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COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

INTERVIEW OF: JENNIFER PSAKI

Friday, July 26, 2024

Washington, D.C.

The interview in the above matter was held in room 2200, Longworth House  
Office Building, commencing at 11:04 a.m.

Present: Representatives McCaul, Waltz, and Crow.

1 Appearances:

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5 For the COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS:

6

7 [REDACTED]

8 [REDACTED]

9 [REDACTED]

10 [REDACTED]

11 [REDACTED] SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND

12 ACCOUNTABILITY

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED]

16 [REDACTED]

17 [REDACTED]

18 [REDACTED]

19 [REDACTED]

20 [REDACTED]

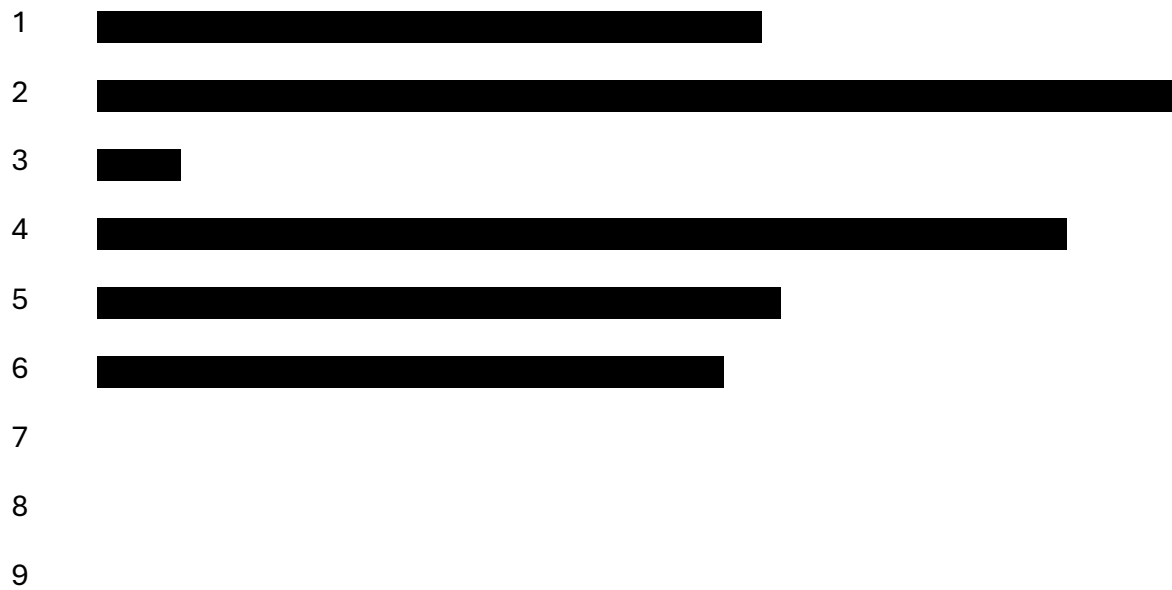
21 [REDACTED]

22 [REDACTED]

23 [REDACTED]

24 [REDACTED]

25 [REDACTED]



1 For the WHITE HOUSE COUNSEL'S OFFICE:

2

3 [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED], [REDACTED]

5

6

7

8 For JENNIFER PSAKI:

9

10 EMILY LOEB, ESQ.

11 KATIE JOHNSON, ESQ.

12 RACHEL PALERMO, ESQ.

13 CAROLINE DARMODY, ESQ.

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15 1099 New York Ave NW, Suite 900

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25 [REDACTED]. This is a transcribed interview of former White House Press

1 Secretary Jen Psaki.

2 Chairman McCaul has requested this interview as part of the committee's  
3 investigation into the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

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

5 Ms. Psaki. Jen Psaki.

6 [REDACTED]. On behalf of the committee and Chairman McCaul, I want to  
7 thank you for appearing here today voluntarily to answer our questions.

8 My name is [REDACTED]. I'm [REDACTED] on Chairman McCaul's  
9 staff on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and [REDACTED] on behalf  
10 of the chairman.

11 I will now ask those committee staff in the majority and minority who may  
12 participate in today's interview to introduce themselves.

13 [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for House Foreign Affairs Committee majority.

14 [REDACTED], majority staff.

15 [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for the majority.

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

17 [REDACTED], also with the majority.

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

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

20 [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for the minority.

21 Mr. Crow. Congressman Jason Crow, House Foreign Affairs Committee.

22 [REDACTED]. I'm [REDACTED]. I'm [REDACTED] for Mr. Meeks on the Foreign  
23 Affairs Committee.

24 [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for the minority.

25 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

1 Ms. Loeb. There are other folks in the room. Can everybody introduce  
2 themselves?

3 [REDACTED]. We are going to get to counsel, yeah. We are going to address  
4 the grounds rules first, and then we'll have counsel -- so private counsel as well as White  
5 House counsel -- introduce themselves.

6 Ms. Loeb. Great. I just actually note the other folks who are in the room as  
7 well. Are those staff members or --

8 [REDACTED]. So there will be staff members -- this is a closed-door, so  
9 anyone who's in the room -- we are just introducing those individuals who will be  
10 participating in today's interview. But to the extent you'd like for them to be  
11 introduced, happy to do so.

12 Ms. Loeb. Would love to just have their names, titles --

13 [REDACTED]. Of course.

14 Ms. Loeb. -- who they're representing in the record.

15 [REDACTED]. Sure.

16 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], [REDACTED], minority.

17 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for Representative  
18 Crow.

19 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for the majority.

20 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

21 I will now go over the ground rules and guidelines that we will follow during  
22 today's interview.

23 Our questioning will proceed in rounds. The majority will ask questions first for 1  
24 hour. Then minority will have an opportunity to ask questions for an equal period of  
25 time if they so chose. We will alternate back and forth until there are no more

1 questions and the interview is over.

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

4 As you can see, there's an official court reporter taking down everything we say  
5 for the written record, so we ask that you give verbal responses to all questions.

6 Does that make sense?

7 Ms. Psaki. Yes.

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

11 Please try and speak clearly so the court reporter can understand and everyone  
12 can hear you. It is important that we don't talk over one another or interrupt each  
13 other, and that goes for everybody present at today's interview.

14 Witnesses who appear before the committee have the opportunity to freely  
15 consult with counsel.

16 Ms. Psaki, you are appearing here today with private counsel, correct?

17 Ms. Psaki. Correct.

18 [REDACTED]. Can counsel please identify yourselves and state your names for  
19 the record?

20 Ms. Loeb. Yes. Emily Loeb, Jenner & Block.

21 Ms. Johnson. Katie Johnson with Jenner & Block.

22 Ms. Palermo. Rachel Palermo with Jenner & Block.

23 Ms. Darmody. Caroline Darmody with Jenner & Block.

24 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

25 It's my understanding that counsel from the White House are also present today.

1 Ms. Psaki, you understand that they represent the White House and not you  
2 personally, correct?

3 Ms. Psaki. Yes.

4 [REDACTED]. Could White House counsel please identify yourselves and state  
5 your names for the record?

6 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], White House Counsel's Office.

7 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], also from the White House.

8 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

9 Ms. Psaki, we expect you to answer our questions in as complete and truthful a  
10 manner as possible.

11 If you do not know the answer to a question or do not remember, it's best not to  
12 guess. Please give us your best recollection and inform us who, to the best of your  
13 knowledge, will be able to provide a more complete answer to the question.

14 If you have any questions or if you do not understand one of our questions, please  
15 let us know, and we will do our best to clarify.

16 Ms. Psaki, this interview is unclassified, so if a question calls for any information  
17 that you know to be classified, please state that for the record as well as the basis for the  
18 classification and the original classification authority. If you are uncertain of the  
19 classification, please consult with your counsel. We can go off the record to afford you  
20 the opportunity to do so.

21 In the interest of transparency and open access to the Federal Government, we  
22 expect that your asserted basis for a classification adhere to the uniform system  
23 prescribed by Executive Order 13526. Once you've identified the requisite classification,  
24 please respond with as much unclassified information as possible.

25 Do you understand?



1 Ms. Psaki. Yes.

2 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

3 The committee reminds you that Congress has a right to information held by the  
4 executive branch in the absence of a valid claim of executive privilege. This right is  
5 affirmed by the Supreme Court in *Wilkinson v. United States*. Any valid assertion of  
6 executive privilege and its basis must be made explicitly on the record.

7 The committee recognizes that you're appearing voluntarily today and not  
8 pursuant to a subpoena. Should you choose not to answer a question without a valid  
9 assertion of privilege, the chairman reserves the right to issue a subpoena.

10 Do you understand?

11 Ms. Psaki. Yes.

12 [The reporter fixes Ms. Psaki's microphone.]

13 Ms. Psaki. Oh. Sorry. It was green but lighter green. Thank you for the  
14 clarification. Okay.

15 [REDACTED]. Although this interview is not under oath, you are required by  
16 law to answer questions from Congress truthfully. This includes questions posed by  
17 congressional staff in an interview.

18 Do you understand?

19 Ms. Psaki. Yes.

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

23 Do you understand?

24 Ms. Psaki. Yes.

25 [REDACTED]. Is there any reason you are unable to provide truthful answers

1 to today's questions?

2 Ms. Psaki. No.

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

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

9 Ms. Loeb. We understand that to be a request but not required by the rules. Is  
10 that correct?

11 [REDACTED]. Correct.

12 Ms. Loeb. Thank you.

13 [REDACTED]. That is the end of the majority's preamble. Is there anything  
14 my colleagues from the minority would like to add?

15 [REDACTED]. Yes. Thanks.

16 I'd just like to note for the record that notwithstanding any agreements made  
17 between the majority, the witness, her counsel, or the White House, there are no rules  
18 mandating or governing confidentiality of transcribed interviews in either the House or  
19 the committee's rules for the 118th Congress.

20 Thanks.

21 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

22 Before we begin the first hour of questioning, your counsel has communicated  
23 that you'd like to make an opening statement, Ms. Psaki. If that is still true, please do so  
24 now.

25 Ms. Psaki. Thank you very much.

1           Good morning, and thank you all for the invitation to speak with you today.

2           My name is Jen Psaki, and I served for just over 15 months as the first Press  
3 Secretary in the Biden-Harris administration.

4           I came to that role after spending the majority of my career in public service,  
5 including nearly 10 years working for two Presidents in two different administrations.

6           By 2020, I had two children under the age of 5 and I had already had the  
7 opportunity of a lifetime, serving the American people during the Obama administration.  
8 But when President-elect Biden offered me the privilege of serving again, I was honored  
9 to return to the White House at a critical time in American history.

10           When I started my role as Assistant to the President and White House Press  
11 Secretary, my mandate was to take the temperature down in the Briefing Room and to  
12 engage with the press without treating them as adversaries. Freedom of speech and the  
13 press is a foundational value of this country, and our Nation is at its best when those  
14 ideals are honored. Those were the values I sought to achieve and advance every day as  
15 White House Press Secretary.

16           That does not mean I did everything perfectly every day. I am human, as we all  
17 certainly are. It means that my unwavering objective every single day was to honor and  
18 respect the role of journalists and provide answers to the best of my ability to the tough  
19 questions they were asking on behalf of the American public.

20           My team and I viewed our work as part of a larger effort to help to restore an  
21 understanding of government. During my first briefing, I spoke to the press corps about  
22 how we may not always see things the same way and how that's okay. That debate in  
23 the Briefing Room is a healthy part of democracy.

24           We returned to the long-held tradition of holding regular press briefings, including  
25 bringing policy experts directly into the Briefing Room, and having frank conversations,

1 even when it came to tough issues.

2 My North Star was to provide the public with the best information I could to  
3 explain the decision-making of the President and the administration. That was all the  
4 more essential when the topic at hand was difficult, complicated, evolving, or even tragic.

5 The 15 months I served in the Biden-Harris administration included the COVID  
6 pandemic, the economic recovery that followed, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the  
7 withdrawal from Afghanistan after 20 years of war, and so much more.

8 I have a deep interest in and love for policy, but, as White House Press Secretary,  
9 my job was not to make policy decisions but, rather, to communicate the government's  
10 policy decisions and objectives to the press.

11 While I was not a policymaker and I did not play any role in policy implementation,  
12 I worked alongside my team to gather as much accurate and up-to-date information as  
13 possible from policy experts, and then I would communicate that information to the  
14 American public.

15 One of the questions I am frequently asked is how I prepared on a daily basis for  
16 the briefing, including during difficult times when the situation was fluid and the options  
17 in front of policymakers were challenging and imperfect. And so I want to provide a  
18 brief overview to the committee about how I prepared, to help you better understand the  
19 flow of information from policymakers and implementers of policy to the press and  
20 communications teams in the White House.

21 Each day in the White House, much of my time was focused directly on preparing  
22 for the White House briefing. Given the nature of the issues that come through the  
23 White House and the often rapidly changing facts around any given situation, my team  
24 and I were in constant coordination with policy experts and other communications staff in  
25 the White House and the interagency apparatus to prepare information that we expected

1 I would need for the briefing.

2 In general, my daily process started early in the morning, typically around 5:00  
3 a.m., when I reviewed the media coverage that had come in overnight. After that  
4 review, I would lead a call with members of the White House press team to discuss the  
5 news of the day and to anticipate what new or additional information we would need to  
6 have on hand for reporter inquiries.

7 After the call, my team would coordinate with the relevant policy teams so that  
8 we would have approved answers by the time of the daily press briefing.

9 We engaged in a team-wide interagency effort to ensure our messaging evolved  
10 with developments on the ground in communicating about the Afghanistan withdrawal.  
11 My goal and the goal of the interagency process, like with all of the other important  
12 policy issues I discussed from the podium, was to share accurate and up-to-date  
13 information in the moment with the American people.

14 Though I've not worked for the Biden administration since May of 2022, I bring to  
15 this conversation the same goal that I brought to my work at the White House: to  
16 answer your questions to the best of my ability.

17 One of the key lessons I take away from my time in public service working for two  
18 Presidents is that the choices made every single day by the President, our military  
19 leaders, and the men and women serving our Nation overseas are rarely simple. But  
20 you know, as I do, that those choices keep us safe and secure here at home.

21 I also want to take a moment to recognize the more than 2,000 U.S. military  
22 personnel who lost their lives in Afghanistan's 20-year war. That includes the 13  
23 servicemembers killed in the Abbey Gate bombing during the final days of the withdrawal  
24 on August 26th, 2021 -- 11 U.S. Marines: David Espinoza, Nicole Gee, Taylor Hoover,  
25 Hunter Lopez, Rylee McCollum, Dylan Merola, Kareem Nikoui, Johanny Rosario Pichardo,

1 Humberto Sanchez, Jared Schmitz, and Daegan William-Tyeler Page; one soldier, Ryan  
2 Knauss; and one Navy Corpsman, Maxton Soviak.

3 The legacy and sacrifice of our Nation's servicemembers inspired my work every  
4 day of the administration.

5 Thank you very much, and I look forward to answering your questions.

6 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

7 The clock now reads 11:17. We will start the first hour of questioning.

8 EXAMINATION

9 BY [REDACTED]:

10 Q Ms. Psaki, before proceeding, I want to define a couple of key terms.

11 First, when referencing the term "withdrawal," the majority is referencing the U.S.  
12 military retrograde, i.e., the go-to-zero order, which was officially announced by  
13 President Biden on April 14th, 2021. This includes related planning by the White House,  
14 State Department and other Federal agencies, and their decision-making processes.

15 Does that make sense?

16 A Yes.

17 Q Second, when referencing the term "evacuation" or "emergency  
18 evacuation," the majority is referencing the evacuation of U.S. citizens and nationals,  
19 civilian personnel, and designated persons in August 2021, resulting in the noncombatant  
20 evacuation operation initiated on August 16th, 2021. This includes related planning by  
21 the White House, State Department and other Federal agencies, and their  
22 decision-making processes.

23 Does that make sense?

24 A Yes.

25 Q Ms. Psaki, you touched upon this in your opening statement, but can you

1 please provide us a brief overview of your career with the U.S. Government?

2 A Sure. I started -- my time in working for Presidents or administrations or  
3 beyond that?

4 Q With the administrations, yeah.

5 A I worked for the Biden -- I'm sorry -- the Obama-Biden administration from  
6 2009, when President Obama was inaugurated, first as his Deputy Press Secretary for a  
7 year. Then I was the Deputy Communications Director after that for about a year and a  
8 half.

9 I was at the State Department for about 2 years, beginning at the start of the  
10 second term, as the Spokesperson at the State Department.

11 And then I was the Communications Director in the White House for the final year  
12 of that administration.

13 I served, as I noted in my opening statement, as the White House Press Secretary  
14 under President Biden for the first 15 months of the administration.

15 Q Thank you.

16 We'll begin with some questions about your role as the State Department  
17 Spokesperson, if that's all right. And you served in that role from April 2013 to March  
18 2015, correct?

19 A That's correct.

20 Q And, as you noted, that was under President Obama's administration,  
21 correct?

22 A Correct.

23 Q And, at the time, Secretary John Kerry was serving as the Secretary of the  
24 State, correct?

25 A Yes.

1 Q Thank you. Can you please describe what that role entailed?

2 A The role of the State Department Spokesperson --

3 Q Correct.

4 A -- for -- for anyone who serves in that role is to speak on behalf of the United  
5 States Government and the work of the Secretary of State and the State Department and  
6 diplomats around the world.

7 Q Did your role as State Department Spokesperson necessitate you to be  
8 informed and well-versed in matters of U.S. foreign policy?

9 A It did. But the role of the Spokesperson at the State Department, as is the  
10 role of the Press Secretary at the White House, is not as a policymaker but as an  
11 individual communicating the policy positions and decisions of the U.S. Government and  
12 policymakers within.

13 Q Were you generally privy to the Department's senior-level decisions and  
14 decision-making processes as the State Department Spokesperson?

15 A I would just ask you to define what you mean by "privy to."

16 Q Were you involved in the senior-level discussions, invited to engagements,  
17 briefed on the contents thereof?

18 A Well, I was briefed on information needed in order to do my job as the  
19 spokesperson for the U.S. Government.

20 Because a great deal of my job involved, of course, traveling with the Secretary, I  
21 was in attendance for certain diplomatic meetings, if that's useful to know, as well as  
22 meetings that took place when we were traveling.

23 Typically, when I was in Washington, I spent my time preparing for the briefly and  
24 also sitting in on those meetings, but, due to the nature of that job, I did not spend hours  
25 a day in policy meetings, because I was doing a different job.



1 Q Can you please speak to how you received briefings on the information you  
2 were tasked to communicate?

3 A As the State Department Spokesperson?

4 Q Correct.

5 A At the State Department, I would, again, have meetings with my team in the  
6 morning to determine what new events had happened that might be on the minds of  
7 State Department reporters.

8 And we would ask members of the team, spokespeople from the team to -- and at  
9 the State Department, it works a little differently than the White House, because it is  
10 staffed primarily by Foreign Service officers, civil servants, and others, and also, of course,  
11 diplomats around the world. So we would ask those spokespeople to work with the  
12 relevant policymakers in each of those divisions and agencies to ensure we had approved  
13 language and talking points for the briefing that day.

14 Then the spokespeople would bring that material back to me before the briefing  
15 so I could review it in order to be prepared for the briefing.

16 Q And did you provide input on policy and/or strategy in that capacity?

17 A Can you tell me more about what you're asking?

18 Q Of course. You had clarified from the outset that, as the Spokesperson, you  
19 were not a policymaker and --

20 A Uh-huh.

21 Q -- you communicated the information that was relayed to you and that you  
22 received briefings on.

23 But at any point in receiving those briefings, would you provide input as to  
24 strategy, as to policy, given your engagement with the various principals in the  
25 Department?

1           A    Well, primarily, that information would be received through spokespeople,  
2 who also were not policymakers.

3           On a daily basis, I did travel with the Secretary, and my job primarily with him was  
4 to prepare him for public engagements, including press conferences or interviews he  
5 might be doing. And, in that job, I would give him a sense of what reporters were asking  
6 about, what was on the minds of them, and what he might be asked about in those  
7 engagements.

8           So, no, it was not a policymaker role either.

9           Q    Is it fair to say, though, that you approached your role as the State  
10 Department's chief communicator as being more than a pass-through vehicle?

11          A    I don't think any spokesperson in the government is a pass-through vehicle.

12          Q    Is it fair to say that you believed in the information you communicated on  
13 behalf of the State Department?

14          A    Did I -- I'm sorry. Did I believe in the information?

15          Q    Correct.

16          A    I did.

17          Q    And what if you questioned the veracity of the information you were tasked  
18 to communicate?

19          A    Did I question it?

20          Q    If in the instance that you did question the veracity, how would you  
21 approach that situation?

22          A    Well, I think what I tried to do as the Spokesperson at the State Department  
23 is similar to what I tried to do as Press Secretary, which was, as much as I was not a  
24 policymaker, learn and understand as much about the policy as I could and be prepared  
25 to ask the right questions and ask for greater clarity to ensure that I knew and was able to

1 explain what I was talking about.

2 Q Thank you.

3 After you completed your tenure as State Department Spokesperson, you went  
4 back to the White House to serve as the White House Communications Director to  
5 President Obama, correct?

6 A That's correct.

7 Q And when did you assume that role?

8 A I assumed that role in March or April -- around late March/early April of  
9 2015.

10 Q And can you please speak to what the role of White House Communications  
11 Director entails?

12 A Sure. So the White House Communications Director is in many ways a  
13 partner to the Press Secretary, in that -- and, at the time when I was in that job, Josh  
14 Earnest was the Press Secretary. And the White House Communications Director is a  
15 person who oversees a great deal of the staff, so a lot of it is a managerial role. Also sits  
16 in on more policy meetings, I would say, than the Press Secretary does, just because of  
17 the nature of the schedule, and is there to be a representative from the communications  
18 and press team. And that includes working with speechwriters, working with planning,  
19 working with the scheduling team.

20 And so it's not all glamorous, but those are the details of that job. But I'm happy  
21 to answer more questions if that doesn't provide you the information you're looking for.

22 Q That's helpful. Thank you.

23 And when did you depart from that role?

24 A When -- in January of 2017.

25 Q What position did you assume thereafter, and where?

1           A    After that job, I went to work for the Carnegie Endowment for International  
2 Peace, which -- I started that job, though, not until September. I was also a contributor  
3 to CNN. And I also did some consulting work during that time as well.

4           Q    Thank you.

5           Let's transition to your next position. Am I correct in understanding that, prior to  
6 assuming your role as White House Press Secretary, you served on President Biden's  
7 transition team for a brief period?

8           A    I did.

9           Q    And when did you join the transition team?

10          A    September, October -- late September, I believe it was, in 2020.

11          Q    What role did you occupy on the transition team?

12          A    I was overseeing the confirmations team.

13          Q    Who asked you to join the transition team?

14          A    Jeff Zients, who was running the transition team.

15          Q    Ms. Psaki, when did you assume the position of White House Press  
16 Secretary?

17          A    When did I start the job?

18          Q    Correct.

19          A    January of 2021.

20          Q    And do you recall the specific date?

21          A    I'm sorry, just for clarification, are you asking me when I started the job or  
22 when I was offered the job?

23          Q    When you started the job as White House Press Secretary.

24          A    The day that the President was inaugurated.

25          Q    And to whom did you report to in that role?

1           A    I reported to Ron Klain.

2           Q    And could you please describe your roles and responsibilities as White House  
3 Press Secretary?

4           A    Sure.

5           So the White House Press Secretary, for anyone who serves in that job, is  
6 responsible for speaking on behalf of the President and the administration, answering  
7 reporter inquiries not just in the Briefing Room but also as they have them throughout  
8 the course of the day, which is primarily how they spend their time.

9           They're also an advisor to the President.

10          Q    Am I correct in understanding that your primary responsibility was to act as  
11 spokesperson for the executive branch as a whole?

12          A    Well, yes, but you're also not necessarily the primary person speaking on  
13 behalf of, say, military strategy -- that would be the Department of Defense -- or  
14 diplomatic strategy. So you are speaking primarily on behalf of the White House and  
15 the President.

16          Q    But those Cabinet-level Secretaries at, for example, the Department of  
17 Defense or the State Department report to the President, correct?

18          A    Yes, but their spokespeople don't report to the White House Press Secretary.

19          Q    And did you receive briefings and inputs from the relevant representatives of  
20 the executive agencies?

21          A    Well, primarily how day to day it worked was, there's an interagency  
22 process. There's an NSC press team, who does not report directly to the Press  
23 Secretary, but you work in close coordination with them. They're responsible for  
24 coordinating and preparing press materials, materials for the briefing. And they are the  
25 ones who are the primary points of contact with the other agencies to prepare those

1 materials.

2 Ms. Loeb. And I think that that is an example for foreign policy. Obviously,  
3 there's domestic policy as well.

4 Ms. Psaki. Yes, correct. Thank you. Yes.

5 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q And you provided daily briefings to the media and the American people on  
8 the President's and his administration's activities and agenda, correct?

9 A Correct.

10 Q Is it fair to say that, as White House Press Secretary, you were entrusted to  
11 serve as one of the administration's chief communicators?

12 A Yes.

13 Q What role does the White House Press Secretary play with respect to the  
14 American people?

15 A The White House Press Secretary is responsible for answering the questions  
16 of the press and reporters, and they are conduits to provide information to the American  
17 people.

18 Q Do you agree that the White House Press Secretary has a duty to provide  
19 truthful and accurate information to the American people?

20 A Of course.

21 Q Did your role as White House Press Secretary necessitate you to be informed  
22 and well-versed in the matters you spoke on?

23 A Yes.

24 Q Did your prior experience as the State Department Spokesperson assist with  
25 your being well-versed in matters of U.S. foreign policy?

1 A It did.

2 Q Were you ever asked questions by journalists, either in the Briefing Room or  
3 in other situations, that you did not know the answer to?

4 A Yes.

5 Q What was your process for attempting to learn that information?

6 A Well, at the State Department, what we would say -- there's a process there  
7 where you would take a question, and it's an actual term, where you would say, "I'm  
8 going to take your question," and then you would go back to the team of policy experts  
9 and work with them -- or they would know, because you would've said it during the  
10 briefing, to get a written answer, to send that information back to the State Department  
11 press corps.

12 Or, if it wasn't to that level, I would go back to the appropriate spokespeople so  
13 that they could work with the policy experts to gain that information, and either I or the  
14 person who was working for the bureau would get back to the reporter.

15 In the White House, it worked in a similar way -- it's just a bigger apparatus at the  
16 State Department -- where, if we didn't have information or if I wanted to correct the  
17 record on information, we would go back later that day and follow up with the reporter.  
18 And typically it would be the spokespeople who worked with the particular policy experts  
19 who would then go back to the reporter and ensure that we followed up.

20 A lot of the work of the Press Secretary is done, of course, at the briefing, which is  
21 where people see them publicly, but there's great deal of work that happens before and  
22 after the briefing, too, in engaging with reporters and helping them understand accurate  
23 information, not just by the Press Secretary but by a number of people who most people  
24 on this committee wouldn't necessarily be able to identify.

25 Q Thank you.

1           A    In person -- I mean, you wouldn't recognize them, is what I mean.   Yeah.

2           Q    Can you please speak to how you worked within the administration,  
3 including the White House, in your role as Press Secretary?

4           A    How did I work with the administration?

5           Q    Within the administration, correct.

6           A    Within the administration?   Sure.

7           As I stated in my opening, typically how we would work is, in the morning, we  
8 would determine, either because there was news stories overnight that had developed,  
9 something maybe had happened on Capitol Hill, maybe there was a development around  
10 the world, and we would discuss where we might need new information and guidance  
11 from the policy experts in order to make sure we had up-to-date information for that  
12 briefing.

13           And it didn't mean that I always determined or even my press team even  
14 determined what those topics were.   Often, there were people who were closer to all of  
15 the questions that might come up, like, say, the NSC press team, that would come to us  
16 with, "I think these are topics, because we've been getting a lot of inquiries, that might  
17 come up."

18           So we would discuss that in the morning.   Everybody would go back, all of the  
19 spokespeople, and work with the policy experts to develop language, to get approval for  
20 that, so that we would then have that information available for the briefing.

21           Q    Thank you.

22           That brings me to my next question.   Did you engage with the National Security  
23 Council?   And if so, with whom?

24           A    "Engage" is a very broad definition.   Can you talk to me about more what  
25 you mean by that?



1 Q In preparation for your daily press briefings and the information that you  
2 communicate to the American public, would you engage with the National Security  
3 Council to prepare yourself for those briefings?

4 A Well, the press team, the NSC press team, was a part of the National Security  
5 Council. Their working-level spokespeople, that is who I typically worked with.

6 Q And would you engage with the National Security Council when you would  
7 provide advice or guidance to the President, as you previously testified to?

8 Ms. Loeb. What do you mean about "engage"? I'm not sure what that means.

9 BY [REDACTED]:

10 Q So, in terms of preparing yourself for the information inputs that you'd  
11 convey to the President as to what's going on in the media or information that you  
12 believed would be of significance to him, would you engage with members of the  
13 National Security Council to prepare yourself for those briefings?

14 Ms. Loeb. I think it'd be quite hard to respond to that as a hypothetical.

15 BY [REDACTED]:

16 Q Did you engage with the National Security Council in your capacity as the  
17 White House Press Secretary to prepare for your briefings or engagements with the  
18 President?

19 Ms. Loeb. Those are -- I'm sorry. Just to unpack, you're asking two different  
20 questions, to engage with the press or to advise the President. Can we just --

21 [REDACTED]. Well, first --

22 Ms. Loeb. -- disaggregate?

23 [REDACTED]. First, we discussed the press and preparing information for the  
24 American public.

25 Ms. Loeb. Right.

1 [REDACTED]. And it's my understanding, based on Ms. Psaki's description of  
2 her role as White House Press Secretary, that that was not the only facet of her roles and  
3 responsibilities. There was also an advisory role as to informing the President as to  
4 what was circulating in the media and information he needed to be made aware of.

5 So the first component was, did you engage with NSC in communicating  
6 information to the American public?

7 Now the question is, did you engage with NSC in communicating information to  
8 the President?

9 Ms. Loeb. I see.

10 [REDACTED]. I would ask Ms. Psaki not to reveal any discussions with the  
11 President.

12 But if you want to answer "yes" or "no," you may.

13 Ms. Psaki. So I would just stay that, just as for the process of preparing for the  
14 press briefing, if we were preparing answers for -- or suggested information, briefing  
15 materials for the President, we would also work through the process of ensuring that  
16 those answers prepared were approved through the NSC process.

17 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

18 And I just want to state for the record that if executive privilege is being asserted,  
19 please state so, the privilege itself, on the record and an explanation thereof, just for  
20 clarity of the record.

21 Otherwise, of course, you're permitted to instruct her not to answer, but,  
22 ultimately, any assertions of executive privilege must be clearly stated.

23 [REDACTED]. I'd just note that Ms. Psaki is here voluntarily.

24 [REDACTED]. Certainly. And as we said in the outset, in the preamble, we  
25 very much you appearing here voluntarily today, but if there are answers that the

1 chairman requires to perform his oversight and legislative functions, he is prepared to  
2 issue a subpoena. So we hope that we're able to find sort of a middle-ground approach  
3 to that.

4 [REDACTED]: We have the same goal.

5 [REDACTED]: Thank you.

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q Ms. Psaki, you had noted that when preparing for your daily press briefings  
8 you engaged with the NSC press team. Can you speak to whom from the NSC press  
9 team you engaged with?

10 A Emily Horne was the NSC spokesperson when I was the Press Secretary, so  
11 primarily Emily Horne, and then more junior working-level staff.

12 Q And did you engage anyone else from the NSC to perform your roles and  
13 responsibilities as White House Press Secretary?

14 A Well, typically -- and I will get to answer your question. I just wanted  
15 to -- so, typically, I would engage through Emily Horne and through the NSC working-level  
16 press team. When there were ongoing and fluid and ever-changing situations, I would  
17 at times, not regularly, ask for further clarification from Jake Sullivan or other senior  
18 members of the team.

19 Q And just for the record, Mr. Jake Sullivan was serving as the National Security  
20 Advisor, and he's still serving in that capacity today, correct?

21 A That's correct.

22 Q Thank you.

23 Ms. Psaki, were you generally a part of White House and NSC senior-level  
24 discussions pertaining to the issues you were tasked to speak on?

25 A Well, the nature of the White House Press Secretary job is that your day is

1 primarily filled with preparing for the briefing and engaging with reporters. So, typically,  
2 I did not have the capacity in my schedule to attend many policy meetings.

3 Q Would you receive inputs from the NSC on issues pertaining to U.S. foreign  
4 policy?

5 Ms. Loeb. I believe Ms. Psaki has answered that question already.

6

BY [REDACTED]

7 Q Just for the record, is it "yes" or "no"?

8 A Again, it was typically through the NSC press team and working-level team  
9 that I would receive guidance, press guidance, in order to be prepared for the briefing.

10 Q And would you at any point provide inputs on policy and/or strategy in those  
11 discussions?

12 Ms. Loeb. So "policy" and "strategy" are different words. We're not sure what  
13 "strategy" means. Maybe we can disaggregate and you can help us understand what  
14 you're looking for here?

15 [REDACTED]. The "and/or" I hoped would achieve that task, but we can start  
16 with policy first.

17 BY [REDACTED]:

18 Q Would you provide inputs on policy in those discussions with the various  
19 principals at the NSC?

20 A No. Again, because my standard points of contact -- I mean, obviously, I  
21 did engage with a range of people as the White House Press Secretary, but, on a standard  
22 basis, my primary points of contact were the NSC working-level press teams, and they are  
23 not policymakers either. So I -- and my role was not as a policymaker. So, no, I did not  
24 provide inputs in that way.

25 Q And to the extent you engaged with Mr. Sullivan, would you provide inputs

1 on policy?

2 A No.

3 Q Let's move on to strategy then, communications strategy, i.e., how the  
4 information is communicated to the American public.

5 A Uh-huh.

6 Q Would you provide inputs on communication strategy to principals in the  
7 NSC?

8 A That has a very broad definition of what "strategy" means, so can you tell me  
9 a little bit more about what you mean by that?

10 Q For example, if an incident were to occur, a foreign policy incident,  
11 hypothetical, and you were tasked with communicating that information to the American  
12 public, if you were told to communicate information one way but you believed a better  
13 way to communicate it, an alternative way, would you provide input on that strategy to  
14 the various principals in the NSC?

15 A Well, I would say, it's hard to speak about a hypothetical, so let me try to  
16 answer it -- let me try to answer it to the best of my ability.

17 If there -- the most important question always when you're the spokesperson is,  
18 what is the baseline of facts and details that you have in the moment? And I relied on  
19 the information by policymakers and experts who were either implementers of a policy or  
20 policymakers who were in charge of any given policy in the U.S. Government, whether it  
21 was COVID or approach to Ukraine during the Russian invasion or, of course, during the  
22 Afghanistan withdrawal. So that was the baseline.

23 I would also base my answers, of course, as I've been saying, on the information  
24 that was provided through the NSC interagency process. If I needed greater  
25 clarification, I would certainly ask for that to follow up on that and ensure that my

1 information was up to date.

2 Q The reason I ask, Ms. Psaki, is that I previously asked the question of  
3 whether the spokesperson, or in this case White House Press Secretary, serves as a  
4 pass-through medium, and you had communicated that, no, no communicators or  
5 spokesperson in the executive branch serves as a pass-through medium for the  
6 information that's relayed to them.

7 So I'd like to better understand how you would provide inputs on the strategy in  
8 your capacity as White House Press Secretary.

9 A Sure. I appreciate the clarification. And maybe I heard "pass-through  
10 medium" in a different way than what you intended, so I could've ask for clarification at  
11 the time.

12 So why don't you tell me more about what you mean by "pass-through medium"?

13 Q When information was communicated to you, did you at any point question  
14 the information, did you question the veracity, provide inputs as to its delivery?

15 I think ultimately it's important to us to better understand how you viewed your  
16 role. So, rather than me ascribing meaning to "pass-through medium," I would like to  
17 hear your perspective on what that entails.

18 A Sure. Well, I just wouldn't use that phrasing, so let me just say it maybe a  
19 different way. And hopefully this provides clarification to the committee.

20 In terms of the veracity of facts and details, because our process, at least in the  
21 administrations I worked in, was based on relying on the implementers and policymakers  
22 on the ground, there wouldn't be a mechanism, nor would it be appropriate, for  
23 spokespeople to challenge or question the language and the veracity of information  
24 coming from people who are front and center to the policymaking process and  
25 implementing it. So that's what I meant by that.

1           There are different ways to say things. And so, for me, part of the job is also to  
2           make it clear and understandable, if possible, for the public. That's not changing the  
3           veracity of it or the bottom-line facts. But if there is an easier and more simple way to  
4           explain things, there were times -- and often it wasn't in the national security space  
5           because of the importance of being specific with language, but there were times where I  
6           would try to simplify language to make it more accessible to the public. But those are  
7           two different things.

8           Q     But I'm sure you're familiar with the phrase, "It's not what you say; it's how  
9           you say it." And you hit the nail on the head. That's exactly what I was asking about.  
10          So thank you.

11          You had previously noted that you were part of interagency senior-level  
12          discussions, as well, pertaining to the issues you were tasked to speak on.

13          Were those interagency discussions led by the National Security Council?

14          Ms. Loeb. I believe Ms. Psaki testified that she actually didn't have a chance to  
15          attend a lot of meetings like that because she spent most of her time preparing.

16          ██████████. Thank you for the clarification.

17          BY ██████████:

18          Q     So you did not attend the interagency meetings?

19          Ms. Loeb. Can you be more specific, which meetings you're talking about?

20          BY ██████████:

21          Q     As a general matter, it's my understanding that, for issues of foreign  
22          policy -- for example, Afghanistan -- there are interagency meetings that are typically held  
23          with principals of, as you noted, the State Department, the Department of Defense, I  
24          imagine the intelligence community as well.

25          And I had previously asked if you were part of those meetings. My

1 understanding was that you were a part of those meetings to the extent you were  
2 available, but if I'm mistaken, please feel free to correct me.

3 A Well, I think it might be helpful -- and just so you totally understand which  
4 meetings I did or didn't attend -- are there specific meetings? Because there were  
5 ranges of meetings at many different times in the administration about a range of topics,  
6 and it wasn't just one standard interagency daily meeting.

7 Q Okay. That's helpful.

8 Were you part of interagency meetings on the administration's Afghanistan  
9 policy?

10 [REDACTED]. On this one, I'll ask Ms. Psaki not to reveal any internal  
11 deliberations, to the extent that she was in meetings. But she can answer whether she  
12 was in those interagency meetings on Afghanistan.

13 Ms. Psaki. Are you referring to the lead-up to the decision to withdraw?

14 [REDACTED]. Just generally the interagency meetings, exactly.

15 Ms. Loeb. I think it might be helpful if we could just narrow down timeframes  
16 about when you're asking.

17 BY [REDACTED]:

18 Q We will be getting to the timeframes specifically. Right now I'm just trying  
19 to better understand the role of the White House Press Secretary and to the extent that  
20 you engaged with the interagency.

21 If the answer is, "It depends on the issue," I think that's helpful enough for us, and  
22 we can move on to the specific timeframes.

23 A Great. That is -- that is correct.

24 And I want to provide you, of course, the most up-to-date, accurate information  
25 to be helpful. I just wanted to make it not overly general, because I want to be accurate



1 of course.

2 Q Thank you.

3 Now moving down the timeline, which will hopefully provide additional clarity,  
4 you served as the White House Press Secretary throughout the 2021 Afghanistan  
5 withdrawal and evacuation, correct?

