insurance wouldn't allow it, right? You could fly in and pick people  
22 up and leave, but you couldn't sit there.

23 Q Uh-huh.

24 A So there were actually limitations in terms of what this PAG group could do.

25 Q At any point did OpMed propose committing more Department resources to

1 operations?

2 A Like, how would they do that? I mean, again, they're in their narrow lane,  
3 so what are we talking about? I'm really confused, I have to tell you, [REDACTED]

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q So, at the time, he was directing CCR; is that correct?

6 A No. No, no, no, no.

7 Q No?

8 A This is prior to -- this is -- so, no, because the CCR -- I don't know when the  
9 CCR review happened, but the bureau had never fully come together, right? He was still  
10 head of OpMed.

11 Q So he never met with you in the capacity of being head of CCR.

12 A I mean, he was in the job, but there was no bureau behind him, right? We  
13 had never -- the people had never come over.

14 Q But he wasn't fulfilling broader contingency and crisis response duties not  
15 specific to Operational Medicine?

16 A I -- to me, he was the OpMed guy. CCR was an outgrowth of OpMed.  
17 Different title. Right? He didn't have staff. He had his team in OpMed doing what  
18 they had always done, but he didn't have his broader mandate from the Department yet,  
19 because that review's going on. And I apologize, I don't know when the review ended.  
20 I don't remember. But he was an OpMed guy.

21 BY [REDACTED]:

22 Q And he was the only person assigned to CCR at the time, correct?

23 A At the beginning, yeah. I don't think the other people ever got assigned.

24 Q We're at 30 seconds. So, before starting the next subject, we'll stop the  
25 clock --

- 1           A    Okay.
- 2           Q    -- and go off the record.
- 3           [Recess.]

1

2 [2:04 p.m.]

3 [REDACTED]: We'll go back on the record now.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q Ambassador Perez, thanks again for being here voluntarily and sharing so  
6 much of your insights with us.

7 Before I turn back to my colleague to kind of keep taking us through the  
8 chronology of your experience, I wanted to hit on a couple of issues that have come up in  
9 prior rounds and just make sure we have a clear understanding and record.

10 First of all, we had asked you previously about the start of your tenure as Acting  
11 Under Secretary for Management.

12 A Uh-huh.

13 Q Just to be clear, who asked you to be Acting Under Secretary for  
14 Management?

15 A Uzra Zeya. She was a member of the transition team.

16 Q And so that was the incoming Biden administration team?

17 A Correct.

18 Q And --

19 A I'm sorry. To be the M or the Director General? What are you talking  
20 about?

21 Q To be the Acting Under Secretary.

22 A Oh, yeah, it was Uzra Zeya, yeah, uh-huh.

23 Q Okay. So you were requested by the incoming Biden administration --

24 A Correct.

25 Q -- to fill that role --

1 A Uh-huh.

2 Q -- in an acting capacity?

3 A I was.

4 Q And you started that role on January 21, 2021, you testified?

5 A That was the day -- the day you flip over. What day is that? The 20th or  
6 21st? 21st, right?

7 Q I think you previously testified that --

8 A The 21st.

9 Q -- that Brian Bulatao had been in that role --

10 A Correct. He had been in the role and then he left and I came on board.  
11 That's correct.

12 Q So you assumed the role immediately following --

13 A Yeah. There was a -- I had -- I needed a letter of designation, but that had  
14 been pre-cleared and ready to go.

15 Q And your previous testimony was that Brian Bulatao, your predecessor, as  
16 Under Secretary for Management, had left on January 20th, didn't he?

17 A I said that. It would have been the same day, right. So he walked out at  
18 the very last moment. I mean, the change of government I think happens at noon.

19 Q Uh-huh.

20 A Was that on the 21st or the 20th? I'll correct the record if it's the  
21 20th -- okay. I'm sorry.

22 Q So on the day that the administration transitioned --

23 A On the day the administration --

24 [REDACTED]. Inauguration.

25 Ambassador Perez. Inauguration day. At noon, Brian walked out with



1 Secretary Pompeo and some others, and then I started.

2 [REDACTED]. As Acting.

3 Ambassador Perez. As Acting.

4 [REDACTED]. Inauguration day was on the 20th.

5 Ambassador Perez. On the 20th. Okay. Let me correct the record. It's the  
6 20th.

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q Okay.

9 A Sorry. I should know better.

10 Q So did you know Brian Bulatao?

11 A Yeah.

12 Q How did you know him?

13 A He was my supervisor.

14 Q And what was your -- what was his reputation?

15 A He's a very talented guy who came from business. He had also been at the  
16 agency with Secretary Pompeo for maybe about a year, maybe, I think.

17 Q Okay. And did he know that you would be assuming the role of Acting  
18 Under Secretary for Management upon his walking out?

19 A I believe he knew I was going to be the Acting, but it was unclear how long I  
20 would be Acting for.

21 Q But he did have knowledge that you --

22 A I mean, there were no secrets. I don't remember if I told him, but there  
23 were things like that. There were no secrets.

24 Q Okay.

25 A The department's not that big.

1 Q Did he ever seek to discuss with you the role of Under Secretary for  
2 Management --

3 A No.

4 Q -- since you would be assuming it?

5 A No.

6 Q Did you ever seek to meet with him about that role?

7 A I had a -- I had a fare- -- a very brief farewell call but we just -- it was more  
8 pleasantries and nothing substantive.

9 Q Okay. So despite the fact that you assumed the position minutes after he  
10 walked out the door, he did not relay -- and that he knew you were taking that position,  
11 you never had a conversation with him and he never relayed any information about the  
12 role?

13 A Not any specifics.

14 Q Okay. Let me move to another topic that you were discussing in the  
15 previous round, this crisis and contingency -- Contingency and Crisis Response Bureau?

16 A Uh-huh.

17 Q I just want to make sure we're clear on the facts. So you testified  
18 previously that you understood that under the Trump administration this proposed new  
19 bureau had been congressionally notified, right?

20 A Uh-huh. Yes.

21 Q And did you know what -- what the reactions were of the congressional  
22 committees to whom this proposed new bureau had been notified?

23 A Not in any specificity. I understood there were holds on the proposal,  
24 which is common, right. A lot of things we do in the Department, especially  
25 reorganizations, you know, you -- you clear it internally. It gets sent to the Hill, as we

1 have to notify, and then things get held. So that is a relatively common thing to have  
2 those things held.

3 Q Was your understanding that these holds were bipartisan in nature?

4 A I don't remember. I think so, but I don't remember.

5 Q Okay. And generally, you testified that holds -- holds occur if the  
6 congressional committees have additional questions or concerns --

7 A That's correct.

8 Q -- that they want to work through --

9 A Yeah.

10 Q -- with the Department.

11 Okay. Do you recall if the Trump administration proceeded to stand up the  
12 bureau despite congressional holds?

13 A They did. Yes.

14 Q And that's what you were referring to in your earlier testimony when you  
15 said it was not fully set up but late in the former administration the bureau was, quote, in  
16 process?

17 A Yeah. So, see, as I said, I was the Director General when I became aware of  
18 this proposal to set up this new bureau. I nonconcurred for all the reasons I talked  
19 about in terms of where the personnel were going to come from, blah, blah, blah.

20 The memo -- I don't remember if the memo setting up the bureau came from M or  
21 came from -- had come from M, because CCR did not exist.

22 Q And that was Brian Bulatao?

23 A Brian Bulatao. But it went to the Secretary. The Secretary signed that  
24 memo. I don't know -- I don't remember exactly when. I think it was in January,  
25 because this is all sort of a little fuzzy to me. And the only person that actually got

1 assigned to the bureau was Dr. Walters.

2 You know, as I said, it's a really complicated bureaucratic process to set up a  
3 bureau. You have to -- I mean, it's craziness, but you have to come up with rules and  
4 regulations. There's FAM that has to be drafted. And you have to move people from  
5 one organization cold into another, and this takes time. So nobody else had been  
6 moved at the time that the actual transition took place.

7 So Dr. Walters was in the job, but he was also still in OpMed, right. And he was  
8 sitting in OpMed. His team was in OpMed. They were not part of CCR.

9 Q So your understanding is that by the end of the Trump administration,  
10 Secretary Pompeo had signed a memo standing up the CCR bureau --

11 A Right.

12 Q -- notwithstanding what you understood to be bipartisan congressional holds  
13 on that new bureau?

14 A Again, I wasn't engaged in any of this, but -- and I never would have seen the  
15 memo that approved the standing up of the bureau. But, yes, I was told, I don't  
16 remember by whom, that the bureau was now --

17 Q Okay.

18 A -- approved.

19 Q And so the bureau that had been stood up by Secretary Pompeo at the very  
20 end of his tenure, you said there was one individual assigned to that bureau. That was  
21 Dr. Walters.

22 A Correct.

23 Q Can you give us a sense, what was Dr. Walters' reputation in the  
24 Department?

25 A You know, I never -- this is interesting. I never knew him. He -- I thought

1 he was somebody who was actually brandnew to the Department, because you would  
2 think -- you know, as you get more senior, you think you know everybody. And I had  
3 never come across him.

4 But evidently he had been there for a number of years. He had come in out of  
5 the military. He had helped with, you know, other crises, I guess, in the past. You  
6 know, sometimes we -- so, for example, when we are trying to recover illegal -- unlawful  
7 detainees from places overseas, you know, he had helped with those kinds of efforts.

8 But I didn't know him from Adam. I know -- only thing I will say is that as  
9 Director General, I was aware that -- that at least Under Secretary Bulatao thought very  
10 highly of him, thought he was a good manager and a good physician.

11 Q And you said he was the director of OpMed.

12 A Correct. Which, understand, Bureau of Medicine, directorates, right.

13 Q And to whom did he report in the role as director of OpMed?

14 A Well, so he -- normally, when you have a directorate, you're like a deputy  
15 assistant secretary level, you would report through the principal deputy to the director  
16 of -- the assistant secretary or assistant secretary equivalent.

17 Q So that would have been through Dr. Otto --

18 A Correct. But in this case --

19 Q -- to Dr. Padget.

20 A Yeah, to doctor -- from doctor -- yes.

21 But in this case, that did not happen. There was a different org chart that was  
22 made, and he reported directly to the medical director and not through the principal  
23 deputy.

24 Q So he reported directly to Dr. Padget.

25 A To Dr. Padget, yeah, and not to Dr. Otto.

1 Q Do you know what the reason for that was?

2 A I'm not sure. I think -- I don't know. It was something that Brian Bulatao  
3 did. He showed me the org chart. I said that's very unusual.

