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5	COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
6	U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
7	WASHINGTON, D.C.
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12	INTERVIEW OF: AMBASSADOR DEAN RICHARD THOMPSON
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16	Thursday, October 27, 2023
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18	Washington, D.C.
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21	The interview in the above matter was held in room 2200, Rayburn House Office
22	Building, commencing at 9:53 a.m.

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2	Appearances:
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5	For the COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS:
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10	, SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY
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9	For the U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE:
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11	, COUNSEL
12	, OFFICE OF THE LEGAL ADVISOR
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2	. On the record.
3	This is a transcribed interview of Ambassador Dean Thompson. Chairman
4	McCaul has requested this interview as part of the committee's investigation of the
5	Afghanistan withdrawal.
6	Would the witness please state his name for the record.
7	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Dean Richard Thompson.
8	. On behalf of the committee, I want to thank you for appearing
9	here today to answer our questions. The chairman also appreciates your willingness to
10	appear voluntarily, and, of course, in person from Nepal. Thank you.
11	My name is on Chairman McCaul's
12	staff on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and I'm leading the investigation into the
13	Afghanistan withdrawal.
14	I will now ask committee staff present from the majority and minority to introduce
15	themselves as well.
16	with the majority.
17	. I'm with the majority.
18	for the Democrats.
19	on
20	the minority.
21	on the minority side.
22	for the minority.
23	<u>.</u> Thank you.
24	I'd like to now go over ground rules and guidelines that we'll follow during today's
25	interview. Our questioning will proceed in rounds.

1	The majority will ask questions for the first hour. Then the minority will have an
2	opportunity to ask questions for an equal period of time if they so choose. We'll
3	alternate back and forth until there are no more questions and the interview is over.
4	Typically we take a short break at the end of each hour, but if you'd like to take a
5	break apart from that, please just let us know, and we'd be happy to accommodate.
6	As you can see, there are official court reporters taking down everything we say to
7	make a written record. So we ask that you give verbal responses to all questions.
8	Does that make sense?
9	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Yes.
10	. So the court reporter can take down a clear record, we'll do our
11	best to limit the number of people directing questions at you during any give hour to just
12	those people on the staff whose turn it is.
13	Please try and speak clearly so the court reporter can understand and so everyone
14	can hear you. It's important that we don't talk over one another or interrupt each other
15	if we can help it, and that goes for everybody present at today's interview.
16	Witnesses who appear before the committee, have the opportunity to freely
17	consult with counsel if they so choose. It's my understanding that you're appearing
18	today with agency counsel; is that correct?
19	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Yes.
20	. Ambassador, you understand that agency counsel represents
21	the State Department and not you personally; correct?
22	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Yes.
23	. Could agency counsel and note taker please identify yourselves
24	and state your names for the record.
25	. agency counsel.

1	<u>.</u> note taker.
2	<u>.</u> Thank you.
3	We want you to answer our questions in the most complete and truthful manner
4	as possible, so we will take our time. If you have any questions or if you do not
5	understand one of our questions, please just let us know. Our questions will cover a
6	wide range of topics so if you need clarification at any point, please just say so.
7	If you do not know the answer to a question or do not remember, it's best not to
8	guess. Please give us your best recollection. If there are things you don't know or you
9	can't remember, please just say so and please inform us, who, to the best of your
10	knowledge, might be able to provide a more complete answer to our question.
11	Ambassador Thompson, this portion of the interview is unclassified. So, if a
12	question calls for information that you know to be classified, please state that for the
13	record, as well as the basis for the classification and the original classification authority.
14	If you are uncertain of the classification, please consult with your counsel. We'd
15	be happy to go off the record to afford you the opportunity to do so.
16	In the interest of transparency and open access to the Federal Government, we
17	ask that your asserted basis for classification adhere to the uniform system prescribed by
18	executive order 13526.
19	Once you identify the requisite classification, please respond with as much
20	unclassified information as possible. Do you understand?
21	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Yes.
22	. Thank you. You should also understand that, although this
23	interview is not under oath, that by law, you are required to answer questions from
24	Congress truthfully. Do you understand?
25	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Yes.

1	. This also applies to questions posed by congressional staff in an
2	interview. Does that make sense?
3	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Yes.
4	. Witnesses that knowingly provide false testimony could be
5	subject to criminal prosecution for perjury or for making false statements under 18 U.S.C.
6	section 1001. Do you understand this?
7	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Yes.
8	. Is there any reason you are unable to provide truthful answers
9	to today's questions?
10	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> No.
11	. Finally, I'd like to make note that the content of what we discus
12	here today is confidential as per Chairman McCaul's request. We ask that you not speak
13	about what we discuss in this interview to any outside individuals to preserve the
14	integrity of our investigation.
15	For the same reason, the marked exhibits that we'll use today will remain with the
16	court reporter so that they can go in the official transcript, and any copies of those
17	exhibits will be returned to us when we wrap up.
18	That is the end of the majority's preamble. Is there anything that my colleagues
19	from the minority would like to add?
20	. Yes. We note that notwithstanding any agreement made
21	between the majority, the witness, and/or the State Department for this transcribed
22	interview, there is no provision governing or mandating confidentiality of investigations
23	and/or transcribed interviews in the House or committee's rules for the 118th Congress.
24	<u>.</u> Thank you.
25	The clock now reads 9:38. We will start the first hour of questioning.

1		EXAMINATION
2		BY :
3	Q	Ambassador Thompson, what is your current position at the State
4	Departmen	t?
5	Α	I'm the U.S. Ambassador to Nepal.
6	Q	What position or positions did you hold at the time of the Afghanistan
7	withdrawal	?
8	Α	Well, just to be really clear, I was the Acting Assistant Secretary, slash, senior
9	Bureau offic	cial. Those titles changed occasionally depending on how long I'd been in
10	one or the o	other, I think, per calendar year, something like that.
11	And	so, when I took over roughly summer of 2020, the announcement of a
12	withdrawal	had already been made. It then, of course, ran through to the next
13	administrat	ion, different set of decisions made, and then the NEO itself was I was still in
14	that capacit	ry.
15	Q	When did you assume the position of Acting Assistant Secretary for South
16	and Central	Asian Affairs, or SCA?
17	Α	Yeah, it was either late July or August 2020.
18	Q	How were you selected for that position?
19	А	Well, I had been approached the previous, let's say, 12 months before by
20	the who v	was then the person who was then the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary
21	in the South	Central Asian Affairs Bureau. Sorry, senior moment, I can't think of her
22	name off th	e top of my head about becoming the DAS, the Deputy Assistant Secretary
23	for India.	
24	So h	ad started pursuing that, but then a few months before summer 2020,
25	Alice Wells	who was the senior Bureau official at the time, called and asked if I would

1	come back as the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau.		
2	So I agreed to do that. What was then supposed to happen was, Paul Jones, who		
3	was our charge in Pakistan at the time, was going to come back to take the senior Bureau		
4	official. I was going to be his Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary.		
5	The day or two before I was supposed to start, though, Paul called to say he		
6	decided to retire. And so David Hale, who was the Under Secretary for Political Affairs,		
7	asked me to step in to the role of SBO.		
8	Q Thank you.		
9	And did you retain a permanent assignment while serving as Acting Assistant		
10	Secretary?		
11	A Sorry. I don't know what you mean by that.		
12	Q I think it would be better phrased, were you serving as the PDAS while also		
13	serving as Acting Assistant Secretary? Did you occupy both roles?		
14	A Not really. I did the SBO, Acting Assistant Secretary role, and Erv Massinga,		
15	who had been Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary before I started, I asked him to		
16	stay on in that role.		
17	Q Thank you.		
18	A So he was acting in that role.		
19	Q That's helpful. Thank you.		
20	And how many people reported to you in that position to the best of your		
21	recollection?		
22	A Oh, boy. Couple hundred. I'm sorry, I don't remember the size of the		
23	Bureau off the top of my head.		
24	Q That's okay.		
25	You're asking about direct reports?		

1	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Oh. Direct reports or the Bureau?	
2	BY :	
3	Q That was my that will be my follow-up question, more broadly the Bureau,	
4	and then we'll get direct reports thereafter.	
5	A Okay.	
6	Q And direct reports, how many people reported to you?	
7	A Oh, let's see. So it would've been DAS Randall, DAS Hornsby oh, I'm	
8	sorry. I'm just counting on my fingers. I think five or six were direct reports.	
9	Q And who were those individuals or their positions?	
10	A So the Deputy Assistant Secretary for India, Laura Stone; Deputy Assistant	
11	Secretary for Afghanistan, Nancy Jackson, when I when I started. Deputy Assistant	
12	Secretary for Pakistan was Less Viguerie.	
13	Let's see. Sorry, we reorganized the Bureau a couple times, so. And then Scott	
14	Sanford was our chief of staff, and Erv was the Acting PDAS, and then who who was in	
15	at Central Asia at the time? Oh, and Jonathan Henick was DAS for Central Asia.	
16	Q Thank you.	
17	Did Ambassador Wilson, as chief of mission to Afghanistan, report to you in any	
18	capacity?	
19	A I mean, I was the Acting Assistant Secretary for the Bureau, so, you know, I	
20	would say, yes, though the Ambassador doesn't, you know I was a had he been a	
21	career ambassador, not the charge, I would have written his EER, his evaluation.	
22	Q So is there a difference between sort of what, you know, the formal	
23	reporting and then the functional reporting? Did he functionally not report to you but	
24	formally did or	
25	A No, functionally he reported to me and, you know, all the other ambassadors	

- in the region. I was their rating official, but because Ross was a retiree filling in, in that role, I don't believe we had the same evaluation procedure for him as for others.
- 3 Q Thank you.
- And what was your professional experience involving Afghanistan leading up to becoming Acting Assistant Secretary for SCA?
- A Really negligible. I'd worked primarily on South Asia issues in the countries
  I'd served in and had not worked on Afghanistan previously.
- 8 Q And when did you leave the position of Acting Assistant Secretary?
- 9 A Well, I sort of transitioned back then to the Principal Deputy Assistant
  10 Secretary role in October 2021 when Don Lu was confirmed and became the Assistant
  11 Secretary for South Central Asia.
- Q And I imagine I know the answer to this question, but why did you leave that position?
- 14 A The PDAS role?
- 15 Q The Acting Assistant Secretary.
- 16 A Oh.
- 17 Q Was it because of the new nominee?
- 18 A Yeah, because a permanent person was in place, and I just went back to the 19 PDAS role, and Don asked me to stay in that role.
- Q Okay. And, just for clarity of the record, when did you first assume the position of Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for SCA?
- A It would've been October 2021.
- 23 You mean after -- after I was Acting Assistant Secretary?
- 24 Q Correct.
- 25 A Yeah. Yeah, October 2021.

1	Q And how were you selected for that position, was there any process in place	
2	or was this just going back formally to your prior position?	
3	A Primarily going back. I mean, I suppose Assistant Secretary Lu could have	
4	said, you know: I want to bring in somebody else, or, I want to run a different process.	
5	But I'd worked with him in the past, and I think he was comfortable with me in	
6	that role.	
7	Q And why did you leave that position and the PDAS position?	
8	A I was nominated to be ambassador to Nepal.	
9	Q Thank you.	
10	Ambassador, before proceeding, we believe it would be helpful to define a couple	
11	of key terms in the interest of clarity. First, when referencing the term "withdrawal,"	
12	the majority is referencing the complete U.S. Military withdrawal, which was officially	
13	announced and finalized by President Biden in April 2021 and includes consideration of	
14	and planning by the State Department and the interagency.	
15	Does that make sense?	
16	A Yeah.	
17	Q And we're happy to repeat that definition at any point	
18	A As we go.	
19	Q to give you clarity. Of course.	
20	Second, when referencing the term "evacuation," the majority is referencing the	
21	evacuation of U.S. citizens and nationals, civilian personnel, and designated persons in	
22	August 2021, resulting in the noncombatant evacuation operation initiated on August	
23	16th, 2021, and includes consideration of and planning by the State Department and the	
24	interagency.	

Does that make sense?