6 A Correct.

7 Q When did you first become involved with discussions relating to the  
8 Afghanistan withdrawal?

9 A I recall attending as just an observer -- not attending meetings until the  
10 summer, closer to the final weeks leading up to the withdrawal timeline -- of August 31st,  
11 I should say.

12 Q Was Afghanistan withdrawal an issue you worked on while serving on the  
13 transition team?

14 A It was not an issue I worked on on the transition team, no.

15 Q Was it an issue that was addressed by the transition team, or were you  
16 aware of it being an issue for the transition team?

17 A Because that wasn't in my area of purview, I am not the right person to  
18 speak to that.

19 Q In the lead-up to the announcement, the go-to-zero order, the April 14th,  
20 2020, announcement, how would you generally obtain information that you relied on in  
21 formulating messaging and making public statements on behalf of the White House  
22 regarding Afghanistan policy?

23 A Well, and just for clarification for the record, I did not attend interagency  
24 meetings that were discussing and determining the decision to withdraw or the timeline  
25 for withdrawal.

1            Obviously, when the topic came up as a topic in the media, in the press, as it did  
2 during this period of time, given that the timeline was a publicly available detail, what I  
3 would do was work through the NSC press team to determine what we would say  
4 publicly, which was quite limited at the time, given it was an ongoing internal  
5 deliberation.

6            Q    How often did you meet with State Department principals?    And if so, with  
7 whom?

8            Ms. Loeb.    In her role as White House Press Secretary?

9            [REDACTED].    Correct.

10          Ms. Psaki.    I did not regularly meet with State Department officials.

11          BY [REDACTED]:

12          Q    Did you meet with the State Department Spokesperson in your capacity as  
13 White House Press Secretary?

14          A    I engaged with him in a limited capacity.

15          Q    And who was that?

16          A    Ned Price.

17          Q    And how often did you meet with Defense Department principals?    And if  
18 so, with whom?

19          A    I did not meet with Defense Department principals typically either.

20          Q    Did you meet with the Defense Department Spokesperson in your capacity  
21 as White House Press Secretary?

22          A    I engaged with him sporadically when appropriate or when needed for  
23 clarification of any information.

24          Q    And who was that?

25          A    John Kirby.

1 Q Would you at any point receive the inputs from the Defense Department and  
2 State Department Spokespersons in your role as White House Press Secretary?

3 A So I think if you mean -- you can tell me if this is not what you mean -- their  
4 materials they prepared for the briefing --

5 Q Correct.

6 A -- I did not seek it every day, because the White House briefing revolved  
7 around such a broad range of issues. It was typically not around military strategy, and  
8 the Department of Defense was obviously addressing that.

9 So I would review it and review the publicly available briefing at times when it was  
10 relevant to the topics that the White House press corps was going to bring up, but not  
11 every day or even every week necessarily.

12 Q Thank you.

13 Going back to my prior questions regarding State Department and Defense  
14 Department principals, were you present at any meetings with those principals regarding  
15 Afghanistan policy?

16 Ms. Loeb. In what time period?

17 [REDACTED]. Present, prior to the April 14th announcement.

18 Ms. Psaki. I was not.

19 BY [REDACTED]:

20 Q To the extent you did receive inputs and briefing materials from State  
21 Department and Defense Department Spokespersons, would you consolidate their inputs  
22 into your own notes when preparing for your press briefings?

23 A So are you asking if I would review their materials and, if there was a  
24 particularly useful line, I would write it on mine?

25 Q Or that it would inform the press briefings you provide to the American

1 public.

2 A From time to time, yes, but typically it wasn't applicable, because there were  
3 only short periods of time where questions that would've gone to the Department of  
4 Defense or the State Department were also coming into the White House Briefing Room.

5 Q And to the extent they weren't coming in the White House Briefing Room,  
6 would you share what you learned from the Defense Department and State Department  
7 Spokespersons and/or other principals, to the extent you engaged with them, with others  
8 in the White House?

9 A I'm not sure what you mean by that. I'm sorry.

10 Q When you'd receive inputs from the relevant individuals at the Defense  
11 Department and State Department, would you then share that information to others in  
12 the White House?

13 Ms. Loeb. That's a pretty broad question. Just as a general matter? Or any  
14 specific time?

15 [REDACTED]. Regarding Afghanistan. I think we're now focusing specifically  
16 on the time period prior to the April 14th, 2021, announcement.

17 BY [REDACTED]:

18 Q If you'd receive inputs from the Defense Department or State Department,  
19 information that you became aware of through them, would you relay that information to  
20 the relevant individuals in the White House?

21 A Just for full clarification -- and I'm sorry if I confused this -- I was not involved  
22 in the interagency process leading up to the withdrawal of Afghanistan.

23 What we said publicly was very limited. And I know the transcripts are publicly  
24 available. I don't have all of those, of course, in front of me, but you can see how  
25 limited it was, what we said. So there wasn't a lot of internal discussion between

1 spokespeople around this topic at the time, because it was internal deliberations we  
2 weren't going to be speaking about publicly.

3 Q Thank you.

4 And, Ms. Psaki, during this period, how did you handle conflicts in inputs between  
5 the State Department and Defense Department?

6 [REDACTED]. I don't think she said there was conflict between the State  
7 Department and the Defense Department.

8 [REDACTED]. Well, that's helpful information.

9 BY [REDACTED]:

10 Q Was there conflict at any point in the information that you'd receive from  
11 the Spokespersons?

12 A Well, again -- and, again, I don't have the transcripts in front of me. And if  
13 there is a particular transcript, I'm more than happy to discuss it.

14 But, at the time, what I recall is that our standard line, line of what we said  
15 publicly, was, "There's ongoing discussions happening within the interagency." So there  
16 wasn't -- it was quite limited, and any internal discussions we wouldn't have been  
17 discussing publicly. And that was what my job was.

18 Q Thank you.

19 So I want to focus on the interagency review, understanding that you've already  
20 noted the information was limited at the time.

21 When you assumed the position of White House Press Secretary in January 2021,  
22 where did things stand with respect to the potential withdrawal from Afghanistan?

23 [REDACTED]. First, to the extent you're talking about internal deliberations, I  
24 would ask Ms. Psaki not to provide those details.

25 But if you want to answer at a high level of your understanding of where things

1 were.

2 Ms. Psaki. Sure.

3 Well, I obviously don't want to speak to any discussions I wasn't a part of, of  
4 course, not that you're asking me to do that.

5 There was, of course, a publicly known agreement made by the prior  
6 administration. Beyond that, in terms of internal discussions, I wasn't a part of those.

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q Thank you.

9 And I believe what White House counsel is mentioning is the deliberative process  
10 issue. And I want to be clear, our understanding of the deliberative process privilege is  
11 that it applies only to information that is not purely factual and predecisional.

12 So, to the extent you can answer our questions either of factual information or  
13 information that arose after the relevant decision, that would be appreciated.

14 A Sure.

15 Q The reason I asked this was: At the time, a decision had not yet been made  
16 to withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan, correct?

17 A Well, there had been a deadline and a timeline set by the prior  
18 administration, as we know because it was publicly available.

19 Q Again, that was not my question. Had the administration --

20 A Well, it's relevant information. But go ahead.

21 Q Certainly. But had the administration made a decision as to whether they  
22 were going to withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan?

23 A Again, because I wasn't in the internal meetings and discussions and  
24 deliberations about this, I can't speak to the status of any decision-making around this  
25 period of time.

1 Q So you received no briefings, no inputs, no information on the  
2 administration's position as to whether it was going to withdraw from Afghanistan?

3 Ms. Loeb. I think Ms. Psaki has already answered this.

4 [REDACTED]. And I'm re-asking the question.

5 Ms. Loeb. Well --

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q You had received briefings, no inputs, no other information outside of what  
8 was already readily available to the American public regarding the administration's  
9 position on the military withdrawal from Afghanistan?

10 A Well, again, as you know, the President himself had made public speeches  
11 and public statements which certainly I think we all were aware of, as was I.

12 But because at the time -- and this is -- again, just to take a step back on what the  
13 job was, when I came in and started the job as White House Press Secretary, the  
14 dominant issue in the White House Briefing Room was, of course, the once-in-a-lifetime  
15 COVID-19 pandemic. That was primarily what reporters were asking me about. That  
16 was primarily what I was focusing my time and energies ensuring I was up to date on the  
17 brief on. There were also ongoing efforts to pass COVID relief packages to get economic  
18 aid and assistance to the American public.

19 So I share that not because I wasn't interested in every single issue happening but  
20 because my responsibility in that job was to focus on the questions and the topics of  
21 interest to the White House Briefing Room and reporters. I didn't determine them; they  
22 determined them. And that was what they were primarily asking about.

23 Q So is it your testimony that that the decision or contemplation of withdrawal  
24 was not a topic of interest in January 2021 to the White House?

25 A I don't -- first of all, that's not at all what I said.

1           What I said was that my job as the White House Press Secretary was to respond to  
2 the topics of the reporters in the Briefing Room, members of the independent media, and  
3 what questions they wanted to ask about.

4           At the time, we were in the middle of a generational pandemic. That was the  
5 primary topic they were asking me about on a daily basis.

6           Every issue of interest to the American public, any issue where our men and  
7 women were serving overseas, was, of course, of interest to the President, to the national  
8 security team, and to officials in the United States Government. I'm just speaking  
9 specifically to the role of the White House Press Secretary and what I had a responsibility  
10 for preparing to answer on a daily basis.

11           Q     Thank you.

12           Ms. Psaki, I'd like to enter exhibit 1 into the record.

13   [Psaki Exhibit No. 1  
14   was marked for identification.]

15           ██████████. I think her counsel needs one too.

16           Ms. Loeb. Yeah. Okay. Well, I'll share with Jen.

17   BY ██████████:

18           Q     I just want to better understand the timeline of the interagency review.

19           So, according to this January 22, 2021, statement by NSC Spokesperson Emily  
20 Horne, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan informed his Afghan counterpart,  
21 Hamdullah Mohib, that the U.S. would review the February 2020 U.S.-Taliban agreement,  
22 i.e., the Doha Agreement, including to assess whether the Taliban was living up to its  
23 commitments.

24           It's our understanding, pursuant to State Department document production and  
25 witness testimony, that this is around the time the interagency review commenced.



1 Does this comport with your understanding as well?

2 Ms. Loeb. So I think we'd like to just take time to read the statement as well.

3 [REDACTED]. Oh, apologies. I assumed that you had already had access to  
4 this, given this coming from the White House, but please feel free to take time to look at  
5 it.

6 Ms. Loeb. This statement is from January 22nd, 2021. You assumed that we  
7 had this at the top of our mind, memorized?

8 [REDACTED]. I assumed, given your role as White House Press Secretary, that  
9 you were aware of the statement made. But please feel free to take your time.

10 Ms. Psaki. Well, I think, just for the record, there were thousands of statements  
11 that were issued from the White House during my time as Press Secretary, and the  
12 interagency. And I did more than 200 briefings. So this is from 3-1/2 years ago. But  
13 thank you for it, and I'm happy to review it.

14 Okay. Go ahead.

15 Ms. Loeb. Can you repeat your question, please?

16 [REDACTED]. Of course.

17 BY [REDACTED]:

18 Q As noted, we just want to better understand the timeline.

19 It's our understanding pursuant to State Department document production and  
20 witness testimony that this is around the time the interagency review commenced within  
21 the White House. Does that comport with your understanding as well?

22 A Well, this is just days after the President was inaugurated, but, again, since I  
23 wasn't involved in the interagency process for the review about the decision to withdraw  
24 or the timeline for withdrawal, I'm not the best person to confirm the timeline of it.

25 Q Do you recall how long the interagency review of the Doha Agreement

1       lasted?

2               A     Again, because I wasn't involved in the process, I'm not the right person to  
3       ask that question.

4               Q     Is it fair to assume that it lasted, at the latest, until President Biden made his  
5       April 14th, 2021, announcement that U.S. troops would be drawn to zero in Afghanistan?

6               Ms. Loeb.   I think Ms. Psaki has said she doesn't have a basis to make  
7       assumptions.

8       ██████████.   Okay.

9               BY ██████████:

10              Q     Ms. Psaki, what, to the best of your understanding, were the goals of the  
11       interagency review?

12              A     Again, because I wasn't involved in the interagency review process and I  
13       wasn't a member of those meetings or that engagement, I'm not the best person to  
14       answer those questions.

15              Q     So is it your testimony that, as White House Press Secretary, you were never  
16       informed as to what the goals of the administration's interagency review of one of the  
17       most important foreign policy decisions were?

18              Ms. Loeb.   That is not what she said.

19       ██████████.   Okay.

20       Then please clarify.

21              Ms. Psaki.   Well, I think at the outset you asked me not to guess and you asked  
22       me not speak about things that I was not personally engaged in.   So I'm just trying to  
23       meet what you asked me to do at the start of this engagement.

24       ██████████.   Thank you.

25       So I'd like to enter a press briefing you provided on January 29th, 2021, as exhibit

1 2.

2 [Psaki Exhibit No. 2

3 was marked for identification.]

4 Ms. Loeb. So, just for the record here, this looks like a partial piece of a 26-page  
5 transcript of Ms. Psaki's briefing. Is that correct?

6 [REDACTED]. Correct. This is an excerpt thereof.

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q Most of your press briefings talked about a range of issues --

9 A Uh-huh.

10 Q -- and we're focused on Afghanistan --

11 A Sure.

12 Q -- so I will be reading the relevant question, but I'll make sure that nothing is,  
13 sort of, cut out without context.

14 A I appreciate that. Thank you so much.

15 Ms. Loeb. Great.

16 Well, I just want to say for the record, Ms. Psaki gave over 220 press briefings  
17 during her time at the White House. Most of them took place about 45 minutes long.  
18 This one looks like the transcript is 26 pages. I think that that is, frankly, maybe a  
19 smaller number of pages than what many of these are?

20 [REDACTED]. Yes.

21 BY [REDACTED]:

22 Q Again, we will be reading the relevant portions into the record. And if you  
23 don't feel comfortable commenting on it, Ms. Psaki, you can say so on the record then.

24 A Sure.

25 Q So I'd like to direct your attention to page 3.

1 Mr. Waltz. Don't let me interrupt. Y'all keep going. Thank you.

2 [REDACTED]. We're going to take a quick pause and allow Representative  
3 Waltz to introduce himself for the record.

4 Mr. Waltz. I'm Representative Mike Waltz, Florida's Sixth.

5 Ms. Psaki. Thank you.

6 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

7 [Discussion off the record.]

8 [REDACTED]. We're going to take a quick pause and allow Representative  
9 Waltz to ask any of the questions that he would --

10 Mr. Waltz. In about 5 minutes.

11 [REDACTED]. Certainly. Of course. Happy to. Yeah.

12 BY [REDACTED]:

13 Q Okay. So, going back to exhibit 2, which is a press briefing you provided on  
14 January 29th, 2021, if you could please turn to page 3.

15 A Uh-huh.

16 Q Here, a reporter asks you -- states initially, "Thank you, Jen. One foreign  
17 policy, just to get going: With violence surging in Afghanistan, is the President still  
18 committed to wind down operations there and bringing troops home this year?"

19 To which you respond, "The President -- I have not spoken with the national  
20 security team about this in particular, but his commitment remains."

21 Just 1 week after the interagency review of the Doha Agreement, which outlined  
22 the U.S. withdrawal, you affirmed that President Biden is committed to withdrawing U.S.  
23 troops.

24 Can you please explain how this commitment was cemented even though the  
25 interagency review had just begun?

1           A     Well, I would say first, as you know, the President had given a number of  
2 public speeches related to Afghanistan, and so that was publicly available information.

3           Q     When speaking to "the President remains committed," or "his commitment  
4 remains," had a decision been made to withdraw U.S. troops in January 2021?

5           A     Again, I think I spoke to the fact that I was not involved in the interagency  
6 process. All I'm speaking to is the fact that the President, even during the campaign and  
7 prior to that, had made his views on winding down the war in Afghanistan publicly  
8 known.

9           Q     So was your statement, "but his commitment remains," informed exclusively  
10 by public information that was already readily available to the American people?

1 [12:04 p.m.]

2 Ms. Psaki. There are times when the reporters asked questions that did pertain  
3 to information that was already publicly available. So, yes.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q Did anything else inform the language here about "his commitment  
6 remains"?

7 A Again, as I've told you previously, I wasn't involved in the interagency  
8 process or meetings related to the decision and the timeline for withdrawal.

9 Q Just for clarity of the record, Ms. Psaki, can you please explain to us what  
10 you mean by "his commitment remains"?

11 A I'm not going to parse language in a press briefing from three and a half  
12 years ago. I don't have anything to add to what I said in the briefing.

13 Q I'd like to enter into the record next as exhibit 3 an excerpt from the  
14 biography of Richard Holbrooke titled "Our Man: Richard Holbrooke and the End of the  
15 American Century."

16 [Psaki Exhibit No. 3

17 was marked for identification.]

18 [REDACTED]. Mr. Holbrooke previously served as the U.S. Special  
19 Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations,  
20 Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs, and U.S. Ambassador to  
21 Germany.

22 Ms. Psaki, if you could please direct your attention to what is marked as page 530.

23 Ms. Loeb. I think if we can take just a moment to read this, that would be great.

24 [REDACTED]. Certainly.

25 [Witness reviewing.]

1 BY [REDACTED]:

2 Q Are you ready, Ms. Psaki?

3 A I am. Go ahead.

4 Q Okay. Great.

5 So the following recounts a 2010 meeting between then Vice President Biden and  
6 Mr. Holbrooke, who at the time was serving as the U.S. Special Representative for  
7 Afghanistan and Pakistan.

8 In that meeting, Mr. Holbrooke argued that the U.S. owed Afghans continued aid  
9 and assistance, particularly directed at women who suffered in the Taliban's brutal rule.

10 Holbrooke recalled that then-Vice President Biden rejected that, stating, quote,  
11 "I'm not sending my boy back to there to risk his life on behalf of women's rights. It just  
12 won't work. That's not what we're there for."

13 According to Mr. Holbrooke, then-Vice President Biden stated that Afghanistan  
14 was a, quote, "debacle politically" that would harm their positioning in the 2012 election.

15 When Mr. Holbrooke raised America's "obligation," quote, "obligation to the  
16 people who had trusted us," then-Vice President Biden responded, "F--- that. We don't  
17 have to worry about that. We did it in Vietnam. Nixon and Kissinger got away with it,"  
18 referencing the abandonment of America's Vietnamese allies at the end of the Vietnam  
19 war.

20 Ms. Psaki, did President Biden have an impulse to get out of Afghanistan no  
21 matter the cost in 2021?

22 A I would just say that this is a reference to a conversation that I can't even  
23 confirm happened from 2010, when I was the deputy press secretary in the Obama  
24 administration and I was not working on issues related to Afghanistan.

25 Q I'd like to enter as exhibit 4 an excerpt from a press conference you gave on

1 August 24th, 2021.

2 [Psaki Exhibit No. 4

3 was marked for identification.]

4 Ms. Loeb. I just, again, would like to note for the record, we've been handed a  
5 transcript, about 3 pages out of a 26-page transcript,, so I just -- the full transcripts are  
6 the full record of what Ms. Psaki said on any given day are the best record of what she  
7 said.

8 So sometimes reporters would come out and ask questions about different topics  
9 at different times. So we're obviously going to look at whatever you'd like us to look,  
10 but the complete transcript would be the best record of what Ms. Psaki said completely  
11 on any given day.

12 [REDACTED]. Certainly.

13 [REDACTED]. I'd like to say for the record we're trying to do your client a favor  
14 by producing smaller pages as opposed to hundreds of thousands. That's the reason for  
15 that. I'm not trying to conceal anything or cut it short.

16 [REDACTED]. Before proceeding, we have 8 more minutes on our time, so I'm  
17 going to put a pin in this quickly and allow Representative Waltz.

18 Mr. Waltz. Thank you.

19 Hello, Ms. Psaki.

20 Ms. Psaki. Hi, Congressman. Thank you for your service too.

21 Mr. Waltz. Thank you.

22 I just want to go back to a meeting I had with President Ghani the night before he  
23 was to visit with the President, 25th of June, and he indicated to me, to folks such as  
24 General Petraeus and others at a small dinner, that his number one ask going in to talk to  
25 the President was that the President allow U.S. contractors to continue to support the



1 Afghan air force.

2 His number one ask. Didn't want any more troops. Didn't want U.S. air  
3 support. He wasn't going to ask for any additional arms or what have you. But just  
4 that the contractors were given the legal authority by the White House, the kind of  
5 go-ahead, so that his air force could continue to support the Afghan army.

6 We saw then-President Ghani at a meeting with Speaker Pelosi the day after, and  
7 President Ghani's indication was that that request was denied in his Oval Office meeting.

8 Fast forward. We then have early July a dissent cable from 26 diplomats coming  
9 from Embassy Kabul.

10 Were you aware of the dissent cable when it came?

11 Ms. Psaki. When it was made public, I was aware.

12 Mr. Waltz. So you were not aware, at least in your capacity as spokesperson,  
13 that the majority of diplomats -- or at least a large group of diplomats in Kabul -- had sent  
14 a formal dissent cable to the Secretary of State essentially saying that if we continue on  
15 this trajectory, the Afghan Government is going to collapse within days of a full  
16 withdrawal.

17 Were you aware that had been sent?

18 Ms. Psaki. So, Mr. Congressman, I wasn't -- I wouldn't have been in the channel  
19 that that dissent cable would have been sent to. So that is just what I was referring to.

20 Mr. Waltz. Right.

21 Ms. Psaki. But it was publicly reported, and that was when I was made aware of  
22 it. But not the --

23 Mr. Waltz. I don't believe it was publicly reported then at the time.

24 Ms. Psaki. When it became publicly reported, I should say, for verification.

25 Mr. Waltz. Well after.

1 Ms. Psaki. Well after, yes.

2 Mr. Waltz. So I think the issue is you have your key diplomats indicating that a  
3 collapse is imminent. The Secretary of State is aware of it. And it is unclear either  
4 whether he told the White House's senior team, whether he informed the senior team  
5 around the White House, including the person who's communicating on behalf of the  
6 President, that this dissent had happened.

7 To your knowledge, you didn't know at the time.

8 Ms. Psaki. Well, I wouldn't have been in the meetings with the Secretary of State  
9 and the President or PDBs or other meetings that would have occurred at that time  
10 among the national security team typically.

11 Mr. Waltz. Okay. Were you -- so but did you have any knowledge that -- I  
12 mean, I'm not talking about the details of the cable.

13 Ms. Psaki. Uh-huh.

14 Mr. Waltz. Just that it had happened, that there was dissent from Kabul.

15 Ms. Psaki. My recollection is being made aware of it when it was publicly  
16 reported, and as you noted, that was sometime after that.

17 Mr. Waltz. So that dissent had happened. The warning had gone up.

18 Then you have a call between President Biden and Ghani on the 23rd of July after  
19 the dissent cable was sent and after his meeting with Ghani where he made that request,  
20 and two key things came out of that call, which was then publicly disclosed and there was  
21 a transcript from the White House.

22 One was that Biden indicated to Ghani that he had a, quote, "perception  
23 problem." Quote, "I need not tell you that the perception around the world and in parts  
24 of Afghanistan, I believe, is that things are not going well in terms of the fight against the  
25 Taliban." And quote, "There is a need, whether it is true or not, there is a need to

1 project a different picture."

2 I mean, that's a clear strategic communications issue that the President was  
3 communicating to Ghani.

4 Were you aware of that call? Did you participate in the call?

5 Ms. Psaki. If it was -- I did not, nor would I have given the President guidance on  
6 how he should speak with a foreign counterpart. That wasn't my role.

7 Mr. Waltz. Okay. And then both you and Secretary Blinken go on leave in  
8 August, immediately after. That's correct, right?

9 Ms. Psaki. I was -- I had a long-planned vacation with my family. I have two  
10 young kids. They were even younger then. I had not taken any time off from my  
11 totality of my time as press secretary.

12 I will answer your question, I promise. I just want to give the full context, if  
13 that's okay.

14 Mr. Waltz. Sure.

15 Ms. Psaki. And I have a whole team, as we've been discussing, that is always  
16 available even if I was out sick for a day, which I don't think I ever really was, that was  
17 available to answer questions when I was not there.

18 In this particular instance for me, and I can only speak to me, I returned from my  
19 trip within hours of departing in order to be at the White House and I gave briefings that  
20 week when I returned.

21 Mr. Waltz. I think that's commendable. I think it's also notable that Secretary  
22 Blinken was in Martha's Vineyard till the day before Afghanistan collapsed.

23 I just think it speaks to a broader issue of how seriously I think the White House  
24 was taking or either ignorant of or dismissive of what was happening on the ground.

25 So did you, just in the few minutes I have remaining, did you advise the President

1 to say that the withdrawal was an outstanding success?

2 Ms. Psaki. My role -- oh, go ahead.

3 [REDACTED]. You got it.

4 Ms. Psaki. Okay. Sorry.

5 My role was actually to rely on the guidance from the national security team and  
6 the implementers on the ground, which included people who were in Kabul who were  
7 projecting their information through the NSC process.

8 Mr. Waltz. Well, they projected dissent and that collapse was imminent, that  
9 you would not be able to keep a presence there post-military.

10 Ms. Psaki. Well, again, sir, what I'm referring to -- and I understand your  
11 question certainly, but I'm just speaking to my own experience and process here was  
12 relying on the NSC press team to work with the policymakers and the implementers to  
13 gain answers to the questions that we were going to be asked in the briefing room. I did  
14 not have independent separate guidance I was offering at the time on that.

15 Mr. Waltz. Did you have any indication that you had more than a hundred  
16 Americans who wanted to leave and couldn't?

17 Ms. Psaki. I would just point to my publicly available briefings when I spoke to  
18 the work and efforts that were underway.

19 Mr. Waltz. What did you believe the number to be?

20 Ms. Psaki. Well, again, there were a range -- I was not a person who was  
21 implementing and determining the numbers of Americans, as you well know -- sorry  
22 about that -- and you're not asking me that question. I was just providing answers to  
23 the reporters who were asking about the efforts underway to reach Americans and  
24 provide them with information. That was my role at the time.

25 Mr. Waltz. And you realize it's since been revised to nearly a thousand --

1 Ms. Psaki. Well, again --

2 Mr. Waltz. -- between eight hundred and a thousand?

3 Ms. Psaki. Every press briefing is about a moment in time and providing the  
4 information you have available at the time. So that was my particular role.

5 Mr. Waltz. That was the information you had from the State Department.

6 Ms. Psaki. The information I projected publicly was what I had available to me at  
7 the time.

8 Mr. Waltz. I only have a few seconds remaining.

9 Have you spoken with any of the Abbey Gate Gold Star families?

10 Ms. Psaki. I have not personally spoken with any of them directly.

11 Mr. Waltz. Have they tried to speak with you?

12 Ms. Psaki. Not that I am aware of.

13 I would note --

14 Mr. Waltz. Have you reached out to them?

15 Ms. Psaki. I have not.

16 I would note one thing. I did list of all their names at the beginning of my  
17 opening statement to honor their service as well, which I hope more people do.

18 Mr. Waltz. Do you have any regrets on how this went down?

19 Ms. Psaki. I think any time men and women's lives are lost in a war, that's  
20 something that everybody should look back on and have a greater understanding of how  
21 they --

22 Mr. Waltz. They find it personally insulting any time an administration official  
23 calls it a success. Are you aware of that?

24 Ms. Psaki. Well, I would say -- I would just add one thing, sir, is one of the things  
25 that motivated me every day in the White House was the men and women serving our

1 country in the military -- I know you have served -- but also as diplomats overseas. And I  
2 had the honor of seeing that up close when I was at the State Department.

3 And so I am certainly someone who believes we should do everything we can to  
4 honor everyone, including Gold Star families, of course.

5 Mr. Waltz. Thank you.

6 [Recess.]

7 [REDACTED]. Just as an announcement before we begin with the minority's  
8 round, Ms. Psaki, you are now -- you've now been late twice. To the extent you need  
9 additional time for the break, please let us know. It's no problem at all. Be happy to  
10 accommodate.

11 Ms. Psaki. Sure.

12 [REDACTED]. The time is now 12:36 and we said 12:30. So for the next  
13 round, if you require 15 minutes or more, please let us know. Be happy to  
14 accommodate that.

15 Ms. Psaki. Okay. Thank you so much.

16 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

17 [REDACTED]. Okay. We can go back on the record and start the clock.

18 So as I introduced myself, I am [REDACTED]. I work with Ranking Member Meeks on  
19 the Democratic staff side of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

20 I just want to thank you on behalf of Ranking Member Meeks and the members of  
21 the committee again for being here voluntarily and for sharing your knowledge, your  
22 firsthand experience and information today.

23 I'll just note that -- you already know this -- the Foreign Affairs Committee  
24 jurisdiction involves the State Department, U.S. Agency for International Development,  
25 the Millennium Challenge Corporation, other foreign relations-related agencies.

1           So we particularly note and appreciate that you're here today largely answering  
2 questions about your time as a former White House official. Thank you for that.

3           Ms. Psaki. Thank you.

4           ██████████. We are going to endeavor not to retread on topics that have already  
5 been covered out of respect for your time. We do have some follow-up, so I'm going to  
6 ask your indulgence in advance. We may jump around from topic to topic and we may  
7 revisit something that you testified to previously. So feel free to refer back to your  
8 earlier testimony if we fail to acknowledge it.

9           And I already noted we're interested in your firsthand experience. I appreciate  
10 the efforts you've been making and I would ask you to please continue to make them. If  
11 we ask you a question where the premise is inaccurate or flawed, please correct that for  
12 us, because we would like to get a clean, clear record that is fact-based.

13           And I want to turn things over to Representative Crow, but before I do, I just want  
14 to clarify at the top, I believe at the beginning of the last question round the majority read  
15 in some definitions or understandings of two terms, "withdrawal" and "evacuation."

16           We have a slightly different understanding of those terms when we use them in  
17 questioning a witness like yourself, so I just wanted to clarify at the top our own  
18 understanding.

19           When we use the term "withdrawal" with respect to Afghanistan, we understand  
20 this to describe the retrograde of U.S. troops, equipment, and personnel from  
21 Afghanistan.

22           As such, the withdrawal of U.S. military personnel was initiated in the February  
23 2020 Doha deal, involved partial troop drawdowns prior to 2021, and was completed by  
24 August 31st, 2021.

25           Do you understand that definition?

1 Ms. Psaki. Yes.

2 [REDACTED]. And do you agree with it?

3 Ms. Psaki. Yes.

4 [REDACTED]. And also we understand withdrawal to have included the drawdown  
5 of all U.S. Embassy personnel in Afghanistan in addition to a military withdrawal, and we  
6 understand that U.S. troops and equipment are primarily the domain of DOD and military  
7 leadership.

8 Do you have any quibbles with that definition?

9 Ms. Psaki. No.

10 [REDACTED]. Similarly, with respect to the term "evacuation," we understand this  
11 term to describe the removal of American citizens and their eligible family members,  
12 lawful permanent residents and their eligible family members, special immigrant visa  
13 holders and their eligible family members, and certain other Afghan allies.

14 As such, our understanding of the evacuation encompasses both the civilian-led  
15 Operation Allies Refuge that began in July 2021 and the subsequent military  
16 noncombatant evacuation operation that occurred from August 16th to 31st, 2021.

17 Do you have any objections to that term "evacuation" as we have defined it?

18 Ms. Psaki. No.

19 [REDACTED]. Okay. With that, let me turn it over to Representative Crow to  
20 begin our questioning.

21 Mr. Crow. Thank you, Ms. Psaki. Appreciate you coming in today. And as has  
22 been noted, you are here voluntarily, so we appreciate your prior service to the U.S.  
23 Government and continuing to do so and fulfill your personal obligations to come.

24 We're grateful for that time and for you also recognizing at the outset the sacrifice  
25 of the members who gave their life during our over-20-year war in Afghanistan.



1 I want to start broadly for a moment here, because the House majority used the  
2 terms "deliberations" and "conflict" almost interchangeably.

3 And as you have noted, you are not a policymaker. You were not a policymaker.  
4 You were an observer of that process at times and a recipient of the products that came  
5 out of the policy process.

6 So in your experience, deliberations, discussions about complicated policy issues  
7 are normal, correct?

8 Ms. Psaki. That's correct. And may I add, because I said this to your colleague,  
9 Republican colleague over here, thank you for your service as well. But that is correct.

10 Mr. Crow. And, in fact, for complicated policy issues, deliberations are a part of  
11 the process, because you want to get different views. And again, you're not a  
12 policymaker, but from your observations, you want to get a variety of views and discuss  
13 those for a better result.

14 Ms. Psaki. That's correct.

15 Mr. Crow. So then that's not conflict.

16 Ms. Psaki. Correct. In fact, if I may add, discussion in a forum where people  
17 can have differing points of view is actually a healthy part of a process, I find, as a person  
18 who has observed it over the course of two administrations.

19 Mr. Crow. I agree.

20 The other thing is that policy issues evolve over time, particularly complicated and  
21 dynamic ones. Is that fair to say?

22 Ms. Psaki. That is correct.

23 Mr. Crow. So had you mentioned at the outset that you served during the  
24 pandemic, for example, and information about the pandemic would change as we got  
25 new science, as new information came in. So you would make sure that you would

1 communicate those changes in that evolution as things went on, correct?

2 Ms. Psaki. That's correct. And in fact, it's what the role of the press secretary  
3 is. It's your responsibility to make sure you are providing updated information as  
4 situations that are fluid and challenging evolve.

5 Mr. Crow. And that's not uncommon.

6 Ms. Psaki. No.

7 Mr. Crow. For any policy issue.

8 Ms. Psaki. That's correct.

9 Mr. Crow. Including, in this case, Afghanistan.

10 Ms. Psaki. Correct.

11 Mr. Crow. That the dynamic situation of Afghanistan and military operations in  
12 general require updating of information and communicating as things change.

13 Ms. Psaki. Correct.

14 Mr. Crow. Prior to that, or in your prior testimony, you referred to a publicly  
15 known document made by the prior administration. That document is also known  
16 colloquially as the Doha Agreement, correct?

17 Ms. Psaki. That's right.

18 Mr. Crow. And that agreement was made by the prior administration, the Trump  
19 administration, correct?

20 Ms. Psaki. Correct.

21 Mr. Crow. I'd like to just enter into the record a copy of the Doha Agreement.

22 The Doha Agreement includes -- there was some discussion earlier about private  
23 contractors. This agreement, that was made under the Trump administration, actually  
24 specifically includes private contractors as personnel that have to be withdrawn as a part  
25 of the agreement. Is that your understanding?

1 Ms. Psaki. I don't have the document in front of me. I'm happy to take a look  
2 at it.

3 Mr. Crow. Sure. Towards the bottom of the first page under part one.

4 Ms. Psaki. Sure. Yes. I see the reference.

5 Mr. Crow. So under part one of the Doha Agreement made by the Trump  
6 administration, the United States was obligated under this agreement to withdraw all  
7 personnel, including private contractors.

8 Ms. Psaki. That is what is in the publicly available document.

9 Mr. Crow. Okay.

10 And you weren't in government service under the Trump administration, but  
11 you're aware that the Trump administration and President Trump at that time made  
12 several comments saying he was going to withdraw all troops by Christmas of 2020. Do  
13 you recall that?

14 Ms. Psaki. I do recall publicly made comments. And I was not in the  
15 administration or didn't -- wasn't in public service at that time.

16 Mr. Crow. And again, publicly available information. Is it your understanding  
17 from publicly available information that the Trump administration negotiated the Doha  
18 Agreement directly bilaterally with the Taliban?

19 Ms. Psaki. Yes, I recall that as well.

20 Mr. Crow. And not including the Afghan Government?

21 Ms. Psaki. Correct.

22 Mr. Crow. I'd like to just switch for a moment to the transition, because you  
23 spoke earlier that you were part of the transition effort.

24 Was that the first transition you were a part of?

25 Ms. Psaki. I was also a part of -- well, I was in the White House and serving as the

1 communications director for former President Obama during the transition into the  
2 Trump administration. And I was also a part of the team that came in with President  
3 Obama at the beginning of his term when we transitioned from the Bush administration.

4 Mr. Crow. So you had seen a prior transition, the Obama to Trump transition.

5 Ms. Psaki. Yes. And the one prior to that as well.

6 Mr. Crow. Could I ask you to tell me what struck you as different between the  
7 transition that you participated in between the Obama administration into the Trump  
8 administration and how that compares to the transition that you experienced from the  
9 Trump administration into the Biden administration?

10 Ms. Psaki. Sure. And I would add also, because I had been a part of another  
11 transition from a Republican President to a Democratic President, that experience as well,  
12 that typically during a transition, once there is a President-elect, there is close  
13 coordination and sharing of documents -- obviously where appropriate; if it's classified  
14 information, obviously, people have to have the appropriate approval for that -- in order  
15 to ensure there is a smooth transfer of power and continuity of government.

16 And when I came in with President Obama and the Bush administration was  
17 departing, it was of course during the height of the financial crisis and there was very  
18 close coordination from senior-level officials to ensure that information was shared  
19 appropriately.

20 That is something that we tried to model and President Obama asked us to model  
21 as the Trump administration was coming in to ensure we provided information, whether  
22 it was briefing materials or documents.

23 Now, in my role as the communications director, that was not policy briefings.  
24 That was related to other people. But my role was more about ensuring that for  
25 continuity of government, even with differences of point of view, that the incoming team

1 had the information they needed to be successful in their jobs.

2 Mr. Crow. And given that experience in multiple transitions, how did the  
3 amount of information that was provided by the Trump administration to the incoming  
4 Biden administration compare to those prior transitions?

5 Ms. Psaki. Well, I, because I was coming in as the White House press secretary, I  
6 was not involved in the policy handoff or lack thereof of information. My engagement  
7 in that was quite limited. So I only am aware of kind of what was publicly reported and  
8 the lack of information that some of my colleagues had.

9 Mr. Crow. And so that public reporting, can you describe that public reporting,  
10 that secondhand knowledge that you received or that you learned about with the lack of  
11 information?

12 Ms. Psaki. Well, just that the sharing of information and briefing materials and  
13 documents was not consistent with the level of coordination that had been conducted  
14 from Bush to Obama and Obama to Trump.

15 Mr. Crow. Because a lot of the public reporting has indicated that there was very  
16 little information provided to the Biden administration from the Trump administration  
17 about Afghanistan and about the status of the war and the status of compliance with the  
18 Doha Agreement.

19 Ms. Psaki. I'm certainly aware of the public reporting, and I just don't have any  
20 unique additional information on that given I wasn't involved in discussions around  
21 Afghanistan or the withdrawal during that period of time.

22 Mr. Crow. Thank you.

23 I want to turn to the issue of American citizen evacuation from Afghanistan,  
24 American citizens sometimes referred to as AMCITs.

25 The United States doesn't require American citizens to register or to provide their

1 information to the State Department when they travel and live abroad. Is that correct?

2 Ms. Psaki. Correct. It's always voluntary.

3 Mr. Crow. We are a free and open society. We don't track and require  
4 registration of our citizens as they travel.

5 Ms. Psaki. That's correct.

6 Mr. Crow. So no administration, including the Biden administration, had a full  
7 picture of how many American citizens were living in Afghanistan in 2021, correct?

8 Ms. Psaki. That's correct, unless they registered.

9 Mr. Crow. Unless they voluntarily registered.

10 Ms. Psaki. Correct.

11 Mr. Crow. It's also true that in many instances American citizens are dual  
12 nationals.

13 Ms. Psaki. Correct.

14 Mr. Crow. And in this instance, many American citizens were both Afghan  
15 nationals and American citizens, correct?