4 Q But it's your understanding that Under Secretary Bulatao had revised the  
5 organizational chart?

6 A He did. It didn't -- it was not my decision.

7 Q To remove that layer of reporting --

8 A Right. And to move him so he reported directly to Dr. Padgett.

9 Q And the role that Dr. Walters had been assigned to in the CCR bureau when  
10 it was stood up, that was as the head of the new bureau?

11 A That's correct. So he would have moved from being a deputy assistant  
12 secretary to being an assistant secretary equivalent with his own bureau.

13 Q So is that considered a promotion?

14 A You know, in the senior ranks there's no more money but, yes, more  
15 responsibility, more prestige. Now, it's a different level, right. Like, I was the DG. I  
16 was Acting M. I got paid not a nickel more for the pain but, you know, it's, again, the  
17 glory of serving, so yes.

18 Q Okay. You testified previously that you didn't know Dr. Walters from  
19 Adam, I think is what you said. Did you have a sense that he was known elsewhere in  
20 the Department? Did he have a reputation, that you were aware of, more broadly in  
21 the Department?

22 A I mean, I think -- honestly, I feel like I was in a bubble, right. I -- you know,  
23 he worked with DS. I knew that. And as I said, he worked his OpMed programs. He  
24 was known on the seventh floor because he was one of the doctors that helped -- that  
25 traveled. In fact, I think he started traveling quite a bit with the Secretary. And so he

1 had a lot of access, probably access I didn't have to --

2 Q With Secretary Pompeo?

3 A Correct, yeah.

4 Q And you testified previously that your understanding is that Brian Bulatao  
5 was a longtime acquaintance of Secretary Pompeo?

6 A Yes. They had worked together.

7 Q Okay. And then just to complete the chronology on this bureau, I believe  
8 you testified previously that the new Biden administration did do a review of whether  
9 there was a need for this new bureau.

10 A Uh-huh.

11 Q Is that correct?

12 A Uh-huh.

13 Q And you recused yourself --

14 A I did.

15 Q -- from that review.

16 And for the record, why did you recuse yourself?

17 A Because I had gone on the record in not concurring with the setup of the  
18 bureau in the fall of 2020.

19 Q Okay. And --

20 A As Director General. Thank you.

21 Q And do you recall what the results of that review was?

22 A So as I think I mentioned, the decision ultimately was not to stand up the  
23 bureau, but I don't remember how long that took. Again, I wasn't engaged. So, you  
24 know, you learn, as you get more senior, you sort of focus on what's in front of you, and  
25 you just don't think about the things that you don't have the time to really deal with.

1 I think it took a while. I don't think this was like a, oh, we have one meeting and  
2 it was done. But I don't actually remember when the final decision was made. It  
3 would have been the Secretary's decision, by the way.

4 Q Secretary Blinken?

5 A Yeah. Because I have a belief. So, I mean, he would have a  
6 recommendation. But just like Secretary Pompeo, it sets up a bureau, I would expect,  
7 but I was not involved. I think perhaps, you know, when you talk to somebody else  
8 more senior, they'll be able to give you a better sense of that.

9 Q Okay. Just to clarify our record, could you turn back to exhibit number --

10 [REDACTED]. Three.

11 Ambassador Perez. This one?

12 [REDACTED]. Sorry. Four.

13 BY [REDACTED]:

14 Q The Vanity Fair article --

15 A Yeah.

16 Q -- our majority colleagues gave you.

17 And could you turn to page 3 of 24?

18 And at the top of the page, at the third sentence begins: Then in July --

19 A Oh, it was in July.

20 Q -- everything changed. Blinken approved a recommendation against  
21 upgrading OpMed into a bureau. A unit distinguished by its ability to blow through  
22 bureaucratic wickets would instead be forced to play "Mother may I," answering to a  
23 series of administrators: a director, an Acting Under Secretary, and on up to the Deputy  
24 Secretary for Management and Resources. To outsiders, this might seem like a  
25 low-stakes game of Jenga in reverse. But the move, which blindsided many, appeared



1 to have profound consequences.

2 Does that timeline comport with your understanding that the decision would have  
3 been in July?

4 A I don't remember for sure. It could be. Again, it wasn't immediate, so I  
5 don't -- and it wasn't as if they came in January and by February we had a decision. So,  
6 again, since I wasn't there, that is completely reasonable. I don't know. You'd have to  
7 ask somebody else.

8 Q And the results of that decision, basically keeping OpMed as it had  
9 previously been, reporting through Med and up the chain --

10 A To me.

11 Q -- through M onward, you testified previously that Under Secretary Bulatao  
12 had removed reporting layers that existed above Dr. Walters.

13 So is it -- does it comport with your understanding that the decision to maintain  
14 OpMed and to not stand up a CCR bureau resulted in preserving additional management  
15 layers over Dr. Walters?

16 A So nothing changed. We never -- in my tenure, I did not go back and redo  
17 an org chart that had him going through Dr. Otto and then up to Dr. Blinken, at least  
18 nothing on paper. So he still had that cut out. I think that's all I want to say.

19 Q Okay. So just so we're clear on this, and then we can move --

20 A Yeah.

21 Q -- to another topic, the CCR bureau was stood up at the tail end of the Trump  
22 administration, notwithstanding congressional holds, correct?

23 A Yes.

24 Q The standing up of that CCR bureau resulted in Dr. Walters being assigned to  
25 the bureau to a position that essentially was a promotion with higher prestige.

1 A Yes.

2 Q Separately, the management layers over Dr. Walters had been reduced by  
3 Under Secretary Bulatao.

4 A Yes.

5 Q And you said -- you testified that he had even better access than you may  
6 have had to Secretary Pompeo.

7 A Oh, absolutely, because he traveled with him.

8 Q And the Biden administration reviewed the proposed CCR bureau and  
9 decided not to proceed with standing it up and returned to the status quo in July. Is  
10 that your understanding?

11 A Yes. But Dr. Walters was gone by July. So he went on leave and he never  
12 came back. He resigned. So him as a person, he wasn't there, right. So I don't know  
13 when this happened in July, if it happened in July, but he was gone by mid-July.

14 So OpMed, there was -- there was -- there was nobody left. There was one  
15 person in CCR who didn't -- who's gone -- I mean, on leave, in the Department but on  
16 leave.

17 Q Okay. So your testimony is that Dr. Walters had left in July, by the point at  
18 which Secretary Blinken had decided to preserve the status quo of existing management  
19 layers and a role for OpMed subsumed within the Med bureau.

20 A Right. So OpMed then was still within Med, yeah.

21 Q Okay. Let me --

22 [REDACTED]: Can I ask one more question?

23 [REDACTED]: Yeah, go ahead.

24 [REDACTED]: You also testified that he resigned. Is that correct?

25 Ambassador Perez. I don't know if he retired or resigned. I don't know how

1 many years of service -- that's a technical thing, but he did leave.

2 [REDACTED]. Okay. Fair enough.

3 Ambassador Perez. Yeah.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q Okay. I also wanted to pivot back to another exhibit that you were given  
6 previously, exhibit 3. This is the --

7 A Oh, this one, the meeting with --

8 Q General Miller.

9 A With General Miller, yeah.

10 Q Exactly. I just had a few additional questions on the substance of this  
11 exhibit. Before I get into them, let's just level set.

12 So your understanding is that President Biden made the decision to complete a  
13 full U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. He made that decision in April --

14 A Uh-huh.

15 Q -- 2021, correct?

16 A Yes.

17 Q And the decision at that time was that the full U.S. withdrawal, troop  
18 withdrawal, would be completed by September 11th, 2021?

19 A I don't know why I think this, but I thought it was September 11th. And I  
20 guess I got corrected. I thought it was September 11th. Again, I'm a little fuzzy.

21 Q So I think your understanding is you had testified previously was that that  
22 was President Biden's timeline.

23 A So if you remember, it was going to be May --

24 Q Uh-huh.

25 A -- which was impossible.

1 Q That was going to be my next question.

2 A Right. So, like, May would have been horrible, right. At least we had now  
3 some additional months to really start to work it with this. And, again, like I said, we  
4 had a fair level of security there. It wasn't like we ignored it, but we had more time to  
5 work on how this was going to actually sort out, which is what I did.

6 Q Okay. So then President Biden's decision in April 2021 to complete the  
7 withdrawal included a 4-month extension, roughly speaking, of the original timeline --

8 A That is correct.

9 Q -- to allow additional space and time to prepare for that withdrawal.

10 A That's right. It gave me time to prepare.

11 Q Okay. Let's go to exhibit 3. On page 1, the first paragraph under Key  
12 Objectives, I'll start the first full sentence after the bolded heading.

13 Following President Biden's announcement of the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO  
14 forces by September 11, Resolute Support, RS, has accelerated its plan for departure,  
15 with a focus changed to an orderly, swift, and protected retrograde of all personnel and  
16 equipment.

17 And now if you could turn to page 2 of this exhibit --

18 A Uh-huh.

19 Q -- the first bullet under the section entitled, "Gain General Miller's  
20 Continuing Support for the Embassy Transition." This is a talking point, as we  
21 understand it, that was prepared for you, and it says: I appreciate the military's support  
22 for embassy preparations for continued and future operations. I have heard concerns  
23 from diplomatic counterparts of allies and partners regarding the accelerated timelines  
24 and the complicating impact it might have on their ability to stay.

25 So let me step back a bit.

1           Can you explain to us what your understanding was of these accelerated plans for  
2 the U.S. military to depart?

3           A     So when I met with General Miller, I mean, he was -- you know, he wanted  
4 to get his people out safely as well.   So he was looking at a drawdown plan, and what we  
5 didn't want was for his drawdown plan to happen so quickly that we couldn't get our  
6 plans into place.

7           That's not what happens in Kabul, by the way.   That's more of like a D.C. kind of  
8 thing, but that was really -- I mean, again, these are talking points.   You know, people  
9 write them.   You never see them to get to post.

10          But that was the idea.   We did not want him to do an acceleration that would  
11 somehow, you know, I'm done.   And we're like, well, wait a minute.   We're not done  
12 yet, right.   So the point here is we need to coordinate and make sure that your  
13 withdrawal is not so quick that we don't have the ability to pick up.

14          Q     So notwithstanding that President Biden's April announcement involved an  
15 extension --

16          A     Right.

17          Q     -- of the overall U.S. timeline for withdrawal, your understanding was that  
18 the military had actually condensed and shortened its timeline for withdrawal.

19          A     They were evidently -- again, I never had any lengthy discussions with  
20 anybody from the military, with the exception of this one meeting with the general, but  
21 they were moving quickly, right.   You know how, once they get started, oh, you know,  
22 we can do this in 3 days or 5 days, and we're, like, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, we  
23 are not you; slow down.

24          Q     Okay.   So is it fair to say that the speed with which they were accelerating  
25 their departure plans was causing challenges for the State Department?

