



**Background:**

Ambassador Zalmay “Zal” Khalilzad began his career at the U.S. Department of State in 1986. He then served in the U.S. Department of Defense and the National Security Council (NSC). In 2003, Khalilzad was nominated by President George W. Bush to serve as the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, serving in that role until 2005.

He was then nominated by President Bush to serve as the U.S. Ambassador in Iraq from 2005 to 2007, and finally as the 26<sup>th</sup> U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations from 2007 to 2009. Khalilzad took a break from government service until 2018 when he was selected for the position of Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation (SRAR) by the Trump administration and, subsequently, in January 2021 by the Biden Administration. Khalilzad served as SRAR throughout the Trump and Biden administrations, including the 2021 withdrawal and evacuation.

**Taliban Negotiations Began During Obama Administration:**

1. According to Khalilzad, the first step towards negotiating an agreement with the Taliban occurred under the Obama administration, not the Trump Administration, testifying, “There had been, earlier, maybe a year earlier perhaps, under President Obama's period, that I had received a letter that I wasn't sure was authentic, saying -- from Mullah Yaqoob, allegedly -- that, you know, there was no military solution to what was going on and they are interested for a way out. (Page 13, Lines 22-23; Page 14, Lines 1-5).

**Doha Negotiations Under Trump:**

1. According to Khalilzad, the Trump administration gave him three priorities for negotiations with the Taliban: to negotiate an agreement that allows a safe and orderly withdrawal, ensure that Afghanistan would not revert to a haven for terrorist organizations, and the necessity of intra-Afghan negotiations. (Page 15, Lines 15-25; Page 16, Lines 1-16).
2. Khalilzad also travelled to Islamabad in Pakistan with Secretary Pompeo to meet with Pakistani military officials. Khalilzad testified the Pakistanis did not support his appointment as SRAR. (Page 92, Lines 1-11).
3. During the summer of 2020, Khalilzad pushed the Afghan government to release thousands of Taliban prisoners because the Taliban refused to negotiate with the Afghan government without the release.
  - a. “I did. And the Secretary of State did, and others. Because, as part of the agreement, there was -- after the signing, before beginning intra-Afghan negotiations, the Talibs wanted some confidence building measures. They argued for release of prisoners... The Afghan Government was not opposed to the principle; they were opposed to the number, that the number was too high. It should be equal numbers. . . . So, yes, they were a part of my agreement, and the

reason for it was that we wanted to get to intra-Afghan negotiations, which was a big concession -- the achievement that the Talibs would sit with the government that they had refused to sit, to get into that process -- while we were still there.” (Page 260, Lines 1-20, Page 261, 1-8).

### **Transition to the Biden Administration:**

1. Khalilzad provided a briefing in December 2020 to President Biden’s State Department transition team – the most senior representative at that meeting was Counselor Chollet, whom the Committee interviewed in December 2023. (Page 17, Lines 1-25; Page 18, Lines 1-6). Khalilzad was informed he would be retained by President Biden via Chollet in late December 2020 or early January 2021. (Page 18, Lines 8-21).
2. Khalilzad testified that while he technically reported to Secretary Blinken, in practice much of his early communications went through Chollet – Chollet largely failed to recall his involvement on Afghanistan policy before the Committee in his December 2023 interview. Khalilzad also communicated with D-MR McKeon, Deputy Secretary Sherman, and Under Secretary Nuland. (Page 20, Lines 12-25).
3. Upon assuming his role as SRAR under the Biden Administration, he did not receive any new guidance/instruction. Khalilzad received new guidance months into the Biden administration: (1) Because the Biden Administration extended the withdrawal window from 14 months to 18 months, Khalilzad was tasked with having the Taliban extend the ceasefire; (2) Accelerate the political negotiations and include the international community in the negotiations. He was not otherwise told to deviate from anything the Trump administration had done. (Page 142, Lines 8-25; Page 143, Lines 1-8).