16 Ms. Psaki. That's correct.

17 Mr. Crow. And it's also the case that many of those folks would have family  
18 members, either spouses or children, that may be only Afghan citizens, correct?

19 Ms. Psaki. That is also correct.

20 Mr. Crow. Which then complicates evacuation efforts. And when folks talk  
21 about American citizens, we're also talking about people who have spouses and children  
22 who may not be American citizens.

23 Ms. Psaki. Correct.

24 Mr. Crow. And in many instances, those individuals may not want to leave,  
25 because they don't want to abandon their children and their spouses.

1           Ms. Psaki. That's correct. I recall that being something that was noted by State  
2 Department officials publicly at the time.

3           Mr. Crow. And like other complicated policy issues, that also can evolve and  
4 change. So one week there might be a certain number of folks who want evacuation,  
5 but as the conditions change, that number also can change. Is that accurate?

6           Ms. Psaki. Correct.

7           Mr. Crow. Going to the issue of the questioning around calling the withdrawal a  
8 success.

9           It is true that the United States military conducted the largest airlift in American  
10 history in August of 2021. Is that right?

11          Ms. Psaki. That is correct.

12          Mr. Crow. The Doha Agreement also specified that the withdrawal was  
13 supposed to have happened in May of 2021. Is that your understanding?

14          Ms. Psaki. Yes, that was in the publicly available document.

15          Mr. Crow. So the Biden administration actually prolonged and extended that  
16 deadline to the end of August of '21. Is that your understanding?

17          Ms. Psaki. That is correct.

18          Mr. Crow. From the original date that had been negotiated by the Trump  
19 administration.

20          Ms. Psaki. Correct.

21          Mr. Crow. In your experience as a spokesperson and a communication  
22 professional involving issues of armed conflict, is it possible to both applaud and  
23 recognize the successes of servicemembers in conflict while also mourning those who are  
24 killed in conflict?

25          Ms. Psaki. I believe it is.

1 Mr. Crow. So it's not inconsistent, in your view, to both say that the  
2 servicemembers who conducted those operations in August of 2021 did remarkable work  
3 conducting the largest airlift in American history, that involved thousands of  
4 servicemembers, and at the same time mourn the deceased and those who were killed in  
5 action during that operation.

6 Ms. Psaki. Absolutely, as we should, and why I wanted to honor them in my  
7 opening statement.

8 Mr. Crow. Thank you for coming in today and for voluntarily providing this  
9 testimony.

10 Ms. Psaki. Thank you so much.

11 EXAMINATION

12 BY REDACTED:

13 Q I'll just continue the minority's questioning.

14 I do want to back up, way back, to the beginning of the interview and make sure  
15 that we have a complete understanding of your background and your experience.

16 So I believe you already testified in the first questioning round to your work  
17 experience essentially from the Obama-Biden administration to the present?

18 Can you fill in for us -- well, first of all, let me start with the top-line question.

19 How many years of work experience do you have?

20 A Well, sometimes I forget how old I am.

21 I started working -- I graduated from college in 2000. It is now 2024. So about  
22 24 years of work experience.

23 Q Okay. So can you help us fill in the space from 2000 until the start of the  
24 Biden administration, can you give us a sense of some of the roles that you held in that  
25 period of time?



1           A     Sure. I worked on a number of political campaigns in Iowa for the Iowa  
2 Democratic Party in 2002. I then worked for John Kerry's Presidential campaign from  
3 2003 through 2004.

4           I worked on Capitol Hill for Congressman Joe Crowley in 2005 as his press  
5 secretary. I then worked for the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee in  
6 2006.

7           I then worked for President Obama's Presidential campaign from 2007 through  
8 2008.

9           I then worked, as I noted earlier, in the White House as the deputy press secretary  
10 in 2009 through 2010. Then I was the deputy communications director into 2011.

11          I left the administration briefly before I returned -- and I was a consultant -- before  
12 I returned to work on President Obama's reelection campaign in 2012.

13          Then I started in the State Department once President Obama won reelection and  
14 I worked for Secretary Kerry from February of 2013 through about March of 2015.

15          I then returned to the White House where I was the communications director until  
16 the end of the administration. When I left, as I noted earlier, I was a CNN contributor, I  
17 was a consultant, and I also worked at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace  
18 starting about September of 2017 through about March of 2020.

19          And then I joined the Biden-Harris transition in late September, early October of  
20 2020.

21          Q     Okay. Thank you. That's a helpful chronology.

22          Just to fill in some of the gaps, you mentioned the campaign work you did earlier  
23 in your career. Did your work on those campaigns relate to press and communications  
24 or did it relate to other activities?

25          A     It primarily related to press and communications. On my first campaign in

1 2002 and in the first part of my time working for the Kerry campaign, I did field organizing  
2 and door knocking and assistant work until I transitioned into press in late 2003.

3 Q Okay. And you mentioned your role in the U.S. House for then  
4 Representative Crowley was as his press secretary?

5 A That's correct.

6 Q And your work with the DCCC that you referenced, what was your role there  
7 and what did it entail?

8 A I was a regional press secretary and a spokesperson, one of the  
9 spokespeople in the DCCC.

10 Q On your work on the Obama campaign, were you the traveling press  
11 secretary?

12 A I was. I was initially in 2007 a deputy press secretary, and then I began  
13 traveling with then-Senator Obama in about December of 2007.

14 Q Okay. And you mentioned some consulting that you did in the 2011 to '12  
15 range. Can you describe the nature of that work?

16 A I did some consulting for a polling firm called the Global Strategy Group for a  
17 brief period of time during that year.

18 Q And did that entail a focus on press and communications matters as well?

19 A It did. And politics.

20 Q Okay. And then the Obama reelection campaign, you mentioned that you  
21 worked on that effort. And that was also as press secretary?

22 A Yes. I was the traveling press secretary on that campaign as well.

23 Q Okay. And you mentioned your time at the Carnegie Endowment for  
24 International Peace. Can you explain the role that you held there?

25 A Sure. I was the communications director for the Carnegie Endowment for

1 International Peace, and I worked with all of the scholars there to help elevate their work.  
2 And we had offices around the world. So I also worked with them to elevate their work  
3 as well.

4 Q So is it fair to say that the vast majority of jobs that you have held since 2000  
5 have all entailed press and communications work?

6 A That's correct.

7 Q And have you ever held a job since 2000 that required you to formulate or  
8 implement foreign policy?

9 A That wasn't my primary job, no. I was the spokesperson at the State  
10 Department. And my job at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace was also  
11 overseeing communications.

12 Q Okay.

13 So is it fair to say that you're an expert in press and communications matters?

14 A I guess. I suppose I am at this point in time, but --

15 Q Do others consider you an expert?

16 A They may.

17 Q And is it fair to say that you're not an expert in policymaking and  
18 implementation?

19 A That is correct.

20 Q Last thing. People always hate this question, but if you'll indulge me.

21 Have you received any awards or accolades for your work over roughly 24 years  
22 largely focused on press and communications matters?

23 A No. We just do our work as public servants who keep our heads down.

24 Q Okay. Thank you.

25 Let me even, again just to make sure we're crystal clear on your prior experience,

1 and these probably will be yes or no questions, but I'm happy to give you time to  
2 elaborate on any if you need.

3 Do you have any particular work experience related to Afghanistan or the South  
4 and Central Asia region?

5 A Can you clarify for me more what you mean by that?

6 Q Have you ever had a job where the assigned duties or responsibilities  
7 pertained specifically to that region?

8 A No.

9 Q Do you have any prior work experience working in conflict settings? By  
10 conflict, I mean active military conflict or war.

11 A No. I've been to Iraq and Afghanistan and other conflict zones a number of  
12 times, but I did not have a job that pertained specifically to implementation or policy  
13 work in those areas.

14 Q And have you ever been deployed overseas in your professional career?

15 A I have not.

16 Q Have you ever participated or worked with a crisis-related task force in the  
17 Federal Government?

18 A Well, I would say I've not been a member of a crisis-related task force, but as  
19 there has been work determined through a crisis-related task force, my role has  
20 been -- whenever it has been -- helping to make public their information where  
21 appropriate.

22 Q Okay.

23 A Their determinations, I should say.

24 Q So it's fair to say that the experience you have with crisis-related task forces  
25 in the Federal Government relates expressly to press and communications matters.

1 A That would -- that is correct.

2 Q Have you ever worked in or on a complex evacuation situation like that  
3 involving Afghanistan in 2021?

4 A I was not -- I did not have a role in implementation or determining any  
5 aspect of evacuation or the process or any implementing role either.

6 Q So the answer is no with respect to Afghanistan in 2021. But have you ever  
7 worked on that at any other point in your career?

8 A Not as a policymaker or a person implementing or making determinations  
9 about how the process would work.

10 Q Okay. And have you ever worked on a noncombatant evacuation  
11 operation directly?

12 A I have not.

13 Q Have you frequently encountered scenarios where noncombatant  
14 evacuation operations are occurring?

15 A Well, I don't know how to define frequent. I would say when I was at the  
16 State Department -- and, obviously, this is of public record -- there were certainly times  
17 where countries where diplomats were serving became more dangerous, and there were  
18 of course steps taken by those, the implementers, the military and others, as appropriate.

19 But no, I was not directly involved. I would be involved in sharing publicly what  
20 was appropriate to share publicly about any of those circumstances.

21 Q Okay. And just to be clear for the record, when you referred to  
22 encountering scenarios at the State Department where civilians were being evacuated,  
23 that would have included instances where the State Department was the lead agency in  
24 undertaking a commercial or a civilian evacuation?

25 A That is correct. Or if there was a change in status of a country and whether

1 it was safe for people to be there, and that was just information we were publicly  
2 reporting, or if there were diplomats, there was a change in status for diplomats in a  
3 country overseas as well.

4 Q So not necessarily a military-led noncombatant evacuation operation?

5 A Correct.

6 Q Is it your understanding from your two decades of working in Washington  
7 that NEOs are generally rare?

8 A Yes.

9 Q Last yes or no question. Have you ever contributed to an after-action  
10 review subsequent to a crisis situation?

11 A I don't recall being a part of an after-action review given my role is primarily  
12 in any scenario reporting public information. And my public transcripts at all moments  
13 have been published online from any time I've worked in the U.S. Government, especially  
14 administrations.

15 Q Okay. Thank you.

16 Let me turn to my colleague, who's going to ask a few follow-up questions on your  
17 tenure as White House press secretary.

18 BY [REDACTED]:

19 Q Hi. Thank you again for appearing voluntarily.

20 I just want to further drill down and level set exactly on your role in the Biden  
21 administration given that there are some questions about the exact nature of your duties.

22 Before you took the job, though, did you have any concerns about taking such a  
23 prominent position, such a time-consuming position?

24 A Well, I have young children, and I think anybody who weighs the honor of  
25 serving as a public servant also weighs the impact on your personal life, because we're all

1 human beings. So I certainly weighed that.

2 But when I was asked to return as a public servant to work under the Biden-Harris  
3 administration, you know, I did weigh that, but I also knew that it would be the honor of a  
4 lifetime to do it.

5 Q Well, we certainly appreciate and acknowledge your service.

6 What did you understand your job responsibilities to be?

7 A Well, as I conveyed in my opening statement, my job responsibilities were to  
8 communicate on behalf of the President and the administration the decisions made by  
9 the President and the administration on policymaking and other issues that were asked  
10 by White House reporters in the briefing room.

11 I did a briefing typically Monday through Friday unless the President was traveling.  
12 Then we would do what's called a gaggle, and I didn't always travel for those. So that  
13 was part of my responsibility.

14 And I was also being available to reporters as they were seeking clarification or  
15 greater information to the degree I could provide that.

16 Q And who did you speak with about developing your responsibilities and who  
17 communicated these responsibilities to you?

18 A Well, because I had served in a prior administration and worked in the press  
19 office and on the communications team, I had a baseline familiarity with what the  
20 responsibilities were.

21 But certainly through discussions, once I was in discussions about the job and was  
22 offered the job with my direct supervisor, and even with the President during our initial  
23 discussions, we talked about that.

24 Q Is it fair to say, based on your experience in previous administrations and  
25 obviously having seen as a public observer what other White Houses do, that your -- the

1 nature of your responsibilities and your position was similar to the nature of former  
2 White House press secretaries?

3 A Yes. And, in fact, I spoke with a number from Democratic and Republican  
4 administrations prior to taking the job. And there is a consistency of the role and there  
5 is also a consistency of the reporters in the briefing room.

6 Q And so it's fair to say, which I believe you've stated, just to put a fine point  
7 on it, that your role was communications and not policy.

8 A Correct.

9 Q Were the topics that you dealt with when you were in the briefing room and  
10 in your day-to-day, were they fixed or did they change with the news cycle?

11 A They changed constantly in the briefing room. The conversation -- or I  
12 should say the questions that were being answered in the briefing were based on what  
13 reporters topically wanted to discuss.

14 And in the White House, which is different from the State Department in how they  
15 approach it, the topics could rotate. There could be a question on COVID followed by a  
16 question on negotiations with the Hill followed by a political question followed by a  
17 national security question.

18 Whereas in the State Department they traditionally stay on one topic. So  
19 sometimes those briefings can be a little easier to follow as you're reviewing them, which  
20 are all publicly available.

21 Q So what activities took up the most significant percentage of your time in  
22 your role?

23 A You mean in terms of my day-to-day?

24 Q Uh-huh.

25 A So I would say my day-to-day was consumed primarily by of course



1 reviewing news coverage and materials for that, working with my team and appropriate  
2 spokespeople from -- who worked with policy experts, as I was outlining, as I have  
3 discussed earlier, to ensure that we had accurate and up-to-date information to provide  
4 to reporters. Reviewing that to make sure I was as well versed as possible in advance of  
5 the briefing.

6 And then being available, which often could be -- and I think anybody who has  
7 served in this job, the Republican and Democratic administrations, would say this -- that  
8 there's hours of time spent talking with reporters and helping them understand issues as  
9 well that often follows the briefing, and you don't often see that publicly, of course.

10 Q Was setting foreign policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan a big portion of your time?

11 A It was not -- I was not -- I did not play a role in setting policy for issues,  
12 including of course Afghanistan. I played a role in communicating publicly once  
13 decisions were made.

14 Q Thank you.

15 Could you talk a little bit about the structure of the White House communications  
16 team?

17 A Sure.

18 So the press office -- I was the White House press secretary, of course. I had  
19 three deputies and three or four, depending on the time, additional spokespeople. And  
20 then we had three or four press assistants who were primarily responsible for logistics  
21 and making sure the reporters knew where they were going and what they should be  
22 doing, scheduling types of things.

23 There was also an NSC press team that worked directly as a part of the NSC press  
24 apparatus and was primarily responsible for being the point of contact in the interagency  
25 national security process for preparing public messaging talking points and answers to

1 questions. They had their own process that we worked with them in close coordination.  
2 They did not report directly to me or any press secretary typically.

3 There's also a communications team. The communications team, this can  
4 change in any administration and it was different in the two I worked in, but that typically  
5 includes oversight and management of the regional spokespeople, the research team,  
6 sometimes the speechwriters, and individuals who speak to different constituency press,  
7 as well as scheduling and planning of events and things that any President might do  
8 publicly.

9 Q So you did not actively run the National Security Council press team.

10 A Correct. They did not report directly to me.

11 Q Did you actively run or oversee the press teams of any individual agencies  
12 like the State Department or the Defense Department?

13 A I did not.

14 Q In your work, did you also -- you mentioned working with the National  
15 Security Council press team, but did you also work with, say, the National Economic  
16 Council or the Domestic Policy Council? Did you also work with, like, domestic press  
17 teams?

18 A I did as well, and particularly in the first year of my time as White House  
19 press secretary, I worked a great deal with the COVID press team, given how dominant  
20 the pandemic was as an issue in the minds of the American people.

21 Q Were there any constraints that you feel you and your team operated  
22 under?

23 A In what capacity?

24 Q Time, resourcing, amount of people.

25 A Yes to all of those, as everyone in this room may also feel at times.

1 Q Thank you.

2 I just want to quickly run through a couple of areas of responsibility and ask if you  
3 were responsible for any of them.

4 Did you or the office develop foreign policy within the White House or the  
5 interagency?

6 A No.

7 Q Did you conduct diplomatic negotiations with other countries?

8 A No.

9 Q Did you draft internal or deliberative policy papers?

10 A No.

11 Q Did you implement U.S. foreign assistance programs?

12 A No.

13 Q Did you plan, direct, or implement any U.S. military activities?

14 A No.

15 Q So is it fair to say that your work as a spokesperson was largely distinct from  
16 the policymaking or policy implementation process?

17 A Yes.

18 Q Is this sort of distinct relationship between policymaking and communication  
19 functions normal in your experience?

20 A In my experience, from working in two administrations, yes.

21 Q And then with respect to Afghanistan, again, I just want to run through a  
22 couple of different possible responsibilities and ask if you had any role in them.

23 Did you ever negotiate with the Afghan Government?

24 A I did not.

25 Q What about with the Taliban?

1 A I did not.

2 Q Did you participate in interagency planning regarding the withdrawal from  
3 Afghanistan?

4 A I was not a part of the interagency team related to Afghanistan.

5 Q Were you responsible for screening or issuing special immigrant visas for  
6 Afghan applicants before, during, or after the withdrawal?

7 A I was not.

8 Q Did you implement U.S. refugee admissions programs before, during, or  
9 after the withdrawal?

10 A I did not.

11 Q Did you work to ensure the security of U.S. personnel in Kabul before,  
12 during, or after the withdrawal?

13 A I did not.

14 Q Were you tasked with analyzing intelligence coming out of Afghanistan at  
15 any point?

16 A No.

17 Q Did you ever offer any direct policy recommendations for Afghanistan policy  
18 during your time at the White House in 2021?

19 A No.

20 Q Given the nature of your position in the White House, do you know why your  
21 testimony has been sought for this congressional investigation?

22 A I don't.

23 Q All right. I'm going to hand it back to my colleague [REDACTED].

24 [REDACTED]: Thanks.

25 BY [REDACTED]:

1           Q    I just want to clarify that, notwithstanding your answer just now that you  
2 don't know the reason for why you were requested to speak here today, you did appear  
3 here voluntarily.

4           A    I did appear here voluntarily, and hopefully I've shown and I will continue to  
5 show I'm happy to answer all the questions you have in this room.

6           Q    Okay.

7                    I want to ask one follow-up and then unpack a little more of the process by which  
8 you developed the messaging outputs from the White House press secretary's office.

9                    But, first, you spent time with my colleague just now clarifying the distinction  
10 between the communications work that you did and policymaking or policy  
11 implementation roles, which you did not engage in, correct?

12          A    Uh-huh.

13          Q    And why do you think that distinction matters?

14          A    Because I think in my experience in a well-functioning government, the  
15 policymakers and the experts in all of the issue areas are the ones making determinations  
16 about not only the path forward, but how things should be implemented and also the  
17 accuracy of information.

18          Q    So is it fair to say that if policymaking and communications were more  
19 intertwined, you think that would have a negative impact on the quality of outputs?

20          A    Well, I think they're intertwined to the degree that it's important for  
21 communicators to be basing their public information on the policy experts and their  
22 processes and how they're implementing policies in the U.S. Government.

23                    But just as politics shouldn't influence health advice from the CDC, for example,  
24 say during COVID, obviously, the information of policy experts and the accuracy of  
25 information on the ground, especially during challenging circumstances, should be the

1 basis of information shared with the public, because it is what is accurate.

2 Q So communications professionals should not be making or implementing  
3 policy.

4 A Correct. They shouldn't be, correct. And they also should not be -- they  
5 don't have a means of -- nor should they -- seek alternate information to what the  
6 policymakers and experts on the ground are determining and providing.

7 Q So given the relationship that you've just described, the distinct relationship  
8 between policy and communications and the interactions that you've already spoken to, I  
9 want to better understand the process with which you engaged others, including on your  
10 team or outside your team, to develop what we'll call messages -- or media outputs, I  
11 should say, messaging outputs.

12 In your time as White House press secretary, what were the mechanisms through  
13 which you communicated such messages to the public? You've mentioned press  
14 briefings. But can you give us a sense of other ways that you pushed messages out.

15 A Sure. I conducted, I think, more than 200 press briefings. I also did  
16 interviews with the media from a range of outlets throughout the course of my time  
17 there on television and a range of other forums and formats.

18 I did briefings where appropriate where I would join a policymaker. I also invited  
19 policymakers to our briefing room and to the briefing in order for reporters and the  
20 American public to hear from them directly, both from the national security team and  
21 from other domestic policy areas as well.

22 Q And you also released written press statements?

23 A Yes. Correct. We did. We released many, many written press  
24 statements, yes.

25 Q Can you estimate "many, many"?

1           A    Hundreds, if not more. Just overall from the government, I would not have  
2 approved most of those. I would have approved ones that were in my name.

3           Q    Okay. And all of these mechanisms you've described, press briefings, press  
4 statements, interviews, these were all essentially available to the public, correct?

5           A    That's correct.

6           Q    So they can be taken at face value in terms of the content.

7           A    Correct. And they were typically posted -- the White House briefing was  
8 sent typically within the day. The State Department briefings as well.

9           Q    You mentioned earlier that you instituted essentially Monday through Friday  
10 press briefings, give or take if scheduling interfered.

11           How did that pace or approach differ with or compare to your predecessor in the  
12 White House press secretary role?

13           A    I did more briefings during my time as White House press secretary in 15  
14 months than the totality of the four years of the prior administration.

15           Q    Okay. And what was the purpose of the approach you took, which was to  
16 significantly increase the number of press briefings and messaging engagement?

17           A    The purpose was to be available to the White House press. Part of our  
18 democratic system, as I noted in my opening, is that engagement with the press, even at  
19 times where it can be adversarial, that's part of our democracy, and to provide  
20 information through them to the American public.

21           Q    And what reactions did you get to this approach that you instituted of  
22 near-daily press briefings and a very forward-leaning engagement with media and the  
23 public?

24           A    The press -- the press corps was pleased to have more opportunities to ask  
25 questions of the White House and to also ask questions from the State Department and

1 the Department of Defense, which also had regular briefings. We did so many policy  
2 briefings a number of them even complained about how many there were.

3 Q And the approach you took, did it have the support of the President?

4 A It did. When I -- as I noted in my opening statement, and I'll just  
5 reiterate -- when I spoke with him about the job, one of his areas of focus was taking the  
6 temperature down, not allowing for inaccurate information, but taking the temperature  
7 down and hopefully making the briefing room a forum for providing information, which  
8 was why I also made -- regularly would bring in policy experts, too, in order for reporters  
9 to be able to ask them questions directly, including a number of Cabinet members to the  
10 briefing room.

11 Q Okay. And just for the record, were the messages that you communicated  
12 as White House press secretary, whether from the podium or in a briefing or an  
13 interview -- or in a statement or in an interview -- were those your own personal  
14 opinions?

15 A No. When you're the spokesperson for any White House or any  
16 administration, you're not speaking on behalf of your own personal opinions. You're  
17 speaking on behalf of the positions of the U.S. Government.

18 Q And so, in fact, they were not your personal opinions, they were official  
19 positions?

20 A Correct.

21 Q And were these official positions the result of a considered process to  
22 develop and communicate such messages?

23 A Yes. That is how the process worked, to ensure that the information that I  
24 was providing or other spokespeople were providing was reflective of the positions of the  
25 President and the administration.



1

Q Okay.

1 [1:22 p.m.]

2 BY [REDACTED]:

3 Q Okay.

4 I don't want to belabor, because I know we did talk intermittently in prior rounds  
5 about the process for developing your messaging output, but I just want to make sure  
6 we're clear on some of the technical aspects of that process.

7 Did you or your office generally draft White House press statements or press  
8 guidance?

9 A There were people on the press team who were responsible primarily for  
10 domestic issues, to work with the domestic policy teams on developing answers. So, for  
11 example, we had one person who worked with the NEC on economic press guidance and  
12 worked closely with that team, someone who worked closely with the COVID team on  
13 their responses.

14 The NSC press team was primarily responsible for developing the baseline of press  
15 responses and language and answers that could be provided publicly.

16 Q Okay.

17 So, in instances where you or your subordinates in your office were not drafting  
18 the messaging output, you said, at least with respect to national-security-related  
19 information, it would've been the National Security Council press team?

20 A Yes. And they worked through the interagency. So I obviously can't  
21 answer nor are you asking me this, but just for greater clarification for the record, there  
22 was press guidance that may have come from different agencies if it was more relevant to  
23 that agency. It's not that they drafted everything; they were just the coordinators on it  
24 to ensure that it was accurate information that was going in a briefing book on a daily  
25 basis.

1 Q So it's fair to say that, regardless of who drafted the messaging output, it  
2 was informed by contributions from the relevant policy agencies and entities in the  
3 Federal Government?

4 A That's correct.

5 Q Was it cleared by those entities?

6 A That would've been a process that the NSC press team would've been  
7 overseeing.

8 Q Okay.

9 And during your tenure as White House Press Secretary, who had the final  
10 authority to clear and release these messaging outputs?

11 A Well, the NSC press team would oversee the totality of that process.

12 Q Okay.

13 You testified previously about -- I think there was some back-and-forth about  
14 interagency meetings and your engagement with the interagency. I just want to unpack  
15 that and make sure we're clear.

16 A Uh-huh.

17 Q Is it your understanding, from your decades of experience working in the  
18 Federal Government, that the interagency can convene for both policy-related meetings  
19 and non-policy-related meetings, correct?

20 A Yes.

21 Q And, in fact, I think you testified previously to an interagency  
22 communications-focused meetings that members of your staff would engage in on a  
23 regular basis.

24 A Well, I would say -- and it just depends on how you define "interagency."  
25 For example, on domestic policy issues, if there was an economic policy or speech that

1 was going to be announced, there might be an interagency team, several layers of policy  
2 experts working on the policy, but there might also be, and typically would be, a team of  
3 interagency communicators coordinating on the release. Because it might be that  
4 sanctions -- and sanctions implementation was under the Treasury Department, of  
5 course. So it was a coordination on ensuring that the White House and others had the  
6 accurate information and it was consistent.

7 So there was also interagency, overseen by the NSC, coordination on a range of  
8 policy issues that -- the agencies involved just depended on what the policy was. It  
9 wasn't just one standard group at any particular time.

10 Q Okay. I think I'm just trying to clarify our understanding that one could  
11 engage the interagency without becoming a policymaker or a policy implementer to do  
12 so.

13 A That is correct. That is correct.

14 Q Okay.

15 And we've spoken a little bit more and you've provided more details, helpfully,  
16 about the White House Press Secretary process to develop and finalize some of these  
17 messaging outputs.

18 Did you ever have any concerns about that process?

19 A I did not.

20 Q Did you consider the process to be sound?

21 A I did.

22 Q Did you consider the process to be effective?

23 A I did.

24 Q And what's the basis for those opinions?

25 A Well, the basis is that the process when it is working effectively means that

1 communicators are relying on policy experts and implementers to ensure that  
2 information is up to date.

3 Of course, when there are fluid and challenging circumstances, that's when it  
4 becomes harder for everybody, and you have to be in constant contact and ensure you  
5 have the most up-to-date information.

6 Q And I think you testified previously when Mr. Crow was questioning you that  
7 fluid, dynamic situations are, in fact, normal --

8 A Yes.

9 Q -- and common.

10 A Especially in the national security space, as you all, I think, know well.

11 Q Okay.

12 You testified previously that there was not a mechanism for you or your staff, as  
13 communications officials, to necessarily challenge the quality or veracity of the  
14 policymakers' information that you were receiving, correct? Am I fairly summarizing  
15 your earlier testimony?

16 A That's correct.

17 Q Given that, were you nevertheless confident that you were receiving  
18 credible and sound policy-related information from them?

19 A Yes.

20 And I would also note that, while I couldn't, as I testified earlier -- while  
21 I -- because of the nature of my own responsibilities, I didn't typically and didn't have the  
22 ability to typically sit in hours of policy meetings, that there were moments when I did ask  
23 to attend meetings -- for example, I already noted, in the final weeks leading up to the  
24 timeline for withdrawal, but also around Russia's invasion of Ukraine -- when I knew that  
25 it would be a dominant issue in the Briefing Room.

1           And it doesn't mean -- obviously, a fair amount of that information might be  
2           classified or sensitive regarding operations, which obviously I wouldn't share. But I also  
3           wanted to make sure and I felt I had a responsibility to ensure I was there so I had the full  
4           scope of things, as much as I could be in those moments.

5           Q    Okay. So, as a general matter, when you participated as an observer in a  
6           policy-focused meeting, it helped you confirm and feel more confident in the veracity of  
7           the policy information that you were then messaging onto the public?

8           A    Correct.

9           I would also note that -- and hopefully this is helpful for the committee to  
10          understand -- there were many, many different meetings happening on any given day.  
11          And even in the period of time when I was attending some meetings leading up to the  
12          final withdrawal timeline or, say, in the weeks after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, I was not  
13          in the PDB, I was not in intelligence meetings. I wasn't in every meeting at all that was  
14          happening about any range of issue.

15          Q    Were you ever challenged to explain or defend the accuracy of the  
16          statements you made in briefings or press statements or interviews?

17          A    Yes.

18          Q    Frequently?

19          A    Well, I would just take a step back, that I think a responsibility of reporters,  
20          which I have a great deal of respect for, is pushing the Press Secretary, no matter who it  
21          is, for more information and for updated information. On a daily basis, sure.

22          Q    And did you ever have to later clarify remarks that you'd made previously or  
23          elaborate on an earlier statement?

24          A    I did.

25          Q    And was the purpose of doing that to ensure accuracy?

1 A It was.

2 Q And the best truthful information available at the time?

3 A That's correct.

4 Q And, again, just for the record, did that inform the belief you testified earlier  
5 to that, even though you didn't have a mechanism to challenge policymakers' information  
6 and the veracity of it, you were confident in the process -- you were confident in the  
7 quality and veracity of the information policymakers were providing to you?

8 A That's correct.

9 Q Okay.

10 I just want to go to a couple other items to follow up on from the previous  
11 questioning round.

12 I'm sorry, I should've covered this at the top when we were going over  
13 terminology, but the term "go-to-zero order" has been used today. Do you understand  
14 that to be a particular or specific term?

15 A I don't -- and, again, I spoke thousands of words, so I can't -- but it wasn't a  
16 phrase that I would've used regularly, no.

17 Q So it has no particular reference or meaning for you?

18 A I can guess what it means, but I'm not going to guess what it means, yes.

19 Q Okay.

20 And I believe you testified previously that your understanding of the U.S.  
21 withdrawal from Afghanistan was that it was rooted in the Doha Agreement concluded in  
22 February 2020, and that's what initiated the start of U.S. withdrawal, correct?

23 A Well, again, I wasn't in any of these meetings through the interagency  
24 process. I was not a part of the interagency process. So I can't speak to or confirm all  
25 components that were discussed during those either.

1           Q    But from what's publicly available and what you discussed with  
2   Representative Crow, the Doha deal directed the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan to  
3   go to zero?

4           A    Yes.   Well, it was in place before President Biden took office.

5           Q    And it directed the full withdrawal of U.S. troops to zero?

6           A    That is -- well, the publicly available document, which we all have in front of  
7   us, we can certainly read how it's exactly phrased, but --

8           Q    Okay.

9            You also briefly discussed the Dissent Channel at the State Department.   So I  
10   know I'm asking you to step a few years back into the past when you wore the State  
11   Department Spokesperson hat, but were you familiar, are you familiar today, with what  
12   the Dissent Channel is?

13          A    I am.

14          Q    Can you tell us little bit about what you understand the Dissent Channel to  
15   be?

16          A    Sure.   It's a mechanism for diplomats around the world to express their  
17   opposition or dissent to a policy or a policy implementation.   There's a range of  
18   meanings of it.   And there are, of course, some well-known dissent cables throughout  
19   history, including during the Iraq war.

20          Q    And do you understand the Dissent Channel to be a closed channel, internal  
21   to the State Department?

22          A    That is how I understand it.   And, as I noted earlier, the Press Secretary -- I  
23   think this is true in any administration -- the White House Press Secretary would not have  
24   been a typical individual who would've received a dissent cable.

25          Q    And based on your understanding of the Dissent Channel as a closed,



1 internal State Department channel, and since you worked at the State Department, can  
2 you give us a sense of why you think it's important that that channel is closed?

3 A I think, while some have been shared publicly, it provides a forum for  
4 diplomats who are serving our country in challenging circumstances to provide their input  
5 in disagreement with a U.S. Government policy.

6 Q And I shouldn't have put words in your mouth. Do you think it's  
7 important --

8 A I do think it's an important --

9 Q -- that the channel is closed?

10 A Yes, I do think it's an important channel, and I do think it's important that it's  
11 closed.

12 Q Okay. And so, then, let me to ask you to elaborate on why you think it's  
13 important.

14 A Because, having worked at the State Department for 2-1/2 years, I mean, I  
15 have a tremendous amount of respect for the men and women serving in the Foreign  
16 Service and civil servants and the sacrifices they make in their lives, as well, including in  
17 challenging war zones and others. And I think it's important for them to have a forum  
18 that does not need to be publicly available or made automatically public -- although I  
19 know there are cases when it does -- to express their disagreement. And disagreement  
20 is, again, a healthy part of our democracy.

21 Q And from your experience at the State Department, do you believe that,  
22 even though the Dissent Channel is closed, it informs internal discussions at the State  
23 Department on foreign policy matters?

24 A Well, I can't speak to that personally or directly, but I would just reiterate  
25 what I said earlier, which is, in my experience working for two Presidents and two

1 administrations, disagreement, in general, in meetings is a part of debate and a part of  
2 policy development. And so I think there are a range of forums that that can be done.

3 Q Okay.

4 I don't think we have any further questions for you in this round. I'll give you  
5 2 minutes back. And thank you for your time.

6 A Thank you so much.

7 [REDACTED]. We can go off the record.

8 [Recess.]

1 [2:06 p.m.]

2 [REDACTED]. For those who just entered the room, if you could just state  
3 your name for the record.

4 Chairman McCaul. We're going to go back on the record.

5 [REDACTED]. Hi. I'm [REDACTED]. I'm [REDACTED] for the  
6 House Foreign Affairs Committee majority.

7 [REDACTED]. Hi. I'm [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for the House Foreign  
8 Affairs Committee majority.

9 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for the House Foreign Affairs  
10 majority.

11 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for the House Foreign Affairs  
12 Committee majority.

13 [REDACTED]. I'm [REDACTED] from Mike Waltz's office.

14 [REDACTED]. I'm [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for the House Foreign Affairs  
15 Committee majority.

16 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], majority [REDACTED].

17 Ms. Loeb. I appreciate that.

18 Just for the record, is there a reason why we have communications staff in the  
19 room now?

20 [REDACTED]. All transcribed interviews are open to committee staff as well as  
21 to the personal offices for the members who are participating. Because the  
22 communications staff work for the committee, they are attending in today's transcribed  
23 interview.

24 We did not have any objections prior to that in other interviews, but to the extent  
25 it's an issue, we're happy to consider it.

1 Ms. Loeb. Just wanted to understand for the record why they're here. Thank  
2 you.

3 Chairman McCaul. We're off, or we're on?

4 [REDACTED]. We've been on.

5 Chairman McCaul. Yeah, we're on the record. Okay.

6 So let me just say for -- you know, Michael McCaul, chairman of the Foreign Affairs  
7 Committee, and I want to thank you for coming in voluntarily.

8 With Secretary Blinken, we've had a few of these moments where it got a little  
9 intense, but we, both being adults in the room, came to a consensus that didn't involve  
10 contempt proceedings. And we always think doing this voluntarily -- this is not a  
11 witch-hunt exercise at all. This is a, we want to just get to the truth of the matter.

12 We've handled this investigation, I think, very professionally and very responsibly,  
13 with not a lot of fanfare. And I was a Federal prosecutor for many years, and I want to  
14 handle this like that. It's an investigation. You know, we're not looking for scalps.  
15 We just want to get to the bottom of what was going on the summer that Afghanistan  
16 fell.

17 As you know, in the subsequent months after the fall of Afghanistan, we had, you  
18 know, Mr. Putin invading Ukraine, we have China threatening Taiwan, Ayatollah raising  
19 his ugly head in the Middle East. It's like the world's on fire, in many respects.

20 What worries me about Afghanistan is, in addition to the women left behind, the  
21 Americans left behind, the Afghan partners left behind; is the ISIS-K out of the prisons,  
22 one of whom was responsible for the Abbey Gate bombing that led to the deaths of the  
23 13 servicemembers, and I've spent a great deal of time with the families; and the current  
24 threat at play, without getting into classified, from ISIS-K in the Khorasan region in our  
25 homeland.

1           So I'd like to just ask a couple just background questions.

2           In your role as the White House Communications Director, I mean, you were kind  
3 of like the mouthpiece, right, for the administration? Well --

4           Ms. Psaki. Yes.

5           Chairman McCaul. -- how would you describe your role?

6           Ms. Psaki. Sure.

7           And let me first say, because you mentioned them, that -- and I had mentioned in  
8 my opening that the men and women who serve our country overseas are part of what  
9 has motivated me and driven me through my 20 years in public service. And I wanted to  
10 just note that I included the names of the individuals whose lives were lost in the Abbey  
11 Gate attack.

12           And I know that you have been someone --

13           Chairman McCaul. Thank you.

14           Ms. Psaki. -- who's quite engaged with those family members as well, so thank  
15 you for that.

16           So my role as the White House Press Secretary was to serve as the spokesperson  
17 for the U.S. Government and on behalf of the President and the administration.

18           Chairman McCaul. So, in that role, I mean, I know you're fed information, and I  
19 think █████ will probably get more detail about who was feeding you what, but what were  
20 your major communication channels? I mean, who was feeding you the information  
21 that you had to synthesize and then message?

22           Ms. Psaki. Well, the way that the process worked when I was the Press Secretary  
23 was that, typically, early in the morning, I would read a lot of media coverage --

24           Chairman McCaul. Like, 4 o'clock in the morning probably?

25           Ms. Psaki. 5:00, sometimes 4:00, sometimes 4:00. I'm sure you've had these

1 moments as well. Early in the morning, I would read the coverage and see what had  
2 happened overnight.

3 And then I would have a call with my team in the 7:00 a.m. hour to discuss what  
4 topics we might need more information on. And that was sometimes based on news  
5 that came in overnight or inquiries from reporters; it really depended.

6 After that, the different spokespeople on my team would go and work directly  
7 with policymakers -- so, if it was domestically, they might work, of course, with members  
8 of the COVID team or they might work with the National Economic Council, or the NSC  
9 press team would work through the interagency -- on developing press guidance. And  
10 that is typically how the information would then come back to me, through --

11 Chairman McCaul. So you're on a comms team. And then -- let's just focus on  
12 Afghanistan in particular, that summer --

13 Ms. Psaki. Sure.

14 Chairman McCaul. -- or even the spring leading up to that. What were the  
15 major lines of communication that came to your team? Was that coming from, is it fair  
16 to say, probably State Department, DOD, Jake Sullivan, National Security Council? Are  
17 those the main sources of information?

18 Ms. Psaki. Well, let me just tell you typically, and then obviously I can answer  
19 any followups you have.

20 So, typically, the National Security Council press team that didn't work directly for  
21 me in the structure -- we coordinated with them closely -- they were in charge of working  
22 with the interagency. So all of those entities that you mentioned -- obviously, the  
23 Department of Defense on military operations, State on diplomatic -- would be their  
24 points of contact, where they would work with them to develop press guidance by  
25 working with the policy experts in each of those agencies.