1	А	Yes.
2	Q	So our next question, what was your role in the U.S. withdrawal from
3	Afghanistan	?
4	Α	So, using the definition of "withdrawal" that you just gave, I would say it was
5	fairly limited	d role. I mean, we were planning for how would we maintain a State
6	Department	t, Embassy presence in Afghanistan after the military withdrew.
7	DOD	was handling all of the withdrawal aspects of drawdown of forces and those
8	things. W	e were looking at the question, what would it take to continue operating in
9	Afghanistan	without DOD presence there?
10	Q	And, in the course of those discussions, did the possibility of an evacuation
11	ever come ι	up?
12	Α	Well, so, I mean, an evacuation is kind of always on the table, if you will.
13	It's part of c	our requirement in any country where we serve to have an emergency action
14	plan that in	cludes scenarios up to and including evacuations.
15	So te	ell me, I mean I want to be fair to your definition here, but at the same time,
16	I think it's w	orth
17	Q	No, please feel free to elaborate.
18	Α	Just saying. So starting in well, I think it had already started before I
19	arrived, Em	bassy Kabul was looking at options for, you know, how do we operate here
20	after the mi	litary would go, and what if it got too dangerous to stay at the Embassy, could
21	we go to the	e airport. What if it got too dangerous to stay at the airport? How would
22	we get peop	ole out? So that was a process under way, and there was a, if I recall
23	correctly, ki	nd of a four-point or four-staged plan for that.
24	Q	And when that was?

That would've been fall of 2020, let's say, November -- October, November

25

Α

1	timeframe. And so, you know, there was there was discussions about what that
2	would look like at the time, but of course, you know, an election was taking place.
3	There was a transition about to happen. What would come next was not a hundred
4	percent clear.
5	So then, after the new administration came on and, you know, a review was done,
6	the President elected to withdraw on the terms he laid out for, I think it was September
7	11th was what he had then decided.
8	You know, we started again looking at this question of, okay, we want to maintain
9	an Embassy presence, assuming there's a negotiated settlement, that there's a stable
LO	government in Kabul that will be able to keep doing that.
l1	But there were discussions about, you know, what would it take to draw down
L2	completely if the security situation deteriorated. And, you know, those those
13	discussions took place primarily, I would I say, at the level of the Embassy and the military
L4	forces that were in Kabul at the time, but also to include CENTCOM more broadly.
L5	And then our desk would've been working on a lot of the, you know, the planning
16	for what to do if that happened.
L7	Q And when did those discussions begin under the new administration?
18	A Let's call it, I'd to say spring of 2021, probably boy, so I I went to Kabul in
19	April to look at some of these questions. So they must've started February, March
20	before that even.
21	Q So am I understanding correctly that you first became involved in April then
22	on these issues, or does it date back further?
23	A No. I mean, I was I mean, as a Bureau, we were looking at this question
24	from the moment I started there, about how would we how would we maintain, and

then what would the steps be if we had to take people out.

1	You know, may be worth a quick just review, right? There's different levels of
2	departures that the State Department plans for. One is an authorized departure,
3	meaning people can say they don't feel safe and they want to go, or departures the
4	chief of mission gets to say: I need this person, not this person.
5	And then we try to carry those out, right, without any military intervention
6	whatsoever, just on our own commercial available options.
7	NEOs happen when the situation has deteriorated to such a degree that you can't
8	do it any other way, which was the situation that happened in August of 2021.
9	Q Thank you.
10	And who were the key individuals within SCA involved on a work-related request
11	in the Afghanistan withdrawal?
12	A Well, I would say it's a little less direct from the SCA world at that point. If
13	we're talking about the withdrawal question, Ambassador Khalilzad, right, was the Special
14	Representative for Afghanistan and was negotiating, working with the Taliban. He
15	reported directly to the Secretary and the President as far as those roles went.
16	Our Afghanistan team, I think, would've been in the loop on, you know, planning
17	what was happening, but they weren't part of the decisionmaking if that makes sense.
18	Q Then by "Afghanistan team," was that team led by Mark Evans?
19	A Let's see. Mark Evans at that point. He had become the acting Deputy
20	Assistant Secretary. Nancy Jackson had been asked to take over as senior Bureau official
21	for population refugees and migration.
22	Q And who were the key individuals within SCA involved on work relating to
23	the evacuation August 2021 evacuation?
24	A Well, I mean, at that point it would've been myself, Mark, and the director
25	for Afghanistan whose name is now escaping me. I might think of it as we go.

1	Q	Can you please speak to the relationship between SCA and Embassy Kabul?
2	Α	It was it was good. I mean, I'm not sure, like, I had fairly routine
3	interactions	with Ambassador Wilson and with Scott Weinhold, the acting sorry the
4	assistant chi	ef of mission. Yeah, I mean, very close generally speaking.
5	Q	How frequently would you communicate?
6	Α	I think Ross and I had a call, it was either weekly or every 2 weeks that
7	probably wa	s more every 2 weeks in terms of scheduling process, just to make sure we
8	were synced	up, that we were hearing the same things with regard to where we were
9	headed. I'r	m pretty sure the desk was in touch on a more daily basis.
10	Q	Did the frequency of those communications change throughout the course
11	of 2021?	
12	Α	Not really, no. I mean, we were, you know, we were pretty regularly
13	engaged. I	can't remember us, say, dialing up a different schedule for anything, until
14	August, at w	hich point, right, the situation was, they were all at the airport, and we were
15	trying to hel	p make sure they had the space they needed to conduct the operations
16	there.	
17	Q	Can you please speak to the relationship between SCA and the Special
18	Representat	ive for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Khalilzad, and his team?
19	Α	Yeah. I would say it was very good, very positive. The thing is they were
20	on the road	all the time, and so we would kind of get back briefed from them when they
21	were back in	Washington or if we had a chance to talk to them while they were in Doha
22	or in any of t	cheir other stops.
23	A lot	of it was, you know, Zal was pretty engaged with the negotiations on a
24	day-to-day b	asis. Molly Phee, his deputy, was the one that we would be in touch with
25	most often.	

1	Q Ir	n terms of sort of substantive reliance, did the SRAR's office sort of operate
2	on its own, or	did it defer to SCA on decisionmaking or vice versa?
3	A I	mean, I would say SRAR had the lead on negotiations and sort of the
4	direction of th	at policy. We had more the day-to-day operations of the Embassy,
5	diplomacy witl	h the government, things of that nature.
6	Q C	an you speak a bit more to sort of the roles and responsibilities divided
7	between the S	RAR team and SCA?
8	A W	Vell, I mean, SRAR was doing the negotiations with the Taliban. So they
9	were very muc	ch, that was their lane, and that was the, you know, big issue for the time
10	that I was enga	aged in things.
11	Our rol	e was much more looking at this question, okay, building some
12	assumptions in that, you know, there's going to be some sort of agreement, that there	
13	will be a government in place, there will be enough stability that we could remain, how	
14	could we stay	and stay safely, and what would our footprint look like on the ground
15	there?	
16	Q A	nd can you speak a bit more to those agreements? Were there multiple
17	agreements th	at were being considered? Was it the Doha Agreement? What
18	specifically we	re you contemplating as those inputs?
19	A Fe	or well, the Doha Agreement was what they were negotiating off of.
20	Sorry. I'm no	ot sure about other did I say agreements? I might've
21	Q Y	ou said some sort of agreement in place.
22	A W	Vell
23	Q I'	m just trying to understand what
24	Α	the Doha Agreement, that it would play out to its conclusion of a
25	negotiated set	tlement.

1	Q	That's helpful. Thank you.
2		_ Go ahead.
3		. What portion of your time as senior Bureau official would you
4	estimate Af	ghanistan issues took up throughout 2021?
5	Amb	passador <u>Thompson.</u> Oh, 2021, well, so we had 13 countries. India, severa
6	of them, yo	u know, were their own pretty strong portfolios at the time. I would say at
7	the front of	end 2021, it was probably 20 percent of my time maybe, something like that
8	But,	as the year went on, it grew until August when it was a hundred percent for
9	the whole p	period of the drawdown or the evacuation, and then some of the followup
LO	after that.	
l1		BY :
12	Q	And did SC have any detailees on the SRAR team?
L3	Α	Detailees, you know, I can't remember for sure. I want to say we might've
L4	had one, bu	at I don't remember for sure.
L5	Q	Can you please this is a broad question, but can you please describe the
L6	State Depai	rtment's process for planning, relating to the Afghanistan withdrawal?
L7	Α	The military withdrawal?
18	Q	Correct.
19	Α	I mean, again, our focus was related to, you know, what was the timing of
20	the withdra	wal, what would happen, what would the situation on the ground look like,
21	how could	we maintain an Embassy.
22	As f	ar as the withdrawal itself, I didn't play any role in that discussion.
23	Q	So it's our understanding that there were various offices and bureaus within
24	the State D	epartment that were figuring out some of these questions that you
25	mentioned,	specifically Acting Under Secretary Perez, that there was regional policy

1	issues running through the SCA and through the Afghanistan Desk. Can you speak a bit		
2	more as to how that was structured, specifically, so who was working on what?		
3	A Yeah, well		
4	Q Or which office was working on what?		
5	A So Acting Under Secretary Perez, I would say, under the direction of Deputy		
6	Secretary for Management and Resources, Brian McKeon, was sort of coordinating the		
7	effort with diplomatic security, SCA, Embassy Kabul, to figure out, you know, what were		
8	the resources needed and what would it take to stand up the enablers to stay back.		
9	This included things like the resolute support compound next to the Embassy.		
10	We needed to take that space over to provide additional space and setback in areas for		
11	housing and some medical facilities because we were going to those things would all be		
12	lost as a result of the withdrawal.		
13	As I recall, Carol had a weekly call, I think, with all the various parties to discuss		
14	where we were, who was doing what. Best of my recollection, that call included the		
15	What's OBO's official title? Office of		
16	<ul> <li>Overseas Building Operations.</li> </ul>		
17	Ambassador Thompson building oh, operations.		
18	diplomatic security, SCA, and several other of the management world bureaus.		
19	BY :		
20	Q And where did the SCA fit in that structure? So what was your specific		
21	within those efforts?		
22	A I would say, you know, coordinating with Embassy Kabul and looking at		
23	these questions of, you know, what is it trying to work with Embassy Kabul to		
24	understand what are the needs on the ground that need to be put in place to securely		
25	remain after the military left.		

1	Q And, in terms of assessing those needs, was there consideration given to the
2	role of the Taliban, the increased threat, et cetera, that the Embassy would be subjected
3	to?
4	A Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think it was in some ways a bit of a driving
5	question, right? What would the situation be? What would a government look like
6	that was on the ground? We just didn't know, you know, where that would end up.
7	So we had to do a lot of planning for what it would mean to stay at the Embassy?
8	What it would mean to draw down to the airport? What it would mean ultimately to
9	take our people out?
10	Q And did SCA coordinate with Diplomatic Security, or DS, on those issues?
11	A Yeah. I mean, really that whole group that I just talked about was
12	coordinating on these things because they were all I mean, nobody not one of those
13	pieces could really happen without the input of the others.
14	Q Was there a senior leader at the Department with overall responsibility for
15	planning for that military withdrawal?
16	A Again, just to be clear, we weren't planning the military withdrawal but the
17	outcomes as a result of it. If you were to have asked me at the time, I would've said
18	Brian McKeon had that overarching role, but I know the Secretary and others were keenly
19	aware.
20	Q So it might be helpful for me to clarify, when speaking to the military
21	withdrawal, it's our understanding that there was sort of an interagency coordination
22	given its implications on the U.S. Embassy in Kabul and sort of diplomatic implications as
23	well.
24	A Yeah. So Brian McKeon, I think, would've been the person ultimately
25	coordinating that for us.