1           A    Yeah.  Yes.

2           Q    And can you say more about these concerns from diplomatic counterparts of  
3 allies and partners regarding the accelerated timelines?

4           A    Again, I had that one meeting, as I already mentioned a couple of times.  
5 Everybody was in for the long -- as I said, for the long game.  We -- but they also wanted  
6 the U.S. military there as long as possible, because so much of what they did was  
7 interlaced, right, whether or not the Brits were doing something.  I talked about the  
8 Brits and the Aussies in particular, who were very much engaged with the training of  
9 Afghan Security Forces.

10           The longer everybody could stay, the better.  Gives them time too to adapt.  
11 What do we need to do differently?  You know, we didn't go into this just with this is the  
12 U.S. Government.  We're not going to talk to anybody.

13           So putting those pieces together, especially when you're on -- you're in a green  
14 zone where everybody shares, you know, space, so to speak.  It's important.  You have  
15 to work together.

16           Q    Okay.

17           A    So I think that was it.  It was just like, you know, let's make sure we're all  
18 working together, you know, and you're trying to do one thing, but we're going to do this  
19 in a way that makes sense.  You don't want to go too fast, but you don't want to go too  
20 slow.  And I think that's the key, right, is finding what that looks like.

21           Q    So then is it fair to say that the military's accelerated plans for their own  
22 troop withdrawal -- you previously testified that it created challenges for the State  
23 Department.  But is it fair to say that it also created challenges for other diplomatic  
24 partners in Kabul?

25           A    I mean, I --

1 Q Or that you had heard concerns to that effect?

2 A I had heard concerns. I think that's probably more valid. I had heard  
3 concerns that, you know, it would be -- everybody wanted to make sure, again, that we  
4 were communicating, it was organized. I think that's the key.

5 Q And do you recall, sitting here today, when the U.S. military left Bagram air  
6 base?

7 A No, I do not.

8 Q Was it prior to August 2021, in your recollection?

9 A I don't remember. We -- again, I think we were ready. I think I  
10 mentioned earlier we were already thinking about, well, what about using HKIA. I was  
11 never engaged in any kind of conversation about Bagram, what if, when if, how if. I  
12 mean, I -- that was totally not even in my radar scope.

13 Q But it's your understanding that by the fall of Kabul in --

14 A Yeah, exactly.

15 Q -- the U.S. military had already --

16 A It was closed, absolutely.

17 Q -- left.

18 A But, you know, we were using -- I think I mentioned, we were using  
19 commercial flights until very late in the game. I mean, they were just flying in all the  
20 time. So we were using commercial flights to get people out, and Afghans were leaving  
21 also on commercial flights. But Bagram was closed by then. I just don't -- I'm sorry. I  
22 don't remember when that happened.

23 Q Okay. Do you recall -- so obviously by August 31, the end of the  
24 noncombatant evacuation operation, all U.S. personnel, both military and diplomatic,  
25 were out of the country. Is that your understanding?

1 A Yes.

2 Q Do you recall if the U.S. military went down to zero troops or reduced its  
3 troop presence prior to the NEO?

4 A You know, I -- I'm sorry but, you know, that's DOD, and I don't track -- I'm the  
5 State power. We're not tracking people under Title X COCOMs. So I don't know.

6 Q Okay.

7 A Good question to ask your DOD counterparts.

8 Q Do you recall that President Biden surged some troops into Kabul to assist  
9 with the NEO?

10 A Yes, there were troops that came in, absolutely.

11 Q Okay. So, presumably, the number of troops --

12 A Were higher, yeah, but they had to do with the NEO (ph), absolutely.

13 There's one other thing that somebody -- that I became aware of. There were  
14 NEO planners that came from DOD in the summer of 2021, and they were there to help  
15 with COVID testing, but also they were doing NEO planning.

16 Q Okay. Let me -- rather than asking you to recall recollection that's 2 years  
17 old that relates to DOD's troop levels, which you've, of course, testified that wasn't your  
18 area of responsibility, let me just go back to the issue we were discussing previously  
19 about an accelerated plan for troop departures that the military was working through  
20 that cut against the State Department's own efforts to plan for embassy continuity.

21 How was that tension ultimately resolved, in your understanding?

22 A My understanding is Secretary Austin said we got your back.

23 Q And did that feel -- did that seem to be the case for --

24 A The people that I was working with on those calls, again, they weren't, like,  
25 super high level. We're not talking about -- in fact, I wasn't dealing with anybody at my



1 level. They were more, you know, deputy assistant secretaries or something. But  
2 yeah.

3 Q So is it fair to say that the interagency, both civilian and military actors,  
4 notwithstanding any concerns that you felt in this April 24th, 2021, meeting, had  
5 successfully worked through those concerns by mid-August?

6 A I do believe so, because, again, I think that when we came back and we  
7 started to talk about the challenges ahead, you know, and I had been there, you know,  
8 the travel gives you the, you know, the -- the ground truth, right, of what it's really like.  
9 Like, hey, here's what we need.

10 We're not talking to people in the field. You're talking to me. I was just there,  
11 right. And I think that really helps a little bit. You know, that helped quite a bit.

12 And, again, I found that the people that I was working with, they understood that,  
13 you know, we're -- this is one U.S. Government. We're going to try to do the best we  
14 can. And, you know, again, this -- and during diplomatic presence, two Presidents had  
15 supported, we're going to do the best we can to help.

16 [REDACTED]: Okay. Thank you. I don't have anything else.

17 [REDACTED]: Great.

18 BY [REDACTED]:

19 Q And is it correct that you concluded your tenure as Acting Under Secretary in  
20 December 2021?

21 A That's correct.

22 Q Okay. Did you debrief or have an exit interview with any Department  
23 officials at that time?

24 A I had COVID, and I was out. Like, I was really sick.

25 Q Uh-huh.

1           A    So in a best-case scenario, I would have, but I was really sick with COVID at  
2 the time I left.

3           Q    Understood. I'm sorry to hear that.

4           A    That's okay. I've had it twice now. So I just had it a couple of months ago.  
5 But I was -- again, I was pretty sick. So I would have done that, but I didn't come to work  
6 for like 3 weeks.

7           Q    At any point upon your recovery, did you memorialize any of your  
8 takeaways, lesson learned, et cetera, from your time as Acting Under Secretary?

9           A    They're in my head. They're not written down. Memorializing -- you  
10 know, I mean, I've been around such a long time. And what happens is these -- these  
11 events happen so infrequently that really -- what really concerns me is that this is once in  
12 a generation, once in two generations. It's not something -- we do a lot of evacuations,  
13 right, but, you know, they're smallish. Smallish, ha. We did Ukraine. I mean, now  
14 we've got Israel, Gaza. But, generally, not something like this, you know, and a  
15 humanitarian airlift in addition.

16           I -- you know, there are things that I probably -- you know, I love this idea, it came  
17 out in the AAR, of having red teams. I think that's a great idea, just to bring in  
18 somebody who could really try to look at a different way of doing that.

19           But I have to admit, in the immediate aftermath of my departing, I was,  
20 unfortunately, pretty sick for a while. And by the time I came back, I was in the DG role  
21 then.

22           Q    Uh-huh.

23           A    So no longer -- you know, I was in the building but no longer there.

24           Q    Okay. What is your assessment as to your performance and your team's  
25 performance related to the withdrawal?

1           A    I think we did the best we could do with the information we had at the  
2 moment we had it. I think we pivoted when we had to.

3           You know, it's not -- these are not static. I mean, one moment it's -- one  
4 moment you're here, the next moment you're there, and I thought my team leaned in.  
5 You know, it's one of those things that, when you're in a thing like this, you need to think  
6 not only about what's in front of you but what's around the corners, you know, to try and  
7 anticipate what might happen, especially during the period of the evacuation itself. We  
8 did things we had done never before.

9           Again, I talk a lot about people because that's where I came from. So we gave  
10 our Afghan employees who came to the United States a \$10,000 ex gratia payment each  
11 to help them when they got here because, you know what, being a P-1 -- this is people  
12 that don't have SIVs. You got nothing, right. You got very little money from the  
13 government. I didn't want them, like, begging on the street corners. Nothing like that  
14 had been done since Vietnam.

15           Those are the things that we need to capture, right. How do we take care of our  
16 local staff so that when they come to the United States and they're refugees, they're  
17 not -- they're not SIVs, how are we going to make sure that they -- that we honor our  
18 commitment over decades of service together with them?

19           So we did things like this that I would really hope continue. You know, this is one  
20 of those good lessons learned. Here's what we should do.

21           But I think my team did an amazing job. I mean, we all worked as hard as we  
22 could. I think we were quick. We had planes miraculously coming from everywhere.  
23 You know, it wouldn't be unusual for somebody to say, Hey, you know, we've got -- we've  
24 got to do -- move this group of people from X country to Y country. And I was, you  
25 know, on the phone with TRANSCOM and on the phone with my team, and we'd make it

1 happen. We'd do it quickly, you know, just really being responsive. People worked 24  
2 hours a day, 7 days a week.

3 We haven't talked about consul. People came in from all over, trying to find  
4 people, you know, trying to get to that one person. Where are you? How can we help  
5 you? Can you get to an airport? It wasn't only Kabul, right. We were sending people  
6 out to heart at that time as well. There was no, you know, lack of volunteers. And  
7 when there was, I picked up the phone a couple of times and called senior people and  
8 said, guess what, you've been identified. You're on the task force.

9 So I think that we did the best we could do. But it does worry me that when  
10 these happen -- again, I'm pretty old, but even me had not been through something like  
11 this. How do we make sure that we are best prepared for the future? That's what we  
12 need. We need something that's readily accessible. It can't be 900 pages long that  
13 nobody's ever going to read. It's going to say, yep, here's what worked and here's what  
14 hasn't worked.

15 To your point earlier, we have come so far from 1989 when I started in crisis  
16 management, which was like eight people, and we did continuity of government and all  
17 sorts of other things at the same time that we tried to help embassies and bureaus  
18 manage crises overseas.

19 You know, I think that we've come so far. There's always room for improvement.  
20 And I just hope this is what happens with this, is that we, you know, we identify the things  
21 that went well. And, again, I think the commitment, the creativity, the passion that the  
22 people at the Department had for this.

23 If any of you -- I had the opportunity to go out to a couple of things. I went out  
24 to the Dulles Expo Center. Totally -- we've never done this, right. Talk about a  
25 contracting nightmare. You know, said, okay, this thing is happening in the United

1 States. What are we going to do? Okay. So we opened up this center. We had  
2 dozens and dozens and dozens of volunteers, people that would come off their shift at 5  
3 o'clock and go work until 3 o'clock in the morning there, people that just took care of the  
4 children. Oh, by the way, we had measles outbreaks. We had to contract with the  
5 hotel where we put everybody with measles.