1 Chairman McCaul. Okay. So it's really an interagency process that comes to  
2 your team with the information.

3 Ms. Psaki. Yes, through the NSC -- in the --

4 Chairman McCaul. Okay.

5 Ms. Psaki. -- Afghanistan case --

6 Chairman McCaul. Now, are you --

7 Ms. Psaki. -- through the NSC press team.

8 Chairman McCaul. I just want to clarify that you're not, like, the policy  
9 decision-maker?

10 Ms. Psaki. Correct.

11 Chairman McCaul. Yeah.

12 Now, I have a spokesperson, comms director, who -- same thing, but occasionally  
13 ██████ engage in messaging and, at times, actual decision-making. Like, you know, "My  
14 advice" -- now, I can't get into White House executive privilege, like, with the President,  
15 you'll be happy to know --

16 ██████. Thank you.

17 Chairman McCaul. -- and I know what that means.

18 But in some of your conversations did you ever give advice, like, "Hey, I think this  
19 is the way we need to message," or, "Hey, maybe we shouldn't say this because I don't  
20 think it's consistent with what's actually happening on the ground"?

21 Ms. Psaki. Well, first, I would say, just because I wasn't a policymaker, it doesn't  
22 mean I didn't have a love of policy and still do, as I'm sure your communications team  
23 does as well; otherwise --

24 Chairman McCaul. They do.

25 Ms. Psaki. -- they wouldn't work on your team or for this committee.

1 Chairman McCaul. Yeah.

2 Ms. Psaki. So I certainly did.

3 And while I've never worked for the House Foreign Affairs Committee, I can only  
4 speak to how it works in the apparatus of the administration, which is -- as big and  
5 talented as your team is, it's much, much, much bigger, right?

6 And so my role in that capacity was relying on the policymakers to make the  
7 decisions and then working through the NSC press team to get their guidance from the  
8 policymakers on what we could then say publicly.

9 So, no, I did not see my role as providing policy advice.

10 Chairman McCaul. Right.

11 So, if you were given, like, comms advice from, say, the NSC press team but then  
12 you got information that may be inconsistent with what their message is -- first of all, did  
13 that happen? And, secondly, what would you do?

14 Ms. Psaki. Well, I would say, in the case of any fluid national security issue and  
15 Afghanistan, as we're all here to discuss, that, because it was so fluid, if there was  
16 information that was inconsistent -- not from mal-intent; I'm not saying you're suggesting  
17 that at all -- I would ask the NSC team for greater clarification on it.

18 And there were times -- and I noted this earlier, just for your knowledge -- I would  
19 go and ask Jake Sullivan or other senior officials for greater clarification.

20 Chairman McCaul. Right, because you, obviously, don't want to be, you know,  
21 the spokesperson giving, you know, information to the American people that's not  
22 accurate.

23 Ms. Psaki. Of course not.

24 Chairman McCaul. So, like, what about in the beginning phases -- having had the  
25 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Milley, the CENTCOM commander, Mr. McKenzie, and



1 talking to a lot of the IC community, it was fairly -- I wouldn't say unanimous but pretty  
2 overwhelmingly against the initial decision to withdraw. Were you aware of that fact?

3 Ms. Psaki. Well, a range of it was publicly reported --

4 Chairman McCaul. Yeah.

5 Ms. Psaki. -- and their comments and their points of view were publicly  
6 reported, so I was aware of it in that regard.

7 I had noted earlier, but just for your knowledge, I was not in or a part of the  
8 interagency process leading up to the decision to withdraw, so --

9 Chairman McCaul. And I appreciate that, yeah.

10 Ms. Psaki. -- I wouldn't have been in those meetings where those private  
11 discussions would've necessarily taken place.

12 Chairman McCaul. Okay.

13 So, while you could say the DOD and IC were fully supportive -- and that may have  
14 been true of Secretary Austin, because he's direct in line to the President -- that was not  
15 true with the rank and file underneath. Certainly, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the  
16 CENTCOM commander were all against this decision; the IC was very much.

17 But that was -- you were never aware of that until -- unless you had public  
18 reporting, but you weren't, like, briefed on that?

19 Ms. Psaki. Well, I wasn't in the meetings, and so --

20 Chairman McCaul. Yeah.

21 Ms. Psaki. -- because my responsibility was answering the questions of reporters  
22 and what they asked, I was typically asked about any disagreement once that was publicly  
23 reported.

24 Chairman McCaul. Okay.

25 I mean, just -- and I know [REDACTED] will get -- there were just a lot of, you know,

1 "Every contingency plan has been" -- "Everything's been planned for every contingency."  
2 I didn't see that. Or, you know, "We're not going to have helicopters off the roof of the  
3 embassy like in Vietnam." Well, that's exactly what happened.

4 When you talked about "every contingency's been planned for," were you aware  
5 of the NEO? This is the -- would be the evacuation operation plan that would be  
6 required by the State Department to request from the DOD and then to execute that  
7 plan. Were you involved in any of this or had any knowledge about it?

8 Ms. Psaki. Well, let me make sure I answer all -- because I think there were two  
9 questions in there. I just want to make sure I answer them.

10 Chairman McCaul. Yeah, yeah.

11 Ms. Psaki. So, if you are referring to something I said publicly from a  
12 briefing -- were you? Or --

13 Chairman McCaul. I'm just asking, were you aware, when it was said that every  
14 contingency has been planned for -- and I don't -- that may not have been her statement.

15 [REDACTED]. We'll get into it.

16 Chairman McCaul. [REDACTED] get into this. But this is just an example: "Every plan  
17 has been" -- "contingency has been planned for."

18 And were you aware of this NEO concept, that it's the State Department that has  
19 to request the NEO from the DOD to then implement?

20 Ms. Psaki. So I am aware of what a NEO is, which I know is not what you're  
21 asking me, but I was not involved in discussions or planning for that --

22 Chairman McCaul. Okay.

23 Ms. Psaki. -- so I wouldn't have been a part of those meetings.

24 Chairman McCaul. Do you know that that request wasn't made until after the  
25 fall of Kabul?

1 Ms. Psaki. Again, I wasn't a part of the --

2 Chairman McCaul. Yeah.

3 Ms. Psaki. -- interagency policymaking meeting -- I understand why you're asking  
4 the question, and --

5 Chairman McCaul. And I get it.

6 Ms. Psaki. -- I only want to speak to what I had personal knowledge of.

7 Chairman McCaul. And that's fair.

8 I just want to focus on -- this involves the families, and I hope this is not  
9 uncomfortable, but I do have to ask you this.

10 Ms. Psaki. Of course.

11 Chairman McCaul. There was an Axios article entitled "Psaki's new book falsely  
12 recounts Biden's watch check in troop ceremony," published on May 13th, 2024. And  
13 there is exhibit 6 that I'd like to enter into the record.

14 [Psaki Exhibit No. 6  
15 was marked for identification.]

16 Chairman McCaul. And the article basically -- and let me -- if you can provide the  
17 witness.

18 Ms. Psaki. Thank you.

19 Chairman McCaul. And I'm just seeking clarification. And maybe it was an  
20 oversight on your part.

21 The article states, "Psaki's new account is at odds with fact-checks at the time,  
22 news agencies' photos from the ceremony at Dover Air Force Base, and on-the-record  
23 statements from Gold Star families who were there."

24 "Psaki also mistakenly cited a passage from The Washington Post to bolster her  
25 account. The sentences she quoted were from USA Today's fact-check article -- not the

1 Post. That article noted Biden looked at his watch at the end of the dignified transfer of  
2 the troops' bodies, but also concluded that 'photos and video show [Biden] also checked  
3 his watch during the ceremony.'"

4 Lastly, it states that "Psaki initially declined to comment, but after this story was  
5 published she said in a statement that the 'detail in a few lines of the book about the  
6 exact number of times he looked at his watch will be removed in future reprints and the  
7 ebook.'"

8 And we appreciate that.

9 And I'll tell you why I'm asking you this. The families are very upset. And  
10 perhaps it wasn't done intentionally, but it looks like, "I don't have time for you. Let's  
11 get this thing over with." They're very upset.

12 And, I guess, we appreciate you removing that. That was responsible. But you  
13 have apologized to the families for this oversight?

14 Ms. Psaki. Well, let me just start by saying -- and I don't expect you would've  
15 read my book, but -- the story that this is a part of -- and I think this context is hopefully  
16 helpful or at least useful for people to know -- is actually about me providing tough  
17 feedback to President Biden and a story that The New York Times was writing at the time  
18 about how the families, as you've noted, including at the time and since then -- and I  
19 know you've been engaged with them -- were upset with the President about how -- at  
20 the time, what they had expressed was that he had talked about the loss of his own son,  
21 Beau, in engaging with them when they were experiencing the worst day of their lives.

22 And I will just reiterate -- and I know I've done this during this hearing, but I just  
23 want to reiterate that, obviously, the men and women who serve our country and those  
24 who lost their lives on that day make a tremendous sacrifice. And I venture to try to  
25 honor that in every day, including when I was a public servant.

1           And so the story was about me conveying to the President that his story about his  
2           own son was not received in the way he had intended and that they have every right to  
3           feel how they feel --

4           Chairman McCaul.   Right.

5           Ms. Psaki.   -- as any family member grieving the loss of a loved one, especially  
6           Gold Star families.

7           So that was the context of the story.   And I removed it immediately.   And, of  
8           course, as you know, fact-checks are imperfect.   It is ultimately on me, and I should've  
9           caught it as it was going through that process

10          Chairman McCaul.   That's good.   Have you apologized to the Gold Star families  
11          for that oversight?

12          Ms. Psaki.   Again, I think that my objective in every day I've served has been to  
13          honor the service of men and women and Gold Star families, and I would never want to  
14          do anything otherwise.   And --

15          Chairman McCaul.   Yeah.

16          Ms. Psaki.   -- the story I was providing in my book was actually an attempt to  
17          validate how they were feeling in that moment.

18          Chairman McCaul.   Well, I'll tell you how they feel.   They feel that you were  
19          saying they were not telling the truth and they were spreading misinformation.

20          Is there anything you'd like to say to the families on the record here?

21          Ms. Psaki.   Well, I certainly would say that my objective in including this story  
22          was validating their feelings and understanding that, even when someone has the best of  
23          intentions, as the President did in that moment, someone who has lost his own son, that  
24          it is certainly their -- not just their right but, of course, of any family, to feel however they  
25          want to feel, that the service of their sons and daughters is tremendous.   I greatly honor

1 it. And I honor the role they have played as well.

2 Chairman McCaul. And, you know, I've had to, unfortunately, meet with too  
3 many families during Iraq and Afghanistan.

4 Ms. Psaki. Sure.

5 Chairman McCaul. And it is difficult. And I --

6 Ms. Psaki. Yeah.

7 Chairman McCaul. -- appreciate that. But with respect to the allegation that  
8 they were spreading misinformation or not telling the truth about this, looking at the  
9 watch story, do you have anything you'd like to say to them?

10 Ms. Psaki. Well, that was never intended to be directed at them. And, again,  
11 as I've noted, it's been removed. And, of course, the process was imperfect. And I  
12 have nothing but gratitude and honor for the service of their sons and daughters and, of  
13 course, tremendous value for all of the Gold Star families across the country.

14 Chairman McCaul. Did you talk to them, the families, personally?

15 Ms. Psaki. I did not.

16 Chairman McCaul. Do you know if the -- the President did at Dover that day.  
17 Do you know if he ever made a phone call to them?

18 Ms. Psaki. I don't have any more information on the President's private phone  
19 calls at the time.

20 Chairman McCaul. Do you know if he's ever publicly stated their names, the  
21 servicemen who were killed?

22 Ms. Psaki. I don't have any more -- I know anything that he has said publicly  
23 would certainly be publicly available.

24 Chairman McCaul. Well, I don't know. I mean, making a phone call out of the  
25 Oval Office, we may not know about that. But that's another issue for them. They feel

1 that the President never called them --

2 Ms. Psaki. Uh-huh.

3 Chairman McCaul. -- and said, "I am so sorry about what happened to your  
4 child."

5 Ms. Psaki. And I know the President, from having spent time working for him,  
6 15 months, that, as you said -- and I know every elected official experiences this -- that  
7 communicating with and working with and trying to be there for anyone who's lost a  
8 loved one in the line of service is one of the most difficult parts of any job as President or  
9 any elected official, and I know that's how he personally feels.

10 Chairman McCaul. Okay.

11 Getting back to the watch comment -- yeah, I want to call your attention to an  
12 excerpt in your book titled "Say More: Lessons from Work, the White House, and the  
13 World" to be entered as exhibit 5 (sic).

14 [Psaki Exhibit No. 7  
15 was marked for identification.]

16 Chairman McCaul. And does the witness have this?

17 Ms. Loeb. No.

18 Chairman McCaul. Let me send you that one. I need a copy.

19 [REDACTED]. Sorry, are we going back to 5?

20 [REDACTED]. There was an exhibit -- I think one of the exhibits weren't  
21 tracked previously.

22 [Discussion off the record.]

23 Chairman McCaul. So I'm looking at exhibit 5. "Psaki's new book falsely" -- no,  
24 that's the Axios. Okay. Is it 6?

25 I just want to make sure the record's clear. Exhibit 6 is the Axios article, "Psaki's

1 new book falsely recounts Biden's watch check in troop ceremony."

2 And there's the -- you see the photo here. And it says he "looks at his watch in a  
3 photo taken at 11:51 a.m. on August 29, 2021, during a ceremony for soldiers killed in an  
4 attack during the Afghanistan withdrawal."

5 You wrote, "The misinformation came in the form of a single photo of the  
6 president looking at his watch during the ceremony. People who are quick to criticize  
7 the president seized on this image. They splashed it all over social media, making him  
8 appear insensitive, concerned only about how much time had passed."

9 And your memoir continues, "There was such an uproar that The Washington Post  
10 reviewed video of the event and concluded: 'Footage leading up to the moment...shows  
11 Biden with his hand over his heart...as vans carry the service members' remains off the  
12 tarmac. After the vans left, Biden closed his eyes briefly before dropping his arm and  
13 glancing down at his watch.' In other words, the president only looked at his watch  
14 after the ceremony had ended. Moments later, he and the First Lady headed toward  
15 their car. But by the time this correction was issued, the image was already circulating,  
16 and the damage had been done."

17 That's not accurate, correct?

18 Ms. Psaki. Which is why I removed it from the book.

19 Chairman McCaul. Okay. That's a good answer.

20 And, again, what would you say to the families about that misinformation?

21 Ms. Psaki. Well, again, I would just reiterate that misinformation was never  
22 directed at the families. I have nothing but respect for any Gold Star family and  
23 certainly these families who experienced the worst day of their lives that day.

24 And, actually, the totality of the story in my book is actually about validating their  
25 feelings and how even someone who had the best intentions, as the President did at the



1 time, did not connect with them in the way he had intended.

2 Chairman McCaul. And I appreciate your candor. You know, it's something as  
3 simple as looking at your watch, but it sends a message that "I don't really have time."  
4 That's how they interpreted it.

5 And the saddest thing is, it didn't have to happen. And they have lost their  
6 children forever, blown up in a horrific blast that killed not only 13 servicemembers but  
7 injured -- over 100 Afghan people were blown up that day. It was a massive suicide  
8 bomb that went off.

9 And the idea that the chaos was such and these kids are thrown into the situation  
10 of chaos at the airport, at HKIA, and at Abbey Gate, it's very, very sad to me they were  
11 ever put in that situation in the first place. I know that was not your decision. That's  
12 just Chairman McCaul --

13 Ms. Psaki. I understand.

14 Chairman McCaul. -- speaking his mind.

15 [REDACTED]. [Inaudible.]

16 Chairman McCaul. Well, I think -- okay. I'll just ask that at the very end.

17 Anyway, I appreciate your time. And I'm going to yield back to our counsel.

18 [REDACTED]. If we could just go off the record quickly, I want to just correct  
19 the exhibits.

20 [Discussion off the record.]

21 [REDACTED]. We can go back on the record.

22 BY [REDACTED]:

23 Q Okay. So I want to pick back up from the majority's last round. And just  
24 for ease of reference, I'm going to go back to exhibit 3, which we referenced. This was  
25 an expert from the biography of Richard Holbrooke, titled "Our Man: Richard Holbrooke

1 and the End of the American Century."

2 Ms. Loeb. Sorry, let me just make sure -- oh, I have it. Okay.

3 BY [REDACTED]:

4 Q And I want to direct your attention to what is marked as page 530. I  
5 believe I already ready this into the record, but I'm happy to readdress it, as I'm sure it'd  
6 be helpful for our recollection.

7 So the following recounts a 2010 meeting between then-Vice President Biden and  
8 Mr. Holbrooke, who at the time was serving as the U.S. Special Representative for  
9 Afghanistan and Pakistan.

10 In that meeting, Mr. Holbrooke argued, according to the biography, that the U.S.  
11 owed Afghans continued aid and assistance, particularly directed at women, who suffered  
12 under the Taliban's brutal rule.

13 Holbrooke then recalled that then-Vice President Biden rejected that, stating,  
14 quote, "I am not sending my boy back there to risk his life on behalf of women's rights.  
15 It just won't work. That's not what they're there for."

16 According to Mr. Holbrooke, then-Vice President Biden stated that Afghanistan  
17 was a debacle politically that would harm their positioning in the 2012 election.

18 When Mr. Holbrooke raised America's, quote, "obligation to the people who had  
19 trusted us," then-Vice President Biden responded, quote, "[F] that, we don't have to  
20 worry about that. We did it in Vietnam. Nixon and Kissinger got away with it,"  
21 referencing the abandonment of America's Vietnamese allies at the end of the Vietnam  
22 War.

23 Ms. Psaki, I already posed to you a series of questions pertaining to this exhibit,  
24 one being, did President Biden have an impulse to get out of Afghanistan, no matter the  
25 cost, in 2021? So I won't re-ask those questions, as those are already reflected in the

1 record.

2 But I do want to get to exhibit 4, which is an excerpt from your press conference  
3 that you gave on August 24th, 2021. And if you would please direct your attention to  
4 what is marked as page 25.

5 This press conference was given 2 days before the Abbey Gate terrorist attack  
6 killing 13 U.S. servicemembers and 9 days after the Taliban stormed Kabul, seizing  
7 Afghanistan by force.

8 Here, you were asked about then-Vice President Biden's comments to Holbrooke  
9 regarding the United States not having a duty to the people of Afghanistan -- i.e., the  
10 statement I just read into the record in exhibit 3.

11 Your response, in part, was, quote, "Well, I would first say that was clearly more  
12 than 10 years ago. Second, if it happened -- which I have no confirmation of."

13 Based on the timeline you previously provided us pursuant to your career  
14 trajectory, you were working as the Deputy White House Press Secretary from  
15 January 2008 to December 2009, correct?

16 A That's correct.

17 Q And then the Deputy White House Communications Director from  
18 December 2009 to September 2011, correct?

19 A That's correct.

20 Q This would've been around the time Vice President Biden would've made the  
21 statements if they were indeed true.

22 A Well, and to reiterate, as long as I'm understanding this -- this from  
23 Ambassador Holbrooke's book from many years ago -- sorry. I'm looking at the wrong  
24 thing here. Apologies. Okay.

25 This is a recounting of a private conversation that he wrote in a book prior to his

1 death, correct?

2 Q Uh-huh.

3 A Yes. Okay.

4 Q In those roles, were you ever made aware of this issue of this conversation  
5 between Ambassador Holbrooke and then-Vice President Biden?

6 A It was a private conver- --

7 Ms. Loeb. Can you clarify, [REDACTED], what issue?

8 [REDACTED]. Of the conversation in which President Biden pushed back  
9 against the Afghan -- against the U.S. presence in Afghanistan.

10 Ms. Psaki. I was not a part of this conversation, no.

11 BY [REDACTED]:

12 Q Were you ever made aware of the conversation? Not that you were in the  
13 room, but were you ever informed or did you ever learn of the substance of that  
14 conversation?

15 Ms. Loeb. And, I'm sorry, just to be clear on the record, this is a conversation in  
16 2010 or 2011?

17 [REDACTED]. Correct, while you were working at the White House.

18 Ms. Psaki. No.

19 Can I just convey -- because it might be helpful, or not, but it may be, so let me try.

20 During this period of time, I was the Deputy Press Secretary. My responsibility at  
21 the time was working on economic issues during the financial crisis, and I primarily  
22 worked with the Department of Treasury and the Commerce Department. So I wasn't  
23 working on national security issues at the time.

24 And I was working -- of course it was part of the Obama-Biden administration, but  
25 I wasn't working directly for the Vice President either.

1           So, primarily, my points of contact were around economic issues and preparing  
2 those materials for the press briefing.

3           BY ██████████:

4           Q    That's helpful. Thank you for that clarification.

5           Fast-forwarding, then, to 2021, August 2021, when you held this press conference,  
6 you said that you have no confirmation of this statement.

7           In the years since -- you had previously testified that, when you didn't know an  
8 answer to a question or you didn't have the information, you would do something called,  
9 I believe it was, a takeback, or you would go back and confirm whether it was indeed true  
10 or not.

11           Did you at any point seek to get confirmation on whether this conversation did  
12 indeed happen or that President Biden made this statement with respect to the United  
13 States not having an obligation to the Afghan people?

14           A    Well, I would first say that, typically, from the White House briefing, we  
15 didn't confirm private conversations between two senior members of administrations,  
16 involving Vice Presidents, Presidents, or others. So, in this circumstance, it wouldn't  
17 have been information that I would've typically sought that sort of clarification on.

18           Q    Did you ever seek clarification on President Biden's mindset on the U.S.  
19 obligation to the Afghan people?

20           A    Well, again, the President had delivered a number of public statements and  
21 briefings and made a number of speeches, and so I'm not sure if there was clarification  
22 needed, in the sense that he had stated his position publicly.

23           Q    What did you interpret his position to be?

24           A    I'm not going to parse the President's words. I would point you to the  
25 many speeches and public interviews he gave on his own behalf. And I'm no longer a

1 spokesperson for him. I left more than 2 years ago.

2 Q So, in 2021, when you were asked this question, in August 2021, specifically  
3 the 24th, what was the President's mindset on this?

4 A I'm not going to speak to the President of the United States' mindset from  
5 3-1/2 years ago.

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q So, when you were attempting to characterize the President's stance or  
8 whether or not he felt he had some sort of obligation toward the Afghan people, how  
9 would you characterize his position in your own conversations?

10 A Well, again, I think, as the spokesperson, which is true of any spokesperson  
11 for Democratic and Republican administrations, you -- I did more than 200 briefings.  
12 Those are all available publicly, and I would certainly point you to anything I said at the  
13 time, which is about the moment in time.

14 And there were certainly days where I sought his point of view. There were days  
15 where it was more about, again, as I've discussed, working with the National Security  
16 Council press team and other policy experts to ensure I had answers for the press.

17 Q So you don't have any recollection of how you personally described  
18 President Biden's stance toward the Afghan people?

19 A Well, I did more than 200 briefings, and so my characterization of that is very  
20 publicly available. And I'm more than happy to discuss, as I hope I've evidenced over  
21 the last 2-1/2 hours, any briefing you'd like to talk about.

22 BY [REDACTED]:

23 Q Ms. Psaki, I just have to interject here.

24 I think an issue of this import, Afghan girls no longer having access to education,  
25 being subjugated to oppression by the Taliban, personally, I would remember information

1 like that.

2 So we just want to offer you the opportunity to provide us greater clarification as  
3 to what the mindset was at that time. If you don't recall, then that's fine. But it would  
4 be helpful for the purposes of this investigation to better understand what was the  
5 President's mindset in August of 2021 toward those vulnerable populations.

6 Ms. Loeb. I believe what Ms. Psaki has testified to is that the President's mindset  
7 was public. He spoke to this on many different occasions. So having her synthesize a  
8 voluminous record publicly, I'm not sure how that's more helpful than looking at his own  
9 words.

10 [REDACTED]. We're happy to do that. But to the extent you're --

11 [REDACTED]. It seems like your client is saying that she has no independent  
12 recollection of that time period about this particular topic. She's referred us to a  
13 voluminous set of briefings, but we're trying to clarify for the record, other than the  
14 public statements that we can find online, you have no recollection whatsoever of what  
15 President Biden's stance toward Afghan women and other vulnerable populations were.

16 Ms. Loeb. So it sounds like what you may be asking is for private impressions  
17 from the President. And I just want to make sure our colleague --

18 [REDACTED]. No. As I --

19 Ms. Loeb. -- from the White House can ensure that --

20 [REDACTED]. -- stated clearly, I asked your client's personal recollection of how  
21 she described President Biden's stance.

22 Ms. Psaki. And I'm just trying to be helpful here. So I think we can all have a  
23 calm tone in how we engage with each other.

24 But all I'm saying is that I spoke repeatedly from the Briefing -- I realize this is not  
25 true of everybody you have interviewed for your extensive investigation, which I have all

1 respect for -- about the President's point of view, about what was happening in the  
2 administration at the time. So I don't know that there's anything I can add to parse  
3 what I already said publicly at the time about the thinking within the administration.

4 [REDACTED]. I think we can move on to the next exhibit. Are we on  
5 exhibit -- exhibit 8. Perfect.

6 [Psaki Exhibit No. 8  
7 was marked for identification.]

8 [REDACTED]. Exhibit 8 reflects an excerpt from Special Counsel Hur's  
9 February 2024 report regarding President Biden's retention of classified materials.

10 Ms. Loeb. Can we take a look at this, please?

11 [REDACTED]. Certainly.

12 Ms. Loeb. Thank you.

13 [REDACTED]. And this reflects an excerpt of the executive summary.

14 BY [REDACTED]:

15 Q Please direct your attention to page 2, the first full paragraph.

16 Here, the report states: "In 2009, then-Vice President Biden strongly opposed  
17 the military's plans to send more troops to Afghanistan. U.S. policy in Afghanistan was  
18 deeply important to Mr. Biden, and he labored to dissuade President Obama from  
19 escalating America's involvement there and repeating what Mr. Biden believed was a  
20 mistake akin to Vietnam. Despite Mr. Biden's advice, President Obama ordered a surge  
21 of additional U.S. troops, and Mr. Biden's views endured sharp criticism from others  
22 within and outside of the administration. But he always believed history would prove  
23 him right. He retained materials documenting his opposition to the troop surge,  
24 including a classified handwritten memo he sent President Obama over the 2009  
25 Thanksgiving holiday, and related marked classified exhibits. FBI agents recovered these



1 materials from Mr. Biden's Delaware garage and home office in December 2022 and  
2 January 2023."

3 Ms. Psaki, you referenced President Biden's public statements and information  
4 that's been conveyed to the American public. Would you consider his perspective on  
5 Afghanistan conveyed here in these memos that were released as a result of his retention  
6 of classified information to inform his perspective on Afghanistan as President?

7 A I'm not sure what you're asking me exactly. Sorry.

8 Q Then-President Biden's views which were focused on the U.S. withdrawal  
9 from Afghanistan and his guidance to then-President Obama against a U.S. involvement  
10 in-country, did that reflect his views as President as well?

11 A Again, as I've stated previously, one, I didn't work for him at this time. I  
12 worked in the Obama-Biden administration. I did not work on national security issues at  
13 the time -- which I know you're not asking me, I just want to reiterate for the record.

14 Memos that were released publicly -- I can't speak on behalf of the President and  
15 what influenced his thinking or decision-making. He gave a number of public speeches  
16 and interviews about his decision-making on this issue.

17 Q I have to ask, Ms. Psaki, was the interagency review of the Doha Agreement  
18 pretextual? Had President Biden already made up his mind about how he would  
19 approach the Afghanistan withdrawal when he got into office?

20 A As I previously conveyed to you a number of times, I was not a part of the  
21 interagency process leading up to the decision, and so I can't speak personally. And I  
22 know others were a part of that process, and you may have spoken with a number of  
23 them to the discussions and what influenced the final outcome.

24 Q You also testified that you observed the interagency process, though,  
25 correct?

1           A    Again, for clarification, this is why we asked you to clarify the timeline you  
2 were asking about at the time.

3           Q    From January until April 14th, 2021, when President Biden announced the  
4 decision to withdraw, did you observe the interagency process?

5           A    As I already previously told you, I did not.

6                   BY ████████:

7           Q    Did you have any knowledge of the process?

8           A    I had a knowledge --

9           Q    You weren't part of the process, but did you have factual knowledge of what  
10 was going on in the process?

11          A    I was not -- when you say "knowledge of," do you mean that it was  
12 happening?

13          Q    Well, you've said that you were not a part of the interagency process, and --

14          A    Correct.

15          Q    -- I want to really home in on what you mean by that. Did you have  
16 knowledge of any facts that were relayed back and forth as part of that deliberation?

17          A    I was not receiving briefings on the interagency deliberations leading up to  
18 this, because -- and this is just helpful to understand the job -- my job was reflective of  
19 the White House press corps and what topics were most front and center for them, which  
20 I did not determine, they determined.

21               And because this was an ongoing deliberative process, which was known, which is  
22 why I just wanted to make sure I understood your question, there was very little we said  
23 publicly about it at the time, because it was an internal deliberation.

24          Q    Right. And you said you didn't receive any briefings on the process. But  
25 did you receive any information at all from anyone about what was going on in that

1 process?

2 A That wouldn't have been typical, so I don't recall receiving briefings or  
3 updates on the interagency review process leading up to the timeline, no.

4 Q So is that a, no, you didn't receive any information, or is that a, I don't know  
5 if I did or not?

6 Ms. Loeb. I believe Ms. Psaki has answered this question now several times.

7 [REDACTED]. I'm not sure I heard a clear answer.

8 BY [REDACTED]:

9 Q Is that a no?

10 A I was not --

11 Ms. Loeb. The record would reflect her clear answer.

12 But, Ms. Psaki, if you'd like to repeat it again --

13 Ms. Psaki. I was not a part of the process. I did not receive briefings on the  
14 process. So, no, I don't have any additional information to share with you on the  
15 process.

16 BY [REDACTED]:

17 Q Again, I'm not sure that was a clear answer. You weren't a part of the  
18 process, and you don't have any additional information to share about the process.

19 I'm asking, outside the context of the formal process itself, were you in contact  
20 with anyone who gave you any information about what was going on in the process?

21 A Well, let me say broadly speaking that, of course, Afghanistan was a topic  
22 that was in the public and in the press at times during this period of time. So, as it was, I  
23 would receive materials in terms of what I should say publicly, which was quite limited.

24 But, no, I did not -- I was not a part of it, I did not receive briefings on it, I did not  
25 receive any additional information on the internal deliberations. I know you all are

1 talking to some people who did, and I certainly encourage you to ask any questions that  
2 would provide clarification to them.

3 Q You've indicated that you would often, quote, "ask senior officials for greater  
4 clarification" when issues arose. Did you ask any senior officials for greater clarification  
5 on this process as it was going on?

6 A No, because it was an ongoing process which we would not be speaking  
7 about publicly.

8 BY [REDACTED]:

9 Q Ms. Psaki, according to multiple witnesses the committee has interviewed,  
10 including the chief of staff to Secretary of State Blinken, Suzy George, and the former  
11 counselor to the Secretary of State, Mr. Derek Chollet, this interagency review that you  
12 said you were not a part of was led by the White House and, more specifically, the  
13 National Security Council.

14 You previously also testified that the National Security Council was and is still  
15 being led by National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan.

16 Ms. Psaki, what role did Mr. Sullivan play in guiding or influencing Afghanistan  
17 policy in 2021?

18 A I can't speak to that because, again, I wasn't a part of the process.

19 Q My question was not limited to the interagency review. My question was,  
20 Afghanistan policy in 2021, what role did he play?

21 A I'm not sure why you think I would have unique information to share on that  
22 in particular. But maybe you could further clarify your question.

23 Q So I would like to enter exhibit 9 into the record.

1 [2:52 p.m.]

2

3

[Psaki Exhibit No. 9

4

was marked for identification.]

5

6

7

██████████. Exhibit 9 is an excerpt from your memoir, another excerpt from your memoir, "Say More: Lessons from Work, the White House, and the World," published on May 7th, 2024. The excerpt is found on page 35.

8

9

10

Here you state, "I would often email a draft of my questions and answers to several senior officials, including Jake Sullivan, the National Security Advisor, Jon Finer, the Deputy National Security Advisor, and Ron Klain, Biden's Chief of Staff.

11

12

13

"I would then incorporate their feedback into new answers. They are able to dial me down, push me further, or correct a misunderstanding before I went into the briefing room. Rephrasing their commentary in my own words also tested my knowledge."

14

15

16

17

So I want to go back to my question about National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan and his role in Afghanistan policy. And I don't want to misstate what you said, but my understanding was you're asking why you should know that or why would you be the right person to know that information.

18

19

It sounds like, based on your own recollection of your relationship with Mr. Sullivan, you coordinated quite closely in your roles.

20

21

22

23

So Afghanistan being one of the single most important foreign policy decisions under the Biden administration, one that resulted in the deaths of Americans, we want to better understand: What was Mr. Sullivan's role in setting the administration's Afghanistan policy?

24

25

Ms. Loeb. Just to be clear, you mischaracterized what Ms. Psaki said about Jake Sullivan's role.

1 I think that the question is quite broad. What is the National Security's Advisor's  
2 role in setting Afghanistan policy? She didn't say she didn't know. She said that she  
3 thought others could speak more to that.

4 You mentioned a couple of State Department officials who sound like they must  
5 have worked more closely with them and they would be able to speak to that, is I believe  
6 what Ms. Psaki said.

7 [REDACTED]. And I think you misstated my question, too. I explicitly asked  
8 about National Security Advisor Sullivan.

9 And we are now on our 19th transcribed interview. As I noted in our letters, as  
10 the chairman noted in our letters, we have exhausted our resources. So now we're  
11 asking Ms. Psaki this question.

12 BY [REDACTED]:

13 Q And if you don't want to answer the question, you're here voluntarily, we'd  
14 be happy to proceed with another avenue.

15 So I'm going to restate my question. What was Mr. Sullivan's role in setting  
16 Afghanistan policy in 2021?

17 A And I really am trying to answer your question. So I'm just trying to  
18 understand what you're specifically asking me.

19 Were you asking me if he was leading meetings? Are you asking -- tell me a little  
20 bit more about what you're trying to ask me.

21 Q I'm just trying to understand what his role was. If it was leading meetings,  
22 that's one component of it. If his role was coordinating with the State Department,  
23 that's another component.

24 I'm asking you because I don't work in the White House, you did, so I'd like to  
25 better understand what his role was.

1           A     Well, broadly speaking, the National Security Advisor in any  
2     administration -- and this is certainly the case for Jake Sullivan -- would have been the  
3     person coordinating policymaking and decision-making and leading meetings, in general,  
4     about any national security issue leading up to a decision, presenting decisions to the  
5     President, and ensuring that each of the agencies involved had their own role and voice in  
6     a decision.

7           Chairman McCaul.   Can I ask this another way?

8           Ms. Psaki.    Sure.

9           Chairman McCaul.   And I know Jake fairly well, and I've been in the Situation  
10    Room with him.

11           He is the chairman of the National Security Council.

12           Ms. Psaki.    Right.

13           Chairman McCaul.   So you have -- I'm sure you have independent knowledge of  
14    this.   But as a matter of practice, he would obviously be shaping the national security for  
15    the President of the United States' policy?

16           Ms. Psaki.    Well, yes.   But as you know well, because you know Jake and you  
17    also know what that role is, it's also primarily a coordinating role, right?

18           Chairman McCaul.   Uh-huh.

19           Ms. Psaki.    So, obviously, they have -- any person in that job has their own role in  
20    voicing their views on policy.   But they also have a big role in coordinating all of the  
21    Cabinet officials within the national security team.

22           Chairman McCaul.   Who was the lead architect of the Afghanistan withdrawal?

23           Ms. Psaki.    You mean who was leading the process?

24           Chairman McCaul.   Correct.

25           Ms. Psaki.    Well --

1 Chairman McCaul. Other than the President.

2 Ms. Psaki. Again, I can -- I don't want to speak out of turn on who I think was the  
3 point person. There were a number of people involved in this process. You've spoken  
4 with a number of them. You know the Cabinet members well, and different agencies  
5 had different responsibilities.

6 Chairman McCaul. You know, I always get this question, like, who's really  
7 running the White House? Right?

8 So who was really leading the effort on the withdrawal from Afghanistan? Who  
9 would be the principal policymaker within the White House that was doing that?

10 Ms. Psaki. I'm not -- I'm just trying to make sure -- I'm not trying to be difficult  
11 here in any way, shape, or form.

12 The President ultimately makes the decision --

13 Chairman McCaul. Of course.

14 Ms. Psaki. -- including the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan.

15 Chairman McCaul. Now, Jake worked with Biden when he was a Senator, right,  
16 the Foreign -- was he on the Foreign Relations?

17 Ms. Psaki. I don't have Jake's bio in front of me. I know he worked for him.

18 Chairman McCaul. Is it fair to say they're pretty much like-minded?

19 Ms. Psaki. I wouldn't argue that. I don't know their differences or view on  
20 things.

21 Chairman McCaul. I guess who had more of a role in this? Would it be Jake  
22 Sullivan or Secretary Blinken?

23 Ms. Psaki. I just can't speak to that personally.

24 Chairman McCaul. What was Secretary Blinken's role?

25 Ms. Psaki. In Afghanistan?



1 Chairman McCaul. How involved was Secretary Blinken in Afghanistan?

2 Ms. Psaki. Well, I certainly understand why you're asking. I would just  
3 reiterate that I wasn't in the interagency meetings. I wasn't in the after-action  
4 meetings. I was in a limited number of meetings leading up to August 31st. So I'm just  
5 not the right person to articulate the extent and range of his role.

6 Chairman McCaul. Last question from me and I'm going to turn it over. I know  
7 Mr. Waltz has shown up as well.

8 There have been public statements about al-Qaeda is gone, al-Qaeda's not a  
9 threat in Afghanistan anymore, and that the Taliban is not tied to al-Qaeda.

10 What is your opinion of that?

11 Ms. Psaki. Are you talking about current statements?

12 Chairman McCaul. These would have been -- let me get some clarification.

13 So on April 14th, when asked a question about the U.S. Government's ability to  
14 collect information on threats, part of her response was, quote, "Al-Qaeda, it is not -- it is  
15 not being harbored in a safe haven in Afghanistan how it was 20 years ago."

16 What'd you mean by that?

17 Ms. Loeb. I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman. I'm not -- we're not trying to be difficult.  
18 But can you just tell us the year of the statement?

19 Chairman McCaul. Yeah. This was April 14th of 2021. And this is -- I mean,  
20 this is certainly in your -- a question you can answer because it's your statement.

21 "Al-Qaeda, it is not," you said, "it is not being harbored in a safe haven in  
22 Afghanistan how it was 20 years ago."

23 Ms. Loeb. And was this in a press briefing?

24 Chairman McCaul. Yes.

25 Ms. Loeb. Just trying to clarify. Okay.

1 Ms. Psaki. Well, I don't -- did not have an independent view of our intelligence  
2 or intelligence assessments.

3 Chairman McCaul. Uh-huh.

4 Ms. Psaki. Any statement I would have made would have been based on, again,  
5 the interagency process and the NSC press guidance that was providing information to  
6 me on --

7 Chairman McCaul. So you were just echoing what you were told from --

8 Ms. Psaki. From policymakers through the interagency --

9 Chairman McCaul. Inside the White House.

10 Ms. Psaki. -- and the national security team, who provided that information to  
11 the press team, yes.

12 Chairman McCaul. Do you think that's an accurate statement?

13 Ms. Psaki. I don't -- I'm not in a position to make an independent assessment.

14 Chairman McCaul. And did you believe that the Taliban had a relationship with  
15 al-Qaeda?

16 Ms. Loeb. Sir, do you mind if Jen just actually takes a look at the statement?  
17 We don't have it in front of us. We were able to pull it up.