1	Q And who were the senior leaders at the Department most involved in
2	matters relating to the withdrawal, in addition to
3	A So Brian McKeon, Deputy Secretary for Management Resources; Acting
4	Under Secretary Carol Perez, Under Secretary for Management. I would say Carlos
5	Matus, who was the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary he had another title at
6	DS effectively, the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diplomatic Security, myself
7	and Mark Evans for SCA.
8	_ Just remember, asked about the withdrawal, which is MIL.
9	Ambassador Thompson. Okay. So, if we're talking about, like, planning for the
10	withdrawal, we didn't have a role in that. But, if we're talking about planning for the
11	aftermath of a withdrawal
12	BY :
13	Q Correct.
14	A Sorry.
15	then that's who I'm listing now, those people.
16	Q And the implications of that withdrawal or sort of how we understood it, so
17	not necessarily how the military is going to conduct their withdrawal but what that would
18	mean for the State Department and the Department's equities in that decision.
19	A Right. Yeah, yeah.
20	Q Was there a lead Bureau responsible for the Afghanistan withdrawal? We
21	understand that DMR McKeon took sort of a leadership role, but which Bureau within the
22	Department was sort of leading those efforts?
23	A Again, these efforts at maintaining a diplomatic presence, I would I mean,
24	would say SCA had a key role in that, but it was very much in conjunction with Diplomatic
25	Security, Overseas Building Operations, and the M family.

1	Q	So, in terms of Diplomatic Security, which officials, in addition to the PDAS
2	that you just	t mentioned, were involved?
3	Α	Gentry Smith, the Assistant Secretary, again, if we're talking about the
4	Biden-era pe	eriod. Yeah, it was Gentry and Carlos were who I dealt with.
5	Q	And, to the best of your recollection, when did they get involved?
6	Α	I mean, I don't remember Carlos not being involved, so they may
7	have well,	Gentry, obviously when he came on board, whenever that was in winter,
8	spring of '21	. Carlos had been involved from the get-go as far as I know.
9	Q	Can you please speak to the interagency process relating to the planning for
10	the withdray	wal and its aftermath?
11	Α	So I wasn't part of an interagency process. I think Mark Evans may have
12	played a role	e for us in that realm, and then there were, of course, you know, deputies
13	meetings an	d things of that nature that Brian was probably involved in.
14	But,	you know, we would've, on any interagency kind of group that was put
15	together, we	e would've had a representative to look after our interests and discuss, you
16	know, State	Department equities in that.
17	Q	Are you aware how the interagency process was organized?
18	Α	I mean, I recall there being an interagency group that was put together.
19	Again, I don'	t think I sat on it very regularly or if I did at all. But Mark and DMR would
20	certainly hav	ve that information.
21	Q	Would Mark provide you briefings on what took place in those meetings?
22	Α	Yeah. I mean, as part of our normal catch-ups, you know, about what's
23	going on and	d what issues are coming up, and if they needed anything, you know, to be
24	discussed.	I just don't remember a regular schedule of those things that you know, in
25	the same wa	ay as my interactions with Ross and others.

1	Q Who were the key military figures working with the Department on matters	
2	relating to the Afghanistan withdrawal and its aftermath?	
3	A Yeah. I didn't have a lot of visibility on that. I mean, Scott Miller was	
4	obviously in charge of the forces in Kabul, and I know that's who the Embassy was dealing	
5	with primarily.	
6	I'm trying to remember other you know, as things proceeded in the summer of	
7	'21 spring and summer of '21, Admiral Franchetti, I know, was in a number of the	
8	meetings. Shoot. There was a colonel whose name I just can't remember, but that	
9	was that was sort of later in the process.	
10	Q Who was your main point of contact at the Department of Defense?	
11	A I would probably have reached out typically to Admiral Franchetti if there	
12	were any issues that I needed to raise with them.	
13	Q And what were the White House and the National Security Council's role in	
14	the Afghanistan withdrawal and its aftermath?	
15	A My sense is they were very much in the coordinating role on it. I really was	
16	not as much part of that process until the evacuation itself started taking place when I did	
17	sit in certain deputies meetings that were taking place at the time just because so much	
18	was happening in realtime.	
19	Q And, given this interagency process and the White House and NSC's role, did	
20	the State Department receive direction from the White House on Afghanistan? More	
21	specifically, was it the White House making the decisions, or was it the State Department	
22	making the decisions?	
23	A I mean, for anything related to the withdrawal, I think it would've been the	
24	White House, ultimately, making the decisions. What that process looked like there and	
25	how it was staffed and structured, I couldn't tell you.	

1	But, you know, as it pertained to our footprint and our presence in Afghanistan,		
2	you know, I think we had the green light to continue our planning to make that happen.		
3	But, you know, we, as a State Department, I don't think, were making any		
4	decisions related to the withdrawal, any timing issues, anything like that.		
5	Q How about engagement with the Afghan Government, was that at the		
6	direction or guidance of the White House, or does the State Department exercise its own		
7	independent role in that?		
8	A I'd say all of the above. I mean, there were certainly instances where I'm		
9	sure Ross reached out at the direction of, you know, the White House and others on		
10	issues. And then there were just normal diplomatic interactions that were taking place		
11	on a regular basis.		
12	Q Who were the key people at the White House and the NSC on matters		
13	relating to Afghanistan at that point in time?		
14	. I would note this is confined to who you dealt with		
15	<u>.</u> Correct.		
16	you know, for		
17	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Who I would've talked to?		
18	<u>.</u> Yeah.		
19	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> So Sumona Guha, who was the senior director for		
20	South Asia. Is it Eric Green who did Central Asia over there? And then I was		
21	occasionally, in the August 2021 period, in video conferences that included Jon Finer and		
22	Liz Sherwood-Randall.		
23	BY :		
24	Q Did you or others in SCA ever engage directly		
25	A Oh, I'm sorry.		

1	Q No, please, go anead.		
2	A There was another gentleman who I dealt with once or twice named Russ		
3	Travers. I can't remember what role he had, but he was kind of keenly interested in		
4	trying to get the SIV process up and going again.		
5	Q Thank you.		
6	Did you or others in SCA ever engage directly with the Taliban?		
7	A No. That would've been Zal, Ambassador Khalilzad, and Molly's territory.		
8	Q Did SCA support SRAR in its engagements with the Taliban?		
9	A Broadly, yes. I mean, if they needed something from us, if we our		
10	executive office, you know, planned their travel, helped with all that type of thing, for		
11	sure. And, if there was ways we could be supportive on policy fronts, we would do that		
12	Q When you took over as Principal Assistant Deputy Secretary, or PDAS, in the		
13	prior administration, in the Trump administration, where did things stand with respect t		
14	the potential withdrawal from Afghanistan?		
15	A So, at the point I took over, I believe the decision had already been made fo		
16	withdrawal, and there had already been a reduction of forces to some level. I think it		
17	was down to about I better not state. I can't remember off the top of my head.		
18	I think by the time the Biden administration came in, we had about 4,500 in place		
19	and so that you know, that process had begun. You know, I'll say it was the so the		
20	military had their directions through their chain of command as we understood it.		
21	Sometimes it was a little bit I'm not trying to be pejorative here or		
22	anything just confusing because the President would tweet things that we then had to		
23	run down.		
24	. Which President?		
25	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Trump. So, you know, so that's why I just say there		

1	was there was sometimes some question about, was this policy of something political.
2	But, you know, that never really touched us too much. We just simply followed
3	up through the chain and got instructions whichever direction it would go.
4	. And what was the status of negotiations with the
5	Afghan Government and the Taliban at the time?
6	. And I'm sorry to interrupt. Each time like when if you could try
7	to place the date. I mean, "that time," so I'm not sure what "that time" means.
8	BY :
9	Q Under the prior we're looking right now at the prior administration. So
10	to the extent you have
11	A The Trump administration, right?
12	Q Correct.
13	and when you were serving as PDAS. So, to the extent that you can narrow it
14	down to a specific timeframe, that would be wonderful.
15	<u>.</u> Thanks.
16	Ambassador Thompson. So, just to clarify, I wasn't ever PDAS until after this all.
17	I started said as Acting Assistant Secretary
18	BY :
19	Q Okay.
20	A and was in that role through the whole run-up to the evacuation, the
21	aftermath, and then until October '21
22	Q So thank you for that clarification.
23	A just for clarity.
24	Q That's helpful.
25	A That's fine.

1	I'm sorry, what was the question?
2	Q So what was the status so what was the status of negotiations
3	A Oh.
4	Q with the Afghan Government and the Taliban?
5	A I would say active. I mean, Ambassador Khalilzad, Molly, were in Doha
6	pretty regularly. There was a lot of travel to and from Kabul to, you know, discuss wha
7	was going on.
8	I know Ross was engaged when Zal came through and was pushing the
9	government for, you know, working out a negotiated settlement along the lines of what
LO	the Doha Agreement called for.
l1	Q And what planning had been done by the State Department relating to a
L2	potential military withdrawal from Afghanistan?
L3	. Again, you need to fix a date on these questions because it could
L4	be anytime.
L5	_ So from
L6	. He was in that job for over a year.
L7	BY :
L8	Q So, in your role as Acting Assistant Secretary under the Trump
19	administration, what planning had been done relating to a potential military withdrawa
20	from Afghanistan?
21	A So, again, the effort that we were looking at the military withdrawal was
22	running on a military DOD timetable we were looking at the question of, what would
23	take to operate in a post-military Kabul environment?
24	And so, at that point, under the Trump administration, and let's say kind of
25	October, November timeframe, 2020, at that point, we were looking at this question of:

1	Okay, if you had to draw down the Embassy, go to the airport, protect a certain group
2	there, you know, how would those pieces work, what resources would you need? How
3	would you put that together?
4	And then I know one of the ultimate end steps that was being considered was, and
5	if you had to take everybody out, what would be involved in that. But that was, I would
6	say, very focused on the question of the Embassy and American citizens at that point.
7	Q Can you please describe the, quote, prudent planning process for the
8	withdrawal under the Trump administration?
9	A Well, again, it was largely driven by Embassy Kabul and their efforts to
LO	develop these drawdown scenarios which they then presented to the interagency
l1	through or, sorry, I shouldn't say "interagency" probably. I should I think there was
12	probably an interagency team that worked on them in Kabul, but they would've
L3	presented to the State Department leadership through our process in Washington for
L4	clarity and for, you know, approval.
L5	Q Can you please explain what the alpha, beta, gamma, and omega planning
16	options were?
L7	A Yeah, I can't really. I mean, I remember there were four options laid out.
18	They were progressively done, but it would be irresponsible of me to try to review them
19	from the top of my head.
20	Q Okay. I'll share what our understanding of these options were, and if you
21	can just elaborate or confirm or clarify to the extent it's correct or incorrect.
22	So our understanding of the alpha option is that the U.S. carries out most current
23	missions at the roughly existing size with the addition of approximately 150 annex
24	personnel moving under chief of mission authority and 150 contractors.

Can you please elaborate on this? Or, to the extent you don't recall, that's fine

1 as well. 2 You know, I honestly don't recall. Again, I would state very broadly that it Α started with kind of business as usual, going down to, things are really bad, and we have 3 4 to get out. 5 Q Okay. I'd be hesitant, without being able to go back and see the other stuff, to 6 Α characterize numbers and everything else. 7 8 Q Entirely fair. So let's just move on sort of to the worst option, which would 9 be the omega, based on our understanding -- and please let us know if this is a fair 10 capturing of this -- withdrawing and conducting Embassy operations from another post in D.C. 11 Is that what you recall the omega option being? 12 13 Α I recall definitely the withdrawal piece -- or the evacuation piece. I don't remember thinking about it from another post, but, you know, that might've been 14 discussed. 15 Q Do you recall what option SCA was supportive of? 16 Α Well, these were --17 Q Of these options? 18 19 Α But these options were dependent on the scenario on the ground. I mean, 20 the idea was, you know, changing circumstances would lead to engaging different ones of 21 these -- these mechanisms, I believe. So it's my understanding that, you know, if President Trump had won the 22 Q 23 election at the time, he'd announce a May 2021 withdrawal, is that correct --Α 24 Right.

25

Q

-- of the U.S. Military?