6 So it was a lot and things that people had never done before, but we did the best  
7 we could do.

8 Q Thank you. That was really illuminating.

9 I'd like to discuss the AAR with you --

10 A Yeah.

11 Q -- a little bit.

12 A Okay.

13 Q Introducing it into the record as exhibit No. 5.

14 [Perez Exhibit No. 5

15 was marked for identification.]

16 BY ██████████:

17 Q This is the unclassified portion of the After Action Review January 2020 to  
18 August 2021.

19 Before we dig into it, were you involved in the researching or drafting of the AAR?

20 A No.

21 Q Were you interviewed --

22 A Yes.

23 Q -- as part of it?

24 A Yes.

25 Q Okay. And have you read the unclassified portion of the AAR, what's sitting

1 in front of you?

2 A I -- this is the one that Secretary Blinken put out in July? Yes.

3 Q Okay. And are you aware of who drafted the AAR?

4 A Dan Smith and a team of his colleagues from the Department.

5 Q Do you know Dan Smith?

6 A I do.

7 Q What is his professional reputation?

8 A He's fantastic.

9 Q What informs that opinion?

10 A Well, he was the Acting Secretary of State. He was selected. He's a  
11 former colleague. I worked for him, and he is incredibly smart, incredibly  
12 even-tempered, and incredibly good at making good decisions. And that's sort of what  
13 you want in a leader.

14 Q Do you trust his judgment, therefore, in drafting the AAR?

15 A Absolutely.

16 Q And conducting the AAR interviews?

17 A Absolutely.

18 Q And in your assessment, when you read the AAR, do you feel that it reflected  
19 viewpoints that you had expressed in your interview?

20 A Yeah. I was trying to go through this to see what was me. I think I was  
21 the piece about they started -- they continued a plan for the continued presence, because  
22 I don't see myself too much -- too much else here.

23 Q Do you take any issues with the findings of the AAR itself?

24 A You know, I don't believe so. You know, some things were done and they  
25 weren't done perfectly. And this was a good way to say, look, this was okay but it could

1 have been better and this or that.

2 You know, it wasn't meant to be, I don't think, this didn't turn out to be some sort  
3 of whitewashing of what happened, right. So if you're going to do a true hotwash, you  
4 talk about the great, and then you talk about the not so great. We have a lot of great  
5 things. We just talked about it, this creativity. You mentioned entrepreneurship  
6 earlier. Some things didn't go so great.

7 One of the things I picked up out of here he talks about red teams. And I  
8 thought, yeah, that's a great idea. Why didn't I think about that? Well, you're in crisis,  
9 and you're not thinking, right.

10 So, yeah, I mean, I think it's a very fair -- let me just say a very fair review.

11 Q Thank you.

12 Turning to page 16 of the AAR, it's the page entitled Recommendations.

13 A Uh-huh.

14 Q Under section 1, Strengthen the Department's Overall Crisis Preparedness  
15 and Response Capabilities, if you could just take a moment to review them, the bold  
16 points underneath the header, and let us know if any of these resonate with you and  
17 you'd like to speak about any of them.

18 A Okay. So the first one, the office -- CMS should be, to me, I agree, this  
19 should be the focal point for all crisis planning and strategy. And the reason I say that is  
20 CMS is part of the operation center, which is part of the Executive Secretariat, which  
21 supports the Secretary directly. When you bury it someplace else in the organization,  
22 it's just not as effective.

23 Q Uh-huh.

24 A The executive secretary, by nature of their position, also does the  
25 interagency coordination. That's the job. It's not the rest of us. That's the job, right.

1 That's why all the other Cabinet agencies have exec secs, and they are supposed to  
2 coordinate among each other. So I concur that I -- I'm old school. CMS could, should  
3 be that office.

4 I -- he had never -- now, Dan never talked to me about this, but this idea of having  
5 an M advisor, I think it's a great idea, right. It would give me another person. I would  
6 have to find that person but get somebody senior who could come in and be the liaison.  
7 I think that's a great idea. Because, as I said earlier, life goes on. You're doing 9 million  
8 other things. And when you're not involved in Afghanistan and you are in Laos,  
9 Xiangkhouang, and you're not getting paid, that's a bigger issue to you than what's going  
10 on in Afghanistan.

11 I mean, for those who worked Afghanistan, it was the most important issue, but  
12 for many others in other parts of the world, it was another crisis. And we have so many  
13 of them and people come in, ignore it. And then they think, but what about me? I'm  
14 not paid this month. How am I going to go ahead and pay for my child's daycare, or  
15 whatever it might be?

16 So do you see what I'm saying? It depended on where you sit. So the ability to  
17 have somebody else who could do that, I actually think it is a great idea but, again, he  
18 never cleared this with me. So I didn't know in advance.

19 And then this idea of working with DOD planners, I think this was the original  
20 intent. I don't know whatever happened over time. But when I was there, that was  
21 actually the idea, that there would be some real planning done and the office would work  
22 with DOD planners. But that was, you know, 30-some years ago. So I just don't -- over  
23 time things change and everybody has a new vision and, you know, it just changes.

24 Q Thank you.

25 Our final question is pretty open-ended. We want to provide you with an



1 opportunity to share any affirmative testimony related to your experience with the  
2 withdrawal, anything we didn't ask you, et cetera. So an opportunity for you to share  
3 whatever you'd like with the committee.

4 A Well, first of all, I want to thank all of you. And I'm going to thank the  
5 majority as well.

6 I came into this with good intent. This organization gets beat up pretty badly  
7 over time. It's unfortunate. We're small. I think we do a great job. I don't think we  
8 get credit. It's almost like when something falls between the seams and it's got  
9 foreign -- you know, it's international, it's on us.

10 And I'm getting emotional right now, but we have to fix it. I'm afraid people  
11 won't want to work in the State Department if they have to be approached with -- it's got  
12 to be bipartisan.

13 I'm sorry. I'm really emotional about this, but --

14 Q Can we take a moment? Thank you.

15 [Discussion off the record.]

16 Ambassador Perez. You know, I had the privilege at the end of my -- are you on?

17 BY [REDACTED]:

18 Q Yes. Thank you.

19 A Yeah. I had the privilege at the end of my career to be in some very senior  
20 jobs, especially as the Director General, to meet officers from around -- around the world,  
21 from everywhere in the United States, places like Cleveland. I mean, I grew up in  
22 Garfield Heights, right. I'd never been anywhere. I came from a middle-class family,  
23 and here I am. Got to be an ambassador. Got to be a Director General.

24 The idea of public service to me is really important, and I don't want that to get  
25 lost. But public service also means we take these, and we say with good intent, we're

1 going to make it better, right.

2 One of the reasons I love what I do now at the Foreign Service Institute is because  
3 it's all about that. It's about how do we train leaders. How do we make sure that you  
4 take care of people? Things are going to happen all around you, and it gets really, really  
5 ugly at times. And you have to be -- you know, you have to be supportive. And it's a  
6 whole of government. It's not just us. It's everybody.

7 And I don't want this -- I just would ask that, whatever you do, there be part of  
8 this that is just truly a short, short, sweet, easy-to-read, easy-to-understand guideline for  
9 the next generation. And I hope to God we don't have one of these for another 50 years  
10 or a hundred years. This should not be the norm.

11 We did so much. We got so many people out. Was it everybody? No. But  
12 people tried their hardest. Every day everybody woke up with good intent to go in there  
13 and to do their best for the American people, for the people of Afghanistan. And that  
14 should be the -- that should be the memory.

15 Were there mistakes made along the way? Probably. AAR talks about it, ways  
16 to improve.

17 I mean, I could have stayed, right. I -- Secretary Blinken was, Well, you want  
18 another job? And I just -- I was done. I was done. And I'm glad I'm back, and I'm glad  
19 with what I do. I just couldn't do it full time anymore. And I had family and other  
20 things.

21 But I don't want that to be the future. I want it to be -- you know, we're here  
22 together. It's ugly. Our enemies are without. I mean, they're the people that beat us  
23 up every day, these crazies. Everybody looks to the United States.

24 You know, I think since -- you know, that year I had -- well, we, again, we had  
25 Burma, we had Haiti, we had Afghanistan, we had Ethiopia, we had Ukraine. We have

1 Israel-Gaza. I mean, it just never stops. The emotional toll on our teams is immense.  
2 And that is something to really think about too, is I think we really got to do -- we've got  
3 to really protect our people in terms of mental health.

4 There's a little bit in here about that, right. What's the aftermath? We're doing  
5 much better. Again, we've learned a lot, but it's just a more complicated world. When  
6 I came in, like, we didn't have the internet, right. Colin Powell brought the inter -- do  
7 you remember when -- you were around. [REDACTED] was not like me. We had nothing. We  
8 didn't have internet at the desktop. We had one machine in the office we all had to  
9 share. It was crazy.

10 But we have to do that because it's just -- it's just so hard. It's so hard. My  
11 kids, you know, they grow up as kids of diplomats. Not one of them wants to be one. I  
12 get it. You know, everybody thinks it's like cocktails and the circuit. It's not.

13 So I'm sorry I got really emotional. I didn't think I was going to do that. But I do  
14 say, if we all just approach this with good intent, I think it's going to go a long way. And I  
15 like to say we did that, right, that we tried to just make sure we understand what  
16 happened so we can make the best recommendations. But then I say, do something  
17 with it. Don't make it a 9,000-page report that'll sit on a shelf that nobody will read.  
18 People don't have time.

19 So that would be my one ask of all of you. And I do apologize again for getting a  
20 little bit --

21 Q Thank you for sharing. No apology needed.

22 I know we're about at time.

23 A Yes.

24 Q So, in conclusion, thank you very much for your service.

25 A Thank you.

1 Q And your exemplary work as related to the withdrawal in particular,  
2 including testifying here today.

3 A Thank you.

4 Q On behalf of Ranking Member Meeks and the minority staff, thank you very  
5 much. And that concludes our round. Thank you.

6 Ambassador Perez. Thank you.

7 [Discussion off the record.]

8 [REDACTED]. Back on the record.

9 BY [REDACTED]:

10 Q I think you're back on the record.

11 Ambassador, I want to sort of switch gears from our prior discussion, focusing now  
12 sort of later down the timeline on the NEO planning.

13 And I imagine I know answer to this question, but are you familiar with what a  
14 noncombatant evacuation, or a NEO, is?

15 A Yes.

16 Q In the course of the withdrawal planning, did the possibility of a  
17 noncombatant evacuation come up during your tenure?