18 Chairman McCaul. Okay.

19 Ms. Loeb. If you have it as an exhibit, that would be super helpful for her, to  
20 actually be able to take a look, please.

21 [REDACTED]. If we could please enter it as exhibit -- I believe we're on exhibit  
22 9 now -- 10, exhibit 10. That's what I intended to do.

23 [Psaki Exhibit No. 10

24 was marked for identification.]

25 Chairman McCaul. Do you need time to --

1 Ms. Loeb. Yeah, it would be great to take a look at the statement from 3 years  
2 ago.

3 [REDACTED], do you know which page this was on?

4 Chairman McCaul. So this would be --

5 [REDACTED]. If you could direct your attention to what is marked as page 5.

6 [REDACTED]. Sorry. We need a copy.

7 [REDACTED]. On page 5, about halfway through.

8 Chairman McCaul. So, yeah, look at page 5.

9 [REDACTED]. Just a second, please.

10 Chairman McCaul. On exhibit 8? 10. You are asked -- I want to give you time  
11 to look at it. Just let me know when you're ready.

12 Ms. Psaki. Okay.

13 Chairman McCaul. So you were asked, "You saw where the CIA director said that  
14 the U.S. Government's ability to collect and act on threats will diminish when the time  
15 comes for the U.S. military to withdraw. Does that give you pause at all?"

16 Your response is, regarding al-Qaeda, "And even if you look at al-Qaeda, it is  
17 not -- it is not being harbored in a safe haven in Afghanistan how it was 20 years ago."

18 So what did you mean by that?

19 Ms. Psaki. Well, again, I'm just looking -- thank you for the transcript.

20 Any statement I would have made on this would have been based on information  
21 that came --

22 Chairman McCaul. Given to you.

23 Ms. Psaki. -- in that moment of time through the NSC --

24 Chairman McCaul. Do you know who gave you that information?

25 Ms. Psaki. Well, there was an NSC interagency process that where information --

1           ██████████. Was given to you.

2           Ms. Psaki. -- how we discussed the --

3           Chairman McCaul. So this is reflective of how the NSC and the interagency saw  
4 the threat of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan.

5           Ms. Psaki. Again, any of these are a reflection of a moment in time.

6           Chairman McCaul. In time.

7           Ms. Psaki. For the record, yes.

8           Chairman McCaul. So the -- if I can turn to another event in time that  
9 happened -- there we go -- another date in time.

10           Around August of 2022, we have a pretty spectacular event happen. The  
11 number two -- actually the -- essentially the head of al-Qaeda, after bin Laden was taken  
12 down, Mr. Zawahiri, the Egyptian who escaped the prisons and joined al-Qaeda many  
13 years ago, was suddenly found in Afghanistan. And he was under the custody and care  
14 of the Haqqani Network.

15           You're aware of who Mr. Haqqani is?

16           Ms. Psaki. I am.

17           Chairman McCaul. So the Haqqani Network is basically the terror tunnel, terror  
18 pathway between Pakistan and Afghanistan. He is responsible for a lot of the  
19 al-Qaeda-Taliban relationship and terror.

20           As you know, he is -- he's taken out, but he's being harbored by, ironically, the  
21 Minister of Interior in Afghanistan after the fall of Afghanistan. He is made as the  
22 Minister of Security, essentially, for Afghanistan, Mr. Haqqani. And, lo and behold,  
23 Mr. Zawahiri is found in his care and custody at one of his safe houses.

24           What does that tell you about the relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaeda?

25           Ms. Psaki. Again, I would state that the period of time you're referring to I was

1 no longer in the U.S. Government, nor have I ever been an official in the intelligence  
2 community. So I'm just not --

3 Chairman McCaul. Okay. So you can't defend the statement you made about  
4 al-Qaeda's not a problem?

5 Ms. Psaki. Again, I think, Mr. Chairman, you're asking me about a statement that  
6 was made based on information that was provided to me --

7 Chairman McCaul. Yeah.

8 Ms. Psaki. -- in April of 2021, and you're asking me about events in -- more than a  
9 year later.

10 And, again, I understand --

11 Chairman McCaul. And I get you're not an intelligence analyst. I would just say  
12 you were given bad information, because there is a connection between the Taliban and  
13 al-Qaeda. If anything illustrates it, it's Mr. Haqqani harboring the top al-Qaeda leader.  
14 And it continues to this day.

15 And I will end with this and you probably won't see me the rest of the day. I  
16 have to -- you'll see Mr. Waltz.

17 But the situation after the prisons were let out of ISIS-K, thousands of them, one  
18 blowing up the 13 servicemen and -women, is actually incredibly dire, particularly in the  
19 Khorasan region where now we have al-Qaeda, where we have -- I'm sorry -- ISIS now  
20 entering our country through our southwest border because of this disastrous  
21 withdrawal.

22 And I yield back.

23 Ms. Psaki. Can I may I add one more thing?

24 Chairman McCaul. Uh-huh.

25 Ms. Psaki. Since you gave me the opportunity to do this.

1 Chairman McCaul. We would love to have your response.

2 Ms. Psaki. Well, I don't have anything to add to that, although I understand and I  
3 am a consumer of news and a consumer of information, and I'm not -- so I appreciate you  
4 adding that for the record.

5 I wanted to just go back to what you were asking me before about the Gold Star  
6 families, and I know you speak to them personally, as you conveyed.

7 And I was just hoping that you could convey directly to them my gratitude for the  
8 sacrifices they made and certainly any apology for anything that I've ever said that would  
9 be found offensive to them. Because my goal at every moment was to honor them and  
10 honor their children and nothing otherwise.

11 Chairman McCaul. And thank you for saying that. I did want to follow up on  
12 that. I gave you about five opportunities to say that you apologize, but you did say that.  
13 And I will definitely take that back to the families, and that will mean a lot to them.

14 Mr. Waltz.

15 Mr. Waltz. Can I just jump in there? Because that's what I wanted to come  
16 back to.

17 Chairman McCaul. No, thanks for saying that.

18 Ms. Psaki. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for being here.

19 Mr. Waltz. I'll do one better. I'm put you in touch with the families, and you  
20 can apologize to them. I'm happy to do that for you.

21 Will you apologize to them directly?

22 Ms. Psaki. I'm certainly happy to talk to the families, of course.

23 Mr. Waltz. But I want to let them know that, as I'm putting you in touch, your  
24 intent is to apologize for the misleading and false chapter in your book --

25 Ms. Psaki. Well, again --

1 Mr. Waltz. -- that directly contradicted their account.

2 Ms. Psaki. Again, Congressman, and I know we had talked about this. And I'm  
3 not sure when you came back in, and we talked about this extensively, as well.

4 Mr. Waltz. Yeah.

5 Ms. Psaki. So --

6 Mr. Waltz. So would you intend to apologize to them or just intend to have a  
7 conversation? Because I just want to let them know. It's obviously a very -- still very  
8 raw episode for them.

9 Ms. Psaki. Of course it is.

10 Mr. Waltz. Your book kind of ripped the scab off once again --

11 Ms. Psaki. And I think --

12 Mr. Waltz. -- on top of the President most recently in the debate saying there was  
13 no casualties under his watch. So this has happened multiple times. I don't want to  
14 set them up for yet another painful incident.

15 So is your intent to apologize if I put you in touch?

16 Ms. Psaki. I think I just conveyed that to the chairman.

17 I'd also note that, as I conveyed to the chairman earlier -- and I know you came in  
18 and out. So I don't know what you were here for.

19 Mr. Waltz. I got it.

20 Ms. Psaki. Well, no, but earlier, that -- and I don't assume you've read my book.  
21 You're probably not my target audience, and that's okay.

22 Mr. Waltz. I'd read --

23 Ms. Psaki. Well --

24 Mr. Waltz. The families actually sent me the transcript.

25 Ms. Psaki. Well, I understand.

1           But the story in the book, which I think is important context, is actually intended  
2 to validate the feelings they had in the moment when the President was talking about the  
3 loss of his own son.

4           Mr. Waltz. I got that part. No, I did.

5           And that, by the way, was incredibly painful to them. So thank you for at least  
6 transmitting that to them. But, yeah, I just want to read you what they said in the wake  
7 of it.

8           Shana Chappell, the mother of Lance Corporal Kareem Nikoui, wrote just after the  
9 incident, "I watched you disrespect all 5" -- "disrespect us all 5 different times by checking  
10 your watch!!! What the f--- was so important that you had to repeatedly keep looking  
11 at your watch?????"

12           That was the day after the ceremony in 2021.

13           Mark Schmitz, the father of Lance Corporal Jared Schmitz, told -- testified to  
14 Congress that he stood there on the tarmac while the President checked his watch over  
15 and over again, and all he wanted to do was shout out, "It's 2-effing-30, asshole."

16           So, I mean, the families were repeatedly publicly on record. This wasn't a -- you  
17 didn't get a date wrong or a figure wrong. It's not a mistake. In their view, you tried to  
18 spin and minimize the incident to cover for the President.

19           So I hope you're, if we put you in touch with them, that you'll be a healing factor  
20 and saying you got it wrong, that wasn't your intent, and you apologize. I really hope  
21 that's the case.

22           Ms. Psaki. I think I --

23           Mr. Waltz. I'm happy to facilitate that.

24           Ms. Psaki. I think, as you've asked me repeatedly, I've clearly conveyed that that  
25 would be my intention.



1 Chairman McCaul. Well, and it's on the record, and we appreciate that. We'll  
2 relay it to the families.

3 I'll tell you, as Mr. Waltz said, General Milley didn't have to talk to the families.  
4 And, quite frankly, he was worried about it. And there was some anger.

5 But, you know, when he did talk to them, it was a very cathartic experience for  
6 them. It was a healing process that they desperately need right now.

7 And I know it'd be very difficult if I'm sitting where you are to do something like  
8 that, but it would mean so much to them.

9 Mr. Waltz. Can you imagine if General Milley wrote a book right now that  
10 contradicted them in that painful moment?

11 So I hope you can be a force for healing, because it hasn't been thus far.

12 Chairman McCaul. And that's -- we're just -- we're not saying that in a partisan  
13 way.

14 Mr. Waltz. No.

15 Chairman McCaul. We're saying that because we care about these families and  
16 what they went through. And it just seems to me the officials responsible for this policy  
17 and these statements you made, that just saying in a very heartfelt manner, "Hey, I'm  
18 sorry, I got it wrong, it wasn't intentional, and I'm sorry if it caused you" -- and sometimes  
19 venting is cathartic and it's a healing process.

20 And as we say in Congress, though, the gentleman's time has expired. So thank  
21 you for being here today voluntarily.

22 Ms. Psaki. Thank you.

23 Chairman McCaul. I really do appreciate that.

24 Ms. Psaki. My pleasure.

25 [REDACTED]. If we could go off the record.

1 [Recess.]

2 [REDACTED]. So we'll go back on the record and start the clock. If my majority  
3 colleagues could do the latter.

4 Thank you.

5 BY [REDACTED]:

6 Q So thank you again for being here. I don't think we'll take anywhere close  
7 to an hour of the minority's available question time, but I did want to follow up on a few  
8 points from the last round.

9 A Sure.

10 Q I wanted to pick back up on this issue of what had been recounted in your  
11 book. You know, there was already a lot of back-and-forth about what you've now  
12 removed from editions of your book going forward -- or prints of your book going  
13 forward, I should say.

14 We looked at an Axios article about your book, but we have the author herself  
15 here. So I would like to have you clarify for us the meaning and intent of some of the  
16 stories that you shared in there.

17 To that end, you had testified in the last round that -- I believe you wanted to  
18 provide some context in response to a question from the majority.

19 And you noted that the excerpt of the book about your sharing what the  
20 President, the perception that he had talked about his own deceased son rather than the  
21 deceased children of the families at Dover that day, you had explained the context in  
22 which that story emerged was in a chapter, I guess, or a section on giving tough feedback.

23 Is that accurate?

24 A That's correct.

25 Q So, first, just to level set, your book is essentially about communications

1 work, right?

2 A That's correct.

3 Q And is it fair for us to understand then that you see delivering to us feedback  
4 as an important part of communications work?

5 A Yes.

6 Q Okay. And this is based on your two decades of experience doing  
7 communications work.

8 A That's correct.

9 Q And so picking up on this story around the President having shared  
10 references about his own deceased son at Dover, as an example of you giving tough  
11 feedback, maybe I need to just reread the book again. But since I have you here, can  
12 you answer for us, how did President Biden respond to that feedback when you provided  
13 it?

14 A Well, thank you for that.

15 And the feedback was actually providing him an update on a New York Times  
16 story -- which is, I think, important context -- that was being written when some of the  
17 comments and views -- which I fully validated in the book and I fully will revalidate here  
18 again -- of the families who had lost their loved ones.

19 And I was conveying to the President that there was going to be a story written  
20 about their comments and how they responded to him talking about his son Beau. And  
21 his response was, "I thought I was helping them."

22 And that is based on the fact that he has on many occasions been at places where  
23 people have lost loved ones, either through tragedy or just through illness. And  
24 projecting, talking about his son at times has helped people. And he found when he has  
25 gone through loss that people talking about their own loss helped him, but it doesn't

1 mean it helps everybody. And that was what the story was about.

2 Q So the response that you just quoted him as saying, "I thought I was helping  
3 them," is it fair to infer then that his intent in engaging the families at Dover was to be a  
4 help to them?

5 A Yes. And he also spent, I believe, a couple of hours with them.  
6 And so I wasn't there for that, but that was certainly his intent.

7 Q Okay. And, I'm sorry, I forget which exhibit number this ended up being,  
8 but this was the excerpt of your book that you were shown.

9 A Yes.

10 Q And near the top of the third full page of text, the next to the last page is  
11 page 87 of 230, at the bottom, for what that's worth.

12 Starting about four lines down, in response to a question you posed to the Bidens  
13 about how you could best work with them, the response is, quote, "'We have been  
14 through a lot,' Dr. Biden replied."

15 I'm assuming for the record that's Jill Biden, correct?

16 A Correct.

17 Q And the quote resumes, "And we ask that you always be honest with us,  
18 always tell us what is coming."

19 So is it fair for us to understand that not only as you've testified earlier did you  
20 feel it was important as part of your communications work and being an expert and an  
21 effective communications professional to deliver tough feedback, is it fair for us to infer  
22 that President and Dr. Biden welcomed and wanted you to deliver such feedback?

23 A That is correct.

24 Q And can we infer from that it's because they were concerned about how  
25 their messages would land and would be received by the recipients?

1 A That's correct.

2 Q Let me, again, just sort of zoom out and get back to what we can hear from  
3 you based on your own firsthand knowledge and experience.

4 When did you first meet Joe and Jill Biden?

5 A Well, I believe -- I don't remember the exact date, but I would have met  
6 President Biden during the Obama-Biden administration, likely at some point in 2009.

7 Q Okay. So you've known them now -- I can't do math on the spot -- but 10,  
8 15 years, roughly?

9 A That's correct. But I did not work closely with him during the time I worked  
10 for President Obama. So I did not get to know him well until I worked for him as his  
11 press secretary.

12 Q Okay. But at the time that you wrote the book, which was subsequent to  
13 your tenure as White House press secretary, is it fair for us to assume that you had had  
14 extensive interactions with both the President and his wife?

15 A Yes.

16 Q And did you know them? Did you have the opinion based on those  
17 interactions that President Biden and his wife are empathetic people?

18 A Incredibly so.

19 Q And that they value empathy?

20 A Yes.

21 Q Did you know them to care about vulnerable individuals?

22 A Very much. I think the President and the First Lady, because of all of the  
23 tragedy they have been through personally, feel connected pretty immediately, having  
24 nothing at all to do with politics, with people who have experienced loss and tragedy.

25 Q And did you know them to care about vulnerable people outside the United

1 States, not just within the United States with whom they interacted as constituents?

2 A Absolutely. They both have traveled extensively, both in his role as the  
3 chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, as the Vice President of the United States,  
4 her as the Second Lady. And they have met, engaged with, and have been impacted by  
5 a range of populations around the world.

6 Q And did you know the President and his wife to be particularly empathetic to  
7 individuals, American or not, who have experienced the pain that they have of losing a  
8 child?

9 A Yes, I have, because that is a unique and horrible pain that when you've  
10 gone through it, as I understand it -- and I certainly have not, but just having observed  
11 them -- it's like nothing else. And I think they immediately felt empathy and connection  
12 with people who had experienced a similar loss.

13 Q Okay. And I want to follow up. I know there was an exchange before  
14 about the President's mindset 3-1/2 years ago and whether you would sufficiently  
15 characterize that today.

16 I want to introduce for the record -- and, I'm sorry, I forget what number we're on.

17 Voice. 11.

18 [REDACTED]. 11. This will be minority 11.

19 [Psaki Exhibit No. 11

20 was marked for identification.]

21 BY [REDACTED]:

22 Q Do you have the exhibit in front of you?

23 A I do. Thank you very much.

24 Q Do you need a minute to refresh your recollection?

25 A Sure.

1 [Witness reviewing.]

2 Q I can go ahead and direct you to a couple of portions of the speech --

3 A Of course.

4 Q -- if you're comfortable with me proceeding.

5 So this exhibit reads at the top August 31st, 2021, entitled, "Remarks by President  
6 Biden on the End of the War in Afghanistan," delivered in the State Dining Room at 3:28  
7 p.m., eastern daylight time.

8 This appears to be a transcript of a speech that the President gave on that date.

9 Are you familiar with the speech?

10 A Yes.

11 Q Okay. And as a general matter, would a speech like this be a good indicator  
12 of the President's mindset on August 31st, 2021, in the State Dining Room on this topic?

13 A Yes.

14 Q And it would reflect his views at the time?

15 A That's correct.

16 Q So let me call your attention to the very last paragraph, beginning on page 1,  
17 where the President says, quote, "I was just at Dover Air Force Base for the dignified  
18 transfer. We owe them and their families a debt of gratitude we can never repay but  
19 we should never, ever, ever forget."

20 Is it fair for us to surmise from a statement like that that the President on August  
21 31st, 2021, was concerned about the families at Dover and mindful of the fact that they  
22 had experienced a great loss?

23 A Yes.

24 Q A loss that perhaps no one could ever compensate for?

25 A Correct.

1 Q And if we go ahead a few pages, to page 4 of 10, again, at the very bottom of  
2 the page, I'll read a little bit more of the President's remarks into the record.

3 It begins, quote, "As for the Afghans, we and our partners have airlifted a hundred  
4 thousand of them. No country in history has done more to airlift out the residents of  
5 another country than we have done. We will continue to work to help more people  
6 leave the country who are at risk, and we're far from done. "

7 Again, recognizing this is a snapshot 3-1/2 years later, but, as you previously  
8 testified, this is a reliable indicator of the President's mindset at the time, can we infer  
9 from that excerpt that he was concerned about the plight of Afghans?

10 A Yes.

11 Q And can we infer from this excerpt that he was willing to marshal  
12 unprecedented levels of U.S. Government effort to meet their needs?

13 A Yes.

14 Q Okay. And another topic I want to revisit, you were asked extensively  
15 about comments that you made in an April 14th, 2021, press briefing on al-Qaeda in  
16 Afghanistan.

17 I just want to connect some dots here, because in your earlier testimony, in  
18 response to questioning from Representative Crow and others, you've stressed  
19 repeatedly that the nature of comms work is dynamic and that's because the underlying  
20 policy that informs it is also dynamic and affected by real-time developments on the  
21 ground.

22 Is that a fair summary?

23 A That's correct.

24 Q And those real-time developments are often things that are well outside the  
25 U.S. Government's control, correct?



1 A Correct.

2 Q And in some cases they're developments that we help effectuate through  
3 our government's actions, correct?

4 A Correct.

5 Q So just as a general matter, the issue of degrading and destroying al-Qaeda  
6 in Afghanistan, first, to clarify for the record, did you understand that to be a  
7 longstanding objective of U.S. foreign policy?

8 A Yes.

9 Q And is it possible that the effort to do so and what was true about that effort  
10 on one day could change days, weeks, or months later?

11 A Yes.

12 Q Okay. And the last item I have, although I'll defer to my colleagues if  
13 there's any other pieces I'm forgetting, in the earlier questioning round just now -- I  
14 apologize if I'm not precisely characterizing it, but you can tell me if this comports with  
15 your understanding -- I believe the point was asserted to you that after Taliban prisoners  
16 in Afghanistan were released, the situation, quote, "became dire" with respect to  
17 al-Qaeda and Afghanistan.

18 Do you recall that exchange and that assertion?

19 A That assertion by the chairman? Yes.

20 Q And I want to go back to minority exhibit 5, the text of the Doha Agreement.  
21 Do you have that?

22 A Let's see. I know I have it here somewhere.

23 One moment. Sorry. We should have it here somewhere.

24 Q No problem.

25 A Oh, I have it. I have it. I have it. Thank you.

1 Q Okay. So just for the purposes of a clear record, this was minority exhibit 5  
2 entitled, "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of  
3 Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the  
4 Taliban and the United States of America." It's dated February 29th, 2020.

5 And I believe this is what you had initially referenced in your testimony as a  
6 publicly known agreement committing the United States to withdraw all its troops from  
7 Afghanistan, correct?

8 A Correct.

9 Q That became colloquially known as the Doha deal?

10 A Yes.

11 Q So let's look at page 2 and paragraph C. It reads as follows, quote:

12 "The United States is committed to start immediately to work with all relevant  
13 sides on a plan to expeditiously release combat and political prisoners as a confidence  
14 building measure with the coordination and approval of all relevant sides.

15 "Up to five thousand prisoners of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not  
16 recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and up to one  
17 thousand prisoners of the other side will be released by March 10, 2020, the first day of  
18 intra-Afghan negotiations."

19 So based on your understanding of this publicly known agreement, did you  
20 understand this to be a commitment, explicit commitment in the deal that the Afghan  
21 Government should release Taliban prisoners as part of kick-starting the process for U.S.  
22 troops to leave?

23 A Well, as you've noted, this was a -- is a publicly available deal that was made  
24 during a prior administration. So I can only speak to my understanding of what was  
25 stated in this document.

1 Q Uh-huh. Is it your understanding that this term of the deal was ultimately  
2 fulfilled within a few months?

3 A I don't recall all the specifics of how it was delivered on. But I am familiar,  
4 of course, with what was stated in the original document.

5 [REDACTED]: Okay.

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q Just to clarify something for the record in case it's used again, you were  
8 handed the exhibit which is the book "Our Man."

9 A Uh-huh.

10 Q I believe it was misstated that Richard Holbrooke was the author of that  
11 book.

12 A Oh.

13 Q But I believe it's clear from the exhibit that the author is George Packer.

14 A Understood.

15 Q Does that reflect what you see?

16 A Yes, it does reflect what I see on the exhibit.

17 Q And I did read this book in preparation for this job, and it quotes extensively  
18 from Richard Holbrooke's diaries, which are there but were ultimately unconfirmed. But  
19 that quote is from his diary, not from Richard Holbrooke writing about his accounts 10  
20 years later.

21 A Appreciate that clarification. Thank you.

22 [REDACTED]: We don't have any further questions for you in this round, and we'll  
23 pass it back to the majority.

24 Thank you.

25 [Discussion off the record.]

1 [REDACTED]. Thank you again for your time today.

2 I just wanted to return to perhaps a couple of points that were discussed in prior  
3 rounds. And seeing as the Holbrooke quote was just brought up, I did want to return to  
4 the questioning that you had responded to earlier around that quote.

5 I just wanted to be clear on your answer. The question that was put to you  
6 concerned whether in, I believe it was August 2021, you were asked about this quote and  
7 about this information.

8 Did you, in fact, confirm whether or not that occurred?

9 Ms. Loeb. I'm sorry. Can we just go back to which quote are you referring to?

10 [REDACTED] Sure. So this is the -- all right.

11 So this is the quote referenced in exhibit 3 wherein there was a meeting between  
12 Mr. Holbrooke and Vice President Biden, and Vice President Biden was quoted as saying,  
13 "I'm not sending my boy back there to risk his life on behalf of women's rights. It just  
14 won't work. That's not why they're -- that's not what they're here for."

15 And then the Vice President continued in Holbrooke's account that basically,  
16 "F--- that. We don't have to worry about that being an obligation to the people who  
17 trusted us."

18 So when you learned about this in August of 2021, did you, in fact, attempt to  
19 confirm whether this conversation happened?

20 Ms. Loeb. So I just want to go back to. I want to make sure we're matching up  
21 the account from a book about Mr. Holbrooke with the right press briefing.

22 What is the date or exhibit number so we can find it?

23 Ms. Johnson. It might actually be helpful to let Ms. Psaki read what the exhibits  
24 just because I think there's been a renumbering of the exhibits.

25 [REDACTED]. So the press briefing, as I understand, occurred on the 24th of August,

1 2021, and that was referenced in exhibit 4.

2 Ms. Loeb. 4. Got it. Okay. Just one second, please, if we could just take a  
3 look, now that we've clarified that this is not Richard Holbrooke's book, just reread.

4 [REDACTED]. I think it was previously represented. I know I said biography,  
5 not autobiography. So maybe that wasn't caught earlier. But I'm happy to clarify. I  
6 explicitly stated it was a biography.

7 Ms. Loeb. Sorry. I don't know that anybody's asked if Ms. Psaki's read this  
8 book or is familiar with it. So we just -- we're trying to understand.

9 So if we could just take a second to read the exchange in the briefing, one second,  
10 please.

11 [REDACTED]. So you had mentioned, Ms. Psaki, that you, quote, "ask senior officials  
12 for greater clarification in your line of work."

13 In August of 2021 -- or, frankly, any time after you learned about this exchange  
14 that was reported in the book -- did you ever try and confirm whether this exchange  
15 happened?

16 Ms. Loeb. So just to be clear, the exchange you read from Mr. Packer's book is  
17 not what the transcript says.

18 The transcript, I believe, says, "There's this lingering question that the President  
19 has had this impulse to get out of Afghanistan. He even had an interaction with former  
20 diplomat Holbrooke that said -- where Holbrooke said, 'Listen, we have a duty to these  
21 people.' And the Vice President reportedly had answer to that. What is your  
22 response?"

23 So it doesn't actually provide all the information that is in the Mr. Packer book. I  
24 just want to make sure we're looking at the right place. Is this the correct place you're  
25 referring to?

1 [REDACTED]. That's exactly it. I think the book has more information,  
2 obviously, the quote that we read into the record. But a part of that, the quote that we  
3 read in as exhibit 3, was the duty to the Afghan people, to which President -- then-Vice  
4 President Biden responded.

5 And I believe that's the portion that's reflected in the press conference.

6 Ms. Loeb. It doesn't actually say what the Vice President's answer to that is. It  
7 says "reportedly had answer to that," right?

8 [REDACTED]. Yes, and I think our question here is whether you followed up  
9 on that conversation.

10 So to the extent that you can confirm that the Vice President responded to it in  
11 the way that was presented in exhibit 3 -- i.e., saying -- Vice President Biden saying we do  
12 not owe an obligation to the Afghan people -- did you at any point follow up to confirm  
13 the substance of that, to clarify to the substance of that, or to find out what was actually  
14 said during that exchange?

15 Ms. Loeb. But that wasn't what she was asked, is what I'm trying to say. What  
16 you just said, that was not the question Ms. Psaki was asked in the press briefing.

17 [REDACTED]. In the press briefing, she's asked about then-Vice President's  
18 comments to Holbrooke regarding United States not having a duty to the people of  
19 Afghanistan.

20 Ms. Psaki. All that's stated in the press briefing is where Holbrooke said, "Listen,  
21 we have a duty to these people." That's the total of the quote in the transcript.

22 Ms. Loeb. Again, if we're looking in the wrong place, please tell us if it's found,  
23 but I just -- I'm not finding what you're saying here.

24 [REDACTED]. By "these people," the context of Afghanistan, so "we have a  
25 duty to these people." Is there another alternative meaning to "these people"?

1           Ms. Loeb. But that's what Holbrooke said. The Vice -- there's no information  
2 about what the Vice President said. The response -- the next sentence is, "And the Vice  
3 President reportedly had answer to that."

4           ██████████. Correct. And they're referencing the book because that is the  
5 exchange. So we're just asking, did you follow up at any point on that exchange in  
6 particular? We're not trying to ascribe meaning to it. We're asking, did you follow up  
7 on the exchange? Yes or no?

8           Ms. Loeb. But it doesn't say that it's from a book. How would -- you're just  
9 assuming it's from a book? I'm not -- I just -- I don't see what you're saying here.

10          ██████████. Let's take a step back. We're trying to get at this exchange,  
11 alleged exchange, between Holbrooke and Biden. Ms. Psaki was asked about it in this  
12 press conference.

13           I mean, regardless of whether or not it refers to the book or not, did you at any  
14 point try to seek additional information about the alleged conversation between  
15 Holbrooke and Biden that was referenced, that was asked about in the briefing?

16          Ms. Loeb. But the briefing exchange does not ask about the book.

17          ██████████. I know.

18          Ms. Loeb. So I don't think she can answer a question that is premised on a  
19 question that was about the book that does not say that.

20          ██████████. We can certainly ask the question the way that ██████ has rephrased it.

21          ██████████. I was trying to take a step back and ignore the book because  
22 apparently that's confused, muddying the waters.

23           She was asked in this press conference about an alleged exchange between two  
24 individuals, Holbrooke and Biden. Did she ever go back and try to seek additional  
25 information about the content or veracity of the existence of such a conversation?

1 That's what we're trying to get at. So ignore the book.

2 Ms. Psaki. Okay. Thank you for the clarification.

3 So if you're asking me if I went back to the President of the United States and  
4 asked him if he had a conversation more than 10 years earlier with a former diplomat  
5 who had since passed away, I did not go and follow up with him about that exchange.

6 [REDACTED]. That was not the question. The question is whether you sought  
7 to -- that is not the question. The question is not whether you went to the President to  
8 ask whether that conversation happened. It's whether you sought to confirm that  
9 information in any way.

10 Ms. Psaki. What information?

11 Ms. Loeb. But what conversation?

12 [REDACTED]. Whether that information took place.

13 Ms. Loeb. But what conversation? This says, "And the President reportedly  
14 had answer to that." What's the conversation to --

15 [REDACTED]. And how about we just narrow it? Quite frankly, I think  
16 the -- based on that press conference, if you look at the context, it appears that it's about  
17 the book. If you want to question that, that's fine. We can move on from that.

18 There is a conversation in which Ambassador Holbrooke says, we have an  
19 obligation to these people, to the Afghan people.

20 Did you at any point seek to clarify what Vice President Biden said pursuant to his  
21 obligations to the Afghan people?

22 Did he say, "We owe an obligation to the Afghan people"? Did he contest it?  
23 Did he say, "F--- that, we don't owe an obligation," as was stated in the book? Did you  
24 at any point seek to find any clarification whatsoever pursuant to said obligation?

25 Ms. Psaki. First, I would say I don't think there's any reason to phrase in the



1 President of the United States' mouth "F--- that." That's not something he would ever  
2 say.

3 [REDACTED]. It's from the book.

4 Ms. Psaki. Okay. I have not read the book.

5 I think it's important context that Ambassador Holbrooke has passed away a long  
6 time ago.

7 I'm finishing my answer. So let me finish, please.

8 The President of the United States has given extensive speeches about  
9 Afghanistan, including the people of Afghanistan, including his own feelings about the  
10 people of Afghanistan, repeatedly, and I would certainly point you to that.

11 So just to provide further clarification, I did not have a conversation about this  
12 limited, narrow exchange about a book that I had not read, that was not quoted directly  
13 in the press briefing.

14 [REDACTED]. Thank you for that. And I apologize. I don't want to  
15 interrupt.

16 Before my colleague proceeds, I would ask that my minority colleagues not laugh  
17 when the majority's proceeding with our questions.

18 Thank you.

19 BY [REDACTED]:

20 Q Was this transcribed interview today the first time you had heard that  
21 purportedly Vice President Biden responded, "F--- that. We don't have to worry about  
22 that," in response to a concern raised by Mr. Holbrooke that there's an obligation to the  
23 Afghan people? Was today the first time you'd heard about that exchange?

24 A Again, this is obviously a book that has been published. It's not a book that  
25 I have personally read.

1 I think Mr. Holbrooke --

2 Q This is not the question. The question is --

3 A I'm trying to understand your question.

4 Q -- is today the first time you've heard about this exchange?

5 A Again, this was a book. There was public reporting about it. Whether or  
6 not I have seen this exchange before, I'm refreshed of it. So I appreciate that.

7 Q When did you first hear about this exchange?

8 Ms. Loeb. And if you could please just let the witness finish her answer before  
9 asking the next question, that would help us have a clean transcript. Thank you.

10 [REDACTED]. When did you first hear about this exchange?

11 Ms. Psaki. I don't have any -- I didn't read the book. So I haven't read the book.  
12 It may have been when it came up in the briefing on this particular day where you've  
13 shown me the transcript?

14 [REDACTED]. And when you heard about it in the briefing in August of 2021, what, if  
15 anything, did you do to confirm the contents of the conversation?

16 Ms. Loeb. So, again, the exchange from the book that you have shown us is not  
17 in the press briefing. That is not what we are being shown.

18 [REDACTED]. Did you seek greater clarity or information about what happened in any  
19 conversation between Mr. Holbrooke and the Vice President regarding the obligation to  
20 the Afghan people?

21 Ms. Loeb. Ms. Psaki has already answered that question. But if you would like  
22 it one more time, please go ahead.

23 [REDACTED]. I'm not sure that she has.

24 Ms. Psaki. I did not seek further clarification about the President's conversations  
25 with a former ambassador who had been dead for more than 10 years, no.

1 [REDACTED]. Were you ever made aware of statements President Biden made  
2 in the past that represented a vulnerability or that in your press team's opinion needed to  
3 navigate it around, because they were going to be perceived by certain people in a way  
4 that you found politically detrimental?

5 Ms. Loeb. Is that in her entire 15 months as press secretary, or is there a specific  
6 time period you'd like her to focus on?

7 [REDACTED]. In her entire 15 months as press secretary in relation to  
8 Afghanistan.

9 Ms. Psaki. I'm happy -- if there's a particular moment, I'm happy to speak to it.  
10 I would say in general, if I misspoke or if the President misspoke, then I would seek  
11 to clarify that if I had the opportunity to do that.

12 [REDACTED]. No, that wasn't my question. I'm sorry if I was unclear.

13 Ms. Psaki. Okay. Go ahead.

14 [REDACTED]. If you were ever made aware by your press team by statements  
15 that President Biden public had made in the past, not necessarily during his Presidency,  
16 during his Vice Presidency, during his time in the Senate, whenever, that you knew that  
17 could potentially come up in a press briefing or another press context that were  
18 politically -- made him politically vulnerable and represented a liability and that you-all  
19 would have to strategize about how to deal with those past statements?

20 Ms. Psaki. I'm really trying hard to be helpful here. I'm just not sure what  
21 you're getting at here. Can you tell me a little bit more about what you're trying to  
22 receive clarification on?

23 [REDACTED]. I think it's going back to not this particular book or this context.  
24 But in his long career as Senator, Vice President, it's inevitable that you make public  
25 statements. There have been many public statements that President Biden has made

1 with respect to Afghanistan.

2 Ms. Psaki. Uh-huh.

3 [REDACTED]. Some of those have been, if this is true, more problematic than  
4 others. And I believe the question my colleague is asking is if you all had to address  
5 strategically mitigating the fallout from prior comments pertaining to Afghanistan, and, if  
6 so, can you speak to those?

7 Ms. Psaki. I think if I would have had to speak to it publicly, you would be aware  
8 of that in a transcript.

9 And, otherwise, the time that I was press secretary was primarily focused on the  
10 events that were happening during that period of time and providing information to the  
11 press on those events that were happening during that period of time.

1

2

BY [REDACTED]:

3

Q That isn't an answer.

4

A I guess I'm having a hard time understanding your question.

5

Q The question was whether you had to strategize about mitigating past

6

statements that Vice President Biden made.

7

I understand that you're saying that you spoke about some of those issues that

8

are public, but that's not the question. The question is whether you internally had to

9

strategize about mitigating about past statements.

10

A Can you give me an example?

11

Q This is one example.

12

A I've already answered --

13

Q This reported conversation that occurred between Mr. Holbrooke and the

14

Vice President.

15

A That reportedly occurred in a book written by somebody else. No, we did

16

not, I did not have internal strategic conversations about this book.

17

Q What about other potentially problematic statements that the Vice

18

President made about Afghanistan?

19

A Like what?

20

Ms. Loeb. I think it would help if you would be more specific.

21

[REDACTED]. It's a general question. At any point did you have meetings like

22

that?

23

Ms. Loeb. Like what?

24

BY [REDACTED]:

25

Q Mitigating the fallout about previous statements made by President Biden

1 on the topic of Afghanistan.

2 Did you ever once have a consultation or meeting about that topic?

3 A Again, you'd have to give me examples of what specific statements you're  
4 referring to. But no, we did not typically have meetings about the President's former  
5 statements when he was Vice President, no.

6 Q Not my question, but just for the record, we can move on. The witness has  
7 dodged the question.

8 A Hold on a second. I dodged no question. You have provided no clarity. I  
9 think there's no understanding of what you're trying to ask. If you're --

10 Q I asked you if ever you had a single meeting or consultation about President  
11 Biden's past statements. And the reason for such a meeting would be to strategize  
12 about how you mitigate potential liabilities or fallout about those previous statements.

13 Did you ever once have a consultation or meeting? It's a very specific question.

14 A Well, maybe I can provide for you a better understanding of how the White  
15 House actually works, because you're dealing with questions that are in the current  
16 moment of what is happening during that period of time.

17 So that is what you're focusing your time on as the White House press secretary.  
18 You're not having meetings that are looking at comments and statements from 10 or 20  
19 years prior. That's why I think I was having trouble trying to understand your question.

20 Q I apologize. I was trying to refer to interactions of any kind, not a sit-down,  
21 formal meeting, necessarily, a conversation. Does that help?

22 A Again, that is not -- that would not have been a typical meeting or discussion  
23 that we would have had.

24 Q My question was not was it typical or was it not. I asked you if you ever  
25 once had a conversation about mitigating the fallout of President Biden's previous

1 stances or statements on Afghanistan.

2 Ms. Loeb. I think Ms. Psaki has now asked this -- answered this question several  
3 times.

4 [REDACTED]. No, she hasn't.

5 Ms. Loeb. And it's an extremely broad question. It would be impossible to  
6 answer.

7 [REDACTED]. I'm happy to move on, but she hasn't.

8 Ms. Loeb. Again, just for the record, I think it is important that Ms. Psaki be  
9 allowed to fully answer questions before counsel speaks over her, if we can just please  
10 agree to that going forward.

11 [REDACTED]. Switching gears a bit.

12 Ms. Psaki, what were the major issues and questions the administration addressed  
13 pertaining to Afghanistan prior to President Biden's April 14th announcement?

14 Ms. Psaki. Again, there's publicly available press briefings where I answered  
15 those questions that became --

16 [REDACTED]. And, Ms. Psaki, you are the primary source of those publicly  
17 available documents, unless you'd like to say that your statements are more valid than  
18 what we're asking today.

19 We asked you as a witness here because we want to ask you what were the  
20 primary issues to the best of your recollection.