1	So, at that point in time, which it's my understanding, it sounds like, are we
2	speaking about the October 2020 timeframe onward?
3	A Thereabouts, yeah, yeah.
4	Q So what option did SCA believe to be most likely?
5	A Oh, I don't remember us having a, this is the most likely option, or, the least
6	likely option. It was very dependent on what would happen with the circumstances on
7	the ground, where things went with negotiations, what the security footprint would look
8	like at the time.
9	Yeah, I don't I don't recall speculating as to, say, the probability of one over the
LO	other. We might've. I just don't remember that.
L1	Q What was SCA's position on whether the U.S. should maintain its Embassy in
L2	Afghanistan following the military's withdrawal?
13	A I'm sorry, whose which position?
L4	Q SCA's position on whether the U.S. should and could maintain its Embassy in
15	Afghanistan following the military withdrawal.
16	A Our planning and policy was that we would maintain so, again, let me
L7	clarify the timing. If we're talking in the Trump administration, it was operating within
L8	the framework of these particular options papers that were put together, so that we
19	would probably continue some type of engagement, conditions on the ground allowing.
20	So we were supportive, I guess you would say.
21	Q How did the Bureau of Diplomatic Security characterize the level of risk that
22	would result for maintaining Embassy operations in the absence of a military presence?
23	A I don't remember how they characterized it specifically, but I know they
24	outlined and helped us, you know, formulate an idea of what would be needed in what

would certainly be a much more difficult security situation without the U.S. Military in

1	place.
2	Q Do you recall DS raising concern about the security situation in Afghanistan
3	starting in the spring or summer of 2020?
4	A Well, spring of 2020, I wasn't there yet, so I don't I don't know about that.
5	I don't remember anybody raising a concern, saying, you know, we can't stay.
6	The question was, what would the conditions be, and what would need to be
7	done to mitigate the risks that were there. And DS was certainly vocal about, you know
8	what the risks were and what would be needed.
9	Q And what was your reaction to DS' security assessment?
10	A I mean, it seemed I mean, it's a little hard to say, because I don't
11	remember getting one specific assessment from them. I would just say we worked well
12	with DS to come to solutions that made sense at the time for what we were thinking the
13	scenario could be.
14	Q Do you recall DS raising concerns about the significant reduction of security
15	capabilities once U.S. troops withdrew?
16	A About DS raising concerns about the reduction?
17	Q Correct. Specifically about what the reduction of security capabilities
18	would mean and whether the Embassy could actually replicate the functions that the
19	U.S. Military performed.
20	A I don't I don't remember them questioning whether it could happen. I
21	remember discussions about what it would take to mitigate.
22	Q Were there disagreements between
23	A I can't say they didn't. I just I don't remember having, say, deep
24	discussions about
25	Q Of course.

1	Α	this can't be done.
2	Q	And we would only ask you to testify to what you recall and what you
3	А	Right.
4	Q	personally experienced.
5	Wer	e there disagreements between SCA and DS on the level of risk in maintaining
6	a diplomati	c presence in Afghanistan without military support?
7	Α	I don't recall anything that was I can't speak to what might've taken place
8	at a more w	orking level, but I don't recall any, you know, discussions between me and
9	Carlos or m	e and now I can't think of who the Acting Assistant Secretary for DS was at
10	the time, bu	ut
11		_ Todd Brown?
12	Amb	passador <u>Thompson.</u> Oh, Todd, right. Todd was very helpful in terms of
13	thinking thr	ough these issues.
14		BY :
15	Q	So is it fair to say you were never privy to any of those disagreements?
16	Α	I don't recall
17	Q	if they existed?
18	Α	I don't recall any kind of any, you know, this can't be done, period,
19	understater	ment, type of discussions.
20		BY :
21	Q	But were there situations in which DS was pushing on the side of concerns
22	regarding se	ecurity and that maintaining an Embassy or certain concepts of the Embassy
23	would be in	nprudent, whereas SCA was pushing for a more expansive diplomatic presence
24	or for main	taining the Embassy itself?

Again, there probably were discussions about, you know, what levels of risk

25

Α

1	we could, you know, we could reasonably take and what would be needed to mitigate
2	them. I just don't remember having a discussion that was, like, we want to do this, and
3	DS was saying that's too aggressive.
4	You know, our position was we should try to maintain a diplomatic presence as
5	long as it was feasible and the security conditions allowed it and that we could provide
6	the security that was needed. But we certainly were not pushing it at the, you know,
7	potential expense of our people and their security.
8	So DS was again, I would characterize them as a key partner in trying to figure
9	out a way forward.
LO	BY :
l1	Q Do you recall DS raising alarms or concern that the security conditions may
L2	not allow for it?
L3	A I I don't recall anything specific, but I'm sure that that's their job, right? If
L4	they had concerns that the security condition wouldn't allow for it, then but I don't
15	recall a specific there were DS reports, right, that looked at the possibility of certain
16	scenarios and raised questions about what the security situation post-withdrawal would
L7	look like.
18	But I don't I don't recall those being definitive so you can't, you know, we can't
19	mitigate we can't find other ways to protect our people.
20	Q Was SCA involved in the preparation of memos for senior Department
21	leaders such as the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, DMR counselor, and others on
22	Afghanistan? I imagine I know the answer to this.
23	A Broadly speaking for that entire period, absolutely, yes.

And would you generally have reviewed these memos pertaining to your

areas of responsibility before they went to senior leaders?

24

25

Q

1	Α	Anything that would've come through SCA going to a seventh floor principal,
2	almost certa	ainly either I would've reviewed or Massinga if I wasn't available, so, yeah,
3	pretty much	anything that went up, we would've probably seen.
4	Q	Did SCA ever remove or stop language provided by other Bureaus in those
5	memos rela	ting to the withdrawal that expressed concern about the security situation or
6	level of risk	?
7	Α	Not to my knowledge. I can't speak to what might've taken place in the
8	clearance p	rocess, as anyone who's seen that, you know, knows it's a lot of back and forth
9	with a lot of	f discussion about things. So, you know, what happened at the working
10	level, I'm no	ot sure. I don't recall changing language in anything.
11	Q	Can you definitively state that this did not occur?
12	Α	I cannot.
13	Q	Did the Department ever consider formally requesting that DOD provide a
14	stay-behind	force?
15	Α	So now just to get into timing questions again, I want to say, in the new
16	administrat	ion, the Biden administration, there was some discussion then about, you
17	know, what	could be possible, like, were there some residual pieces of the military
18	engagemen	t that could stay for protection.
19	And	there was a decision, I think, to leave back a couple hundred or a few
20	hundred.	I don't remember the firm number off the top of my head.
21	And	I know that well, I shouldn't say I know I had heard that either
22	Ambassado	r Khalilzad or Molly had sort of talked to the Taliban about what an Embassy
23	presence lo	oks like and, you know, that we have sometimes we have military
24	component	s to those and to sort of help them understand that a military, say,
25	leave-behin	d that is related to Embassy security is not, you know, not something that

2	I don't know if they ever specifically agreed to anything or, you know, signed off
3	on anything because no agreement was ever formed.
4	Q Can you speak just as to timing, so within a new administration, do you
5	recall which sort of months that may have that was considered?
6	A I knew you were going to ask me that. I don't remember exactly. I'd
7	roughly put it at early early, late spring of '21, I think. But that's a very vague
8	recollection.
9	Q And did SCA oppose that request? And by "that request," I mean the
10	stay-behind force, the residual force you just mentioned?
11	A No. No, I think we were quite happy with the idea that if I recall
12	correctly.
13	Q So it's your recollection that SCA supported that request?
14	A I believe so. If we're talking about the same I mean, if what we're talking
15	about is this small footprint of a few hundred people that would provide some additional
16	security support at the Embassy there.
17	_ Did you ever learn whether the Taliban ever agreed to the idea of
18	the U.S. Military leaving behind a residual force to protect the Embassy?
19	Ambassador Thompson. I don't remember having knowledge of any kind of
20	decision they had made or whether you know, how it had even been run up their,
21	whatever the Taliban chain of command, so to speak, was.
22	I just remember hearing that Ambassador Khalilzad or Molly may have sort of to
23	educate them and explain to them what these things look like as a way of sort of
24	softening them to the idea.
25	But I don't know if they went further with that off the I just can't remember if

should be viewed as threatening to them.

1	they did.
2	. Does it seem like the sort of thing that you would remember if
3	you had learned that the Taliban had agreed to allow residual U.S. Military presence to
4	protect the Embassy and the airport?
5	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> I'm really hesitant to characterize it that way because
6	as I've sort of thought about everything from that era for this discussion, you know, there
7	was a lot going on, and I just I just don't remember in that particular case. So I'm not
8	going to characterize it as something that I think I would or wouldn't remember.
9	<u>∸</u>
10	Q So it's our understanding, just in the course of our investigation and the
11	material that we received, and then please feel free to correct us if this understanding
12	is wrong that there were disagreements between offices within the Department,
13	including DS, SRAR, and SCA on this issue.
14	A Of the leave-behind force?
15	Q Correct.
16	Do you recall your respective position in that disagreement?
17	A I really don't remember this disagreement to be very, very honest with you.
18	I you know, I have a recollection of thinking, oh, that could be helpful, given what we're
19	trying to do and maintain.
20	The concern was always, you know, what would the Taliban interpret that as, and
21	so, you know, I don't know that I put a whole lot of stock in it until, you know, we knew
22	how that was all going to work out.
23	But of course at that point there were still discussions and negotiations going on
24	with regard to what an eventual government in Afghanistan might look like.

[10:33 a.m.]	
	BY :
Q	Is it fair to say that there was deference given to the Taliban's opinion and
sentiments	on this request?
А	I wouldn't say there was deference given to it. I think how they viewed it
or responde	ed to it would be an issue for what the threat level would be. But, no, I
wouldn't ch	aracterize it as them having like a veto over our thinking or planning or
anything lik	e that.
Q	You were serving in the leadership role under the Trump administration and
then ultima	tely the Biden administration.
How	was the issue of a potential military withdrawal from Afghanistan
approached	in the Presidential transition to the Biden administration?
Α	Well, so there was a point ultimately where kind of a transition team was
appointed t	o the State Department that I think consisted of Derek Chollet, Sumona Guha,
Tom Sulliva	n, and might have been one another person, and that we did some briefings
for them.	First, it was very broad, you know, SCA writ large. I think they got some
additional b	riefings on where things stood. Certainly, they would have been briefed by
SRAR on the	eir efforts, and I think that's what began the process of thinking about what
President Bi	iden's options would be as he considered what he wanted to do.
Q	Did SCA brief incoming Secretary of State Blinken on the potential
withdrawal	and its ramifications?
Α	I don't remember briefing Secretary Blinken or at that time
Secretary-d	esignate Blinken. I remember talking with Derek, Tom, and Sumona about
	Q sentiments A or responde wouldn't ch anything lik Q then ultima How approached A appointed t Tom Sulliva for them. additional b SRAR on the President B Q withdrawal A

SCA issues writ large that would have included a component on, you know: Here's

_	where we are with Arghanistan and some of the things that we in need to be thinking	
2	about as we go forward.	
3	Q And when did you communicate as to here's where we are on Afghanistan to	
4	those individuals?	
5	A Well, there had been a decision for withdrawal that we were planning	
6	towards an ability to stay behind, but we were probably keen to know what direction the	
7	new administration would want to take things as they considered their options.	
8	Q So, in providing these briefings, was it your understanding that the new	
9	administration was going to make a decision on these options?	
10	A I say it was my understanding only in the sense that it seemed like that's	
11	what had to happen, right?	
12	Q And what was your impression why Ambassador Khalilzad was retained	
13	SRAR by the new administration? By "the new administration," I mean the Biden	
14	administration?	
15	A So I had no discussions with anybody about this. I can't tell you for sure,	
16	but what I've seen, you know, subsequently is indications that, you know, his knowledge,	
17	his experience, and the fact that he was sort of on the ground negotiating with the	
18	Taliban, it seemed like a prudent step. But I don't have firsthand knowledge on how	
19	that decision was made. Tom West joined probably late January or February, if I	
20	remember correctly, and became another member of the team. He came in with the	
21	new administration.	
22	Q Was Ambassador Khalilzad a trusted actor in the Department?	
23	A I mean, he was the Special Representative. I certainly viewed him as	
24	critical to what we were trying to do. Look, there's lots of people that will talk about Zal	
25	I'm not going to be one of them.	