18 A Yes. Again, there was another group that was working on it, but, yes, that  
19 was one of the options.

20 Q Can you please walk us through the Department's plan with respect to a  
21 NEO, as you understood it?

22 A Oh, I'm not -- I was not in those meetings, so I'm not the right person to ask.  
23 I'm sorry.

24 You know, again, what is a NEO? That's when you work with DOD. As I told  
25 you, I was aware of DOD planners that had gone to post to help them with, you know,

1 how the military might support it.

2 Q Uh-huh.

3 A But I don't have enough knowledge to give you anything at all beyond that  
4 really.

5 Q That's helpful. Thank you.

6 The reason I ask is that, in the course of our investigation through the transcribed  
7 interviews and sort of documentary production, it sounds like there are two -- there were  
8 two parallel tracks in the Department. One track was focused on maintaining the U.S.  
9 diplomatic presence, which we've been discussing today, and the other was planning for a  
10 potential NEO.

11 A Uh-huh.

12 Q And that this -- the focus was the diplomatic presence, but there's always  
13 this consideration or understanding of a NEO --

14 A Uh-huh.

15 Q -- in the background. Were you at any point involved in the NEO  
16 component of this?

17 A I was not. I mean, I remember did tell you that I attended as a more of a  
18 spectator, not a participant, the two tabletops.

19 Q Uh-huh.

20 A But that was run by the bureau, is my understanding, and I was not engaged  
21 with that. I didn't go to meetings or anything like that for the NEO planning.

22 Q Which -- and by bureau, which bureau?

23 A Bureau of South Asian Affairs.

24 Q Okay.

25 A Central Asia, SCA, yeah.

1 Q Did your focus shift at any point from maintaining a U.S. diplomatic presence  
2 in Afghanistan to planning for a potential NEO?

3 A My focus shifted when the evacuation started and all of a sudden it was like  
4 how do we get people out and move them to the United States quickly and safely and  
5 that kind of thing. So that was my shift.

6 Q Do you recall or were you -- are you aware of if that shift happened at an  
7 earlier point for others within the Department, for example, within SCA or within other  
8 bureaus or offices?

9 A I don't know. I don't know.

10 Q But it's your testimony that your focus shifted when? Mid-August when  
11 Afghanistan was --

12 A Right. So when the -- when the evacuation happened, then I came in.  
13 And we started to focus again on getting people out. And, as I said, the -- I didn't  
14 negotiate the terms of the lily pads but just making sure that there was coordination with  
15 the lily pads. You know, you didn't want to have too many planes show up in one place  
16 and not enough.

17 You know, often there was a call. How many beds do you have tonight? Oh,  
18 we're going to have 600 beds. Great. The next plane's are coming your way, kind of  
19 thing, just so we could make sure people had a place to sleep, that kind of thing.

20 BY [REDACTED]:

21 Q When did the lily pad planning that you got involved with, when did that  
22 happen?

23 A So we always had Doha, right. We always had -- CAS was there because  
24 that's what we were going to use for the SIV, and then that expanded, obviously, as we  
25 got more and more people in.

1 I did not -- I was not the person engaged with the actual identification of potential  
2 spots for lily pads. That would have been done by the policy side of the house. I'm not  
3 sure who in particular, but we ended up with places in UAE, in Kuwait, in Bahrain. And  
4 then we had a couple in Europe as well.

5 Q And when did your involvement related to the lily pads --

6 A Once the evacuation started -- personally, because, again, I talked about I  
7 was really focused on getting airlift. And, you know, I called TRANSCOM and spoke to  
8 the commander of TRANSCOM about getting somebody on board because my folks could  
9 do some but, you know, we didn't have any real visibility into what was happening with  
10 the military aircraft. So when you've got civilian and military aircrafts and just so much  
11 ramp space and so much, you know, space. So I needed somebody.

12 So that's what I was really trying to help with is, like, you know, if you send X  
13 number of planes to this place and they don't have room, that's not a good thing, right.  
14 So trying to have a more informed conversation about where planes could go, where  
15 could we bring people out temporarily before we can move them on.

16 So that was what I was really mostly engaged with was those kinds of logistical  
17 things.

18 Q And looking back on it now, do you -- do you wish that perhaps you  
19 had -- you had been able to get involved in that aspect of this sooner?

20 A You know, I -- I came to be pretty fast because, you know, I think I -- one of  
21 the -- I think the charge in Doha had actually reached out to me and said, hey, you know,  
22 where else are we sending people or something. I'm like, oh, this is a great question.  
23 What's going on at other places? Because he sort of knew what was happening in Doha  
24 but didn't know what happening like in Kuwait.

25 So that's when this idea of having these daily calls. And as I said, sometimes they

1 go on for 2 or 3 hours every day to just get everybody up to speed, what's the status of  
2 space where you are, do you have beds, what's the government saying.

3 So, for example, some governments wanted to offer us aircraft. Well, every time  
4 you get an offer, it's a gift to the Federal Government and you have to get L to clear it.  
5 One of the things we did was I got L to clear a blanket. Said if country X offers us an  
6 aircraft, we're going to take it for this humanitarian airlift thing.

7 So just working through -- I mean, it seems like crazy stuff. But, you know,  
8 it's -- the details are important when you're trying to move people. So that's the kind of  
9 thing that I was really focused on.

10 I had no control over what was happening in Afghanistan and getting them out,  
11 right. That was really no visibility because it was like a black box, right. You didn't  
12 want to call out there and say how you doing because you knew they were doing. So it  
13 was more just trying to make sure that, once they were out, where do we put them, how  
14 do we feed them, where do we -- you know, and then where do we move them on.

15 Some people moved from Doha to perhaps Germany, right, and stayed in  
16 Germany for a couple of weeks and then came to the States. It wasn't like it was a  
17 direct flight here.

18 BY [REDACTED]:

19 Q Ambassador, were you aware of an Afghanistan NEO working group?

20 A One of those reports mentioned it. I don't remember -- I don't know what  
21 it was -- oh, yeah, it was -- I think it was that in Vanity Fair.

22 I was aware that SCA has a -- you know, obviously, they're doing planning, which  
23 they should be doing, right. So, you know, the term "working group," I don't know what  
24 that means. I don't know who was a member of it. But yes, there was -- obviously,  
25 there was planning was going on, and that's what they should be doing.



1 Q Were you involved at all in that --

2 A I was not personally.

3 Q Were there potential events that the Department identified as decision  
4 points that would have triggered NEO? Were you aware of that?

5 A Again, I wasn't involved in the NEO planning. It was -- the SCA bureau was  
6 really working with DOD on this. I think it might be a good question to ask somebody  
7 from SCA.

8 Q Are you aware if -- once Kabul did fall, you became involved in the NEO itself,  
9 were you working off of a NEO plan or something that had been put into writing? Was  
10 there a plan?

11 A There's always a plan. Whether or not people were following it, I don't  
12 know, right. It tends to be -- DOD has plans. So they would have drafted something.  
13 I don't know -- I don't recall if I saw it or not. Potentially, but I don't remember.

14 Q Did anyone in the Department or, more broadly, the administration call for a  
15 NEO to be initiated prior to August 15th?

16 A Not that I'm aware of.

17 Q How adequate do you think -- how adequate do you believe the planning  
18 and preparation for the NEO ultimately was?

19 A I mean, you know, I wasn't involved in the process, so I don't really know  
20 how much they were working through. You know, generally you sort of sit down and go  
21 through options. And, you know, so is it going to be permissive, nonpermissive? You  
22 know, how many people?

23 I mean, we have this thing called F-77s, which are always a wish and a hope and a  
24 guess, probably not real numbers. But I -- since I wasn't engaged, I just can't tell you.  
25 Again, I was on a completely different track. I know it sounds sort of crazy, but that was

1 like a full-time thing for me to do.

2 So, you know, my understanding was the SCA bureau was working on this. They  
3 obviously had brought in others, DS and others, to work on this. And they were working  
4 with DOD. And at the post level, it was clear that they were engaged very much so with  
5 what that might look like.

6 Q Did SCA or Embassy Kabul provide you periodic updates on how likely they  
7 believed the NEO would be?

8 A I -- the embassy for sure not. The embassy I think was very positive. And  
9 I don't even remember SCA saying, yeah, we think that's going to be the NEO.

10 I think it took -- I mean, again, I think it took everybody by surprise. Remember  
11 the airport was open, right. As long as the airport's open, there's no NEO. You don't  
12 need it. You can get out on commercial flights.

13 And by the way, the Department doesn't use DOD most of the time because you  
14 want to keep the costs down to the Federal Government which, as you say, Leave.  
15 Please leave, please, please, please, please. We can't tell you to, but please.

16 And then, you know, we suggested people get out commercially. That's always  
17 the first thing. The option is not to start to charter aircraft or even, after that, get DOD  
18 involved. That's sort of a last thing. That's a big step up.

1

2 [3:12 p.m.]

3 BY [REDACTED]:

4 Q So, going back to the earlier question as to sort of a trigger point, is it fair to  
5 say that the airport, commercial flights being available, was one of those trigger points or,  
6 once that was no longer available, that was a potential trigger point?

7 A It would change the -- it would've definitely changed it, but you're asking me  
8 whether or not specifically I knew it was in the NEO plan or not. I do not know --

9 Q Okay. That's --

10 A -- okay?

11 Q -- very helpful.

12 A But that would've been one of the things that you would want to look at: Is  
13 the airport open?

14 Q Uh-huh.

15 A But it doesn't always become a NEO, right? I mean, I'll give you a good  
16 example: Burma. We talked about Burma. Well, the airport closed in Burma briefly.  
17 We chartered a flight. We didn't need to get the military in, right?

18 So it really depends. But that's, like, the last level, right -- commercial, charter  
19 aircraft. Because sometimes the airlines won't fly. It just happened in Israel.

20 Q That's fair. Thank you.

21 A Yeah.

22 Q Ambassador, in publicly released sections of the After Action Review -- so,  
23 not the publicly released AAR, but public sections within, a section marked, sections  
24 within the classified AAR -- there's mention of insufficient senior-level consideration of  
25 worst-case scenarios.

1           Why do you think -- obviously, this is your personal opinion based on your  
2 professional experience -- that the Department was deficient in anticipating and being  
3 prepared for worst-case scenarios? And what could it have done differently?

4           A     So I think I mentioned earlier I like this idea of a red team, and I take that  
5 across a lot of other things.

6           The first time I really thought about a red team was in the context of cyber.  
7 Because you get people that are dealing with cyber problems all the time, and you  
8 sometimes think, "Gee, maybe we need to have somebody come in who's really going to  
9 take a fresh look at what's going on."

10          I think that fresh look is really important. Because I do think that, within  
11 agencies, you know, you all start thinking the same way or you start doing things. And  
12 to bring somebody in to really, you know, sort of, challenge assumptions is a good thing.