21 If your statement is that those statements are more credible than your current  
22 recollection, then that's fine. But we'd like to hear from you what were the issues that  
23 the administration addressed during that period.

24 Ms. Loeb. So, counsel, just for the clarity of the record, I think what Ms. Psaki  
25 has said is that her press briefings and public statements are the best, most complete

1 record of what she said at the time.

2 Three years later, memory, recollection will not be better than a transcript of what  
3 a human being said at the time, and that is what she has said.

4 [REDACTED]. And I will say that for me personally the way that I recall  
5 information is, when it's of something of importance to me, it's hard for me to forget.

6 So I would like to know now in 2024 what to the best of your recollection were the  
7 primary issues that the administration addressed prior to the April 14th, 2021,  
8 announcement.

9 [REDACTED]. I think she's also repeatedly said that she was not a policymaker or  
10 was not involved in those discussions.

11 [REDACTED]. And I did not ask about the interagency process. I did not ask  
12 about policy decisions you made. I asked about issues that the administration  
13 addressed.

14 I think, as the White House press secretary, that is distinctly within your purview  
15 and jurisdiction, given that you are entrusted in communicating that information to the  
16 American people.

17 Ms. Loeb. So is your question what communication issues she was facing before  
18 April 14th?

19 [REDACTED]. My question is, what issues was the administration addressing  
20 at that point in time?

21 As you noted earlier, your job was to communicate the information to the public.  
22 But how you communicate that information -- it's not what you say, it's how you say it,  
23 which is what I said previously -- that's your prerogative.

24 I'm not asking the message that was delivered, your public statements. I'm  
25 asking you, what were the issues that the administration addressed at that point in time?



1 If it's the same as your public statements, then that's fine. But that's not what I'm  
2 asking.

3 Ms. Psaki. Okay. Let me try to answer your question and see if I can address it.

4 If you're asking me what the internal discussions were about Afghanistan at the  
5 time, I'm not going to discuss internal conversations about any particular policy  
6 deliberations, of course, and I was not in those meetings either.

7 I can speak to what the questions were and the topics were that were on the  
8 minds of reporters at the time to the best of my recollection.

9 I would reiterate that because, unlike your job, there's publicly available press  
10 briefings of every single press briefing I did that everyone has access to.

11 So, yes, I delivered the press briefings. But those are available to anyone out  
12 there who'd like to read them. So that is the difference.

13 At the time, because it was publicly known that the Doha Agreement had been  
14 agreed to by the prior administration, there were questions about -- I believe about  
15 the -- that and the status of that and the President's decision-making.

16 Beyond that, I'm happy to speak to any briefing I had at the time and any public  
17 comments I had at the time, as I hopefully have exhibited over the course of the last few  
18 hours.

1 [4:06 p.m.]

2 [REDACTED]. I'd like to introduce as exhibit 12.

3 [Psaki Exhibit No. 12  
4 was marked for identification.]

5 [REDACTED]. Hopefully this will jog some of your memory. It's an excerpt of  
6 A report by the Special Inspector General from Afghanistan Reconstruction, dated January  
7 30th, 2021.

8 Ms. Loeb. What exhibit number did you say this was?

9 [REDACTED]. I believe we're on exhibit 12.

10 Ms. Loeb. Thank you.

11 BY [REDACTED]:

12 Q Ms. Psaki, are you familiar with the Special Inspector General for Afghan  
13 Reconstruction?

14 A Yes.

15 Q If you can please direct your attention to the bottom of page 47 -- 48. I'll  
16 read the relevant text into the record: "These negotiations between the Afghan  
17 Government and the Taliban continue this quarter amidst sustained high levels of  
18 insurgent and extremist violence in Afghanistan. The Taliban's participation in the talks  
19 provides an opportunity to fulfill one commitment in the February 2020 U.S.-Taliban  
20 agreement to discuss the date and legalities of a permanent and comprehensive  
21 cease-fire and complete an agreement over the political future of Afghanistan.  
22 However, several Taliban actions continue to belie other commitments and agreement,  
23 including continued affiliation with terrorist groups, high levels of overall violence, and  
24 attacks on major population centers and on U.S. and coalition personnel."

25 Ms. Psaki, do you agree, in the year 2021, that the Taliban's repeated actions belie

1 their commitment to the Doha agreement?

2 A I'm not a policymaker, nor do I have independent assessments of the  
3 Taliban's actions.

4 Q Is it your opinion that the Taliban's actions belie their commitments in the  
5 Doha agreement?

6 A I'm not here to share my personal opinions, and I shared the positions of the  
7 U.S. Government at the time.

8 Q Did the administration agree that the Taliban's repeated actions belie their  
9 commitments on the Doha agreement?

10 A Again, I would point you to my public comments and the public comments of  
11 officials at the time.

12 Q I'm not asking for your public comments. I'm asking for your recollection of  
13 what the administration assessed at that time.

14 A Again, I was not in the internal meetings about it. I don't have an  
15 independent assessment. I can point you to what I said at the time publicly and on the  
16 record.

17 Q And please point us to that. What did you say at the time?

18 A All of my transcripts are available, and I'm happy to discuss any of them  
19 you'd like to discuss.

20 Q Ms. Psaki, I want to be very clear. Resorting to documents that I can find  
21 on Google is not an answer to this committee's questions. As previously noted, you  
22 came here voluntarily under the threat of a subpoena. If you do not answer a question  
23 today, that is your prerogative, but pointing us to publicly available documents, which we  
24 have done our very best to present to you, is not only disrespectful, but it completely  
25 evades the Congressional oversight we're seeking to pursue in this instance. So it's your

1 prerogative how you want to answer, but pointing us to publicly available documents,  
2 which by the way, up until this point, you have even noted, "Well, I don't remember; it  
3 was 3 years ago. I need more time." That is not an appropriate answer. So I'm going  
4 to continue with my next question.

5 [REDACTED]: Counsel, I think that's an unfair characterization. She has  
6 answered all your questions truthfully.

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q And I'll repeat my questions. At the time, in January of 2021, what was the  
9 administration's assessment of the Taliban's commitment to the Doha agreement?

10 A Again, at no point have I been disrespectful of you, and I would appreciate if  
11 you are respectful of me in response, but I will tell you again that my job was to be the  
12 spokesperson and speak publicly on behalf of the administration. So the reason that I'm  
13 pointing you -- and I'm not trying to be unhelpful in any way -- to what my public  
14 statements were, is because there is a record of what my actual job was. And I was not  
15 a policymaker involved in these discussions or negotiations, and I don't want to speak out  
16 of turn or guess on things that you're asking important questions about. That's my only  
17 objective here.

18 Q Fair enough. So --

19 BY [REDACTED]:

20 Q You have indicated that, quote, your role was to, quote, "gather as much  
21 accurate and up-to-date information as possible from policymakers," close quote, in  
22 order to do your job. In the process of gathering accurate and up-to-date information,  
23 were you aware of any information that would indicate the administration assess the  
24 Taliban to be noncompliant with the terms of the Doha agreement?

25 A Well, I can only speak to both what I shared publicly at the time, and -- let

1 me finish. Let me finish. Then I'm happy to answer further questions. And also I  
2 would not have shared information that conflicted with my knowledge. I don't -- if you  
3 want to discuss a transcript or answers I gave at the time, I'm happy to do that. I don't  
4 have in front of me if I discussed the SIGAR or the Taliban's compliance at the time, but if I  
5 did, I'm happy to talk about it.

6 Q You said you wouldn't have shared information that conflicted with your  
7 knowledge. With respect to requiring information, though, wouldn't there be potential  
8 for conflicting views and opinions, conflicting information that you received? Yes?

9 A Of course. Of course. And so what I was referring to there -- and again,  
10 just to reiterate, I was not in the meetings at this time. I was in some meetings leading  
11 up to the final timeline of August 31st where I asked to attend those meetings in order to  
12 provide more information to the public. So all I'm conveying is that I -- if I heard  
13 something that was conflicting to what was on a talking point, I would not have said it.  
14 But, again, because I was not in these meetings at the time, I just don't have an  
15 independent assessment of that. That's all I'm conveying.

16 Q So are you not aware of any information during that time period that  
17 indicated that the Taliban was not in compliance with the terms of the Doha agreement?

18 A Well, because my job at the time was to speak to the topics of interest to the  
19 White House press corps, which was primarily -- and again, it doesn't mean I didn't speak  
20 to questions on Afghanistan. I likely did during this period of time, and I'm, again, happy  
21 to discuss that. But the primary questions and topics on the minds of reporters in these  
22 early months was related to COVID-19 and the pandemic and the response to that,  
23 because that was of concern to the American people.

24 And, again, they determine what questions they wanted to ask about. They  
25 could have come to the briefing and asked an hour of questions about Afghanistan. But

1 they were asking questions about a range of other topics more predominantly during that  
2 time.

3 Q I think we'll probably move on in the interest of time, but I would just note  
4 as well that you have indicated that your role was also to gather information and that you  
5 weren't just a pass-through vehicle for that information, so certainly, you would be privy  
6 to disparate and perhaps conflicting accounts and disparate opinions, different types of  
7 information, and so the fact that you're unable to speak at all to sort of any information  
8 speaking to or going to the administration's assessment of the Taliban's compliance with  
9 the Doha agreement, it is surprising.

10 Ms. Loeb. I think, Counsel, what she has said repeatedly is that she would gather  
11 information in response to reporters questions, and they were in charge of which  
12 questions that she asked. She has not testified that she sought out the full range of  
13 information going on in the United States Government at any given time. It was driven  
14 by the questions being asked in the briefing room.

15 BY [REDACTED]:

16 Q I'm going to go back to exhibit 10. I believe the chairman, Chairman  
17 McCaul spoke to this. This is the transcript of your April 14, 2021, press conference.

18 A Sure. Let me just pull it up.

19 Q I believe the language that he quoted was from page 5 about halfway  
20 through the page. I spoke about the commitments in the Doha agreement and you  
21 pointed to -- this is your public statement. One of those commitments was cutting  
22 ties -- the Taliban cutting ties with terrorist groups, including but not limited to al-Qaeda.  
23 In this press conference, you were asked: You saw where the CIA Director said the U.S.  
24 Government's ability to collect and act on threats will diminish when the time comes for  
25 the U.S. military to withdraw. Does that give you pause at all?

1           To which you respond in part regarding al-Qaeda, even if you look at al-Qaeda, it is  
2 not -- it is not being harbored in a safe haven in Afghanistan how it was 20 years ago. So  
3 going back to the information that informed that assessment, this is a public statement  
4 that you provided. Can you please provide greater clarity as to what information  
5 informed the statement that you communicated to the American people.

6           A     Again, it would have been based on information gathered through the NSC  
7 press process where the NSC press team put together talking points and answers to  
8 questions that were coming up in the briefing, and there were questions, of course, at the  
9 time about the threat -- about terrorist threats and certainly there were threats at the  
10 time, but also the President spoke to this broadly in his speech around the time of April as  
11 well, so I would also point you to that and what he also said. And beyond that, I would  
12 just reiterate that national security issues, as you know, are fluid as many issues are, and  
13 certainly threats change over the course of time as well.

14           Q     Thank you.

15           ██████████. I'd like to enter as exhibit 13 a memorandum from the Inspector  
16 General from the U.S. Department of Treasury sent to the Department of Defense  
17 Inspector General.

18   [Psaki Exhibit No. 13  
19   was marked for identification.]

20           BY ██████████:

21           Q     The memorandum is dated January 4th of 2021, and I'll give you a moment  
22 to take a look.

23           A     Thank you.

24           Q     So, as noted, this memorandum was published on January 4th, 2021,  
25 analyzing the Taliban's close ties with al-Qaeda amongst other things. This report would

1 have been available to you by the time of your April 2021 press conference. I'd like to  
2 direct your attention to page 4, question 6, in an unclassified publicly releasable format,  
3 describe al-Qaeda funding in Afghanistan, the estimated amount of funds at their  
4 disposal, and how funds are generated and distributed: "Treasury told us, as of 2020  
5 al-Qaeda is gaining strength in Afghanistan while continuing to operate with the Taliban  
6 under the Taliban's protection. Al-Qaeda broadly still depends on donations from  
7 likeminded supporters and from individuals who believe that their money is supporting  
8 humanitarian or charitable causes. Treasury told us al-Qaeda capitalizes in its  
9 relationship with the Taliban through its network of mentors and advisors who are  
10 embodied with the Taliban providing advice, guidance, and financial support. Senior  
11 Haqqani network figures have discussed funding a new joint unit of armed fighters in  
12 cooperation with and funded by al-Qaeda."

13 Haqqani network has a footnote drop there, footnote five: The Haqqani network  
14 is a Sunni Islamist militant organization primarily based in north Waziristan, Pakistan and  
15 conducts cross-border operations in eastern Afghanistan and Kabul.

16 Ms. Psaki, were you ever made aware of this report by the inspector general, or  
17 did you at any point read it prior to your April 14th press conference?

18 A I was not. As you know, it was done during the prior administration. I  
19 have not seen this document before.

20 Q Were you ever briefed on this report?

21 A Again, as I just stated, I have not seen this report before.

22 Q The question was not if you had seen it. My question was if you were  
23 briefed on it.

24 A I was not.

25 Q So you were never informed, nor did you make efforts to rediscover a report



1 which clearly outlines Taliban's close relationship and sponsorship of al-Qaeda?

2 A Again, as I stated earlier, the NSC press team developed press guidance  
3 based on the questions that were incoming, including questions about intelligence  
4 threats, and those were based on assessments made by the intelligence community at  
5 the time when I was serving in government. This was also prior to my time serving in  
6 government, a couple of months prior to me answering the questions from the press  
7 briefing you referenced earlier.

8 Q Just to make sure that I'm not misstating what you provided, so am I correct  
9 in understanding that it is NSC who briefed you on the Taliban's relationship with  
10 al-Qaeda?

11 A Again, any questions I would have answered related to intelligence would  
12 have been based on public -- approved press guidance developed by the team through  
13 coordination in the interagency process that included members of the intelligence team.

14 Q Who told you that the Taliban no longer provided al-Qaeda safe haven in  
15 Afghanistan?

16 A Again, I think --

17 [REDACTED]. Just for the record, that is not what it says. Should we read it for  
18 the record?

19 [REDACTED]. By all means.

20 [REDACTED]. Even if you look at al-Qaeda, it is not -- it is not being harbored in a  
21 safe haven in Afghanistan how it was 20 years ago.

22 I don't think Ms. Psaki said that al-Qaeda was not in Afghanistan. I think she was  
23 comparing it to 20 years previously.

24 BY [REDACTED]:

25 Q Okay. How is it different from 20 years ago then?

1 A Again, I'm just saying it's not -- it is different from 20 years ago.

2 Q I'm asking what's the difference?

3 A Again, this is a briefing from 3 and a half years ago based on information  
4 from our intelligence team at the time. Are you disputing that it's not different 20 years  
5 ago?

6 Q I'm asking you, because you communicated to the American people. I'd  
7 like to better understand how is it different from 20 years ago?

8 A My publicly available press briefing is the best assessment of the U.S.  
9 Government's position at the time, and I'm here, as you know, voluntarily to discuss my  
10 time as the White House Press Secretary, not my own independent intelligence  
11 assessments of which I don't have any.

12 Q Okay. Your publicly available statement does not provide an assessment of  
13 how it's different. So that's why I'm asking you here, but if you don't have a  
14 recollection, that's okay. We can move on.

15 Ms. Loeb. I think 20 years ago prior to this briefing was around the time of 9/11  
16 or pre-9/11, so I think it might be self-evident how Afghanistan is different.

17 [REDACTED]. I don't think it is self-evident.

18 But, if that's your testimony, then that's your testimony, so that's why I'm asking.

19 Ms. Loeb. Ms. Psaki has already answered the question. I just want to point  
20 out that 20 years ago --

21 [REDACTED]. We can move on.

22 BY [REDACTED]:

23 Q Are you aware of any alternative viewpoints to the Taliban's relationship  
24 with al-Qaeda to the one that you publicly conveyed, or were you aware at the time of  
25 any alternative viewpoints?

1           A    Again, I was not in meetings with the intelligence community, so I wouldn't  
2 have been a part of those discussions.

3           Q    The intelligence community or NSC inform you of alternative viewpoints?

4           A    That would not typically have been what would have happened. No, I don't  
5 recall that being informed of range of viewpoints.

6           [REDACTED]. Just to pause there, your answer was rather equivocal. Did you  
7 receive this information or not? Did you receive information of alternative viewpoints  
8 or not?

9           [REDACTED]. Of what? Alternative viewpoints of what?

10          [REDACTED]. Of the Taliban's relationship of al-Qaeda.

11          Ms. Psaki. I did not receive regular intelligence briefings, so, no, I did not receive  
12 any summary or assessment of differing viewpoints or any summary of their relationship,  
13 no.

14          [REDACTED]. That's not the question. Did you receive information of alternative  
15 viewpoints? Not a summary, not the briefing. I'm just asking, in conversations, in  
16 emails at all, did you ever receive information of alternative viewpoints?

17          Ms. Loeb. I would think such information is classified.

18          [REDACTED]. I also think she said she cannot recall receiving that type of  
19 information.

20          Ms. Psaki. No, I did not.

21          [REDACTED] She said she didn't recall receiving information in briefings or -- I just  
22 wanted to make sure that your statement is you did not receive any information of  
23 alternative viewpoints at all.

24          Ms. Loeb. Of alternative viewpoints. Just be very clear. Of alternative  
25 viewpoints of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan?

1 [REDACTED]. Correct.

2 Ms. Psaki. Again, I'm not trying to be difficult here, but I think it's important for  
3 you to understand that the White House Press Secretary would not have been in  
4 intelligence briefings, would not have been in meetings where differing viewpoints on  
5 intelligence would have been discussed. So the information I would have had access to  
6 or would have been briefed on, which is why I was trying to answer the question this way,  
7 was if questions were coming up about differing viewpoints or about our assessment of  
8 that, and then I would use the information from the NSC press process. They would  
9 work through the interagency on -- to prepare it, but I was not discussing intelligence or  
10 different intelligence assessments with the intelligence community, no.

11 [REDACTED]. So your answer to my question is no?

12 Ms. Loeb. I think she gave her complete answer.

13 [REDACTED]. She gave her answer. Thank you.

14 BY [REDACTED]:

15 Q Ms. Psaki, for your awareness, the majority has learned from senior Defense  
16 Department officials, amongst others, that they did indeed provide alternative  
17 viewpoints, and that it was the State Department and the NSC who believed al-Qaeda  
18 was not a threat. As an advisor to the President and senior staffer in the White House,  
19 were you excluded from those briefings with Department of Defense officials?

20 A I did not participate in briefings with the Department of Defense.

21 Q Are you aware of assessments provided by the --

22 [REDACTED]. I believe she said that was not her role, not that she was excluded.

23 BY [REDACTED]:

24 Q Are you aware of assessments by the Department of Defense which stated  
25 that al-Qaeda was still a threat in Afghanistan?

1           A    I don't have any additional information beyond what I've provided to date.  
2           ██████████.   Again, I don't think she ever said al-Qaeda was a threat in  
3 Afghanistan.

4           BY ██████████:

5           Q    In your extensive experience as a White House and State Department  
6 communications staffer, is it common that you would not be privy to the opinions of  
7 senior Defense Department officials on major foreign policy decisions?

8           A    It would be uncommon for the White House Press Secretary to be  
9 independently briefed by Department of Defense officials.

10          Q    Is it -- is it common that someone in your position would not be privy to the  
11 assessments of those senior defense department officials?

12          A    Privy to in what capacity?

13          Q    You've just -- you just stated that you did not receive these assessments.  
14 You are not aware of assessments by the Department of Defense, which stated -- which  
15 contradicted or challenged the public statement you provided to the American people on  
16 April 14th.   My question is, is that common that you would not be aware of assessments  
17 by senior Defense Department officials which challenged the narrative that you were  
18 communicating to the American people?

19          A    Again --

20          Ms. Loeb.   I don't think that we have evidence here in the record that there is  
21 information challenging what Ms. Psaki said.   You're just -- counsel is testifying as to  
22 what others have said.   Is that what's happening?

23          ██████████.   We'll be attributing that to the record.   That's not a problem.  
24 That's why I'm asking the question first.   We'll get to that point.

25          Ms. Psaki.   Okay.   Just to help us understand, because we're referring to one

1 statement I made about, again, just to read it again for the record, about is "not harbored  
2 in a safe haven in Afghanistan how it was 20 years ago." So I guess the question is, do  
3 you have information that you're presenting that conflicts that, that suggests that what I  
4 was saying was inaccurate at the time?

5 Q My question was the Defense Department officials provided assessments  
6 which challenged that statement, and I asked if you received briefings from those  
7 Defense Department officials as to their assessments. You stated you did not receive  
8 briefings from senior Defense Department officials. Then I asked you if you are aware of  
9 assessments by senior Defense Department officials which challenged the statement you  
10 provided to the American people, and you said -- that's the question I'm trying to get to.

11 [REDACTED]. Can you repeat those assessments and put into the record?

12 [REDACTED]. We'll be putting it into the record when we get to the  
13 testimony.

14 [REDACTED]. Are we asking about the testimony now, though?

15 [REDACTED]. Apologies. I'm not asking about the testimony. I'm asking if  
16 she received assessments from Defense Department officials. If your answer is no, then  
17 that's it. I asked about Afghanistan policy generally. I asked about the Taliban's  
18 commitment to cut ties with al-Qaeda, both of which you did not answer or said you do  
19 not recall. So I will give you another opportunity. Do you recall obtaining any  
20 assessments from the Defense Department which challenged the narrative that al-Qaeda  
21 is not a threat in Afghanistan the way that it was 20 years ago?

22 Ms. Psaki. As I already --

23 [REDACTED]. That also wasn't the original question. You just qualified it.

24 Ms. Loeb. Right. So, to be the clear, the question right now is, did she have  
25 information that conflicted with what she said from the podium that we just --

1 [REDACTED]. Correct.

2 Ms. Loeb. Please answer.

3 Ms. Psaki. I did not.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q Ms. Psaki, what was the administration's assessment of the Taliban's  
6 commitment to reduce violence against Afghan population including women and girls?

7 A The internal assessment at the time?

8 Q Correct.

9 A I don't have that in front of me at this moment in time. I'm happy to speak  
10 to it if there's a moment in the briefing that I spoke to that. I'm happy to address that or  
11 answer questions on it.

12 Q Ms. Psaki, were you aware that the Taliban refused to let women be  
13 educated and then you believed that that would happen again if they regained control of  
14 Afghanistan?

15 A I was aware there was a range of public reporting on it. I also will say just  
16 for the record that I did go to Afghanistan a number of times with the Secretary of State  
17 when I was at the State Department. I did meet a number of incredible women and  
18 girls. I was certainly aware of the plight of women and girls, and any human being  
19 would be impacted of that.

20 Q And what was the assessment of the administration of that happening again  
21 if the Taliban took over?

22 A Again, I don't have the administration's assessment at the time. If you have  
23 it in front of you or you'd like to read it or discuss it, I'm happy to discuss it.

24 Q What was the administration's assessment of the Taliban's commitment to  
25 engage in meaningful negotiations with Afghan Government and other stakeholders?

1 [REDACTED]. I think Ms. Psaki has repeatedly said she was not a policymaker.  
2 This was not her role at the White House.

3 [REDACTED]. Of course, but she was entrusted in communicating that policy.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q You also served, as you previously noted, you did engage with the President.  
6 You engaged with senior administration officials as to said policy and you were informed  
7 of the contents thereof. So that's -- my question is, I think it's pretty fair to ask what the  
8 administration's assessment was. If you don't recall, that's fine.

9 A I'm not saying anything is unfair at all. All I'm suggesting is that, because I  
10 answered all of these questions 3 and a half years ago, what I stated publicly about the  
11 position at the time is the best record of the position at the time of the U.S. Government  
12 on Afghanistan and any of these issues.

13 [REDACTED]. Are we on exhibit 14? I'd like to introduce exhibit 14 into the  
14 record next.

15 [Psaki Exhibit No. 14  
16 was marked for identification.]

17 BY [REDACTED]:

18 Q This is an excerpt of a CNN article titled "Biden overruled Blinken and  
19 Austin's attempts to extend U.S. presence in Afghanistan, new Woodward/Costa book  
20 says." The article is dated September 14th, 2021, and references Woodward and  
21 Costa's book titled "Peril," which according to the article, quote, "explores Biden's  
22 determination to withdraw U.S. troops from Afghanistan despite resistance from top  
23 advisers."

24 I'd like to direct your attention to the second page, the first full paragraph, which  
25 references a March 2021 meeting between NATO ministers and Secretary Blinken. The



1 article states, quote, "Woodward and Costa write that Biden Secretary of State Anthony  
2 Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin both pushed for a slower withdrawal. After  
3 a March meeting of NATO ministers, Blinken changed his recommendation about  
4 removing all U.S. troops." It then quotes the book referencing that meeting stating,  
5 quote, "Previously, he had been foursquare with Biden for a full withdrawal, the authors  
6 write. His new recommendation was to extend the mission of U.S. troops for a while to  
7 see if it could yield a political settlement, buy time for negotiations. Blinken told Biden  
8 on a call from Brussels he was hearing from the other NATO ministers in quadraphonic  
9 sound or surround sound that the U.S. should leverage its departure to gain concrete  
10 steps toward a political settlement, according to the book."

11 Ms. Psaki, can you please speak to Secretary Blinken and Secretary Austin's push  
12 for a slower withdrawal in March of 2021?

13 A In what capacity?

14 Q Are you aware that Secretary Blinken and Secretary Austin advised for a slow  
15 withdrawal from Afghanistan?

16 [REDACTED]. I'd ask Ms. Psaki not to reveal any internal deliberations to the  
17 extent that she was privy to them.

18 Ms. Psaki. I did not have independent conversations with them about their  
19 points of view.

20 BY [REDACTED]:

21 Q Are you aware this conversation did happen?

22 A There's publicly available reporting, but I don't have independent  
23 confirmation of it.

24 Q Did you ever become aware that this conversation did happen?

25 A Again, publicly available reporting, but I don't have independent

1 confirmation of it.

2 Q Did you ever pursue independent confirmation of it?

3 A About their points of view?

4 Q Correct.

5 A I did not.

6 Q Did you ever receive Secretary Blinken and Secretary Austin's assessments  
7 for a slow withdrawal?

8 A That wouldn't have been my role, no.

9 Q Were you ever briefed on the Defense Department and State Department's  
10 assessment advocating for a slow withdrawal?

11 A Again, that would not have been my role, but no.

12 Q So you were never informed by two of the lead agencies responsible for the  
13 Afghanistan withdrawal that it was their assessment that the U.S. should pursue a slow  
14 withdrawal?

15 Ms. Loeb. Again, Ms. Psaki does not -- has not said that she knows that this  
16 reporting was true.

17 BY [REDACTED]:

18 Q My question is, did you ever receive that assessment?

19 A I think I've answered that question, but I will also just say that, broadly  
20 speaking, when there are policy decisions and processes in any White House, there are a  
21 range of points of view that are presented, and the President is ultimately the decider.  
22 So it wouldn't be typical for any White House Press Secretary to dig into further  
23 explaining anyone's point of view because those conversations are private so that the  
24 President can get advice and candor and disagreement at times, when appropriate.

25 Q You did receive assessments from the National Security Council, though, or

1 at least from the press team of the National Security Council, correct?

2 A In what capacity?

3 Q Regarding Afghanistan withdrawal writ large.

4 Ms. Loeb. That has not been her testimony. She has said she got press talking  
5 points and briefing points from the NSC about public-facing talking points. If you're  
6 asking about private assessments, just help us to be clear about what you're asking.

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q So what public-facing talking points did you receive from the NSC regarding  
9 the timing of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan?

10 A I'm sorry; in terms of what? The decision to withdraw or the timeline of it  
11 or what --

12 Q The timeline.

13 A Once a decision was made through the interagency process, then obviously  
14 there was a speech that was delivered, and that was something that we would be  
15 explaining and talking about publicly.

16 BY [REDACTED]:

17 Q What concrete actions did you take once this report came out?

18 A In what capacity?

19 Q As Press Secretary.

20 A To further determine -- I wouldn't have been speaking on behalf of the  
21 Secretary of State or the Secretary of Defense.

22 Q To control the fallout.

23 A To control the fallout? Well, we had to determine what we would say  
24 publicly about it, certainly, but beyond that, I wouldn't have taken further action because  
25 I wasn't going to speak on their behalf. They were capable of speaking on their own

1       behalf about their points of view. That was publicly reported at the time as well.

2               Q     So what did you direct your staff to do in light of this report?

3               A     I don't -- direct them in what capacity?

4               Q     As their boss.

5               A     I know, I'm sorry; I'm not trying to be cute about this. I'm just trying to  
6 understand what you mean. Are you asking me if I asked them to develop an answer for  
7 us or --

8               Q     Sure, if that's something you asked them to do. I mean, I've never worked  
9 at the White House, so I'm just curious what -- you know, a bad story comes out. What  
10 do you tell them specifically in regards to this one? What is the staff dynamic like?

11              A     As I stated earlier, and again, I don't have a recollection right now, though  
12 we could certainly discuss it if it's in a transcript of what we said at the time, but because  
13 the President is the ultimate decision maker and ultimately decided the timeline and the  
14 decision to withdraw, I think I likely spoke to that and the fact that people give a range of  
15 views and assessments, and that is a healthy part of the policy process. That is what we  
16 would have provided from the White House briefing. We wouldn't have spoken on  
17 behalf of members of the military or Cabinet members, because they're more than  
18 capable of speaking on their own behalf privately and if they chose to publicly.

19                       BY ██████:

20              Q     Were you concerned about negative political implications of the President  
21 having been known to have taken a decision that was in conflict with the advice of the  
22 Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense?

23              A     Again, I know you've spoken to them, and perhaps you may reference what  
24 they've -- I don't know who you've spoken to. Sorry. Some of them you've spoken to.  
25 I did not independently, obviously, speak on their behalf at the time. I think -- and

1 you're not suggesting I did. I think are you asking me if I was worried that there was  
2 public reporting of people having conflicting views with the President --

3 Q I'm asking if you were concerned about negative political consequences.

4 A My job as the White House Press Secretary was certainly to be prepared to  
5 answer -- for reporter questions and to address stories that were coming out. This was  
6 the President's decision. He obviously weighed a range of viewpoints in that process, so  
7 my job was to just communicate about that.

8 Q What did you do to prepare to answer questions on this particular issue?

9 A On this particular story?

10 Q On this particular -- not on the story, but on the concern that the President  
11 might be known to have taken a decision that is contrary to the advice of the Secretary of  
12 State and Secretary of Defense.

13 A Again, I'm not independently validating that. I just want to state that for  
14 the record. My job at the time would have been to state specifically the President's  
15 point of view and not to provide any additional information on internal deliberations or  
16 internal advice that anyone, whether in the military or the State Department, would have  
17 offered. And Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, General Milley, others  
18 testified before Congress on a regular basis and also did public interviews and certainly  
19 could speak on their own behalf about their own points of view.

20 Q So did you ever take any action or direct your staff to take any action to  
21 confirm whether this reporting is accurate?

22 A Well, most of the management of these -- this story or these stories would  
23 have been through the NSC press team, who we've spoken about previously. I would  
24 have spoken about it in the briefing, and I may have at the time. It's very possible.  
25 They did not work directly for me, so their own statements in the stories, I'm not sure if

1 there is a statement in the story. There might be. Wasn't done at my direction.

2 Ms. Loeb. I'll just note for the record it does look like we were given the first two  
3 pages of the story, but there's nine pages, so we're not able to determine if there is a  
4 White House or National Security Council statement in this story.

5 Q Presumably, Ms. Psaki, in your work, you would have had -- you would have  
6 had to have been prepared to answer questions like did the President make this decision  
7 even though he was advised by the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense on an  
8 alternative course of action, and in order to answer that question, you presumably would  
9 need to know whether that advice was actually rendered, correct?

10 A Well, yes, but also --

11 Q Did you seek to confirm whether that advice was actually rendered or not?

12 A I'm not going to speak now nor did I at the time to independent advice  
13 provided to the President or the perspectives of the Secretary of State or the Secretary of  
14 Defense, and I wouldn't have at the time either.

15 Q I'm asking --

16 [Discussion off the record.]

17 BY [REDACTED]:

18 Q Ms. Psaki, I'm not asking about whether that information was confirmed at  
19 this point. My only question is the action that you took, did you seek to confirm the  
20 information? It's an entirely separate question.

21 A Well, I would say I was not going to discuss from the podium the private  
22 advice or private counsel of Secretary of Defense or the Secretary of State. I knew I was  
23 not going to speak to it, so I can't recall in specificity what actions I took behind the  
24 scenes at the time.

25 Q So you -- your testimony is you don't know.

1 Ms. Loeb. I think her testimony speaks for itself.

2 [REDACTED]. Her testimony is that she does not recall what actions that she took, so  
3 she doesn't know.

4 Ms. Loeb. I think the transcript will reflect what Ms. Psaki said, and we can all  
5 agree on that.

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q Ms. Psaki, on April 14, 2021, President Biden announced the U.S. would  
8 withdraw from Afghanistan by September 11th, 2021, despite the Taliban not meeting  
9 the conditions of the Doha agreement. When did you first learn that this would be the  
10 President's course of action and that this being the full U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan?

11 A Sometime in advance of the speech in April.

12 Q How long in advance?

13 A I don't have specificity on the exact date or time of that.

14 Q An estimate? Was it a week before? Two weeks?

15 A Shortly before, but I don't have a specific date.

16 Q Ms. Psaki, I want to refer you back to exhibit 10. This is the transcript from  
17 your April 14, 2021, press conference. It's the day of President Biden's go-to-zero  
18 announcement ordering a full U.S. military withdrawal by September 11th.

19 Ms. Loeb. April 10?

20 [REDACTED]. It's exhibit 10.

21 BY [REDACTED]:

22 Q Please direct your attention to page 8 near the top of the page. Here  
23 you're asked by a reporter about the White House's decision to withdraw troops on the  
24 anniversary of the September 11th terrorist attacks. The reporter states, quote,  
25 "Republican Senators have criticized attaching withdrawal of troops in Afghanistan to

1 September 11th. They say it's politically driven. Do you have a response to that?

2 And, also, do you have anything to share on who came up with that deadline and why?"

3 Ms. Loeb. I'm sorry, we're just having trouble finding it.

4 Ms. Psaki. I may be looking at the wrong page. Let me just make sure I'm on  
5 the right page.

6 [REDACTED]. 8.

7 Ms. Psaki. Oh, sorry. I was looking at page 10. One second. Okay.

8 BY [REDACTED]:

9 Q To which you respond, "I think it was the President wanting to send a clear  
10 message that this is not going to be an open-ended timeline to withdrawing troops. We  
11 have had that policy for some time in the past, and he disagrees with it, so he was giving a  
12 timeline on when operationally we could move troops out."

13 Again, you were asked about why 9/11 was a final day; to which you respond, "I  
14 think I just explained why he chose that timeline."

15 Ms. Psaki, I want to afford you an opportunity, another opportunity, why was the  
16 28th anniversary of 9/11 selected as a withdrawal date?

17 A I was not involved in the selection of that date.

18 Q I did not ask whether you were involved. I asked why was it selected?

19 A Again, because I was not involved in the discussion nor was I asked for my  
20 input on that date, I don't have any further information.

21 Q So, then, how did you get the information that "I think it was the President  
22 wanting to send a clear message that this is not going to be an open-ended timeline to  
23 withdrawing troops. We have had that policy for some time in the past, and he disagree  
24 with it. Says he was giving a timeline on when operationally we could move troops out."  
25 So who informed that assessment?



1 A I was referring specifically to an actual timeline, not the actual date here.

2 Q And then someone asked you why 9/11 was the final day; to which you  
3 respond, "I think I just explained that." I think the question was specifically why 9/11,  
4 was it not?

5 A Again, this is a briefing from more than 3 years ago.

6 Q So why not just -- I just want to be very clear.

7 A Sure.

8 Q When I ask you -- when we ask you a question about your assessments, you  
9 say you point us to your public statements. When we ask you about your public  
10 statements, you point to the time that's since lapsed for your public statements. So you  
11 won't speak to assessments. Public statements are now too late, too little, too late, you  
12 don't have a recollection. You've put us in a very difficult position. I don't know what  
13 to point to at this point, because you won't speak to public statements, and you won't  
14 speak to your assessments. I'm asking you a very simple question. Why was 9/11  
15 chosen? If you don't recall, please say so.

16 Ms. Loeb. I'm happy to let Ms. Psaki answer that question, but you just gave a  
17 very long preamble, and we disagree vehemently with your characterization of her  
18 testimony today, and I think the record will clearly reflect that Ms. Psaki has been here for  
19 almost 6 hours and has answered many, many questions from many different individuals  
20 over the span of quite some time and is willing to -- has shown herself willing to answer  
21 any question with any document you put in front of her. So I'll let her answer that  
22 question, but I would like to point to the record of her fulsome answers and dispute the  
23 characterization that you just made.

24 Ms. Psaki. I would also just add that I had already just told you in response to  
25 your prior question that I was not consulted on the date, nor did I give input on the date,

1 so, as you asked me at the beginning, I'm not going to guess, and I can just tell you what I  
2 believe I was speaking to at the time looking at this transcript.

3 [REDACTED]. With the NSC talking points that you regularly refer to, would they  
4 have had -- contained information about why 9/11 was selected?

5 Ms. Psaki. I don't have the NSC talking points from 3 and a half years ago in front  
6 of me, so I can't speak to that.

7 [REDACTED]. If we could focus on your use of the word "operationally" --

8 Ms. Loeb. I think we're now at time, so if we can take a break.

9 [REDACTED]. I think we're going to finish, and we can add to the time of the  
10 minority's round, but we're going to finish our question, unless you have an objection.  
11 We can pick it right back up after.

12 Ms. Loeb. Well, I think we'd like -- the hour is over. Am I misreading the --

13 [REDACTED]. Yes, but you spoke for a bit. We'd like to just finish this point,  
14 if you'd indulge us. If not, then that's fine.

15 [REDACTED]. Some latitude if minority assents to a couple extra minutes, we're  
16 happy to that add that on.

17 [REDACTED]. We're happy to have you add it on the time.

18 Ms. Psaki. Go ahead.

19 BY [REDACTED]:

20 Q Since we're on the subject, I just want to focus on the word "operationally"  
21 here. You said so he was giving a timeline on when operationally we could move troops  
22 out. What information, Ms. Psaki, did you have at the time that suggested that it was  
23 operationally feasible to move troops out on that timeline?

24 A Well, again, this language I used here would have been based on the  
25 information provided by the National Security Council on where the -- what their

1 objectives and goals were. I'm not a military expert, so I was basing my information on  
2 what information came through that process.

3 Q Okay. You indicated that you endeavor to give accurate information in  
4 your press briefings, correct?

5 A Uh-huh.

6 Q What steps did you take to ensure that the statement you gave here that the  
7 timeline was operationally feasible, what steps did you take to confirm that information?

8 A Well, again, no Press Secretary would be in a position to independently  
9 confirm information when you're relying on the people who are making the decisions  
10 from the Defense Department, the State Department, the intelligence community, that all  
11 are able to feed in their feedback and objectives to the NSC process. So there wouldn't  
12 be an independent process unique from that, as I'm sure you wouldn't expect there to be,  
13 because they're the experts, because they're the policymakers and implementers on the  
14 ground of what is possible and what the goals and objectives of the U.S. Government is.