1	Q That's fair.	
2	. Ambassador Thompson, I'd like to enter exhibit 1 into the	
3	record.	
4	[Thompson Exhibit No. 1	
5	Was marked for identification.]	
6	BY :	
7	Q So this is a statement by NSC spokesperson, Emily Horne, on National	
8	Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's call with National Security Advisor Hamdullah Mohib of	
9	Afghanistan. This is dated January 22, 2021. And, pursuant to the statement, which	
10	please feel free to take in a moment read, it's our understanding that National Security	
11	Advisor Jake Sullivan informed his Afghan counterpart Hamdullah Mohib that the U.S.	
12	would review the February 2020 U.S. Taliban Agreement, i.e. the Doha agreement,	
13	including to assess whether the Taliban was living up to its commitments.	
14	Is it correct the interagency policy review commenced after this?	
15	A To the best of my knowledge, yeah. There was, you know, an effort to look	
16	at the question and for the new administration to have an opportunity to understand,	
17	you know, what was in train and what direction they wanted to go.	
18	Q And how long did this policy review last?	
19	A I mean, it would have gone until the President made his decision, which I	
20	can't remember the date off the top of my head.	
21	Q So am I correct in understanding that the purpose of this review was to	
22	assist the President in making his decision on Afghanistan and, more broadly, the	
23	withdrawal?	
24	A That's an assumption on my part, but yeah.	
25	. So we have some more questions, but given that we're nearing	

- our time, I'll just end it here and stop the clock and go off the record.
- 2 Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Okay.
- 3 [Recess.]

1	
2	[10:45 a.m.]
3	EXAMINATION
4	BY :
5	Q Thank you so much for joining us today, Ambassador. My name is
6	. I also have some colleagues who will be asking questions on behalf of the
7	minority as well.
8	We'd like to pivot back to your experience before delving into some policy issues.
9	With that said, have you ever served in a crisis or conflict zone?
10	A In a zone? No.
11	Q Have you ever served in a crisis?
12	A Well, I mean, was the director of the State Department's crisis management
13	staff and Deputy Director of the Operations Center. I ran the Afghanistan task force.
14	So I've done a lot on the Washington side for crisis management.
15	Q Okay.
16	A And then, depending on how we define this, I was in Sri Lanka for the
17	aftermath of the tsunami 2004, 2005. You know, I've been in and out of countries
18	where there have been certain degrees of civil unrest, but I have not served at what we
19	call a danger pay post, anything like that.
20	Q Okay. So would it therefore follow, outside of Afghanistan, you also have
21	not served in a NEO; is that correct?
22	A I've helped prepare and plan for NEOs on the Washington side. I've not
23	participated in one overseas.
24	Q Are there other NEOs outside of Afghanistan that you've helped prepare for
25	A Well, yeah. During my time with CMS. I mean. I presume there were a

1	couple that	we prepared for. I don't remember if we ever actually ever had to pull the
2	trigger to ge	et to a full blown NEO. Like I said previously, our desire is always to move
3	people befo	ore things get to the point that you would need the military.
4		<u>.</u> .
5		BY :
6	Q	Again, thank you for being here today. And so, just to ask more specifically
7	have you ev	ver participated in crisis-related task force at State?
8	А	I mean, yeah. I've run them during my time at CMS and Ops. I mean,
9	post 911, w	e were very, very engaged in the efforts to deal with the aftermath of the
10	attacks on t	he U.S., things of that nature.
11	Q	And I just wanted to expand a bit more on your work in the operations
12	center. Ju	st for the record, what is the operations center?
13	Α	So the operations center is the State Department's 24-hour, 7-day a week,
14	you know, r	monitoring the world to keep the Secretary and other principals of the
15	Departmen	t apprised of what's happening and to also be an initial point of contact for al
16	our embass	ies should they be facing some type of dangerous issue or something. We
17	can, Ops ca	n, sort of get the ball rolling on Washington support for that.
18	Q	And how many employees are there overall in the Ops Center?
19	Α	At the time I was there, you know, better than a decade ago, I think we had
20	about 60 pe	eople over all.
21	Q	And then
22	А	And they work on rotating shifts 24 hours a day.
23	Q	Thank you. And, beyond that, I mean, how is it organized, and how did the
24	role that yo	u held fit into that organization?

Well, again, I'm going to speak to what was in place years ago. I think it's

25

Α

morphed somewhat, but I'm not kind of an expert on its current structure. But, at the time I was working there, Ops was the Watch, the 24, you know, We Watch the World group, and then the CMS team, which was always working to put in place best practices

and SOPs for if we needed to stand up a task force to deal with a crisis situation.

So I have been, in the course of my career, I have been a Watch stander much earlier in my career, working the 24/7 shifts. I've been then the director of the crisis management staff, and I spent a year as the Deputy Director of the Watch -- deputy director of the Ops center for the Watch. There's a director that oversees the whole position or the whole operation.

Q And, again, just for the record, when exactly did you serve in the Ops center?

A First time would have been 1999 to 2000. And then the second time would have been, let's see, 2008 to 2009 as the director of crisis management staff. And then must be 2009 to 2010 -- no, sorry. It must be 2007 to 2008 as crisis management staff director, and then 2008 to 2009 as deputy director for the Watch.

Q And I just want to dive a little bit more deeply into your duties as crisis management director. So how did you come into the role originally?

A I was working -- I was doing kind of an unusual assignment, running the Executive Secretary -- or I was the Deputy Director in the Executive Secretary's Information Resource Management Shop. John Bass was the Director of the Operations Center at the time, and I don't remember what happened, but whoever was the Director for CMS moved onto another assignment or something. There was an opening, and he asked me to come in and takeover in that role.

Q What do you understand the responsibilities to be when you took on the role?

A What did I understand them to be?

Q Yes.

A So the crisis management staff is all about helping bureaus prepare to deal with task force or monitoring groups that need to be stood up at a time of crisis. So it was maintaining relationships with the bureaus to help them prepare for exercises. If a task force needed to be stood up, we would sort of have staff stay with them and help them understand what the role of a task force is, what needed to be done, how to get things up to best have information flow in and be coordinated for the broader Department.

We also ran something at the time -- I don't know if it still happens -- called the Washington Liaison Group. So let's say there was a crisis in Namibia -- well, that's not a good example -- but Congo, then, you know, we would call together all of the agencies and bureaus that had issues going on in Congo to help make sure that all interests were sort of considered and that we knew what our footprint looked like on the ground there.

Q Yup. And so, again, just unpacking this in a little more detail, did you develop standing crisis management guidance for the Department?

A Yeah. I mean, from a Department standpoint, right, the crisis management guidance is very focused on the emergency action plans at post, and posts themselves prepare those. I think we -- if I remember correctly, we may have cleared on those or have been part of a clearance process at one point. And then, from a domestic standpoint, we were really about helping bureaus, you know, run task forces and deal with the situation. The situation is, though, that, of course, there is no one size fits all crisis. Everything's different. So you have to have a certain degree of flexibility built in.

Q Yeah. And I guess it would be useful if you could just expand a bit on the importance of that fluidity, right, and how, I guess, did you make sure that the plans that

you had prepared in advance were able to sort of adapt to whatever was happening on the ground?

A Yeah. Well, I mean, first and foremost, you tried to have as much structure in place as you could to collect information and make sure that information is being disseminated to people that could be helpful with resources, decisions, whatever was needed on the ground.

A lot of it was also designed -- and this sort of became -- you know, over time this is something that's become more important in spades, is to take pressures off of the post that's dealing with it so they're not being inundated with requests from 27 different agencies and entities of the U.S. Government. Everything can flow through, the task force can be organized and put out, which then helps post deal with the fluidity of the situation on the ground and the task force, right, staying abreast of that advise people that are wanting to check on things, that's no longer an issue, or we've already checked those people are safe, you know whatever it might be.

Q So, just as a really rough estimate, I mean, how many of these plans did you develop or clear, you know, when you were in that role just as a rough ballpark?

A I don't know. I mean, in the time that I was director, I want to say we ran about 15 or 20 task forces for different things. And these can run the gamut from a hurricane about to hit one of the countries in the Caribbean to a coup situation to just general unrest against people on the ground. So we would have reviewed whatever EAPs came into us at the time. But, as far as specific task forces that we stood up, gosh, I want to say 15 or 20 the year I was doing that job.

- Q But it would be fair to say that it was many plans and task forces?
- A Yeah. Day in and day out, that's what we did. Yeah.
- 25 Q So, taking the totality of those two positions that we have discussed, would

- 1 you characterize yourself as an expert in crisis management?
- A I hesitate to say, after doing one year of that, that you're expert. I'm
- familiar generally with it. And then, like I said, things have progressed over time with
- 4 technology and other structures that the way Ops is setup today may not look exactly like
- 5 it did then. But I'm broadly familiar with how the Department responds to crisis and
- 6 what the priorities are in a crisis.
- 7 Q So, looking at the sort of totality of all the posts that you've held at the State
- 8 Department, though, I was hoping we could go to a bit more detail about your specific
- 9 experience leading U.S. Embassy personnel during complex crises or just State
- 10 Department personnel.
- You engaged in interagency planning and policy formation?
- 12 A Yes.
- 13 Q Developed contingency plans?
- 14 A Yes.
- 15 Q Led or convened emergency action committees at post?
- 16 A Yes.
- 17 Q Analyzed intelligence relevant to a specific role?
- 18 A Yes.
- 19 Q Developed and made policy recommendations for Department or
- administration leadership in Washington?
- 21 A Yes.
- 22 Q Conducted security drills and exercises with Embassy staff?
- 23 A Yes.
- 24 Q And oversaw a partial or full drawdown of Embassy staff?
- 25 A Yeah. COVID definitely. Yeah. Yeah.

1		<u>.</u> Thank you.
2		BY :
3	Q	All right. I'd be remiss to not mention that having engaged in all of these
4	activities an	d also having the most senior role within the Crisis Management Section leads
5	me to belie	ve you are probably an expert or very, very seasoned in terms of dealing with
6	complex cri	ses?
7	А	Yeah. I mean, I've dealt with the issue a number of times over the course
8	of a career.	But I would say, you know, they're in blocks, right? I've not spent an
9	entire career building this out like some people have, who stay and do it day in and day	
10	out.	
11	Q	Fair enough. And, then, can you also clarify how many years were spent
12	working wit	hin operations writ large? Would it have been two within operations and
13	then one sp	ecifically?
14	Α	3 years total, right?
15	Q	3 years total?
16	Α	So a year as a Watch stander early in my career. A year as Director of CMS,
17	and then a	year as Deputy Director for the Watch.
18	Q	And then 3 years a subset of your overall service with the State Department.
19	How many	years in total have you worked for the Department of State?
20	А	30 years.
21	Q	Have you ever won any awards for your service, participation in the State
22	Departmen	t?
23	Α	Yes.
24	Q	Could you identify those for the record?
25		_ This is everyone's favorite part.

1	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Is it sufficient to simply say I've been awarded the		
2	distinguished honor award, several superior honor awards, several meritorious honor		
3	awards, a couple of Franklin Awards. And I think that about captures it.		
4	BY ::		
5	Q About how many awards in total have you received from the Department?		
6	A Probably 10 to 12.		
7	Q Fair enough.		
8	BY :		
9	Q Could you tell us more about the distinguished honor award you mentioned?		
10	Is that the highest level award you've received?		
11	A Yeah. That was actually for the work on the task force with Afghanistan.		
12	It was interesting, I didn't know I was receiving it when Under Secretary Nuland visited		
13	Nepal, she presented me with that.		
14	Q And, for context, approximately how many distinguished honor awards are		
15	you aware of that the Department grants in a given year?		
16	A Oh, I don't have any information on that. I don't know.		
17	Q But it is the highest level that you've received?		
18	A That I've received. I don't think it's the highest level in the Department. I		
19	think there's one or two above that, but it's the highest I received. Yeah.		
20	BY ::		
21	Q This is a perfect segue. We haven't discussed yet the task force. We'd		
22	really like to dig into that. Can you describe for the record what the Afghanistan task		
23	force was?		
24	A So, yeah. It was complex, that's for sure. So it sort of started with an		
25	effort to build out our SIV processing capability. When we brought Tracey Jacobson on		

- board, and she was asked to sort of lead an effort to cycle up and get more SIVs
- 2 processed in the lead up to the withdrawal, the ultimate withdrawal of U.S. Forces.
- 3 Q And do you recall the time period in which the task force was stood up?
- 4 A June -- maybe June, July of 2021, I think.
- 5 Q Okay.