13          Q     Uh-huh.

14          A     You know, we don't have a -- we're small. We're deployed; that's the other  
15 thing. Most of our people are overseas. They're not sitting in Washington. So, when  
16 that happens, you know, just still having somebody be able to come in and say, "Hey, did  
17 you think about this? Did you think about that?" would've been, I think, useful.

18          Q     Uh-huh.

19          A     It was something that, when I read it in this report, I thought, "Oh, that's a  
20 great idea."

21          Q     Uh-huh. And a significant percentage of the Department's employees  
22 constitute LE staff, correct?

23          A     Yes.

24          Q     So, in the course of our investigation, members of the DOD have expressed  
25 frustration at the unwillingness of the State Department to plan for a potential NEO early

1 enough as the security situation deteriorated in Afghanistan.

2 Are you aware of why members of the DOD may have asserted this?

3 A I mean, I guess that's their opinion. I don't know. I don't know who they  
4 are. It makes a big difference. Is it a staff sergeant, or was it a four-star general, right?

5 Q That's fair.

6 Did you take part in or were you aware of any internal meetings at the State  
7 Department or between the State Department and the DOD regarding the decision to  
8 shut down Bagram?

9 A No. No.

10 Q Before August 15th, had any formal arrangements been made with allied  
11 nations, such as Turkiye, to protect Hamid Karzai International Airport or any plans  
12 surrounding HKIA?

13 A So I think I mentioned earlier that, you know, one of the things on the table  
14 had been the U.S. military supporting the security -- not alone, but supporting security  
15 with others at the airport. It was something we could not take on.

16 Q Uh-huh.

17 A So there was a group -- I was not part of it, but there was a group that went  
18 to Turkiye and negotiated with the Turks to take over the airport.

19 You know, we had provided so much support to the Afghans, we didn't want to  
20 leave this just with the Afghans. I mean, I think the Afghans were ready to stand up and  
21 say, "We can do this," but we felt more comfortable having somebody else, and Turkiye  
22 was willing to do it.

23 So there was -- I was, again, not a member of that team, but they went to Turkiye  
24 and, you know, negotiated to have them take over the running of the airport.

25 BY [REDACTED]:

1 Q Had that agreement with the Turks been finalized? Was everything in  
2 place by August 15th?

3 A You know, I don't know, because, again, I was not intimately involved. But I  
4 know there was at least one or two trips there, and I know that there was a team that  
5 was dedicated to working on that.

6 Again, I was not part of it. It didn't take it off my plate, and I was very happy  
7 about that, but they were definitely working to do that.

8 And, again, Turkiye, I believe, was in Afghanistan, right, as part of the NATO  
9 mission, so was well aware of that.

10 Q And can you explain a little bit more about the team, like, not asking the  
11 Afghan forces to take on that role of protecting HKIA?

12 A Well, it was more than, I think, just the protection. You know, we were  
13 providing air traffic control and things like that. You know, it was just like -- it was  
14 airport operations; it wasn't just security. That's not something the State Department  
15 can do, for sure.

16 So having another country that was willing to come in and talk about, you know,  
17 what does an airport look like, how do you screen passengers, what do you do with this,  
18 what do you do with that, seemed like, to me, a much better option, and they were able  
19 to get the Turks to agree. I just don't know how far they were at the time the  
20 evacuation occurred.

21 Q So you're not sure who was running the airport, like, on August 14th, for  
22 instance?

23 A Well, no, I don't believe the Turks were there yet. I don't know for sure.  
24 Again, I was not focused on what was happening on the ground there, because the  
25 military came in, and once the military came -- you know, our military came in, then I

1 assumed that they took over those operations.

2 But we were working with the Turks. I'm way out of my lane on this. I don't  
3 know. So I think I should probably be quiet, because I don't know.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q And we would like for you to only testify to those things that you  
6 personally --

7 A Yeah.

8 Q -- were involved in and are aware of.

9 A I was not, so I can't. I'm out of my lane.

10 Q No, we appreciate you, sort of --

11 A Yeah.

12 Q -- stating that for the record. Thank you.

13 And before August 15th, did the State Department believe that U.S. troops would  
14 be allowed to stay to protect HKIA following the withdrawal deadline?

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

16 Q Did Department leaders ever communicate to you directly that a NEO was  
17 going to be requested?

18 A No, but it doesn't work that way, right? So it starts with the ambassador or  
19 the charge, who decides things are bad and goes back to Washington for permission.

20 Q And once that was communicated by the ambassador -- who would've been  
21 Ambassador Wilson, correct --

22 A Correct.

23 Q -- who was serving as the charge?

24 Was that communicated to you then? Or when did you ultimately find out that a  
25 NEO had been requested?

1           A    Well, I think when I got the phone call that the evacuation had started.

2           Q    Okay.

3                    In another publicly marked section of the AAR, the AAR states that the NEO  
4    planning process was hindered by the fact that it was unclear who in the Department had  
5    the lead.

6                    Can you speak to this a bit more or elaborate on why you think this may have  
7    been the case?

8           A    So I think what they're making reference to is that, traditionally, it's the  
9    bureau that runs all these evacuation efforts, right?  It's the bureau and the post.  And  
10   this was incredibly complex, and it would, you know, probably have made sense to  
11   identify a person to be in charge, and, you know, that didn't really happen.

12                   So I could see where that comment would be made, but I would say it's because  
13   our tradition is post is the one who, sort of, makes the decision.  They talk to bureau  
14   leadership; the bureaus run the task forces, whatever happens on it.  It sort of comes up  
15   that way, which it has to, because we have so many posts.

16                   I mean, you just can't have some -- I mean, like, you know, if you had -- well, you  
17   do.  You have Ukraine and Israel and Gaza, and let's say Haiti blows up tomorrow again.  
18   I mean, you can't have one person, like, being the uber-person on that.  It just doesn't  
19   make any sense.  You've got to have people below that that are dedicated to that, that  
20   know that country, and those are the people that work the issues -- you know, the Civil  
21   Service, the Foreign Service officers at post.

22                   So that's why it sort of feeds up that way.  And it generally does not have  
23   somebody at the top that's in charge.  It's left at that assistant-secretary level or  
24   whatever.  Because it could be we had 10 big crises going on simultaneously, and that's  
25   just too much.  So, you know, the bureaus and the posts are responsible.



1 Q Would you say that this crisis was different than others given, sort of, the  
2 two-decade-long U.S. presence? Is that something --

3 A Well, I mean, look what hap- -- I mean, it became a humanitarian airlift,  
4 which I don't think we've really done since Vietnam, right? So that was the big  
5 difference, to me, right? And, again, I can't say for, you know, the leaders, because I  
6 wasn't in those conversations, but, you know, we did have this decades-long relationship,  
7 and I think that makes a difference.

8 Q As part of your recommendations, do you believe that it would be beneficial  
9 to have -- for these, sort of, more complex issues, to have a lead?

10 A Yeah, again, we have to define -- careful of what "complex" is --

11 Q Right.

12 A -- but I think sometimes, yeah, that would help, right, to get somebody.

13 But you can't do it all the time, because there ain't nobody who could do it,  
14 number one. And you would have to, like, hire a bunch of senior new people who  
15 wouldn't know much of anything anyway. I think it's best where it is now.

16 But, you know, there are simple crises and there are more complex crises, and  
17 then you get to something like this, which is, again, once in a generation. You know,  
18 maybe that would be a great way to look at that, to have that -- is this something that's  
19 worthy of getting, you know, somebody identified?

20 But it's not the way it's done. And that's not an excuse; it's just the practicality of  
21 trying to manage worldwide crises that can happen at any moment anywhere.

22 Q Of course.

23 A Yeah.

24 Q Thank you.

25 In another section marked -- section of the AAR, it states that another major

1 challenge for the NEO planning was that senior administration officials had not made  
2 clear decisions regarding the universe of at-risk Afghans who would be included by the  
3 time the operation had started, nor had they determined where those Afghans would be  
4 taken.

5 Can you speak to that?

6 A I was -- you know, obviously, the F-77 -- we talked a little bit about who falls  
7 under an evacuation, and we had some text read in to this interview about who gets it.  
8 But this was expanding, right? Because there were so many people that wanted so  
9 many Afghans, who had helped them, to come out.

10 So that's why we had the SIV program. You know, this is unique, this SIV  
11 program. You work for the embassy for a year; you get to come to the United States.  
12 It's great. Nobody has anything like it. You know, the Iraqis have something similar,  
13 but there is more time involved. Of course, we have an SIV program, as well, for local  
14 staff.

15 So I think there was already the acknowledgement, but, you know, the numbers  
16 just grew and grew and grew, and that just, you know -- and there was pressure from  
17 everybody, right? From Congress, from the external groups, from everybody, "We've  
18 got to get people out."

19 That was a completely different part of the Department working on that. That's  
20 not something that I did. But, you know, it seemed to increase. And, of course, then it  
21 doesn't necessarily correlate to an F-77 that doesn't think about nontraditional, humane  
22 actions, right?

23 Q Uh-huh.

24 Ambassador, I know we spoke about, sort of, your involvement, or we touched  
25 upon it, and specifically the timeline of that, that you became involved once Afghanistan

1 fell. Can you speak to your role once you did become involved in the NEO specifically?

2 A So, as I said, I was really involved in trying to facilitate good transportation,  
3 primarily airlift -- not military, but commercial airlift -- to get people out.

4 I was working with the DHS, CBP in particular, to make sure that they had teams  
5 available that could do the vetting, because everybody had to be vetted.

6 And, you know, not everybody was necessarily prepared to send teams to the field  
7 right away and, you know, what that was going to look like, the equipment, and that kind  
8 of thing. So I spent time on that.

9 Did do some HR work. There was somebody else that was working more on that  
10 than I was, but, again, sometimes I was asked to call senior leaders and say, "It's your  
11 time to come in and, you know, help out on this," just so that we had the right people  
12 there to help.

13 We talked about the lily pad coordination calls. Very much focused on trying to  
14 get money for the local staff, because I was concerned about that.

15 Tried to stay away from the embassy, except when they needed things. So  
16 remember I talked about baby diapers? You know, they would, like, call me and say, we  
17 need baby diapers, or we need formula, or we need whatever, you name it, to try to get  
18 them to make sure that we could figure out where the supplies were, get them in, and get  
19 them to the airport so that they could give them to the people that were waiting.

20 We did surge people to the region, and then we did surge staff in to help. So,  
21 you know, making sure those people didn't have a problem getting in quickly, and then  
22 meeting them when they came back.

23 And then, also, as I said, trying to focus on mental health, because there were a lot  
24 of people that were really having a hard -- I mean, I had a little moment here. But some  
25 of our people really struggled as they were on the phones with Afghan-Americans who

1 didn't have a way out, you know, that kind of thing. And so were really -- it was really  
2 hard.