15 Q Did you have information, other than a one-line statement saying "this  
16 timeline is operationally feasible"? Or was that all you were given? Is the statement  
17 that you should say on the podium "this is an operationally feasible timeline," or did you  
18 have additional information?

19 A Again, there was a range of talking points and materials I'm sure we had at  
20 the time, as we did every day. You're not allowed to take that material, of course,  
21 from -- I did not take material nor -- and you're not allowed to. So I don't have access to  
22 press briefing documents from this period of time.

23 Ms. Loeb. All right. I think, with that, we would like to take a break since it is  
24 the end of this round.

25 [REDACTED]. Of course. Thank you.

1 [Recess.]

2 [REDACTED]. Thank you to our majority staff for managing the clock.

3 BY [REDACTED]:

4 Q I believe, as I indicated in between rounds off record, I don't think we'll have  
5 a lot of additional questions for you, but again, I just -- I know there's been a lot of back  
6 and forth, a lot of exhibits flying around. I just want to make sure that we're sort of  
7 zooming out and not losing the forest through the trees on your testimony today, so I just  
8 want to quickly hit on a few issues.

9 There was quite a bit of time in the last round spent on a citation in an exhibit that  
10 I don't think you -- that you testified you couldn't confirm the veracity of but that it  
11 purported to reflect a view held by then Vice President Biden that he wanted to get the  
12 United States out of Afghanistan. So, again, zooming out, the question of whether the  
13 United States should maintain, increase, decrease its troop presence in a given country,  
14 that's ultimately a policy question, correct?

15 A That's correct.

16 Q Just as decisions whether to increase or decrease foreign assistance or  
17 engage on a particular diplomatic item might also be ultimately policy questions.

18 A That's correct.

19 Q Yes? And you've testified already, I believe, please correct me if I'm  
20 mischaracterizing your testimony, that -- well, let me back up. This question of whether  
21 or not to maintain U.S. troops in a given theater of operations, that's a question that at  
22 least, as a general matter, several presidents, both Republican and Democrat, have had to  
23 grapple with during their tenure, correct?

24 A That's correct.

25 Q And, with respect to Afghanistan, that's -- and the question of whether to

1 maintain U.S. troop presence there, that's one that we know at least two Presidents have  
2 grappled with, and both of those Presidents were inclined ultimately or held the view  
3 ultimately to reduce that U.S. troop presence to zero, correct?

4 A That's correct.

5 Q We talked about already exhibit 5, the Doha agreement, that President  
6 Trump concluded that explicitly committed to reduce U.S. troops down to zero by a date  
7 certain. And we've also talked today about President Biden's actions to complete that  
8 withdrawal down to zero, correct?

9 A That's correct.

10 Q So, going back to your prior testimony that, as a communications  
11 professional and not a policymaker or implementer, you had to rely on the inputs of the  
12 policy machinery to inform your communications work, correct?

13 A That's correct.

14 Q And I believe you testified previously that, even though you weren't a  
15 participant -- an active participant and a maker of policy or an implementer of policy, you  
16 had confidence that the information that was being relayed to you from those policy  
17 channels that you would then use to message about publicly, you had confidence in the  
18 quality and veracity of that information, correct?

19 A Yes. Because, especially our national security issues, as you know, many  
20 people were nonpolitical, civil servants, Foreign Service officers, diplomats on the ground,  
21 and also individuals with decades of experience in policy.

22 Q And I believe you testified previously that, on occasion, you participated as  
23 an observer only in policy meetings, but those helped -- those observations helped  
24 reinforce your confidence in the quality of the policy process and the material that was  
25 being produced to you on policy, correct?

1           A    Correct.

2           Q    And I think we discussed this in prior testimony as well -- I'm sorry to belabor  
3 it, but just to make sure we're grasping the clear takeaways here -- you would relay policy  
4 as a communications professional to the American public, and you were frequently  
5 challenged on it, correct?

6           A    Yes, by reporters in the room who saw it as their job, greater clarification,  
7 more information, sometimes information that couldn't be shared because it was  
8 deliberative or related to operations, or of course the call was classified.

9           Q    And I believe you said earlier that you would go back in instances, whether  
10 before or after briefings, and seek further clarification from the policy channels if you  
11 thought information was not clear or not defensible or you couldn't be sure that you  
12 could successfully relay it.  Is that accurate?

13          A    That's correct.

14          Q    And I think you testified previously that you gave at least 200 press briefings  
15 during your tenure?

16          A    Yes.

17          Q    What would have been the impact if you would have fact checked every  
18 individual policy point that you received to inform the daily press briefing on any given  
19 day?

20          A    Sure.  Well, I think what I was trying to convey earlier is that because you're  
21 relying, as a spokesperson, on the work of policymakers and the implementers and the  
22 individuals who have the most firsthand accounting of what's happening, they would  
23 have the greatest access to the actual facts and details.  So there wouldn't be an  
24 independent mechanism even that would be appropriate to challenge the conclusions of  
25 the policymakers and implementers.

1           Q   Essentially, it wasn't your job to fact check, and I think you testified  
2           previously that, had you questioned or challenged the information, that could  
3           have -- well, let me make sure I'm understanding your testimony now.   Basically, to  
4           create a separate mechanism to verify the veracity of information you think would have  
5           essentially undercut the existing policy channel.

6           A   Correct.   Because you don't have access to the same channels of  
7           information as the policymakers and implementers, which is why it's important to rely on  
8           them.

9           Q   And was it unusual to see a press story that criticized an aspect of the  
10          administration's policy?

11          A   No.

12          Q   Or that criticized administration officials?

13          A   No.   Or that exhibited different points of view, no.

14          Q   And, again, what would the impact have been if, upon every instance of a  
15          critical news story, you went back and challenged the underlying policy information that  
16          you had received?   How would that have impacted the time that you spent on any given  
17          day and your ability to carry out your duties?

18          A   Well, I certainly wouldn't have had the capacity and time to do that.   I also  
19          would add that, when individuals from an administration are quoted as having differing  
20          points of view, it wouldn't be incumbent upon the White House Press Secretary to  
21          dispute that view.   These are individuals who are public officials, who have their own  
22          spokespeople as well.

23          Q   And, ultimately, I think you testified previously that the ultimate decider of  
24          U.S. policy decisions, whether domestic or foreign, is the President of the United States.

25          A   That's correct.

1 Q So it was not your role to broker policy disputes from the podium, correct?

2 A Or to confirm differing points of views in internal advice provided to the  
3 President.

4 [REDACTED]: Okay. I don't have anything further. Thanks.

5 BY [REDACTED]

6 Q Once again, Ms. Psaki, thank you very much for being here --

7 A Sure.

8 Q -- to speak with us today. I want to return to what we were speaking about  
9 in the last round, which was your statement on April 14th, 2021, at a press conference in  
10 which you characterized the timeline of the withdrawal as a timeline on when  
11 operationally we could move troops out. I just kind of want to get a sense of, you know,  
12 given the answers you just gave in the round with minority to what extent you verify  
13 information you're receiving from policymakers or just sort of take it and sort of pass it  
14 through to the American public.

15 A Well, can you just point to me what page you're referring to just so I'm  
16 looking at it. Is that okay? Which page of the briefing?

17 Q So this would be exhibit 8.

18 A Sure.

19 Q And I believe it's page 8.

20 [REDACTED]: You're looking at exhibit 10.

21 BY [REDACTED]:

22 Q Excuse me, exhibit 10, page 8. This is, again, where you're discussing the  
23 withdrawal and you say he was giving that as the President a timeline on which  
24 operationally we could move troops out. And I guess why I'm asking this, Ms. Psaki, is  
25 because you made the statement on April 14th of 2021, and as we saw in an earlier



1 round, in March of 2021, that is just the prior month, there was a view from the Secretary  
2 of State and the Secretary of Defense that the withdrawal should be -- let me make sure I  
3 find the exact quotation here. Yes. Secretary Anthony Blinken and Defense Secretary  
4 Lloyd Austin both pushed for a slower withdrawal, so, on the one hand, you had the  
5 Secretary of State and --

6 [REDACTED]. I'm sorry; where were you reading that quote from?

7 [REDACTED] So this was --

8 [REDACTED]. The last exhibit, the CNN article.

9 [REDACTED]. Is it 14?

10 [REDACTED]. 14, yeah.

11 [REDACTED]. The article titled by "Biden overruled Blinken and Austin's  
12 attempts to extend U.S. presence in Afghanistan, new Woodward/Costa Book Says," and  
13 it's the page 2, first full paragraph.

14 Ms. Loeb. I'm sorry, I think counsel said it was a month before Ms. Psaki's  
15 statement, but this is in September, right?

16 [REDACTED]. It accounts for a meeting that happened in March of 2021.

17 [REDACTED] The meeting that's being referenced in the article was a March 2021  
18 meeting?

19 [REDACTED]. A purported meeting, I should add.

20 [REDACTED]. Between NATO Ministers and Secretary Blinken. So I'm just trying to  
21 get a sense, Ms. Psaki, when you were conveying to the American people the following  
22 month that the timeline was operationally feasible, what information were you relying  
23 upon at that time? Because it wouldn't seem to be coming from the Secretary of State  
24 or the Secretary of Defense.

25 [REDACTED]. Just for the record, when you quote both push for a slower

1 withdrawal, that's the language that the reporter Jamie Gangel or -- and his or her  
2 colleagues chose to use. That's not actually a quote that's even attributed to the article  
3 to either the Secretary of State or the Defense Secretary.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q Right. But the question remains, when you were reporting to the American  
6 public that the timeline for withdrawal was operationally feasible, what information were  
7 you relying upon?

8 A Well, again, when that decision was made, which the President of the United  
9 States made, of course, I would have been basing my public briefing materials on the  
10 answers to those questions provided through the NSC interagency process, and that was  
11 consulted through all of the relevant agencies, including the Department of Defense and  
12 the Department of State.

13 Q Can we break that down a little bit in this specific context. So how did you  
14 receive that information from the NSC interagency process? What did that look like  
15 specifically?

16 [REDACTED]. I think she has answered this question multiple times. We're just  
17 retreading the same water that we've --

18 [REDACTED]. I don't think she's answered the question with respect to this particular  
19 fact.

20 BY [REDACTED]:

21 Q Let me ask it a slightly different way.

22 A Sure.

23 Q This may help. Ma'am, you told us earlier today that, on occasion,  
24 throughout your role as Press Secretary, you took questions, you know, ones that you  
25 weren't quite sure of how to answer. You told reporters, "I'll take that and get back to

1 you."

2 A I actually just -- for the record, I referred to a process at the State  
3 Department, and that's how they do it, and how I did it in 2014 and 2015, that's a  
4 different process.

5 Q Okay. I apologize. Presumably, at the White House, there's a somewhat  
6 similar process?

7 A It wasn't exactly the same process. Certainly, if reporters had questions,  
8 we weren't able to answer, we would follow up with them or the NSC press team would  
9 follow up with them.

10 Q Okay. Thank you. Given that reporters were asking you about the  
11 timeline and about September 11th as being the date that had been chosen, did you try  
12 to figure out why it had been set? Did you go back after being asked by the reporters  
13 and attempt to gather more information?

14 A Again, the specific period of time, I think I answered the question, and then I  
15 don't recall if it came up again in another briefing or if there was reporting that required  
16 additional information at the time. Obviously, August 31st became the final timeline  
17 and deadline. You may have in front of you when exactly that occurred. I don't  
18 specifically recall when that was --

19 BY [REDACTED]:

20 Q You've testified you were, quote, "in constant coordination with  
21 policymakers." So, with respect to this particular issue, when you were asked the  
22 question in the press briefing and you responded that this was a timeline on  
23 which -- on -- this was a timeline that was operationally feasible, did you go back to  
24 policymakers and say, "is this an operationally feasible timeline? Why do we think so?"

25 A Well, again, what I was trying to convey earlier is that the information I was

1 sharing publicly about a timeline being operationally feasible would, of course, have been  
2 confirmed through the interagency NSC press process. That's what you provide. So I  
3 guess are you asking me if I would have independently, separate from the United States  
4 military, confirmed that?

5 Q I'm asking you how you confirmed, if you even took steps to confirm the  
6 information? I'm just trying to begin that line of inquiry.

7 A Sure.

8 Q Did you take any steps to confirm whether your statement regarding the  
9 timeline being operationally feasible, did you take any steps to confirm the accuracy of  
10 that information?

11 A Well, that wasn't my independent point of view. That was the U.S.  
12 Government position, which would have come through the interagency press process,  
13 which would have consulted all relevant parties.

14 Q But you've also stated that you're not a pass-through vehicle and that you  
15 are constantly in coordination with policymakers and that your job is to gather as much  
16 accurate and up-to-date information as possible from those policymakers. So, with that  
17 in mind, did you take any steps to confirm the accuracy of information that you were  
18 conveying to the American people that the timeline for withdrawal was operationally  
19 feasible?

1

2 [5:23 p.m.]

3 Ms. Loeb. What Ms. Psaki has testified is the process about how it is confirmed.  
4 It came through a process by which it was confirmed and got to her. I am not sure -- we  
5 are confused about what you are asking, about a separate process from the one that she  
6 has already laid out that confirmed through the interagency accuracy? That is the  
7 process.

8 [REDACTED]. I am asking whether she confirmed that the timeline was operationally  
9 feasible or whether she was just told it was operationally feasible and repeated that  
10 information.

11 Ms. Psaki. How would I have independently confirmed separate from the  
12 Department of Defense about an operational military timeline?

13

BY [REDACTED]

14 Q Well, you said you are constantly in coordination with policymakers so you  
15 could have had conversations with people other than the DOD, people in the State  
16 Department. I am just trying to get a sense. This is really not complicate. I mean,  
17 were you told that the timeline was operationally feasible, and you just repeated it to the  
18 American people as a pass-through, or did you take independent steps to confirm the  
19 accuracy of that information?

20 A I am trying to understand your question. I am trying to answer it to the  
21 best of my ability. So would you like me to proceed or --

22 [REDACTED]. Sorry. The microphone is very loud.

23

BY [REDACTED]:

24 Q No, you said the military so I think we got to the point, so this information  
25 came -- you are saying this information came from the military?

1           A    No, no. That is not what I said. I hope you've listened to the full context  
2 of my comments moving forward. What I said is that the National Security Council  
3 process, which consults with all of the relevant agencies and certainly the Department of  
4 Defense on any military operation, would have been an appropriate part of that. All of  
5 the talking points and language I used in the briefing came to me through that process  
6 already. So that is what we were trying to convey. So it had already been confirmed  
7 and approved through a process, these statements that I was making in the public  
8 briefing.

9                   BY ██████████:

10           Q    At the time you made that statement, are you aware of any opposing views  
11 within the NSC process as to the operational feasibility of this withdrawal, or did you just  
12 get a statement from Jake Sullivan that said, you know, Ms. Psaki, we need to say to the  
13 American people this is an operationally feasible timeline?

14           A    First of all, I didn't say that is how the process went through Jake Sullivan.  
15 That is not at all what I said, just for the record. I said that there was a process where  
16 language was approved through the relevant agencies. I can't speak to differing points  
17 of view on any particular issue. I can tell you what the final conclusion was of what was  
18 operationally feasible, and that was what I said in the briefing.

19           Q    So, at the time you made the statement, you were aware of no opposing  
20 views that the timeline was not operationally feasible?

21           A    That is not what I said. There is opposing views on any given issue in the  
22 U.S. Government at any given moment in time. This was what the conclusion was  
23 through an interagency process about what we could say at the time when a decision was  
24 made about the withdrawal from Afghanistan. That is all I am saying.

25                   ██████████. Ms. Psaki, I would like to enter exhibit 15 into the record next.

1 This is a transcript of the hearing held by the committee March 19, 2024, with former  
2 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, and former Commander of U.S.  
3 Central Command, General Frank McKenzie.

4 [Psaki Exhibit No. 15  
5 was marked for identification.]

6 [REDACTED]. If you would please turn your attention to page 164, starting at  
7 line 3-858.

8 [REDACTED]. I'm sorry; you said 164?

9 [REDACTED]. Correct.

10 Ms. Loeb. Transcribed interview taken on March 19, 2024?

11 [REDACTED]. This was a hearing.

12 Ms. Loeb. Okay.

13 [REDACTED]. Outline 3-858. Representative Lawler asked the generals,  
14 General McKenzie and General Milley, quote, "With respect to the decision by President  
15 Biden to announce September 11 as the deadline for full U.S. military withdrawal, was  
16 there any tactical or military reason for a date?" To which General McKenzie responds,  
17 quote, "Not that I am aware of." And General Milley responds, "Not that I know of."

18 Representative Lawler then asks, "Okay, so was it purely political and from the  
19 standpoint of a symbolic date from your understanding?" General Milley responds,  
20 quote, "I will be candid. I don't even know where or who made the decision of the 11  
21 September thing. I frankly thought it was actually inappropriate at the moment in time  
22 but had very rapidly changed at the end of August."

23 As I am sure you are aware, Ms. Psaki, the selection of this date was viewed as a  
24 disrespect to the memory of 9/11 and the thousands of Americans killed and injured at  
25 the hands of al-Qaeda that day. Were there any discussions once it became clear to the

1 administration that this date was viewed as disrespectful to change the withdrawal date?

2 A I think I answered your question earlier that I was never consulted on this  
3 date.

4 Q I didn't ask for the consultation of the date. My question is, was there any  
5 discussion about changing that date?

6 A Well, it was changed.

7 Q Yes and I am asking about the assessments and the conversations that took  
8 place.

9 A I was not a part of those conversations.

10 Q So were you simply told that the date would now change to August 31st,  
11 2021, or how did you become aware of change in the date?

12 A Yes.

13 Q Who were you told that by?

14 A I don't have a specific individual I was told by. I don't recall who I was told  
15 by.

16 Q Were you told this by the NSC? Were you told by NSC briefers?

17 A I think I just answered your question.

18 Q So you do not recall who informed you that the U.S. withdrawal date was  
19 changed from 9/11 to August 31, 2021?

20 Ms. Loeb. Ms. Psaki has answered this question.

21 [REDACTED]. And I restated my question. I just want to clarify for the  
22 record.

23 Is that a yes or a no?

24 Ms. Loeb. Her existing answer is in the record if the court reporter would like to  
25 read it back.



1 [REDACTED]. We can move on from that.

2 Ms. Psaki. Well, let me just add, as I said, I wasn't consulted. I would not have  
3 agreed that September 11 was a good date for a timeline for withdrawal, but I was never  
4 asked that question.

5 BY [REDACTED]:

6 [REDACTED]. Did you ever provide any input on it, despite not being asked?

7 Ms. Psaki. I did not.

8 [REDACTED]. I would like to enter as exhibit 16 an excerpt of a press  
9 conference you and the National Security Advisor, Jake Sullivan, held on August 17, 2021.

10 [Psaki Exhibit No. 16  
11 was marked for identification.]

12 Ms. Psaki. This is a different document? Okay.

13 BY [REDACTED]:

14 Q Would you please direct your attention to what is marked as page 38 and  
15 will then proceed to page 39. Here you are asked why the United States was  
16 withdrawing from Afghanistan during the Taliban's well-known fighting season. I will  
17 read the relevant text into the record. You were asked, quote, "Jen, why was August  
18 better than say November or December to be betting out?" To which you respond, "In  
19 terms of the August 31 timeline?" The reporter states, "Correct. Because this is the  
20 Taliban fighting season, and that would not be." You respond, "I know there's been a  
21 fair amount of focus on that, but I wouldn't say that has been an assessment of a  
22 difference here in terms of what our timeline would have been from the beginning."  
23 The reporter then states, "So there's no belief that it would have been any different in  
24 December than it is in August?" You respond, "I don't believe that military officials have  
25 made that assessment."

1 [REDACTED]: I would like to enter exhibit 17 into the record next.

2 [Psaki Exhibit No. 17

3 was marked for identification.]

4 [REDACTED]: Exhibit 17 reflects testimony provided to the committee by  
5 retired Colonel Seth Krummrich on July 27, 2023, in a public hearing.

6 Ms. Loeb. If we could just -- we are just finishing reading the pages that you  
7 have previously given to us.

8 [REDACTED]: Certainly. Colonel Krummrich served as the chief of staff for  
9 Special Operations Command Central during the White House's withdrawal from  
10 Afghanistan in 2021. If you could please turn to what is marked as page 4 of his written  
11 testimony, No. 2.

12 Ms. Loeb. Just so that we understand, this is his written testimony before a  
13 hearing?

14 [REDACTED]: Correct.

15 Ms. Johnson. Is this a complete record of his testimony?

16 Ms. Loeb. It looks like we have five pages of a single-spaced document of  
17 testimony from Colonel, retired, Seth Krummrich?

18 [REDACTED]: Yes. And, if I could read the relevant text into the record, you  
19 will then see why I am asking about this specific point.

20 BY [REDACTED]:

21 Q You previously spoke to -- in exhibit 16, you spoke to the fighting season on  
22 August 17, 2021. And you stated -- you were asked by journalists, "So there is no belief  
23 that it would have been any different in December than it is August?" To which you  
24 respond, "I don't believe military officials have made that assessment."

25 Now, in the current exhibit, I will be reading into the record testimony provided by

1 Colonel Krummrich, who served as the chief of staff for Special Operations Command  
2 Central during the White House's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. If could you  
3 please turn to what is marked as page 4 of his written testimony. Colonel Krummrich  
4 testifies quote, "The withdrawal window 1 May to 11 September 2021 was planned  
5 during the peak of the well-known Afghanistan fighting season. The Taliban are at their  
6 strongest, most aggressive, and most logistically capable during the May-to-October time  
7 period. U.S. and NATO forces endured this reality for 20 years; it was not a surprise.  
8 Why would we leave the fragile Afghan Government vulnerable to the Taliban's strongest  
9 advantage? Why did the 20-year anniversary of 9/11 matter more than delaying for 5  
10 more months to provide space and time for the Afghan Government and military to  
11 establish their footing? Removing U.S. military support quickly at the height the  
12 summer fighting season lead to disastrous results. The lightning fast U.S. retrograde  
13 demoralized our Afghan forces as the Taliban attacked."

14 Ms. Psaki, I would like to go back to your August 17, 2021, press conference, in  
15 which you state you didn't believe military officials assessed that withdrawing at the  
16 fighting season would be any different. Were you aware of Colonel Krummrich's  
17 concerns when you made this statement?

18 A No, I have also never engaged with Colonel Krummrich, to my recollection.

19 Q Ms. Psaki, Colonel Krummrich was a senior Defense Department official who  
20 played a significant role in the military retrograde considering a large presence of special  
21 operations in Afghanistan at that time.

22 A May I add one more thing? This is also 2 years after I gave my briefing, and  
23 it doesn't confirm official assessment internally in the U.S. Government at the time I gave  
24 my briefing, unless you have a record of that as well.

25 Q This was with respect to the official assessment, but you may just have to

1 take my word for it, that is what he testified before the committee.

2 A I think it is relevant that it was 2 years later, and it is his point of view. He  
3 was obviously -- played an important role.

4 Q I would like to go back to your August 17th statement. You stated, "I don't  
5 believe that military officials have made that assessment." What was that informed by?

6 A I just answered your question that I was not aware of any official  
7 assessment. You haven't presented me either with an official assessment.

8 Q Did you ever confirm that there was no official assessment? But for the  
9 bullet points or briefing that you received from the NSC briefers, did you ever proactively  
10 affirm that there were no military assessments?

11 Ms. Loeb. Ms. Psaki has extensively testified today that the process was the  
12 confirmation of the position of the United States Government. That process was to  
13 confirm with relevant agencies so that, when information came to her, it was confirmed  
14 as a position of the whole of government, not one single individual within the  
15 government.

16 BY [REDACTED]:

17 Q Ms. Psaki, when you make blanket statements about the military, I would  
18 hope that those statements would be true, but if that is your testimony, we could leave it  
19 at that.

20 A I would -- can we just pause here for a second, because, again, I have tried to  
21 be incredibly respectful to you, and I will continue to be, and I expect the same in  
22 response.

23 Q Ms. Psaki, I have a question. How can you truly speak for the  
24 administration if you have military officials who have stated this was an issue, and then  
25 you communicate to the American people this was not an issue?

1 [REDACTED]. I think she has pointed out that there is no evidence that you have  
2 presented that this was presented at the time that she made this statement. This is a  
3 statement 2 years after withdrawal. And nowhere, in at least the portion we read, did  
4 he say that he presented this or that he expressed concerns at that time.

5 [REDACTED]. Okay, let's move on then.

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q At the time of President Biden's decision to withdraw, what was the White  
8 House's position on continued Embassy presence in Afghanistan following the military's  
9 departure?

10 A This was in the President's public statements at the time, and I would point  
11 you to them.

12 Q I am not asking the President; I am asking you. What was the White  
13 House's position on continued diplomatic presence in Afghanistan around April 14, 2021?

14 A Well, again, as any national security issue is, including a difficult one like the  
15 withdrawal from Afghanistan, this was an evolving issue. So I answered this question  
16 several times in publicly available briefings, and I would point you to those.

17 Q Ms. Psaki, who made the decision to keep U.S. Embassy Kabul open and  
18 maintaining U.S. diplomatic presence in Afghanistan following the military withdrawal?

19 A Again, I was not involved in those processes. The national security team  
20 and appropriate officials from the State Department and other appropriate agencies  
21 would have been engaged in those conversations.

22 [REDACTED]. I am losing track of exhibits. Exhibit 19? 18? Okay.

23 Thank you.

24 [Psaki Exhibit No. 18

25 was marked for identification.]

1 [REDACTED]. The majority will introduce into the record next as exhibit 18 an  
2 excerpt from former Acting Under Secretary for Management Carol Perez's transcribed  
3 interview conducted by the committee on November 15th, 2023.

4 Ms. Perez served as the Acting Under Secretary for Management from January 21,  
5 2021, to late December 2021. If you could please direct your attention to page 13, line  
6 21.

7 Ms. Loeb. And again, for the record, I assume that this is a lengthy transcript.  
8 It looks like we have been given pages 13, 14, and it skips to pages 83, 84, and 85. But I  
9 assume it is much longer?

10 [REDACTED]. It is. I believe it is around 200 pages, but it is publicly available  
11 should you want to read the rest of the transcript. But we are going to focus on the  
12 specific question asked by the majority.

13 Here Ms. Perez is asked what her role was in the U.S. withdrawal from  
14 Afghanistan. And she responds that her role at State Department, quote, "Not about  
15 the withdrawal but to help maintain a safe platform for ongoing diplomatic presence."

16 Ms. Loeb. I am sorry. Where are you?

17 [REDACTED]. Page 13 starting at line 21, "And, Ambassador, what was your  
18 role in the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan specifically?" "Specifically? My role was  
19 actually not about the withdrawal but to help maintain a safe platform for the ongoing  
20 presence, diplomatic presence."

21 Now, if you could please turn to page 84 and the excerpts. Starting at line 3, she  
22 is asked, "At that time, was it your understanding that the Department was committed to  
23 keep Embassy Kabul open?" She responds, "That was plan, right, to have a continued  
24 presence." She was then asked, "Did anyone disagree with this position in the  
25 Department or the Embassy more specifically?" She said, "I didn't talk to anybody at the

1 Embassy who disagreed. I never had any conversations with people who said, 'Oh, we  
2 gotta get out tomorrow.' But I think was just sort of in my lane, you know, which was  
3 quite different. I wasn't in policy discussions where people might have talked about it."  
4 You know, again, a very clear quote, "'Here is what we are going to do, and here's who's  
5 going to do that' -- there's a little bit -- I mean, even for us who are not military, you  
6 salute and you say, 'Great. If that's what we are going to do, we are going to try our  
7 hardest to do it. Thank you.'" She was then asked, "Who gave you that direction then  
8 that may you salute?" Ambassador Perez responds, "It wasn't a who. It's the  
9 President's statement that, you know, we are going to withdraw, but there would be, you  
10 know, a remaining diplomatic presence. That, to me, was signaled, right?" "Again, I  
11 never talked to the President" -- "but, you know, that statement was, like, okay. So  
12 now what do we do? Right?"

13 This indicates it was the White House, not the State Department, who decided to  
14 keep U.S. Embassy Kabul open without a U.S. or NATO military presence. Do you  
15 dispute Ambassador Perez' account?

16 [REDACTED]. Could you ask a more appointed question?

17 [REDACTED]. Do you dispute Ms. Perez' account that it was the White House  
18 signaling that Embassy Kabul will remain open following the U.S. withdrawal -- following  
19 the military withdrawal from Afghanistan?

20 [REDACTED]. I mean, I would also like to point out that she says, "And, again, I  
21 never talked to the President in my life."

22 [REDACTED]. And I never said that she did. I am asking, do you dispute this  
23 account?

24 Ms. Loeb. I don't think she is saying -- I guess -- if the question is, is Ms. Psaki  
25 disputing what her own -- I'm sorry -- is this the Secretary or --

1 [REDACTED]. Acting Under Secretary for Management.

2 Ms. Loeb. Under Secretary's Perez's testimony. I don't know. But I am happy  
3 to let Jen answer that question. If the question is whether this person had enough  
4 information to know the underlying facts of what you are asking, I don't know how we  
5 would have any information about that.

6 [REDACTED]. Again, that was not my question.

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q My question was, do you dispute her account that it was the White House  
9 signaling that triggered the idea that U.S. Embassy Kabul would remain open following  
10 the military withdrawal? Who made the decision?

11 A Again, as I have stated a number of times, I was not in the discussions about  
12 the decision to withdraw, about the process for withdrawal, about decisions around  
13 where we would or wouldn't have a diplomatic presence. And, obviously, there was a  
14 period of time where there was a plan to, and there was a period of time where that  
15 changed, which is what I assume you are asking me about this. But I wasn't in any of  
16 these meeting so I can't unfortunately provide additional context to her comments.

17 Q So you were never informed or you never became aware as a senior White  
18 House staffer who made the decision to keep Embassy Kabul open?

19 A There are a range of people who make those decisions around every  
20 embassy in the world. Typically, I can say broadly that involves officials from the State  
21 Department, the Defense Department, as well as the national security team. In terms of  
22 who specifically makes the final decision, I don't have additional context to provide to you  
23 on that.

24 Q Who did the White House consult with before making the decision to keep  
25 Embassy Kabul open then?



1           ██████████. I think she has just testified to the fact that she does not have any  
2 specific knowledge of these discussions, if there were discussions.

3           BY ██████████:

4           Q     Who does the White House typically engage with when they make decisions  
5 surrounding embassy closures?

6           A     I just answered that question 3 minutes ago.

7           Q     So the Department of Defense, the State Department. Are there any  
8 specific individuals within the Department of Defense or the State Department that  
9 would be at the principals level? I am just trying to get a better understanding.

10          A     I understand why you are asking. And I know you talked to a lot of people.  
11 And I fully respect the work of this committee, but I was not involved in the process. So  
12 I am just not the right person to ask about the individuals involved in decisions around  
13 keeping embassies open or closing them.

14          ██████████. What about this specific instance? I know we have been talking  
15 generally about, you know, the process by which the decisions were made, but do you  
16 know any specific individuals who made the decision to keep Embassy Kabul open in this  
17 particular instance?

18          Ms. Psaki. Again, I wasn't involved in those discussions. I understand why you  
19 are asking certainly. I just don't have the names of those individuals. I don't know  
20 who was involved in that.

21          BY ██████████:

22          Q     Ms. Psaki, did you ever become aware of the Department of Defense's  
23 concerns surrounding keeping Embassy Kabul open?

24          A     Again, because I wasn't in the private meetings, I would have been aware of  
25 when it became publicly reported, but, otherwise, I was not getting briefings on the

1 private meetings around that discussion.

2 Q Did Spokesperson Kirby ever inform you that the DOD's concerned about  
3 keeping Embassy Kabul open?

4 A We would have discussed questions that were coming up publicly if I had a  
5 question about it, but we did not talk on a regular basis about these topics.

6 Q So he did not inform you that the DOD was concerned about this?

7 A Again, we didn't have a private channel of discussion, internal discussions.  
8 We were preparing for our own briefings and did not talk about those briefings on a  
9 regular basis. Given, as is publicly known, the majority of topics that came up in the  
10 briefings I was doing were not national security.

11 Q Again, I am not questioning as to the medium by which you came across this  
12 information. It is a very simple yes or no. Did you and then Spokesperson Kirby  
13 discuss DOD's concerns surrounding keeping Embassy Kabul open?

14 Ms. Loeb. We don't have that fact. We are just assuming a fact in the record  
15 here about DOD concerns. Ms. Psaki herself has not testified that there were DOD  
16 concerns.

17 [REDACTED]. Okay. So I would like to introduce next as exhibit 19 transcript  
18 from General Miller's transcribed interview just conducted on April 15, 2024.

19 [Psaki Exhibit No. 19  
20 was marked for identification.]

21 [REDACTED]. Ms. Psaki, for your awareness, General Miller served as the  
22 four-star general on the ground in Afghanistan of the final commander of NATO's  
23 Resolute Support Mission in U.S. Forces Afghanistan. He was, as a result, a person on  
24 the ground who could most accurately assess the situation, at least in our -- one of the  
25 relevant individuals in our perspective. If you could please direct your attention to page

1 129 starting at line 3.

2 Ms. Loeb. Again, for the record, I assume this was a very lengthy transcribed  
3 interview. We have been given a selection of pages from that.

4 [REDACTED]. Correct. And the transcript is publicly available online.

5 BY [REDACTED]:

6 Q Starting at line 3, here, in response to a question about the timing of the  
7 withdrawal during the fighting season, General Miller responds stating, amongst other  
8 things, that he believed Embassy Kabul should have been drawn out of the theater with  
9 the military. His testimony provides quote, "And my recommendation was that,  
10 actually, if we have made a policy decision, you know, based on strategic objectives, now  
11 the overarching concern is safeguarding our forces, safeguarding our diplomats. And so  
12 you want to try to get them out of theater instead of having them linger in the theater."

13 If you can now please direct your attention to page 195, an excerpt starting at line  
14 7. Here the majority asks, "First, addressing the disagreement between the Pentagon  
15 and the State Department regarding keeping U.S. Embassy Kabul open after the military  
16 went to zero, can you elaborate on State Department's position on the issue?" He  
17 responds, "The intention was to keep the Embassy open." The majority then asks, "And  
18 that was even if the Taliban took over?" To which he responds, "I don't know that that  
19 question was asked, but it was -- it was keep the Embassy open." The majority then  
20 asks, "General Milley appeared before the committee for a public hearing held by  
21 Chairman McCaul on March 19, 2024. In that hearing, he stated that it was the general  
22 consensus in the military that the Embassy should be coming out at the same time as the  
23 military. Do you agree with General Milley on this point?" To which General Miller  
24 responds, "I do; that was my position."

25 Ms. Psaki, were you aware of General Miller's position on this issue as a senior

1 Defense Department official regarding keeping U.S. Embassy Kabul?

2 A That he -- that he believed that he -- I would have been --

3 Q That it is his assessment the Embassy should close and should depart with  
4 the military?

5 A Again, because I was not in the majority of these meetings, I don't recall  
6 having independent knowledge of that.

7 Q Did anyone inform you that this was General Miller's assessment?

8 A I would have been speaking to the questions being asked by reporters at the  
9 time. It may have been asked at the time. I am happy to discuss it, if it was.

10 [REDACTED]. May I just ask a general question?

11 [REDACTED]. Sure.

12 [REDACTED]. It seems as though, and please correct me if I am mischaracterizing  
13 your statements, but when it comes to dissenting opinions among military officials about  
14 a number of topics, including the timeline the withdrawal and keeping the Embassy open,  
15 that it is your testimony that you were just not aware of those dissenting views. So, if  
16 that is indeed the case, take that fact with what you have also told us, which is that the  
17 NSC provided you information for your daily press briefings. Do you have any concern  
18 now looking back a couple years later that the NSC was concealing information from you?

19 Ms. Loeb. Could I just clarify for the record? What Ms. Psaki has said is this  
20 process resulted in the position of the United States Government. Individuals having  
21 dissenting views may not be reflective of what the ultimate position of the United States  
22 Government. So I don't see the tension that you are -- that you are exploring there.

23 [REDACTED]. I am not quite following you. Sorry, could you repeat that?

24 Ms. Loeb. Ms. Psaki has testified extensively that her job at the White House  
25 podium was to provide the position of the United States Government as an entity. You

1 are asking whether there were people within the United States Government that perhaps  
2 wanted to go a different way or advise the President differently. That is not the same as  
3 it not being the case, that it was the position of the United States Government.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q Understood. But we are talking about, you know, decisions that were  
6 being made in real time, and she is receiving information daily before some decisions  
7 were even made. So I am asking any NSC talking points that she received or briefing  
8 materials, you know, however she prepared herself using NSC documents. It seems as  
9 though that, when it comes to senior level military advice, that none of that was  
10 making -- none of that information was making itself into what Ms. Psaki was seeing on a  
11 daily basis. So my question again is that, now looking back on that and knowing what  
12 has been introduced into the record about what those senior officials said, do you have  
13 concerns that the NSC was deliberating withholding information from your purview?

14 A Sure. I understand your question. Thank you for clarification.

15 I think my job as the spokesperson was not to discuss everybody's viewpoint from  
16 within the government. It was to send to the public what the position of the U.S.  
17 Government was. So dissenting views, which is a healthy thing, and I certainly  
18 support -- that is part of every policy discussion including around very difficult issues, and  
19 certainly this is one of them. That wouldn't have been -- I wouldn't have been receiving  
20 nor would any spokesperson be receiving a summary of every person's differing view in  
21 an internal National Security Council meeting.

22 Q Yes, ma'am. I understand that. But, as someone who's worked in  
23 [inaudible] before, it is common when you are preparing a principal or you are about to  
24 talk to the press, that people that are under you, working for you and supporting you  
25 provide sort of watch-outs, "look out for this." And so it would seem that, perhaps,

1 when it comes to something as profound as a senior level military disagreement with a  
2 course of action, that that hypothetically could have made its way into some sort of  
3 briefing document that you reviewed. And today you said that it just didn't so --

4 A Well, thank you for the clarification. That is not what I said.

5 There were a range of differing views on Afghanistan, as you know. And that is  
6 why you are having all of us come talk to you I think in part. It wasn't -- though it is not  
7 the job of the spokesperson of the U.S. Government to provide more details on people's  
8 personal views, including senior level officials. So, yes, while I was aware; especially  
9 when they were publicly reported, certainly I was aware. And there are differing views  
10 on nearly every issue that's difficult that the President has to decide on. It is never the  
11 job of the White House Press Secretary to convey all of the differing views to the public.  
12 And it is the President who makes the decision. And there are certainly people who may  
13 disagree with that internally, and we know there were in this case.

14 Q Yes, ma'am. I'm sorry, and I don't mean to belabor the point, but it just  
15 seems like, given your statements earlier about how decisions were being made in real  
16 time and people's views were evolving, that there would be -- that you would have been  
17 privy to, you know, disagreements internally. And I understand it is not your job to  
18 convey those disagreements, but your testimony that you weren't even aware that they  
19 existed is confounding to me.

20 A I don't think I said I wasn't aware they existed.

21 Q You said they didn't make themselves -- that information did not make itself  
22 into an NSC briefing material?

23 A Let me just clarify.

24 Q Yes, ma'am.

25 A I said it wouldn't have been in NSC talking points, which is basically

1 information you would provide to the public and Q&A on how would you provide answers  
2 to reporters, which I think anybody who has ever worked in press or communications  
3 knows that, if you have an internal staff meeting on Capitol Hill or wherever it may be,  
4 you are not going to go out and say, "The legislative director thinks this; the  
5 communications director thinks this." You are going to discuss what your Member  
6 decides. And so that was the job of spokesperson. That is all I am conveying.