A And so, at that point, Tracey came in, had a team of people that was focused on trying to streamline the SIV process even further. We'd done a lot of work on that prior to standing her group up, but we thought having a dedicated interagency group would move things forward on that much faster, and they did in a fairly short order. I think they were able to get about a thousand SIVs cleared and ready to go.

They were continuing that role up and until the fall of Kabul, August 14th of 2021, at which point Carol Perez, the Acting Under Secretary for Management requested that I come in and serve as the director of what would become the Afghanistan task force but ultimately was many different kind of entities, including the operations at the Dulles Airport for welcoming Afghans in, the efforts to identify and work with, you know, special charters groups that were taking kind of their known Afghan entities trying to get them out to safety, our overarching efforts at the evacuation itself in Kabul.

I feel like there were one or two other functions that we covered on that. But, you know, broadly speaking, it was overseeing the whole operation to shut down our efforts at Kabul, do a full-scale evacuation. And what I would -- just to be careful and clear on definitions, characterize as more of a humanitarian airlift, right? So that's kind of a different function than evacuating our people and American citizens, which is the core function of what we were focused on.

Q Okay. Just so I'm ensuring I understand correctly, so Carol Perez approached you around August 14 to lead the task force?

A Yeah. I mean, basically, you know, August 14 got a call from Ops saying,
you know, the situation in Kabul deteriorated significantly overnight, told me to come in
for a meeting with Carol, the Executive Secretary, [inaudible] and others, DMR and others
in the Department were there. And the desire was to set up a task force that would
kind of coordinate all of these efforts that we could. And then I would say, over time,
that expanded just given the needs on the ground and then the desire to take out
Afghans at risk. That happened as well.

Q Why do you think you were approached to lead the team?

A Well, I mean, traditionally senior leadership from the bureau where a situation's taking place is asked to do that. I think because Carol and I had worked together previously in the executive secretariat, and just people knew I had both the CMS background, the Ops background, and the SCA background that, you know, I was sort of that logical fit.

Q Did you feel qualified to take on such a, as you put, complex task?

A I mean, certainly. You know, I've worked on task forces, and you know, I probably knew the totality of the issues with regard to the efforts we were trying to make to keep a presence in place. What I told the AAR team, the one thing I didn't factor in or know enough about going in was just how big the population of Americans who had someone in Afghanistan they really wanted to focus on was.

And so we were -- you know, we were just inundated with calls, requests, bits of pieces of information about people that we were trying to then collate, sort, and you know, and help wherever we could. But that number was just massive at the end of the day.

Q We'll dig into that a bit later, but I also wanted to ask, so you were approached around August 14. When did you ultimately take the position?

- A Oh, it started that morning. I got called. We went in. We started setting things up.
- Q So it was within, fair to say, 12 hours that you assumed this role and began getting to work?
- 5 A Yeah, if not less. Yeah.

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- 6 Q Okay. And why did you end up taking the role?
- A Just my responsibility, right? I mean, I was the head of the bureau. This
  was something we'd been -- I mean, we'd certainly hoped it wouldn't come to the
  situation that it came to that day, but you know, we had to act and we had to protect our
  people. So I don't know how else to answer it. Duty. Responsibility.
- 11 Q I think that's a very fair answer. And who were the core members of the 12 task force?
  - A Oh, it was huge. I asked Karen Decker, who had been our DCM in Kabul -- I think she was on a detail to U.S. Institute for Peace -- to come in and serve as deputy.

    We were also able to get George Sibley, who was, I think, he was a Diplomat in Residence actually for a year. But he was able to come up on loan. So they sort of served as my deputies, deputy task force directors so that we could keep kind of a 24-hour schedule even for senior leadership.
  - Q Did you get to select them?
- 20 A Yeah. I mean, there was -- I mean, I think I probably told Carol or discussed 21 it with Carol.
- 22 Q What was our basis for selecting these individuals?
  - A Familiarity. I mean, Karen is absolutely one of the critical long-term, you know, memory folks for Afghanistan in the Department. And I knew she would want to be part of, you know, trying to resolve the situation as best we could. George was

- available, and I'd known him previously for work in SCA. I don't remember if he had -- I
- think he might have had some specific Afghanistan experience as well. But, at that
- point, I was really more interested in someone who was a senior person who could, you
- 4 know, collect all the information and make sure that stuff was being coordinated for the
- 5 Secretary and others as they carried out their decisionmaking efforts.
- 6 Q So fair to say they were qualified?
- 7 A Oh, yeah.

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- 8 Q And you trusted them?
- 9 A Completely. Yeah.
- Q Okay. You also mentioned that the task force was huge. Can you quantify that for us? About how many folks were involved? Ballpark number is fine.
  - A At the end of the day, hundreds if not more. I mean, we had -- I mean, just in the task force spaces -- so I should qualify, one, it was just simply a logistical issue, but the operations center itself that usually houses task force was under renovation. So the normal space that we would have typically operated within was not available.
  - So we were put up in different suites all over the building. But, you know, between all the different groups, it was hundreds of people just on the task force. But then when you add folks might have been working out of the Dulles Expo Center, the welcome centers, people out at the bases that Afghans were being welcomed to, you know, it may well have been more.
  - Q Okay. Given these physical constraints, did you still find that communication was possible with all of your reports?
- 23 A Well, I would say that was almost the biggest task that, you know, I had to 24 work on, was how do we keep everybody looped in and informed.
- 25 Q And how did you do that?

- 1 Α Primarily by, you know, figuring out who had the lead for each of these 2 issues, making sure we had a morning and an afternoon standup meeting. You know, email was -- everybody was getting pretty inundated and overrun with emails and things 3 4 like that. So I didn't think that was going to be a terrific and tremendously effective communication tool. So it was a lot about trying to find individuals and talk directly to 5 them. And so calling these groups together twice a day was kind of critical. 6 And how often was the task force working during this period? 7 Q 8 Α Oh, 24/7 from August 14 -- I can't remember what day finally shutdown. 9 probably left after about 5 or 6 weeks after the withdrawal -- or evacuation was 10 completed and the last plane had flown out. And then Jim DeHart took over for me for a few weeks, and then Virginia Palmer took over. And then things sort of morphed into 11 the Care Office, which is now up and running, that is looking after the, you know, those 12 13 that might still be able to get out even after the fact. So, in totality, what was the timeframe of the task force? It was 14 O commenced on the 14 of August, 2021. When did it end or taper off? 15 I probably should have looked this up. I mean, I'm gonna -- it took a while, I 16 think, before people were comfortable sort of declaring that everything had shifted over 17 to Care. Let me tell you, I'm not sure off the top of my head. 18 19 Q Fair to say several months?
- A Let's call it 3 to 4 months probably.
- 21 Q 3 to 4 months?
- 22 A Yeah.
- 23 Q Is that typical of a task force?
- 24 A No. No.
- Q Why do you say that?

A I mean, typically, a task force is up and running for the period of whatever the crisis is and very few last, you know, such a long period as that. Obviously, in my experience, you know, 2 to 4 weeks is a more normal type of situation, at which point you can usually slide it down to like a monitoring group if it's run out of the bureau or something that can be run just by the bureau itself.

Q So, in effect, the task force stayed in its course as long as it was needed, which in your testimony was at least a few months?

A Yeah. Yeah. And no, there was -- there was a continuing commitment, right? The one thing I will say is American citizens and protection of American citizens is always the Department's first and highest priority, but I had never witnessed the Department take the steps that it took to try to identify Americans, you know, figure out where they were, what their situation was, and actually try to convince them to come out. I mean, it sounds funny, most people wouldn't assume that, given the opportunity to leave a crisis, people would refuse. But there were people that had American citizenship that, for whatever their personal reasons were, didn't want to leave.

And so, you know, we made every effort we could to identify who was there, to contact them to let them know what their options were. I think you've already seen there were numerous messages that went out about, you know, starting from before the situation got bad in August advising people to leave. But that's, you know, that's our -- first and foremost, that's what we do. So that was incredible to watch the consular affairs team do what they did on that front, but then also to, you know, expand out and start, you know, working the Afghans at risk and figuring out how to get as many people out as we could I think was a real testament to the work of the team on the ground in Kabul.

Q Thank you for that. How much interaction did you have with the

1	interagency while you were leading the task force?
2	A Two to three times a day. There were videoconferences. Yeah.
3	Q So you attended a majority of those meetings?
4	A Probably.
5	Q And, if not, a representative was there on your behalf; is that correct?
6	A Absolutely. Yeah. I mean, I definitely tried to sit in on any of the deputies
7	committee meetings that Brian McKeon or Wendy Sherman or Tory Nuland. Sorry.
8	For the record, that's Deputy Secretary for Management Resources Brian McKeon,
9	Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, and Undersecretary for Political Affairs Tory
10	Nuland. Undersecretary sorry. Acting Undersecretary Carol Perez was often part of
11	these as were the relevant Assistant Secretaries or senior bureau officials from the State
12	Department side. Then there was you know the whole interagency group from DOD,
13	DHS, intel community, on and on and on.
14	Q It sounds like the communication was constant; is that correct?
15	A Yeah.
16	Q Did you find the communication to be substantive and helpful?
17	A Yes, for the most part, given the fluidity of the situation and what we were
18	trying to accomplish in a really short period of time. I mean, I think it was probably
19	about as good as it could be given that it all stood up kind of, you know, in that moment.
20	Yeah. I don't know how I would have structured it differently.
21	Q Fair enough. How much interaction did you have with folks on the ground
22	in Kabul?
23	A So one of the things as much as they needed is how I would say, is how I
24	would put it. You know, we trusted the team there immensely. They often
25	participated in these interagency videoconferences. Well, I should say when it was

reasonable timewise for them to do that. But, you know, we were sort of in daily touch just to see what did they need; what was the big, you know, factor; did they need decisions out of Washington on anything in particular?

And I would say a big part of the role was trying to figure out how to protect them from lots of people going to them directly, again, going back to what I mentioned previously about the role of a task force. There were just so many requests for help on the part of Americans that knew Afghans through having been part of the Afghanistan process over the last 20 years. So we tried to take as much of that off of them, collate that information, and then provide it to them in a more organized fashion so they weren't just getting onesie and twosie calls all the time.

- Q Was it fair to say that you had a good pulse of what was happening on the ground and that informed your ability to lead the task force in a way that was meaningful?
  - A Yeah, I think so. Yeah.

- Q How much interaction did you have with foreign countries and diplomats?
- A Well, prior to the task force probably more than during the task force. A lot of the coordination with countries was taking place on the ground, you know, as we had allies and friends that needed to move their own people around or get people out, things of that nature. And so my assumption, I should make that very clear, is Ross and John Bass were probably dealing with that a lot on the ground in Kabul for whoever was remaining there.

Prior to the task force, when I was talking earlier about our efforts to decide what would our footprint look like if we were able to stay behind, I dealt quite a bit with partner and allied countries to talk about what their plans were and let them know what we were planning so that they had ideas. Also we had encouraged a lot of them to work

1	with as to establish Moos so that we could assist them on evacuations if that came up.	
2	So that's why we were able to assist so many of them during the evacuation.	
3	Q So these conversations were, in fact, occurring before there was a sudden	
4	deterioration in Kabul?	
5	A Oh, absolutely.	
6	Q Okay.	
7	A I mean, you know, in my like, for example, the trip I took to Kabul in April	
8	of 2021, when we were trying to lay eyes on the ground and finalize some of the planning	
9	for that, included a discussion with likeminded embassies and allies to let them know	
10	what we were doing. We then DMR I'm sorry, Deputy Secretary for Management	
11	Resources, Brian McKeon, convened a group I want to say May, I think, of 2021 to discuss,	
12	you know, where we were, what the situation on the ground was and, you know, to	
13	answer questions and see if they had insights or inputs they wanted to add.	
14	Q Thank you.	
15	BY :	
16	Q So I think that's another perfect segue because I did want to back up, zoom	
17	back out a little bit and talk more broadly about the planning processes that you	
18	witnessed related to Afghanistan. I will apologize at the top if we cover grounds that	
19	has already been covered by the majority, but I just want to make sure we're crystal clear	
20	A No worries.	
21	Q And, in that same spirit of clarity, I know you went through some definitions	
22	with the majority counsel already. I just want to, again, for the purposes of our	
23	questions make sure we're clear on what we're talking about when we say terms like	
24	"evacuation" and "withdrawal."	