3 That sort of kept me busy.

4 Q I can imagine.

5 A Yeah. It was hard.

6 Q Were you at all involved in the decision ultimately -- I believe this happened  
7 mid- to late August -- the decision to send Ambassador Bass to assist Ambassador  
8 Wilson?

9 A No, I was not. And, you know, somebody told me about it, but I had no  
10 clue. I think I read an article about it, that he got called and was whisked away. So,  
11 yeah, no, I wasn't.

12 Q That's helpful. Thank you.

13 Now, turning to, sort of, the consular activities and operations on the ground,  
14 what was your role in the consular operations relating to the withdrawal, including visas  
15 for Afghan partners and at-risk Afghans as well as other operations during the emergency  
16 evacuation?

17 A So, I mean, Consular Affairs was obviously -- well, we had set up this  
18 new group to work on helping to try to consolidate the SIVs. You know, we did that  
19 starting in July. What was interesting is, there were a lot of people that were in the  
20 queue but there wasn't a lot of resources.

21 I did, like, in March or April of 2021, I did have a meeting on the SIV portion of  
22 Afghanistan, because they need more resources. Coming out of HR, I had some ideas  
23 about how they might be able to hire somebody. So, for example, they were having U.S.  
24 direct hires do the entire visa process. Well, you could hire contractors to do the  
25 nongovernmental part, and then we would have less U.S. direct hires -- you know, just

1 sort of thinking through. So that helped a little bit.

2 But, other than that, you know, the brand-new Assistant Secretary for Consular  
3 Affairs, who I think started the day of the evacuation perhaps, was -- had to be on our  
4 team, you know, to just do the best they could do.

5 And, you know, the process had already been delayed twice because of COVID.  
6 And my understanding was, you know, that, when people had time available, like, they  
7 were processing visas. So if you had a consular commission, you were asked to help out,  
8 right? Because we were trying to get as many people out as we could.

9 But the demand was enormous. And a lot of people were in the pre- -- in the  
10 early phase, where they needed to be vetted, and then they had to have a letter that  
11 showed -- and that vetting took forever. And getting all the partners -- I mean, you  
12 know, it's not our vetting; it's others -- get them to sort of think of how quickly this  
13 needed to be done was a challenge.

14 Q Thank you. That's helpful.

15 Did M play any role in determining which populations were eligible to be  
16 evacuated?

17 A Not -- not -- no. No. Again, the evacuation, which is, you know, in our  
18 roles, was all that we were, you know, thinking about.

19 Q How about in providing input on the number of consular officers on the  
20 ground in the months leading up to the military departure?

21 A So I believe we did augment the numbers slightly. Again, it was based on  
22 bed availability and those kinds of things. But, again, it was only because we had had  
23 these two times when we had to shut down our processing because we couldn't get the  
24 Afghans onto the embassy compound to do the processing because of COVID. So, you  
25 know, we did bring in a slightly augmented team that summer, but I don't remember how

1 many.

2 Q Okay.

3 BY [REDACTED]:

4 Q Did you have a sense of how many SIV-qualified people there would be in  
5 Afghanistan?

6 A No. So it's rolling, right? So you finish your year and then you are eligible.  
7 So I got hired today so in a year from now I'm good, but you get hired next month so that  
8 it's like a month later. So it's a rolling number.

9 But, also, I think a lot of people outside the -- people in the embassy definitely  
10 took advantage of the program. It was a problem for staffing, I'll be honest, right?  
11 Because you'd be going for a year and then you -- not everybody. Some of the Afghans  
12 were so proud of what they were doing they wanted to stay. But a lot of them just saw  
13 it as a way to get their ticket to the U.S., which is fine.

14 But, you know, a lot of others, perhaps, who worked for maybe a contractor or  
15 who did something else a little bit more on the periphery didn't take advantage and then,  
16 all of a sudden, popped up and said, well, look it, I think I'm eligible.

17 So you don't ever really know, because you have to apply. You know, not  
18 everybody automatically gets it. There is an application process. And if you don't  
19 apply, then you're not in.

20 Q Given the fact that, you know, a NEO might have to happen, given the fact  
21 that perhaps the Taliban might take over and was taking over provincial capitals, all this  
22 sort of stuff, would it have been helpful to have a sense of how many SIV-qualified people  
23 there were in Afghanistan so you could have a sense of how many people you might have  
24 to get out?

25 A Not at the beginning, but I think -- because, again, like I said, it's up to an

1 individual to apply, we were always, I think, tracking those who had applied and then now  
2 needed to go through the chief-of-mission process, which included, you know,  
3 verification of employment.

4 I don't -- maybe -- I don't know if there's any -- I don't even know if you could get  
5 the data to look back and say, well -- so, for example, you are a contractor, right, or a  
6 subcontractor working for some U.S. entity. You have 500 people. Well, how many  
7 apply? Well, maybe in your company only 20 out of 500, but maybe in another  
8 contractor 400 out of 500. So we had to try to parse the data in a way to see,  
9 historically trending, who actually decided to go, right? Because it's a fairly large  
10 universe, but you don't really know until somebody applies.

11 I'll give you an example. Like, you know, as it stands now, local staff can apply  
12 for SIVs after 15, 20 years. I forget. It was at 15; it may have gone to 20. And only a  
13 small percentage do, in some countries. In other countries, most of the staff does. But  
14 you have to look at that historical data to determine, well, how many SIVs would I have?  
15 But, you know, this is more common, for example, in countries that are poor, but not  
16 every country is the same.

17 So maybe, but I think the key would be you'd have to get it at a point that it would  
18 be useful. And I don't think it's one size fits all.

19 Q Okay. Had some sort of effort like that been undertaken?

20 A I don't -- again, you're out of my -- I don't know. I didn't do SIVs. I mean,  
21 I'm talking as an outside expert. I didn't do SIVs. I don't know if they did that or not.

22 But it's not the same, right? Again, the easiest is the people that worked for the  
23 embassy. We know you. Right? We've got records. So that's the easy stuff. It  
24 gets much more complicated when you've got something that's quite not so direct. And  
25 that's the piece that I think would be hard.

1 Q So, earlier in your testimony, you had mentioned that you had no  
2 engagement with SRAR Zalmay Khalilzad, and you had commented that it was maybe not  
3 relevant to what you were doing.

4 Were you aware of what Zal was doing?

5 A Well, I know he was trying to negotiate a settlement that would keep the  
6 government functioning. I mean, I knew in a very broad term what he was doing, but I  
7 was not engaged on the day-to-days.

8 I mean, I think the intent was he would work to have a negotiated settlement.  
9 The Afghan Government would continue, whatever version that looked like, and that  
10 would allow us to have a diplomatic presence.

11 Q And were you being briefed on any of the progress he was making or what  
12 the Taliban was saying?

13 A No.

14 Q Did you, in the course of any of your planning, did you ever contemplate a  
15 government that included members of the Taliban, for instance?

16 A I hate to say this; I didn't contemplate a government in Afghanistan. I  
17 mean, honestly, that was not really what I was focused on, what that might look like.  
18 And there are unity governments that work in some countries, but, honestly, I was not  
19 contemplating anything.

20 Q Okay.

21 Did you think, though, that a government that included the Taliban or was  
22 dominated by the Taliban or perhaps controlled entirely by the Taliban, that that would  
23 impact the work that you were trying to do?

24 A I have to say, I'm not expert enough to answer that question.

25 Q Okay.



1           When the airport was overrun -- for a couple of days, the airport was shut down  
2 by crowds and that sort of thing -- what did you see the impact of that as being?

3           A     I mean, I -- you know, first of all, I was watching what you were seeing on  
4 CNN or whatever we were watching. You know, it was horrible, because people were  
5 just trying to get -- you know, they were desperate.

6           And, you know, I can't comment on what planning went in it or not just to make  
7 sure that the airport was safe for those airlifts. Again, others were on site. I wasn't.

8           As I said, I tried not to call, because there was enough going on. The messages  
9 would come to me and say, I need help on this and that, but it was mostly logistics, and I  
10 tried to take care of that and otherwise not engage.

11          Q     Part of the work that you had done to try to make sure that the embassy  
12 presence was safe and secure -- had some of that contemplated that the embassy might  
13 have to move to HKIA? Is that right?

14          A     Yeah.

15          Q     And so, had it ever been contemplated that the airport itself might be  
16 breached or overrun?

17          A     No. I mean, the HKIA option would be that there was a secure space there,  
18 right? Like, maybe it wasn't the green zone, but HKIA was.

19          Q     So the potential of the airport being overrun, perhaps even, you know,  
20 crowds taking it over, members of the Taliban being on the tarmac, that just wasn't  
21 something that was contemplated?

22          A     No, not with an HKIA presence, because you can't just have a couple of  
23 buildings without having some sort of perimeter.

24          Q     And you had mentioned that there was no script for this and that you hoped  
25 that there is a guidebook after this. Do you think that more could've been done before

1 this for there to be a script, for there to be more of a guidebook for what we could've  
2 done?

3 A You know, I don't think anybody thinks there's going to be another Vietnam,  
4 right, until there's something -- or, you know, another big humanitarian airlift, let me put  
5 it that way. But we've come a long way since the 1970s. And I just think there's an  
6 obligation to just have something that really allows people, if there's ever -- as I said, keep  
7 it short and sweet, but here are the things that worked and here are the things you  
8 should think about as you move forward. Right?

9 And I think the Department's already starting to do that, right? I mean, just  
10 really start to be more focused on crisis management and what that means and the role  
11 that everybody plays. Everybody plays a role. I mean, the Ambassador obviously plays  
12 a role, but everybody plays a role, making it part of what we are. Because, again, I think  
13 the world's more complex.

14 But I just like this idea -- I would love to have had -- I know this may not be  
15 relevant, but back in 20-whatever -- 2021, here are the things that worked, here are the  
16 things you should consider. It would've been great.

17 Q So, when it came to August 2021, early August 2021, were you tracking the  
18 provincial capitals in Afghanistan as they were taken by the Taliban?

19 A I was aware that they were falling, because it was public knowledge.

20 Q And did that worry you at all when it came to the security of Kabul?

21 A So, in my discussions that I was having with, you know, these calls and  
22 everything, Kabul was still quiet.

23 And so I'd say, "How's everything?" And they'd say, "Kabul's quiet." "Are we  
24 continuing?" "Yes." And we did.

25 Q And who were those discussions with that you referenced?

1           A    They were the folks from the embassy, from the bureau, from, you know,  
2 the bureaus that were assisting.  Yeah.