7 Q Yes, ma'am. Thank you.

8 And so I am just trying to understand what you just said in light of some  
9 previous -- so is it your testimony now that you were or weren't aware of disagreements?

10 A Again, it was publicly reported a range of times. There were meetings I  
11 attended as we got closer to the withdrawal. There are disagreements about a range of  
12 things on policy issues every single day in the U.S. Government. So that is all I am  
13 conveying.

14 Q Yes, ma'am. I'm sorry. I was specifically referring to disagreements by  
15 senior level military officials about the timeline and about keeping the Embassy open.

16 A And, again, I was not in those meetings so I did not -- I wasn't aware of and  
17 didn't have personal knowledge directly of their positions on those issues.

18 Q But you were aware of their stance?

19 A Well, again, I didn't receive independent briefing materials or briefing.  
20 That wouldn't have been what the NSC would have provided to any spokesperson.

21 Ms. Loeb. I believe her testimony has been that she was aware of it when there  
22 was public reporting. She said that repeatedly.

23 [REDACTED]. Yes, sorry, thanks.

24 [REDACTED]. I would like to now enter into the record an excerpt of a press  
25 conference you led on August 31, 2021, as exhibit 20.

1 [Psaki Exhibit No. 20  
2 was marked for identification.]

3 Ms. Loeb. So, for the record again, we have been handed a transcript of Ms.  
4 Psaki's press briefing on August 21, 2021. It looks like it is a 27-page briefing that is of  
5 course publicly available, and we have 3 pages in front of us.

6 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q If you could please turn to what is marked as page 13, it is the last question  
9 on the page. Here you are asked quote, "And I know the President also said in his  
10 speech that that assumption about how long the Afghan Government will hold on, how  
11 long the military will be able to hold on, he acknowledged that that was a failed  
12 assumption. Who is responsible for that assumption? And is the President frustrated  
13 with his team at all for having made that false assumption?" And you don't address the  
14 question. A followup question is posed asking, quote, "Was that, like, a military  
15 assumption though? Or was that an assumptions coming from the intelligence  
16 community, or?" Quote, you respond, quote, "I don't think anyone assessed that they  
17 would collapse as quickly as they did. Anyone. Anyone in this room. Anyone in the  
18 region. Anyone anywhere in the world. If you have anyone who did, I'd be surprised."

19 Ms. Loeb. I think, Counsel, you skipped over Ms. Psaki's answer to the first  
20 question. Did you?

21 [REDACTED]. So I am happy to read that part, but my focus is on the question  
22 of this military assumption. But we can add additional text into the record if that is  
23 relevant.

24 Ms. Loeb. Why did -- you skipped --

25 [REDACTED]. We don't have -- I can read it -- "We don't have the luxury of



1 being frustrated. Our focus right now is continuing to move forward in our diplomatic  
2 efforts and continuing to do everything we can to get our Afghan partners and American  
3 citizens out and to get Afghans who have fought by our side safely settled in the United  
4 States and third countries around the world. Go ahead."

5 "Was that, like, a military assumption though? Or was that an assumption  
6 coming from the intelligence community, or?"

7 "I don't think anyone assessed that they would collapse as quickly as they did.  
8 Anyone. Anyone in this room. Anyone in the region. Anyone anywhere in the world.  
9 If you have anyone who did, I'd be surprised."

10 If you could please return to General Miller's transcribed interview, I believe that  
11 was entered as exhibit 19. I direct your attention to page 60, line 1. Here, when  
12 speaking to his guidance to the Trump administration, General Miller states, quote, "My  
13 view was that, going to zero, things would go very bad very fast."

14 Now, if you could please direct your attention to page 130, starting at line 22.

15 Ms. Loeb. I think we would just like to read his complete answer and the  
16 question that he was answering.

17 So this question is about what you and others in the U.S. military warned the  
18 Trump administration would happen if the U.S. rapidly went to zero in Afghanistan.

19 [REDACTED]. Correct.

20 Ms. Loeb. And he said, "Let me speak for myself and not with others in the U.S.  
21 military."

22 [REDACTED]. Correct, because he is retired now.

23 If you could please direct your attention to page 130, line 22. Here the majority  
24 asked General Miller, regarding the Biden administration, in their April 14, 2021,  
25 go-to-zero order, inquiring quote, "And you noted that, once you received your orders,

1 your job was effectuate, of course considering force protection as one of your most  
2 important priorities. But what did you advise Biden administration officials would likely  
3 happen if the U.S. rapidly went to zero in Afghanistan?"

4 If you turn to the next page.

5 Ms. Loeb. I'm sorry. I am having trouble following you. Which page was that  
6 on?

7 [REDACTED]. 130, starting at line 22.

8 Ms. Psaki. I think you said 131 earlier so that is why we were confused.

9 [REDACTED]. It was page 160, line 1, previously. Now it is page 130, starting  
10 at line 22.

11 Ms. Loeb. Just one second please.

12 BY [REDACTED]:

13 Q I will repeat, page 130, starting at line 22. Here the majority asked General  
14 Miller regarding the Biden administration and the April 14, 2021, go-to-zero order,  
15 inquiring, quote, "And you noted that, once you received your orders, your job was to  
16 effectuate, of course, considering force protection as one of your most important  
17 priorities. But what did you advise Biden administration officials would likely happen if  
18 the U.S. rapidly went to zero in Afghanistan?"

19 If you please flip to the next page, page 131. Here, General Miller responds, "I,  
20 actually, not just in one administration, but in two administrations -- going to zero is  
21 always going to be hard, okay? So there really wasn't going to be a good outcome,  
22 going to zero. Now the question is, how do you make it a less bad outcome?"

23 The majority then asks, "And what did you advise would likely happen with  
24 respect to the survival of the Afghan Government?" To which he responds, "I thought it  
25 was in trouble." The majority followed up by asking, "So the fall was foreseeable?" He

1 responds, "Yeah, it was."

2 Now, if you go further down the page to line 18, as to the anticipated timeline, he  
3 states, quote, "You know, as we got part way through the withdrawal, people could see  
4 the districts falling. I want to say they -- you know, from 12 to 18 months to, okay, 6 to  
5 9 months, the intel community was starting to collapse assessments. So that's a  
6 question for the intel community what was driving them."

7 If you could now direct your attention to page 192. Starting at line 7, the  
8 majority asks, "General, do you think then that the warning signs were there throughout  
9 2021 and not just in August? Would you agree with that statement?" General Miller  
10 clarifies by asking, "Warning signs of collapse?" Upon confirmation by the majority, he  
11 responds, quote, "Yeah, this situation -- it was very clear -- the situation to me. It was  
12 very clear the situation was deteriorating."

13 Now, if you could please go back to exhibit 15, which was the hearing, the  
14 transcript of the hearing held by the committee on March 19 featuring the former  
15 Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Mark Milley and Commander of U.S. Central Command  
16 General Frank McKenzie.

17 Ms. Loeb. Counsel, is there a question here in reading this all into the record?

18 [REDACTED]. Yes, it is all pertaining to the statement that not a single person  
19 in the room warned Afghanistan would fall, but if you would allow me to finish, we will  
20 get there.

21 [REDACTED]. Wait, wait. Yeah, that was not the statement that she made.

22 [REDACTED]. I paraphrased.

23 [REDACTED]. Well, you should not phrase a statement that she made.

24 [REDACTED]. Okay, I will say, if you would like for me to read it, but --

25 [REDACTED]. "I don't think anyone assessed that they would collapse as quickly

1 as they did." I don't think anyone said that the -- Ms. Psaki did not say the situation  
2 didn't quickly deteriorate. She said, "I don't think anyone assessed that they would  
3 collapse as quickly as they did."

4 [REDACTED]. And that is why I would like to get through my exhibits before  
5 we get to the questions because it leads to issues like this. So, if I could please continue  
6 with the exhibits, that way we don't paraphrase, and we don't have to jump around.

7 [REDACTED]. Sounds good.

8 [REDACTED]. So, if we could go back to exhibit 15, which is a transcript of the  
9 hearing with Generals Milley and McKenzie. If you please direct your attention to what  
10 is marked as page 129.

11 Ms. Loeb. You have to slow down. We are juggling a lot of transcripts. So  
12 this is the Foreign Affairs Committee hearing now.

13 [REDACTED]. Yes. As I noted, the March 19 hearing featuring General Milley  
14 and General McKenzie. If you could please direct your attention to what is marked as  
15 page 129, starting at line 3024. Here Representative Waltz asked the witnesses, "You  
16 have stated today that you did not advise Biden to pull everybody out. You the advised  
17 him to stay." To which General Milley responds, "That's correct." Representative  
18 Waltz then quotes a statement conveyed by President Biden saying -- let's go back to  
19 July 2021. President Biden, quote, "There is a likelihood -- the likelihood there is going  
20 to be the Taliban overrunning everything and owning the whole country is highly  
21 unlikely." Representative Waltz then asks, "Does that comport with your knowledge at  
22 the time? In fact, you, just a few weeks later, said Kabul would be surrounded in 30 to  
23 60 days. General Milley responds, "That is right. My assessment at the time was, if we  
24 went to zero in U.S. military forces, then there was a high likelihood of a collapse of the  
25 government of Afghanistan and the ANSF with the Taliban taking over." General Milley

1 then explains, "I personally thought it was going to be in the fall, somewhere around  
2 Thanksgiving."

3 [REDACTED]. I believe there is one other sentence that is worth reading.

4 [REDACTED]. Please, please, feel free to read that.

5 [REDACTED]. "The assessments vary widely."

6 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q So, going back to your August 31st, 2021, press conference, in which you  
9 stated, "I don't think anyone assessed that they would collapse as quickly as they did.  
10 Anyone. Anyone in this room. Anyone in the region. Anyone anywhere in the world.  
11 If you have anyone who did, I'd be surprised."

12 So I just read into the record testimony provided by a former Chairman of Joint  
13 Chiefs, former Commander of U.S. Central Command, and the former Commander of  
14 NATO's Resolute Support Mission and U.S.-Forces Afghanistan. The Chairman also  
15 previously addressed the Dissent Channel cable for the Embassy Kabul employees who  
16 sent and signed their warnings. I have to ask if this is becoming an unfortunate pattern  
17 throughout our exchange today? On the one hand, you present to the American people  
18 that no one presented any alternative views that it would fall as quickly as it did. On the  
19 other, you have warning signs coming from the State Department and Defense  
20 Department. Do you feel that you accurately conveyed their warnings in your  
21 August 31, 2021, statement?

22 [REDACTED]. This is where I should jump in and say that General Milley stated  
23 for the record that his opinion was that it was going to fall sometime around  
24 Thanksgiving. So Ms. Psaki's statement when she said -- what did she say so we can be  
25 accurate?

1 Ms. Psaki. As quickly as they did.

2 [REDACTED]. Sorry, I --

3 [REDACTED]. Did anyone assess that they would collapse as quickly as they did  
4 so.

5 [REDACTED]. Is there a conundrum because --

6 [REDACTED]. That is at least accurate regarding General Milley.

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q Is that conundrum between August 31 and end of November, the 2 to  
9 3 months --

10 A I think --

11 Q Because also we said that it varied -- I would like, if I could to finish please.

12 A Go ahead.

13 Q You also noted correctly that it said it varied greatly. You also have  
14 testimony from General Miller who said "very bad, very quick." You also have the  
15 Dissent Channel cable that came in July. I really don't want to play word games. I am  
16 just asking, do you think that your statement to the American people accurately conveyed  
17 their grave warnings?

18 A First of all, I would dispute the way you are speaking to me right now. I,  
19 one, referred to what they would collapse as quickly as they did. I think the reason why  
20 he mentioned the General Milley comment here is because he said Thanksgiving. So I  
21 am not sure why you read that into the record. It is not inconsistent with what I said.

22 Also, the statement that you read from a testimony that happened 3 years after  
23 this where he said he was speaking in his personal capacity does not confirm, unless you  
24 have it separately, independent assessment at the time.

25 Third, I didn't have independent assessment at the time of the timing of collapse,

1 which is what I was referring to in that briefing. And every briefing is a reflection of a  
2 moment in time. And, as we have just been discussing, given how fluid and challenging  
3 the situation on the ground was in Afghanistan, of course, with retrospect and with  
4 hindsight, people's reflections are going to be different, which is why it is so important  
5 you talk to all the people as you do and why oversight is so important and why  
6 after-action reports are important.

7 Q I would like to note for the record that, in General Miller's transcribed  
8 interview, the majority specifically asked, "But what you did advise Biden administration  
9 officials would likely happen if the U.S. rapidly went to zero in Afghanistan?" We  
10 specifically asked, "What did you advise the Biden administration officials?" We did not  
11 say, "What do you now view to be your personal opinion?"

12 A Well, I think it is also important you read the totality of what he also said,  
13 which you did previously, where he said he was speaking in his personal capacity and also  
14 that it was 3 years after the events. And, again, I respect oversight; that is why I'm here.  
15 I think it's important to do after-action and reflect on everything that happens at any  
16 point in government, but that is different from you making accusations at me.

17 Q That is not my intention whatsoever.

18 A That is what it sounded like.

19 Q Well, I apologize. That is not my intention, if that was how it was  
20 interpreted.

21 We focus on the word "quickly," and the question that presents to me is I wonder  
22 how the American people understood the word "quickly." I wonder if they distinguished  
23 between November and August 31st, if it was word games instead or nuances between  
24 2 months. I just think that my question here is, do you think it was acceptable to  
25 present the information in the manner that you did? No one expected, no one in this

1 room -- I want to read it again exactly because I don't want to misstate your quote. "I  
2 don't think anyone assessed that they would collapse as quickly as they did. Anyone.  
3 Anyone in this room. Anyone in the region. Anyone anywhere in the world." Do you  
4 speak to anyone in the world? Do you speak to every single person in this region? Do  
5 you think that is a fair way of representing the warning to the American people?

6 Ms. Loeb. Counsel, you have asked three, four, five different questions in that  
7 one question. If you have a specific, direct question for Ms. Psaki --

8 BY [REDACTED]:

9 Q Do you think that you fairly communicated to the American people based on  
10 the warnings issued within the U.S. Government how quickly Afghanistan would fall?

11 A I answered the question based on the information I had available at the  
12 time, which is what we are all basing information on in these briefings.

13 I would also just note just given the way that have you continued to speak to me  
14 that I served two Presidents over the course of 10 years. I worked at the State  
15 Department. I have been to Afghanistan multiple times, and I proudly was a public  
16 servant for nearly 20. I'm here voluntarily answering your questions, and I would  
17 appreciate if, for the next hour, you speak with me the respect that I speak to you.  
18 Thank you.

19 [REDACTED]. I think we are running out of time. We will call it a round here  
20 and maybe take a break. Off the record.

21 [Recess.]

22 [REDACTED]. Okay. We will go back on the record.

23 BY [REDACTED]:

24 Q Ms. Psaki, you have been asked multiple times today over several question  
25 rounds to provide details on policy matters like the withdrawal, the timing of the



1 withdrawal, the date of the withdrawal, questions around maintaining U.S. diplomatic  
2 presence, et cetera, even though you have repeatedly testified all day today that you  
3 were not part of internal policymaking or policy implementing processes.

4 So I just want to clarify a few things. You testified previously that directly  
5 challenging policy material or policy points that you were getting would have required  
6 essentially an alternative channel of discussion, among people like yourselves, a comms  
7 professional, who didn't have all the information necessary to make policy assessments,  
8 correct?

9 A Correct.

10 Q And you said earlier that you are not a policy expert, and you have never  
11 held a policy job in Washington in 24 years, correct?

12 A Correct.

13 Q And that you have never developed foreign policy within the White House or  
14 the interagency, conducted diplomatic negotiations with other governments, drafted  
15 policy papers, implemented U.S. foreign assistance programs, planned or directed U.S.  
16 military assistance, or analyzed intel, correct?

17 A Correct.

18 Q So is it fair to criticize you for not having answers to policy questions when  
19 you weren't privy and it is not your job and you are not an expert to make those?

20 A Well, I will reserve judgement on what is fair to criticize me about, but I  
21 would just say that I am just trying to provide information on what I had access to and  
22 what I was responsible for in my job as the White House Press Secretary.

23 Q Okay. We appreciate that. I won't make you characterize the fairness or  
24 lack thereof of questions that come from -- on the congressional side, but I will just note  
25 that I think a fair assessment we reached is that it is probably a good thing that you

1 weren't inserting yourself into policy processes, given what you just testified to and what  
2 we just recapped.

3 Now, let me also revisit, I think in the last round you -- your testimony was  
4 characterized and your role at the podium was characterized as presenting U.S. policy as  
5 if there were no dissenting views that had ever occurred with respect to it. But I just  
6 want to be clear for the record, was it your role as White House Press Secretary to  
7 describe the policy process or present the final policy decisions?

8 A To present the final policy decisions. In fact, it was not my role and I think  
9 any senior official would not have appreciated if I had gone to the podium and expressed  
10 their private point of view and their private advice to the President.

11 Q And, again, just to level set here, though you haven't been a policymaker or  
12 a policy implementer, you do have a two-decade career in and out of government. You  
13 have been obviously observing policymaking and implementing processes. People  
14 within the interagency may advance views that are ultimately not adopted as policy  
15 decision, correct?

16 A That is correct, and frequently is the case, including on issues that may not  
17 reach the public debate or discussion.

18 Q And, in some cases, that may chagrin those individuals if their views were  
19 not ultimately adopted, correct?

20 A Sure, absolutely.

21 Q And, in some cases, those individuals might even talk to the press or to the  
22 family around the dinner table or any other number of people about that chagrin or their  
23 dissenting views, correct?

24 A That is correct.

25 Q But is an O6 chief of staff to SOCCENT decider on U.S. military policy?

1           A    I don't want to speak to what their exact deciding role is.  But, again, the  
2   President is the decider.

3           Q    The President is Commander in Chief, correct?

4           A    Correct.

5           Q    And testimony before this committee from an O6 former chief of staff to  
6   SOCCENT should be taken in light of that, that ultimately the President is the decider, and  
7   those who work below him or her make recommendations and air their views and engage  
8   in hopefully a very robust deliberative process so that the President has the best  
9   information, correct?

10          A    That is correct.

11          Q    Was General Miller the decider on all aspects of the U.S. withdrawal?

12          A    Again, the President of the United States in any scenario, Democratic or  
13   Republican administration, is ultimately the decider as the Commander in Chief.  There  
14   are a range of individuals who share their point of view as a healthy part of the  
15   deliberative process in any government.

16          Q    Let me just hit on one other issue.  We talked in our last round about what  
17   the impact would have been had you, as the White House Press Secretary or your staff in  
18   that office, started to fact check each bullet point that came to you as part of the National  
19   Security Council's policy process, correct?

20          A    Correct.

21          Q    And I think we also discussed that, with respect to critical stories and if you  
22   would have sought to mitigate the, quote, "fallout" of every critical story you received the  
23   impact on that, of the impact of that on your job would have been that it would undercut  
24   your ability to do it, correct?

25          A    Correct.

1 [6:40 p.m.]

2 BY [REDACTED]:

3 Q And, essentially, eaten up all your time.

4 A Correct.

5 Q And I want to revisit. Your earlier testimony was that President Biden  
6 supported and even directed the approach that you established in the White House press  
7 secretary's office to reengage the American people, increase by a significant factor the  
8 number of press briefings that you were delivering to them to explain U.S. foreign policy  
9 and domestic policy and the President's views on things, correct?

10 A That's correct. And I would also note that, in addition, the State  
11 Department did briefings multiple times a week, as did the Department of Defense.

12 Q And you took questions at all of those briefings?

13 A Correct.

14 Q Often challenging the rationale for or the results of the President's decisions,  
15 correct?

16 A That's correct.

17 Q So given what we've just discussed now, including that it was your job to  
18 stay in the comms lane and to let the policy people do their job, otherwise you would  
19 have undercut it and brought your policy nonexpertise to bear on the policymaking, is it  
20 reasonable for us to understand that this is the price of transparency? You do your job  
21 as comms professionals. Policymakers do their jobs as policy professionals. Is that a  
22 fair characterization?

23 A That is how we treated things in the Biden administration, which is that  
24 policymakers and their expertise and knowledge was to be relied on for providing  
25 information to the public.

1           Q    And for purposes of argument here, what would have been the impact of the  
2   opposite approach, of not prioritizing transparency and not prioritizing and preserving  
3   your time as the comms professional to do the work of communicating to the American  
4   people?

5           A    Well, I think it would have been making guesses without the benefit of a  
6   great deal of information from not just policy experts but implementers, military and  
7   diplomatic officials, who had far more information than any individual spokesperson has,  
8   in part because there's some information that, as you all know, is on a need-to-know  
9   basis, but also in part because the job of the White House press secretary was to talk  
10  about the issues that were on the minds of reporters in the briefing room.

11           And while I didn't determine that and it certainly didn't cover all of the range of  
12  very, very important issues that were being discussed and debated within the  
13  government on any given day, it covered a range of things domestically, politically that I  
14  was also responsible for having knowledge of.

15           Q    And that's all part of a healthy democracy, right, transparency, the ability to  
16  understand what your government is doing and petition your government and share your  
17  views about what you think about that?

18           A    And push the government and ask them questions and provide the  
19  information you can provide to the best of your ability.

20           Q    And if you don't like the policies of a particular government, you have  
21  recourse, correct?  You can vote for a different set of candidates, you can make a  
22  speech, send a tweet, correct?

23           A    You can.  You can quit.  You can express a different point of view in a  
24  meeting.  You can use a dissent channel.  You can use a -- do a range of things in the  
25  U.S. Government and also outside of the U.S. Government.

1           ██████████: Thank you. I don't have anything further, unless my colleagues do.

2           BY ██████████:

3           Q    Briefly.

4           Again, thank you for appearing here today voluntarily.

5           A    Thank you.

6           Q    And thank you for your service in the U.S. Government.

7           I just want to go back to very briefly some of the documents that you've been  
8 presented about things you've said.

9           So in, I believe it's exhibit 10, on page 5, you were questioned about, "And even if  
10 you look at al-Qaeda, it is not -- it is not being harbored in a safe haven in Afghanistan  
11 how it was 20 years ago."

12          I know there's been a lot of paper presented. So I don't want to get ahead of  
13 you.

14          A    I know what you're referencing. I just -- oh, sorry. Thank you. Thank  
15 you. Thank you.

16          Oh, yeah, sorry. Okay. Yes, sorry. Go ahead.

17          Q    So is it your -- so you said how -- "it is not being harbored in a safe haven in  
18 Afghanistan how it was 20 years ago." This was from April 2021.

19          In April 2001, obviously, you were not in government. Is it your understanding  
20 that the Taliban was in control of most of Afghanistan?

21          A    Yes, I was not in government at the time. But yes.

22          Q    And then in September 2001, September 11th, 2001, exactly, is it your  
23 understanding that a terrorist attack was perpetrated by al-Qaeda on American soil and  
24 killed thousands of Americans?

25          A    That's correct. I would also just add, because the President spoke about

1 this in his speech in April, and I think this was in April, if I remember correctly, about how  
2 the threat of terrorism had spread to northern Africa, through other parts of the Middle  
3 East.

4 And so it was the responsibility of the U.S. Government -- and this is just a  
5 statement of what our policy was at the time -- to ensure we were approaching the  
6 evolving threat in the right way.

7 Q Yes. And then in the paragraph above, you say that the threats have  
8 evolved. Did you say the threats had ceased?

9 A No.

10 Q Did you say the threats had stopped?

11 A No.

12 Q Did you say the threats had been eliminated entirely?

13 A I did not.

14 Q And then going back to your -- the August 31st, 2021, press briefing -- I  
15 apologize. I don't remember which exhibit this is.

16 Ms. Johnson. 20.

17 BY [REDACTED]:

18 Q Exhibit 20. It was referenced, your quote, "I don't think anyone assessed  
19 that they would collapse as quickly as they did."

20 Did you say, "I am a hundred percent certain," without regard -- without any  
21 statement that what you said afterwards was inaccurate -- but did you say that, "I am a  
22 hundred percent certain no one assessed it would collapse as -- they would collapse as  
23 quickly as they did," or did you say, "I don't think"?

24 A I said, "I don't think."

25 Q Okay. And then at the end you say, "If you have anyone who did, I'd be

1 surprised."

2 Does that suggest that you are open to being presented a different viewpoint if  
3 there was one?

4 A Of course. And it's also a reflection of what information I had access to at  
5 the time.

6 Q And today, have you been presented anyone -- any statement by any U.S.  
7 Government official that said that they absolutely expected the Afghan Government to  
8 fall in August 2021?

9 A Not that I have seen. And, obviously, I've been out of government for 2  
10 years. So I don't have access to intel assessments of that sort.

11 Q All right. Thank you.

12 And then just we've talked a lot about your role as White House press secretary.  
13 Was it your role to hunt down anyone in the U.S. Government who disagreed with any  
14 decision made by the President?

15 A It was not. And, in fact, I don't think President Biden would have supported  
16 that approach.

17 [REDACTED]. All right. Thank you. That's it for me.

18 BY [REDACTED]:

19 Q I just had a couple more on a slightly different topic.

20 We're here to talk about Afghanistan, but you also mentioned that the majority of  
21 the topics that came up in the briefings were not national security related.

22 Can you share maybe what some of those other topics were?

23 A Sure. Well, at the time of the Afghan withdrawal in 2021, there was, of  
24 course, the COVID-19 pandemic. And there were a range of questions, even including in  
25 August, because it was a time where parents and families were preparing to send their



1 kids back to school. So there were a lot of questions about COVID and how that would  
2 be addressed.

3 It was also a period of time where programs under the COVID relief package, there  
4 were deadlines for determining whether or not those would be extended, which was  
5 definitely on the minds of Americans.

6 There were quite a few -- not just a few -- many questions about border, border  
7 security during that period of time, as well.

8 And there were ongoing efforts by the President to push forward his Build Back  
9 Better agenda. So those negotiations and discussions, as well as his discussions and  
10 negotiations around infrastructure, were also on the minds.

11 That's not an all-inclusive list but some of the topics, if I recall, that were also  
12 prominent during that period of time.

13 Q Got it. And so you said COVID. Let's just assume that one of the lead  
14 agencies was HHS.

15 Did you talk to the Secretary of HHS every day?

16 A No.

17 Q And then we talked about kids going back to school.

18 Did you talk to the head of the Department of Education every day?

19 A I did not.

20 Q Talked about the border.

21 Did you talk to the Secretary of DHS every day?

22 A No.

23 Q And then Build Back Better, say, Treasury, Transportation.

24 Did you talk to those Secretaries every day?

25 A I did not.

1 Q So it's not unusual for you not to have spoken with the DOD or State  
2 leadership about the withdrawal from Afghanistan or the Afghan withdrawal plans every  
3 day, right?

4 A Correct. It would have been incredibly inefficient if that was the way the  
5 process worked, because we had a responsibility to answer a range of questions on a  
6 broad range of topics every day.

7 All of these Secretaries also had their own full-time jobs and agendas, many of  
8 them traveling quite a bit, some of them internationally, which is why there was a process  
9 in place both domestically and for international foreign policy issues to ensure we had  
10 answers to questions that wouldn't have required me speaking directly to the Secretary  
11 of any agency on a given day.

12 Q And like there was a National Security Council press team dealing with those  
13 issues, there were also different press teams dealing with those issues that you also relied  
14 on to help provide communications guidance as you did your job.

15 A That's correct.

16 [REDACTED]. Okay. Thanks.

17 [REDACTED]. We can go off the record.

18 [Discussion off the record.]

19 [REDACTED]. Ms. Psaki, thank you for indulging us for another round. We'll  
20 try to keep this brief.

21 I'd like to enter as exhibit 21 an excerpt of a transcript of an interview President  
22 Biden gave to George Stephanopoulos on ABC News dated August 18th, 2021.

23 [Psaki Exhibit No. 21  
24 was marked for identification.]

25 [REDACTED]. Give you a moment to take a look.

1 Ms. Psaki. Did you -- was there a part of it we should focus on or was there --  
2 [REDACTED]. Yes. It's specifically page 6 and focusing on Americans in  
3 Afghanistan.

4 Ms. Loeb. I'm sorry. The President Biden section or are you starting with  
5 George Stephanopoulos?

6 [REDACTED]. We're going to start where that -- right. I wanted to give you a  
7 moment to look, but we're going to start right under the image with Stephanopoulos.

8 Here he asks President Biden, quote, "All troops are supposed to be out by August  
9 31st. Even if Americans and our Afghan allies are still trying to get out, they're going to  
10 leave?"

11 To which President Biden responds, "We're going to do everything in our power to  
12 get all Americans out and our allies out."

13 Stephanopoulos then asks, "Does that mean troops will stay beyond August 31st,  
14 if necessary?"

15 To which President Biden responds, "It depends on where we are and whether we  
16 can get -- ramp these numbers up to 5,000, to 7,000 a day coming out. If that's the  
17 case, we'll be -- they'll all be out."

18 Stephanopoulos then responds, "Because we've got, like, 10,000 to 15,000  
19 Americans in the country right now, right? And are you committed to making sure that  
20 the troops stay until every American who wants to be out is out?"

21 President Biden states, "Yes."

22 Stephanopoulos then asks, "How about our Afghan allies? We have about  
23 80,000 people." And he follows up to ask, "Is that too high?"

24 President Biden confirms that the number's too high and states, "The estimate  
25 we're giving is somewhere between 50,000 and 65,000 folks total, counting their

1 families."

2 Stephanopoulos then asks, "Does that commitment hold for them as well?"

3 President Biden responds, "The commitment holds to get everyone out that, in  
4 fact, we can get out and everyone that should come out. And that's the objective, and  
5 that's what we're doing now, that's the path we're on, and I think we'll get there."

6 Stephanopoulos then asks, "So Americans should understand that troops might  
7 have to be there beyond August 31st?"

8 President Biden responds, "No."

9 Stephanopoulos then asks, "But if we don't, the troops will stay -- "

10 President Biden responds, "If -- if we don't, we'll determine at the time who's  
11 left."

12 Upon Stephanopoulos asking, "And?" President Biden asserts, "And if  
13 you're American force, if there's American citizens left, we're going to stay to get them all  
14 out."

15 Ms. Loeb. So, counsel, we were tracking. It looks like you've read the whole  
16 thing with the exception of one final line from the President, the line when  
17 Stephanopoulos says, "So Americans should understand that troops might have to be  
18 there beyond August 31st?" and President Biden appears to respond, "No. Americans  
19 should understand that we're going to try to get it done before August 31st."

20 [REDACTED]. Thank you for that. Apologies for missing that sentence.

21 I'd like to enter next into the record as exhibit 22 an excerpt from a press briefing  
22 you gave -- you and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan led on August 23rd, 2021.

23 [Psaki Exhibit No. 22

24 was marked for identification.]

25 Ms. Loeb. No questions about this?

1 [REDACTED]. The question will follow.

2 So it's in the timeline as to Americans that were left behind.

3 And, again, this is an excerpt from the press briefing, not the press briefing in its  
4 entirety.

5 Ms. Loeb. Thank you.

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q If you could please turn your attention to what is marked as page 22. Here  
8 you're asked a series of questions, Ms. Psaki, one being, "But does the President have a  
9 sense that most of the criticism is not of leaving Afghanistan, it's the way that he has  
10 ordered it to happen -- by pulling the troops before getting these Americans who are now  
11 stranded? Does he have a sense of that?"

12 To which you respond, "First of all, I think it's irresponsible to say Americans are  
13 stranded. They are not. We are committed to bringing Americans who want to come  
14 home, home. We are in touch with them via phone, via text, via email, via any way that  
15 we can possibly reach Americans to get them home if they want to return home."

16 You're then asked, "'There are no Americans stranded' is the White House's  
17 official position on what's happening in Afghanistan right now?"

18 To which you respond, "I'm just calling you out for saying that we were stranding  
19 Americans in Afghanistan when I -- when we have been very clear that we're not leaving  
20 Americans who want to return home. We are going to bring them home, and I think  
21 that's important for the American public to hear and understand."

22 Ms. Psaki, pursuant to the promise that President Biden made in the interview  
23 with Stephanopoulos, as well as the information you conveyed on August 23rd, 2021, on  
24 behalf of the White House, did every American who wanted to get out of Afghanistan get  
25 out before we removed our troops from the country on August 31st, 2021?

1 A No.

2 Q Can you please speak to that?

3 A In what capacity?

4 Q President Biden had stated in his interview with ABC News' George  
5 Stephanopoulos that U.S. troops would not leave until all Americans got out -- that's a  
6 paraphrasing -- or until all Americans that could get out got out.

7 A That's not what he said. He actually said, "Americans  
8 should under-" -- "No. Americans" -- when asked for clarification -- "Americans should  
9 understand that we're going to try to get it done before August 31st."

10 Q Uh-huh.

11 A So he did make clear on what the timeline was that troops would leave in  
12 that same transcript.

13 Q And then he also said, "And if you're American force, if there's American  
14 citizens left, we're going to stay to get them all out."

15 So my question is, we did not stay to get them all out. Can you please speak to  
16 what transpired there?

17 A Let me just reread this whole part because I think the full context --

18 Q Of course.

19 A -- which I know you're acknowledging and you also read the whole thing.

20 So I just wanted to restate just before I answer this question what he actually said,  
21 which is, "The commitment holds to get everyone out that, in fact, we can get out and  
22 everyone that should come out. And that's the objective. That's what we're doing  
23 now. That's the path we're on and I think we'll get there," which is an expression of his  
24 hope and objective as the Commander in Chief of what he -- and he also earlier in this  
25 statement conveyed, "It depends on where we are and whether we can get -- ramp those

1 numbers up to 5,000, 7,000 a day coming out. If that's the case, we'll be -- they'll all be  
2 out."

3 Q And my focus is on the last part, at least relevant to that specific topic, which  
4 is before they transition to, I believe, China and Russia, in which President Biden states,  
5 "And if you're American force, if you're -- if there's American citizens left, we're going to  
6 stay to get them all out."

7 And it's very possible that in the context that's not what he meant, but I just want  
8 to better understand. You've confirmed that Americans who wanted to get out did not  
9 all get out of Afghanistan by the August 31st deadline.

10 And in the context of this statement, I'm just trying to better understand the  
11 decision behind leaving before Americans were all able to get out.

12 A Well, let me add a couple of things.

13 I think it's important contextually in the record that there was an ongoing effort,  
14 as you know, even after the military departed and the diplomats departed, to still work  
15 with third-party countries to help Americans depart who wanted to depart. So that was  
16 an ongoing process.

17 I would also say that in the President's remarks and in my remarks, we also were  
18 keeping in mind that people out there, American citizens, dual citizens, others in other  
19 countries we were asking to help us, were hearing and reviewing what we were saying.  
20 And we wanted to convey to them what our objective was and what we're trying to do  
21 and working to do.

22 So I believe what he's doing here -- I'm not going to parse it further than this -- is  
23 trying to convey what our goal and objective was as the U.S. Government.

24 Q Were you able to confirm, ever confirm, how many Americans were left  
25 behind in Afghanistan?

1           A     Well, I think, as you know, but I just want to state it for the record, because  
2 we don't, as a U.S. Government, track or require people to register who are Americans  
3 overseas or dual citizens, that's not a record that any administration would ever have.

4           And I haven't been in the U.S. Government for more than 2 years. So I'm just not  
5 the right person to provide an update on that status.

6           Q     And have we since -- understanding that you are no longer in the  
7 government but during your tenure, were you ever able to confirm the number of  
8 Americans that did get out of Afghanistan?

9           A     Well, there were numbers publicly provided by the State Department at the  
10 time that we echoed. I did not have additional unique information beyond that since  
11 they were the point of contact or the primary point on that.

12           ██████████. Thank you.

13           I don't think we have anymore questions on our end, so as promised, ending the  
14 round earlier.

15           Ms. Psaki, we appreciate you appearing before the committee for the interview  
16 today. I know there are a lot of difficult questions that were asked. And we appreciate  
17 you doing so voluntarily.

18           I want to give you the opportunity to provide any closing remarks. I know you  
19 had an opening statement. But if there's anything you'd like to say to conclude the  
20 majority's round.

21           Ms. Psaki. Sure. I would just conclude by thanking you all for your work, and I  
22 know how and I value the importance of oversight.

23           And I think that it's always important for governments -- governments and  
24 others -- to reflect on times where things could have been done differently or better. So  
25 I appreciate the work that you're doing.



1           And thank you for having me here today. I appreciate your time.

2           ██████████. Thank you for coming.

3           ██████████. And I'll only take back the minority's time just to also say thank you  
4 on behalf of Ranking Member Meeks for being here and answering our questions. We  
5 appreciate it.

6           Ms. Psaki. Thank you so much. Thank you all.

7           [Whereupon, at 7:03 p.m., the interview was concluded.]

**Errata Sheet for the Transcribed Interview of Jen Psaki**  
**dated 07/26/2024**

1) majority errata, (2) minority errata, (3) White House counsel , (4) private counsel (as applicable) and witness errata

Page	Line	Change	Reason
3		strike “Minority” before “National Security Advisor for Representative Crow”	
4	4	Change “SENIOR COUNSEL” to “DEPUTY COUNSEL to THE PRESIDENT AND DEPUTY ASSISTANT to THE PRESIDENT”	Clarification
6	24	Change “chose” to “choose”	
6	25	Change “chose” to “choose”	Typographical error
30	9	Change “ask” to “asked”	
32	17	Add comma after “now”	
33	19	Change “2020“ to”2021”	
35	16	Strike “present,”	
39	6	Change “received briefings” to “received no briefings”	
42	21	Change “not speak” to “not to speak”	
48	5	Change “transcript,,” to “transcript,”	
64	4	Change “Biden” to “Obama”	
83	21	Strike “an”	
86	3	Change “make sure and” to “make sure, and”	
86	7	Change “onto” to “on to”	
94	19	Change “followups” to “follow-ups”	
101	9	Change “process” to “process.”	Typographical error
114	15	Change “home” to “hone”	Typographical error
117	13	Change “rephasing” to “rephrasing”	
118	9	Change “19th transcribed” to “18th transcribed”	
126	19	Change “I’m” to “I’ll”	
131	3	Change “to us” to “tough”	
140	23	Strike “what”	
152	5	Change “2024 what to the best of your recollection “ to “2024 what, to the best of your recollection, “	
152	9	Change “or” to “and”	Transcription Error/Clarification
161	9	Change “it is NSC” to “it was the NSC”	

165	2-3	Change “Again, I don’t think she ever said al-Qaeda was a threat in Afghanistan.” to “Again, I don’t think she ever said that al-Qaeda was not a threat in Afghanistan.”	Transcription Error/Clarification
167	13	Change “then you believed “ to “did you believe”	
176	16	Change “28th” to “20th”	
176	23	Change “disagree” to “disagrees”	Typographical error
176	24	Change “says” to “so”	Typographical error
188	12	Change “came” to “come”	
189	15	Change “complicate” to “complicated”	
195	14	Change “2021,” to “2021”	Typographical error
199	16	Change “appointed” to “pointed”	Transcription Error/Clarification
199	16	Change “appointed” to “pointed”	Typographical error
200	7	Change “despite” to “dispute”	
200	16-17	Add comma after “informed” and “staffer”	
208	13	Change “followup” to “follow-up”	
208	14	Change “assumptions” to “assumption”	
211	23	Change “Well, you should not phrase a statement that she made.” to “Well, you should not paraphrase a statement that she made.”	Transcription Error/Clarification
211	23	Change “phrase” to “paraphrase”	Typographical error
217	20	Change ‘judgement” to ‘judgment”	Typographical error
218	25	insert “the” before “decider”	