So let me go in alphabetical order. I believe you testified previously or you

1	concurred that "evacuation" refers to the removal of American citizens, lawful permanent	
2	residents, S	IVs, and certain other Afghan allies from Afghanistan; is that correct?
3	А	In this particular case, yes.
4	Q	And I believe you testified previously that the evacuation occurred through a
5	noncombat	ant evacuation operation from mid-August to the end of August; correct?
6	А	Right.
7	Q	Would you also consider the civilian lead operation allies refuge that began
8	in July 2021	and the flights that that entailed as part of an evacuation?
9	А	I mean, yeah, for purposes of this discussion. They were concurrent.
10	Simultaneo	us. Yeah.
11	Q	In fact
12	А	But I mean, for that moment in time now those continued after the NEO
13	was finished	d, right? Care continued to take people out whenever they were able to.
14	Q	So my question is: Does your understanding of the U.S. Government's
15	evacuation	efforts from Afghanistan go beyond simply the NEO because there were
16	flights prior	through Operations Allies Refuge, and there have been flights subsequent to
17	August 31, 2	2021; correct?
18	А	Yeah. Those are factual statements.
19	Q	Great.
20	А	How to characterize them in the realm of evacuations, NEOs, and everything
21	else feels a	bit subjective.
22	Q	Okay. Fair enough. And I appreciate it, which is why I wanted to do this
23	with you at	the outset.
24	With	respect to speaking of a "withdrawal," I believe you clarified previously that,

up and until the precipitous change in the situation in Kabul in mid-August, the term

1	"withdrawal" referred to a military withdrawal; correct?
2	A Well, that's what I understand the definition to be. Yeah.
3	Q Yes. And you testified previously that that withdrawal had been initiated
4	or stipulated in the Doha deal that was concluded in February 2020, correct?
5	A I don't know that I stipulated that earlier, but
6	Q Is that a fair stipulation?
7	A I think that's accurate, that the Doha agreement had certain components
8	related to a drawdown by certain dates, yeah, with other conditions as I understood it.
9	Q Okay. And were you aware of partial drawdowns of U.S. troops
10	subsequent to the signing of the Doha deal during 2020?
11	A I believe so, yeah. I think I can't remember the numbers off the top of
12	my head, but I want to say, by the time we got into that sort of April timeframe when I
13	was out at their and they were in the final withdrawal DOD, I should say, was in the
14	final withdrawal planning stages, I don't know why 4,500 sticks in my head, but that's the
15	number I have many my head for troops on the ground.
16	Q Okay. So there had been reductions in troops from February 2020 through
17	August 2021 on multiple occasions?
18	A To the best of my knowledge, yes.
19	Q And some of those, I believe you testified previously, had been directed by
20	President Trump, correct?
21	A Yes.
22	Q And I believe you also testified that you had questions as to whether the
23	reasons for those were policy related or political?
24	A I don't know if I meant that the I mean, the drawdowns were I'm sure
25	determined by the military as part of their planning process. I think what I was referring

- to is there were sometimes communications from the President, President Trump,
- 2 that -- well, for example, I remember at one point there was a tweet saying all our troops
- 3 will be home by Christmas, right, which ultimately turned out not to be the directive.
- 4 But I'm not -- again, I'm not making a judgment here one way or the other. I'm just
- saying there was a plan that was carried through from that point, you know, whenever
- 6 the agreement was signed.
- 7 Q Okay. So then, given what we previously discussed about the Doha deal in
- 8 February 2020 stipulating terms for the withdrawal of the U.S. military from Afghanistan,
- 9 your knowledge of some troop drawdowns that happened prior to 2021, the tweet you
- just mentioned, is it fair to say the U.S. military withdrawal from Afghanistan was initiated
- 11 by President Trump?
- 12 A I mean, President Trump, to the best of my knowledge, ordered a
- withdrawal that began. And then, you know, it was up to the Biden administration to
- determine if they would continue and carry through with it.
- 15 Q And, based on the tweet that you just referred to, is it fair to say that
- 16 President Trump's intent, as you understood it, was to ultimately reduce U.S. troops to
- 17 zero?
- 18 A Well, I don't know the President's intent relative to the Doha Agreement.
- 19 But the Doha Agreement certainly seemed to be for the full withdrawal of troops with
- certain conditions attached to them. I can't speak to what President Trump would have
- 21 ultimately decided, you know, on the conditions.
- 22 Q But the tweet you recalled indicated publicly that he wanted to bring all
- troops home by a specific date?
- A I mean, he tweeted what he tweeted. I'm just saying it created a question
- 25 mark for some people of like: Oh, did this get accelerated?

1	Q	Fair enough.
2	Α	But that was I think ultimately determined that DOD did not have
3	directions,	you know, through official channels to do that.
4	Q	Okay. So, given that a U.S. military withdrawal was set in motion in 2020
5	and that th	e intent of that military withdrawal seemed to ultimately be to reduce U.S.
6	troop prese	ence to zero in Afghanistan, I'd like to get a sense of the preparations that were
7	going on du	ring that same year, 2020, regarding the potential impacts of a military
8	withdrawal	•
9	Did	you see incremental troop withdrawals from the country leading to zero as
10	potentially	destabilizing for U.S. diplomatic presence in Afghanistan?
11	Α	I don't think I would have termed it destabilizing. It created a need to think
12	about how	we would mitigate the security that those how we would yeah, how we
13	would mitig	gate the loss of certain security elements that that withdrawal would lead to.
14	And so	
15	Q	Okay.
16	Α	the question of, you know, security on the ground, I think was very much
17	one of ultin	nately who was going to be in charge of running Afghanistan. And that was
18	something	Ambassador Khalilzad was still very much engaged in trying to negotiate.
19	Q	Did you see the ongoing troop withdrawals in 2020 as potentially
20	destabilizin	g for the Afghan Government or for intra-Afghan negotiations?
21	Α	Again, I think for I would really have to defer to Ambassador Khalilzad on
22	the negotia	tions question. I just wasn't a direct part of those. But my understanding,
23	of course, is	s that the withdrawal was part of you know, that part of the agreement and
24	part of the	negotiations was carrying the withdrawal out.

What was the other part of the question? Negotiations or --

1	Q The impact of the incremental troop withdrawais?
2	A you said on the government.
3	Q On the government itself.
4	A On the government. So, again, that became an issue of discussion of what
5	support would be given to the government, you know, without U.S. troops being on the
6	ground. And so I know DOD and others were working on this question of what
7	continued support could be given for maintenance of aircraft, things of that nature.
8	Yeah. So that was again, I don't think I would use the "destabilizing" as what we were
9	thinking about at that point. I would just note that it would have effects on the ability of
10	all these entities to operate, and we needed to figure out how to replace the functions.
11	Q Okay.
12	A Enablers I think is what we were all calling them at the time.
13	Q And you just mentioned that, in 2020, you understood that the military was
14	working through plans related to the withdrawal of its troops.
15	Was there any planning inside the State Department in 2020 of which you were
16	aware that related to the impacts of withdrawal?
17	A Well, again, yeah I think the efforts that the alpha, beta sorry. I can't
18	remember all the Greek letters that were used. The options papers that were put
19	together, right, were I think explicitly looking at this question of what would the
20	conditions on the ground be and how would we position ourselves in certain situations.
21	Q And were you aware of any such planning related to the impacts of the
22	ongoing withdrawals occurring inside the U.S. interagency?
23	A Yeah. I mean, there was an interagency discussion and effort on
24	these well, I know at the Kabul level there definitely was.

So, at post, there was discussion and inside the State Department there was

25

Q

_	1.	
1	<b>UICCII</b>	ssion?
_	uiscu	331011:

- A Yeah. And I think if there had been interagency discussion, it probably was
  more working level in Afghanistan. I don't remember when the working group was
  established off the top of my head.
- Q So you said, if there was interagency planning, it's your belief it would have been only the working level. Is that because you didn't see any indication of senior level engagement in the interagency on these issues?
- A No. No. No. If we're talking specifically about -- we're talking specifically about the time period --
- 10 Q 2020.

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- 11 A 2020. No. There would have been interagency discussion. And, looking at those papers, I just can't remember what format that took.
  - Q Okay. Other witnesses have described to the committee that -- have described what they called a lack of a comprehensive interagency process in 2020 under the Trump administration related to planning for withdrawal.

## 16 Is that a fair characterization?

- A May depend on how you define "interagency process." What I don't remember is that there were senior level deputies committee or principal committee meetings, but I might not have been privy to all those either.
- Q Is it usually the case that interagency planning on significant events like the withdrawal of thousands of troops would rise to the level of diplomatic DCs or PCs in your experience?
- A Absolutely. I mean, talking about something that ultimately goes to the
  President for decision so.
- Q Okay. And were you aware of any contingency planning or discussions in

1	2020 to har	idle a precipitous deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan? You
2	did refer to	Embassy continuity planning.
3	А	Yeah.
4	Q	But were there contingency plans related to more precipitous change?
5	А	Well, I think the options papers had such cases in mind, if I recall correctly.
6	There were	up to and including a complete withdrawal or a complete evacuation of our
7	people.	
8	Q	Okay. I'd like to get a sense of the transition from the Trump
9	administrat	ion to the Biden administration that occurred in early 2021. But let me back
10	up a little b	t. How many administration transitions have you witnessed in your career?
11	Α	Oh, man. You're going to make me do math in 4-year increments.
12		<u>.</u> Ballpark is fine.
13	Amb	passador <u>Thompson.</u> Yeah. Let's call it five or six.
14		BY :
15	Q	Okay. And how have they generally proceeded from your vantage point?
16	Α	I mean, typically there's a I think there's sort of a start of transition process
17	that goes ev	ven before the election, right, that's setup somewhere else in the bowels of
18	governmen	t. And then, you know, once an election is decided, the incoming
19	administrat	ion, if it's different, sends in teams to start coordinating and collecting
20	information	and understanding what the policy prerogatives are within the various
21	agencies.	
22	Q	Okay. So it's fair to say that, in your general experience, transition
23	processes h	ave occurred over several months?
24	Α	Yes.

To includes months prior to an election?

25

Q

1	Α	Well, no. I mean, think preparations begin prior to an election. We
2	would not s	tart working at the agency level.
3	Q	And those preparations would be pursued by the administration currently in
4	power, corr	ect?
5	Α	I mean, that's how I understand. I have no role in any of that type of work
6	Q	Why is a transition process like this that occurs over several months from an
7	outgoing to	an incoming administration important?
8	Α	Well, I think to have continuity of operations and to give the incoming team
9	time to det	ermine what its priorities are going to be as it takes on both the initiatives of
10	the new ad	ministration, plus whatever existing programs, policies, and efforts are in
11	place.	
12	Q	And, in your experience in prior transition processes, was it usually the case
13	that immed	iate events or immediate decision points that a new administration would
14	have to face	e were part of a transition process?
15	А	Yeah, certainly there would be either sometimes written, sometimes oral
16	briefings re	garding priorities and things that would need to be decided quickly in the new
17	administrat	ion.
18	Q	Okay. And you were working at the State Department during the transition
19	from the Tr	ump to the Biden administration, correct?
20	Α	Yes.
21	Q	Yes. What was your impression of that transition in comparison to others
22	that you ha	d witnessed?
23	Α	You know, from a State Department standpoint, I would say it started a little
24	later than p	revious ones. I couldn't tell you exactly by how much. But I will say that,

you know, at some point, the team that I'd mentioned earlier did come in, and we were,

- you know, able to brief them and work with the incoming team, you know, to get them
- 2 ready for what they needed to do. I just recall it taking -- but, you know, as we all know,
- 3 there was a lot of stuff happening outside of the Department of State that was, you know,
- 4 maybe not typical.