### **The 2021 Withdrawal from Afghanistan:**

#### ***The Interagency Review of the Doha Agreement***

1. Khalilzad participated in senior level interagency meetings that reviewed the Doha agreement in the first several months of the Biden Administration. (Page 144, Lines 22-25; Page 145, Lines 1-7).
2. Khalilzad advised the Biden administration that fighting would continue if no agreement was reached between the Afghan government and the Taliban. (Page 146, Lines 10-18).
3. Khalilzad testified there were three options the Biden Administration could have considered regarding the Doha Agreement: (1) “essentially not to insist on conditionality, just emphasize withdrawal and counterterrorism”; (2) tear up the agreement like President Trump did with the Iran nuclear deal, “saying it's flawed, we don't want to do that”; or (3) enforce conditionality, saying “We would agree to implement Doha, the withdrawal part, provided the other elements are — the Talib part, commitments.” Khalilzad stated that President Biden did not select a conditions-based withdrawal. (Page 81, Lines 2-15).

4. Khalilzad stated he recommended a conditions-based approach to the Doha Agreement; he believes Secretary Blinken recommended the same, but others refuted their recommendations on the basis that the Taliban would go back to targeting U.S. forces. Both ultimately supported President Biden's unconditional withdrawal.
  - a. "Well, Secretary Blinken and I, I believe, did recommend that conditionality. That's my judgment, that conditionality would be the prudent thing to do. But then the response was, can you get the other side to -- the Talibs not to go back to fighting?" (Page 147, Lines 5-7).
  - b. "My judgment was that, again, it's my judgment, that obviously he [Blinken] supported the ultimate decision on how things — the decision that was made after the review. I think he [Blinken] would have — again, it's a personal observation, that he would have acknowledged that he would have perhaps preferred conditionality." (Page 81, Lines 18-22)

#### ***The White House and National Security Council***

1. According to Khalilzad, the White House and the National Security Council (NSC) were leading the entire withdrawal process throughout 2021. (Page 85, lines 5-10).
2. Khalilzad's main points of contact at the White House and the NSC were Jake Sullivan and Jon Finer. (Page 85, Lines 11-19).
3. During August 2021 – the month of the deadly evacuation – key decisions pertaining to engagement with the Taliban came from President Biden's NSC. (Page 85, Lines 24-25; Page 86, lines 1-2).

#### ***"Peace Government" Plan and Taliban-Dominated Government***

1. With Secretary Blinken's backing, Khalilzad pursued an Afghan "Peace Government" plan in early 2021 which would have given the Taliban essentially an equal share of power with the legitimate Afghan government. The plan was for a power sharing agreement where the new Afghan government would be comprised of both Afghan government officials and Taliban officials and purportedly be led by someone who was acceptable to both sides. (Page 147, Lines 16-25; Page 148, Lines 1-20).
2. Khalilzad said that as 2021 proceeded, the Taliban was discussing the "percentages" of a potential "power-sharing" government. The percentages Khalilzad testified to included "50-50, 60-40, 70-30" with the Taliban demanding an increasingly Taliban-dominated government as its military offensive gained success. According to Khalilzad, "as the balance shifted on the ground ... the negotiations on the government continued, but the dollar demand with it increased." (Page 148, lines 15-20).

3. Khalilzad testified that, during at points throughout the negotiations, there were times he believed that the Taliban negotiated merely as a stall tactic to wait out the U.S. until its military forces withdrew to zero. (Page 266, Lines 8-25; Page 267, Line 1).
4. When asked about the Taliban's publication of a fatwa stating its true goal being the re-establishment of the Islamic emirate. Khalilzad acknowledged this as the Taliban's preferred outcome, but he believed the Taliban purportedly had concluded that to secure a U.S. withdrawal, they needed to agree to a power-sharing plan. (Page 211, Lines 2-25; Page 212, Lines 1-25; Page 213, Lines 1-6).
5. Khalilzad believes Biden's announcement in April 2021 to withdraw all U.S troops negatively affected the morale of the Afghan government forces.
  - a. "The U.S. withdrawal had a psychological impact and negatively affected the relative balance of power for the government. That's obvious. You have two fighting forces. There is a third force that supports one side. That force wants to leave. It affects the balance. But it affects the balance to the degree that it led to disintegration, and that is the shocking part. I wouldn't have been surprised if there had been some restraint and some loss of territory based on the shift in the balance." (Page 229, Lines 8-24).