3           Q    And just in hindsight now, do you think that perhaps this was too  
4 Kabul-centric of a focus on the security of Afghanistan, given the fact that, as we now  
5 know, the provincial capitals falling preceded Kabul itself falling?  Do you think that this  
6 was maybe too Kabul-centric of a focus on everything?

7           A    You know, I don't know.  Because you look at Iraq.  You know, we do have  
8 Basra -- I mean, not Basra -- Erbil, but, you know -- thank you.  Erbil.  It's very  
9 Baghdad-centric.  It works, so far.  So it's like we didn't have another example of  
10 something like that.

11           If the intent is to keep a relationship with the Afghan people and Kabul's okay,  
12 then Kabul's okay.  As I said, there was another living example, you know, in the region.

13           Q    And, earlier here, you had said that we were still planning when Kabul fell.  
14 What were some of the plans that were still ongoing and unresolved before Kabul was  
15 taken by the Taliban?

16           A    So, in my world?  This is about -- yeah, again --

17           Q    In your world.

18           A    -- as I talked about, they were just really making sure we identified for all the  
19 enablers where we were, what was the DOD timeline or the handover timeline, were  
20 there gaps.  A lot of the gaps closed.  Personnel Recovery, DOD, decided to pick up.  
21 There were things we couldn't do.

22           And, you know, we had a checklist.  I don't remember everything, but there was  
23 a checklist that we would go through.  And as we would get those things, yes, we'll do  
24 this; we're not going to turn that over tomorrow -- that kind of thing.  But it was not like,  
25 as I said, one minute, pfft, and then they're gone.

1 Q So you did your trip to Kabul in late April, after President Biden had made his  
2 withdrawal announcement.

3 A Right.

4 Q Do you think it would've been helpful at all to have visited the country  
5 sooner?

6 A I'm not sure. I had been in the job a couple months. That's nothing, you  
7 know. Just trying to sort of get myself, you know, very much on top of what was going  
8 on. I think the timing was a good timing. As I said, again, we weren't starting from  
9 ground zero; we were starting at quite a good level.

10 But it also -- the announcement gave impetus for people to work, right? If I had  
11 gone earlier and said, "Hey, what about this?" and they're like, "Well, why do we care?"  
12 right, "There's no announcement," people -- you know, "Yeah, I'll worry about that  
13 tomorrow." It's human nature, right? Unless you're not a procrastinator. But I am.  
14 So, you know, you just don't do it. But that actually said, "Well, the President  
15 announced, so now we know we've got to do it." Yeah, I think it really helped to get  
16 people's attention.

17 Q Can you talk a little bit more about the DOD NEO planning meeting in the  
18 summer of 2021 that you've referenced a couple of times?

19 A Oh, the tabletop exercise?

20 Q Oh, no, sorry. I'm talking about the DOD site -- the site meeting that they  
21 did.

22 A Oh, I don't know any details. I only knew because the numbers had gone  
23 up. Remember, I was tracking numbers of people, right, because of ordered departure,  
24 and the numbers ticked up, and I'm like, "What are the numbers?" And they're like,  
25 "Oh, we've got some folks out here from DOD. They're helping us." And I'm like,

1 "Okay, great. That's why they" -- I don't know what they did, but they were there.

2 Q And do you have a sense of what the U.S. residual force was around  
3 mid-August before the Taliban took Kabul?

4 A I don't remember. No.

5 Q Were you tracking U.S. troop numbers, like, at the embassy and HKIA in, like,  
6 May, June, July, August?

7 A So we track those under title 22, under chief-of-mission authority, not title  
8 10, okay? So the people that I was tracking were those who we would've been  
9 responsible for were there to be an evacuation. And that includes military personnel  
10 who report to the chief of mission.

11 But if you're there with a COCOM doing whatever you're doing, we're not tracking  
12 that. Yeah, they're supposed to let us know they're in-country -- I'm talking as a former  
13 ambassador -- that kind of thing, but it's not quite the same, because the responsibilities  
14 are slightly different, right? So COCOMs have certain responsibilities; ambassadors have  
15 others. So that's the big thing.

16 And, as I said, I was just tracking gross numbers and wanted to make sure I  
17 understood if there was a bump.

18 Q And you had mentioned that there were some great things and some  
19 not-so-great things, related to, I believe, probably the evacuation, or earlier in your  
20 testimony. Are you able to talk about what some of the not-so-great things were?

21 A So people -- some of the military members lost their lives. That was tragic.  
22 Right? I don't want anybody to lose their life.

23 You know, we got people out. We took care of them as best they could. It's  
24 hard for Afghans here in the U.S. now. It's not easy.

25 I think we did amazing work. I mean, I'm talking about everybody in the Federal

1 Government. We did amazing things. Communities came together. But, you know,  
2 is it perfect? No.

3 So, for me, the loss of life is always really hard.

4 Don't get me started again. That's it.

5 BY [REDACTED]:

6 Q Ambassador, I want to briefly touch upon your preparation for this  
7 interview.

8 How did you learn about the committee's interest in conducting a transcribed  
9 interview?

10 A You sent me an email, or somebody sent me an email.

11 Q I believe [REDACTED] first --

12 A [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] sent me an email.

13 [REDACTED]. I did it. It was me.

14 BY [REDACTED]:

15 Q I was the followup.

16 A That's how I found out.

17 Q And what kind of preparations did you take for this interview?

18 A I had a prep meeting with these [REDACTED] fine [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], to walk  
19 me through this. I had never done one of these before. You know, how it works, the  
20 going-from-side-to-side kind of stuff. I had a prep session.

21 Q And were any officials from outside the Department involved in your  
22 preparation?

23 A No.

24 Q And I want to give you an opportunity to -- I know that the minority  
25 addressed this previously, but I want to give you an opportunity to speak to what you

1 were most proud of about the withdrawal and subsequent evacuation.

2 A I am so proud that we -- first of all, that, in terms of the actual  
3 evacuation -- I'm talking evacuation now -- we got everybody out of the embassy. We  
4 didn't lose a life. We didn't lose any equipment. We got everything destroyed.  
5 Everything was done. I mean, to be textbook-perfect in such horrible conditions so  
6 quickly, that was just huge.

7 I'm so proud, as I talked about, the fact that my colleagues stood up the Dulles  
8 Expo Center, you know, and turned it into this amazing, welcoming thing. I really was  
9 proud of that.

10 I was proud of the people that raised their hands and said, "You want me to go to  
11 Doha tomorrow? I'm on a plane. I will go," you know? That kind of thing.

12 So it just gave me great pride, for sure.

13 [REDACTED]. Ambassador, we appreciate you answering our questions today.  
14 We have more we could ask, but I think we've -- I think you've actually answered  
15 everything we have to ask.

16 So, on behalf of Chairman McCaul, thank you so much for appearing voluntarily  
17 before the committee and answering our questions truthfully and with sincerity. We  
18 truly appreciate it.

19 Do you have any closing remarks you'd like to make?

20 Ambassador Perez. I think I said my closing remarks. I'm afraid if I do it again  
21 I'll just sort of start --

22 [REDACTED]. Right. Well --

23 Ambassador Perez. -- bawling or something.

24 [REDACTED]. -- thank you again on behalf --

25 Ambassador Perez. No. Thank you so much.

1           ██████████. -- of the majority.

2           And that concludes the majority's round.

3           Ambassador Perez. Thank you. Thank you all very much.

4           ██████████. We have nothing further. Thank you.

5           [Whereupon, at 3:46 p.m., the interview was concluded.]



1  
2  
3  
4  
5  
6  
7  
8  
9  
10  
11  
12  
13  
14  
15

Certificate of Deponent/Interviewee

I have read the foregoing 174 pages, which contain the correct transcript of the answers made by me to the questions therein recorded, subject to the errata submitted on February 13, 2024.

Carol Z. Perez   
Witness Name 

02-21-2024  
Date

**Errata Sheet for the Transcribed Interview of Carol Perez**  
**dated 11/15/2023**

1) majority errata, (2) minority errata, (3) State/agency counsel , (4) private counsel (as applicable) and witness errata

Page	Line	Change	Reason
2	7	Revise to [REDACTED]	
2	8	Revise to [REDACTED]	
2	12	Revise to [REDACTED]	
2	17	Change "Minority Legal Assistant" to "Minority Staff"	
13	4	Change "AID" to "A"	
17	24	Change "AID" to "A"	
42	3	Change "out of the airport" to "out at the airport"	
42	9	Change "of" to "on"	
46	22	Change "A hundred percent involved, no." to "A hundred percent resolved, no."	
46	21	Change "involved" to "resolved"	
47	16	A COR is a Contracting Officer's Representative, not a Contracting Officer	
50	14	Change "take" to "talk"	
50	14	Change "like to take" to "like to talk"	
51	16	Change "And were you" to "Okay, and you"	
51	25	Change "secretary of staff office" to "Secretary's staff office"	
53	3	strike "fair enough"	
53	15	Change "we never" to "we'd never"	
53	25	Change "civil service" to "civil servants"	
55	19	Change "Do you" to "And, do you"	
56	16	Change "second tier" to "second tour"	
57	1	Change "we" to "we've"	
57	4	Change "connected" to "connective"	
58	1	Insert "." after "taking care of our people"	
58	23	Insert "they" to read "but they had some experience"	
59	5	Strike "And"	
59	2	Change "front" to "coned"	
61	4	Change "and a teacher" to "or longer"	

64	14-15	Change "did" to "didn't"	
65	17	Change "specifically, I'd like to be really clear for the record in your response." to "“specifically, I'd like to get a clear record on this point.”"	
73	4	Change "grooming" to "green"	
73	10	Change "agree" to "agreed"	
73	20	Insert "and" to read "continue and coming"	
75	2	Change "there" to "bear"	
76	19	Change "rule" to "role"	
80	4	Change "do" to "have"	
82	22	Change "of" to "much"	
88	6	Change "AID" to "A"	
107	13	Change "we" to "he"	
116	5	Delete "cold"	
117	1	Change to "brandnew" to "brand new"	
117	1	Insert space between "brand" and "new"	
121	17	Change "Dr." to "Secretary"	
125	9	Change "you never see them to get to post" to "you never see them until you get to post"	
128	5	Change "power" to "person"	
129	14	Change "and during" to "an enduring"	
131	12	Change "you" to "you've" (twice in sentence)	
131	3	Change "consul" to "consular"	
131	6	Change "heart" to "Herat"	
132	23	Insert "visit" so it reads "go out to visit a couple"	
136	9	Change "Xianghouang" to "or Chiang Mai"	
136	2	Change "we" to "we've"	
140	1	Change "And your exemplary" to "And for your exemplary"	
141	17	Insert "I" so it reads "I remember I did"	
142	18	Change "plane's" to "planes"	
150	6	Change "didn't" to "did"	
166	15	Change "followup" to "follow up"	