#### ***Taliban Adherence to the Doha Agreement***

1. Khalilzad claimed no one assessed whether the Taliban adhered to the Doha agreement as a whole in 2021. However, he said there were intelligence reports that determined the Taliban's adherence to the terrorism issue was "mixed to positive, not completely satisfactory, mixed to positive." (Page 189, Lines 7-25).
2. Khalilzad said the provision the Taliban best adhered to the provision of not attacking U.S. troops, and this was the most important provision to President Biden. (Page 190, Lines 3-7).
3. Khalilzad agreed that during 2021, the Taliban attacked U.S. and coalition bases with indirect fire. During this time, a communication channel was opened between the U.S. and Taliban officials. The goal for this channel was to prevent these attacks from happening again and prevent further escalation. The Taliban never admitted to carrying out any of these attacks. (Page 220, Lines 3-25; Page 221, Lines 1-20).
4. Khalilzad agreed with the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) January 30, 2021 report that the Taliban failed to live up to the requirements of the Doha Agreement. (Page 191, Lines 17-25; Page 192, Lines 1-20).
5. When asked if he was deceived by the Taliban, Khalilzad responded: "No, I don't know. Nobody is honest throughout. But they – we negotiated. They made some commitments.

We made some commitments. The agreement was condition based. We did not hold them to the conditions at the end.” (Page 227, Lines 15-17).

### ***Taliban Takeover***

1. Khalilzad’s assumption that the Afghan government could hold out for two years did not change until August 2021. (Page 38, Lines 13-19).
2. When asked about the State Department’s contingency planning in Afghanistan, Khalilzad admitted that the State Department generally fails to plan for contingencies, testifying, “I think not enough of it is done in the – in our profession, in diplomacy planning in that regard.” (Page 38, Lines 1-12).
3. When asked if General McKenzie had given the Taliban a green light to take over Kabul, Khalilzad said, “I think that’s clear.” (Page 88, Lines 1-18).
4. From Doha, Khalilzad communicated with the Taliban directly on various issues that required Taliban cooperation, such as security at HKIA and procedures for getting Americans and American visa holders through Taliban checkpoints. (Page 24, Lines 24-25; Page 25, Lines 1-13).
5. Khalilzad viewed President Biden as ultimately in charge of the evacuation operations, saying, “[T]he President is in charge, and I have to say the President spent a lot of time on this, to say it was the most intense period of focus.” (Page 80, Lines 12-16).
6. Khalilzad said he is unaware of the Taliban refusing to raid any ISIS locations, despite reports by military officials which contended otherwise. According to Khalilzad, he believed the Taliban did not place any restrictions on U.S. operations during the evacuation. This included any potential strikes against ISIS targets. (Page 271, Lines 9-25; Page 272, Lines 1-9).

### **Pakistan’s Double Dealing**

1. Khalilzad believes that Pakistan supported the Doha negotiations and opposed to a Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. (Page 243, Lines 1-16).
2. When asked about Pakistan’s ties with the Haqqani Network and the Taliban conflicted with his view that Pakistan had truly supported the negotiations, Khalilzad claimed he did not trust Pakistan, but due to changing circumstances, they were included as a necessary important regional player. (Page 251, Lines 15-25; Page 252, Lines 1-15).

### **Denial About al-Qaeda in Afghanistan**

1. Khalilzad contended that al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent no longer exists, despite evidence presented to the contrary. Khalilzad said, “I have to say for the record, looking

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back, that al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent has been dismantled. It doesn't exist anymore, according to our intelligence, since the Taliban took over. That's one, that what has been highlighted about al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent doesn't exist anymore.” (Page 205, Lines 3-6).

2. Khalilzad did acknowledge that Ayman al-Zawahiri (Osama bin Laden's number two and the longtime leader of al-Qaeda after bin Laden's death) hid in a Taliban-Haqqani safehouse in Kabul in 2022, and Khalilzad admitted that this clearly violated the Doha Agreement: “A violation, full and complete, and -- yeah, that -- yeah. That's all I can say in this setting.” (Page 277, Lines 12-13).