1		
2	[11:38 a.m.]	
3	BY :	
4	Q Fair enough.	
5	So you just testified that eventually at some point you witnessed the incoming	
6	team engaging State Department officials as part of the transition.	
7	A Yeah.	
8	Q But you had previously testified that potentially outgoing administrations in	
9	prior transitions had taken steps internally before elections to get ready for a potential	
10	transition.	
11	Did you ever receive any taskings of that nature in preparation for a transition	
12	from outgoing officials in 2020?	
13	A I honestly don't remember what the internal process was. Typically, that	
14	would be handled by our Executive Secretary, and they would issue guidance to us. I	
15	just can't remember exactly when that took place.	
16	Q So you can't say for certain that the outgoing administration did put such	
17	taskings out to the Department.	
18	A I mean, again, I would typically look to the Executive Secretary for guidance	
19	on those things. And I just I know it came eventually. I can't remember exactly	
20	when.	
21	Q We've heard from other witnesses in front of this committee that the	
22	transition that occurred around the 2020 election was marked by cooperation that had	
23	been severely constrained or denied, a minimal provision of information, and that it was	
24	not anything close to the quality or breadth of prior transitions.	
25	Does that comport with your understanding?	

1	Α	So having seen prior transitions from the Executive Secretary's vantage point
2	and not hav	ving seen it this time, I can't speak to it as well.
3	l wi	Il say that I think it felt like it started later than I remember in the past.
4	Q	Okay. I know we only have 5 minutes left. But I want to try to pivot to a
5	new topic v	with you, and that is post-transition, the preparations and planning that you
6	saw.	
7	Α	Sorry. Post-transition to the
8	Q	So in 2021, after January 20th, 2021
9	А	To the Biden administration. Okay.
10	Q	After January 20th, 2021, your experience with preparations for the
11	withdrawal	at that time.
12	Wei	re you part of the interagency policy review in early 2021 on Afghanistan?
13	А	Mark Evans would have probably spearheaded that for us. And I may have
14	done one o	r two meetings here and there. But he would have been the lead, I think, on
15	that.	
16	Q	Okay. What did you understand, though, in brief to be the outcome of that
17	interagency	y policy review?
18	А	Well, that there would be a withdrawal, that they would extend the timeline
19	I believe Ar	mbassador Khalilzad was talking to the Taliban to help them understand what
20	this would	look like and what our expectations would be for their behavior as a result.
21	And	then it began the process of, again, planning for, okay, if we're able to get to a
22	negotiated	deal where there's an Afghan Government and there's stability on the ground,
23	what would	d it take to continue to operate the embassy safely and effectively in this new
24	environme	nt?
25	0	Okay

1	A So we were very focused on one level on continuity of operations.
2	At the same time, I would say, just given the general uncertainty regarding
3	whether a deal would be struck and how things would go, there was a discussion about
4	worst-case scenarios or planning for options, drawdown options that might be needed.
5	And then those definitely accelerated, I would say, probably June or July
6	timeframe as the Taliban became more aggressive in taking over some of the provincial
7	capital areas.
8	Q Okay. So your testimony then is that the interagency policy review
9	outcome was that the withdrawal would be completed with a slightly new deadline.
10	A Uh-huh.
11	Q And that withdrawal planning accelerated at that point and particularly
12	intensified in June and July. Is that fair?
13	A Yeah. I don't I mean, I don't know that I would say accelerated at that
14	front point, that it continued and then accelerated more in the June, July timeframe, and
15	that the sorry. What was the first way you phrased it, though?
16	Q That the outcome of the interagency policy review had been that the
17	withdrawal would continue down to zero.
18	A Right. Sorry, I thought there was a second point to that.
19	But, yeah, and that and then, just as I've mentioned, the discussion resumed, if
20	you will, about, okay, what do we need to have if we're going to keep operating in a
21	post-withdrawal environment?
22	Q Okay. Last thing, and we'll pick this topic back up in a later round.
23	You mentioned that the planning process in 2021 did include contingencies for
24	potential evacuation and potential drawdown of U.S. diplomatic personnel.
25	When did that piece of the planning process resume or initiate to your

1	recollection?
2	A Well, I mean, again, I'd hesitate to call it resuming. I mean, this is always
3	part of embassy planning.
4	But I think there were meetings maybe as early as March timeframe about what
5	things would look like if it went south, if we weren't able to get a deal.
6	But I should note the feeling, the general feeling at the time was that the center, if
7	you will, would hold and would hold for some time. So the urgency started more when
8	the Taliban started taking more aggressive steps around the provincial capitals.
9	Q Okay. So is it fair to say that the planning intensified as the situation on the
10	ground merited it?
11	A I think so, yeah. Yeah, with prudent planning happening in the lead-up to
12	that time.
13	. We have gone 14 seconds over.
14	Ambassador Thompson. Oh, my goodness.
15	So let me stop and go off the record.
16	[Recess.]
17	<u>.</u> 11:52, and we're back on the record.
18	BY ::
19	Q Ambassador, I have a couple clarifying questions, as I think it's important
20	that the record reflect the respect we afford to the authority of each distinct Commander
21	in Chief.
22	First question. In January 2021, based on your prior testimony, you recalled the
23	number of troops in Afghanistan being at 4,500. Is that correct?
24	A That number sticks in my head. I can't tell you for sure, but that number's
25	in my head.

1	Q Okay. Thank you.
2	And did the troops then get drawn down to 2,500 at some point under the Biden
3	administration?
4	A That sounds right, yeah.
5	Q And then ultimately, in April 2021, it was President Biden who made the
6	decision to go down to zero, correct?
7	A Was it April? Yeah, probably.
8	Q Thank you.
9	So I am going to backtrack a little bit.
10	So there's going to be two time periods we look at, one before the April 2021
11	announcement under the Biden administration and then after the April 2021
12	announcement under the Biden administration.
13	So beginning with the first time period, prior to the April 2021 announcement
14	under the Biden administration, what was your assessment of whether the Taliban was
15	meeting the conditions of the Doha Agreement?
16	A I'll be honest, I didn't really try to keep tabs on that. That was very much
17	Ambassador Khalilzad's territory. I was focused primarily on the effort to try to figure
18	out how we were going to keep things going based on the efforts to keep the negotiation
19	underway.
20	Q Did Ambassador Khalilzad coordinate with you or SCA more broadly on that
21	issue at all, given its implications on the Afghan Government's sustainability and the
22	embassy?
23	A I don't remember having specific discussions with him. I know there were
24	discussions. There was questions about the levels of violence, things of that nature.
25	But I wasn't playing a role in advising anyone on were they living up to

1	the conditions set by the agreement.
2	Q So I'm going to break down some of the conditions. And to the extent, if
3	you're not able to answer, that's fine, but just in order to do our diligence.
4	What was your assessment of whether the Taliban was living up to its
5	commitment to cut ties with terrorist groups in Afghanistan?
6	A Again, I wasn't I just wasn't making those types of assessments in my role
7	at that time. I was reading other people's intel or whatever else that would have
8	thoughts on that. But I just I wasn't really weighing in.
9	So I can maybe recall things that other people wrote or said, but I was not making
10	a personal assessment myself.
11	Q So let's focus on the bureau level then, SCA more broadly, given the role of
12	the Afghanistan desk on Afghanistan policy.
13	What was SCA's assessment of whether the Taliban was living up to its
14	commitment to cut ties with terrorist groups?
15	A I just don't remember if we offered an opinion on that separate from
16	Ambassador Khalilzad's.
17	Q What was your or SCA's assessment of whether the Taliban was reducing
18	violence in Afghanistan?
19	A I remember a lot of discussions about it. And I remember there being
20	questions about what counted and what didn't count. But, again, I would have deferred
21	to Zal's impressions more than my own at that point.
22	Q So is it your testimony that the regional policy bureau did not provide an
23	opinion on this issue but for S.R. Khalilzad.
24	A I don't remember if we offered a separate one, and so it's not sticking in my

head that we ever made an assessment separate from what he was doing.

1	Q	What was your assessment of the Taliban's commitment to and engagement
2	in negotiati	ons with the Afghan Government?
3	А	Again, I mean, if we're talking about the conditions of the agreement, I
4	wasn't mak	ing strong assessments at the time. My sense was that it was difficult, that
5	Zal was hav	ring difficulty bringing them along to negotiations with the government.
6	Q	Did SCA ever provide an opinion on this?
7	А	I don't remember.
8	Q	Did you believe the Taliban was interested in peace?
9	Α	Based on my discussions with Ambassador Khalilzad and Molly Phee, I think
10	had the imp	pression at least some members of the Taliban were interested.
11	Q	But how about the Taliban as an organization?
12	Α	I'd hesitate to make a characterization. I just, as an organization, I couldn't
13	speak for th	nem.
14	Q	Did you or SCA ever provide a formal opinion on this issue to either DMR
15	McKeon or	the Secretary?
16	Α	I don't think we would have provided anything like that to DMR. I don't I
17	just don't re	ecall if we did an assessment, again, separate from anything Zal would have
18	done.	
19	Q	Who would you have provided that opinion on if you had?
20	Α	I mean, something like that would have more likely gone up to the Secretary
21	or to Under	Secretary Nuland.
22	Q	But you don't recall ever providing such an opinion.
23	Α	I can't swear we didn't, but I don't recall doing that.
24	Q	Did you believe the Taliban was genuinely interested in negotiations, rather
25	than seizing	g Afghanistan from its government and its people?

1	A Again, I would defer to Ambassador Khalilzad for that question. I can't	t
2	speak to their motivations on that.	
3	Q Did you assess the Taliban to be a reliable and trustworthy partner?	
4	A Speaking personally, I would not have characterized them that way. B	ut,
5	again, you are often not negotiating with only people you trust. So I think the real	issue
6	was whether or not they could live up to the conditions as set out.	
7	BY :	
8	Q What did Zal communicate to you about the Taliban cutting its ties to	
9	terrorism?	
10	A I don't remember having a specific discussion on that question. I think	(
11	probably there were concerns about the kind of longstanding ties they would had wi	th
12	al-Qaeda and whether or not that those could be overcome.	
13	But I don't remember forming a direct opinion that they were continuing to	
14	support them in any way, as opposed to, say, ISIS, where I think they were definitely	not
15	interested in working with them.	
16	Q You don't remember Zal told you whether the Taliban was cutting its tie	<del>)</del> S
17	with al-Qaeda or not?	
18	A I don't remember having that conversation with him directly, no.	
19	Q What about anyone on his team?	
20	A Probably not.	
21	Again, they were traveling quite a bit at this point, so it was somewhat infreq	uent
22	conversations on these fronts. And I was very focused on the question of what ena	blers
23	we would need to put in place to continue our operations there.	
24	<u>.</u> Did you broader question. Please feel free to seek	
25	clarification if it doesn't makes sense.	

1	But my understanding of sort of the reduction in violence, its commitment in
2	negotiations with the Afghan Government, and its reliability, my understanding is that
3	that would have an impact on the sustainability of the embassy, given who would be in
4	power, what the threat assessments would be.
5	Did those ever get factored into the assessment of whether the embassy could
6	continue?
7	Ambassador Thompson. I would not have factored in hypothetical sort of
8	scenarios. I wouldn't say in terms of we would have tried to make decisions based on
9	what the conditions on the ground were at any given time.
10	And so the real question, as I was thinking about it at the time, as I recall, was can
11	the government hold Kabul and the sort of environs around it and maintain a stable place
12	for us to have continued operations to support them?
13	I would say everything was kind of aimed at trying to find a way to get to a point
14	where a deal could be cut for a larger national government sort of structure.  That's how
15	I sort of understood the goal that was there.
16	BY :
17	Q Did you think understanding the true intentions of the Taliban was
18	important to understanding what actions they would be taking and the impact that that
19	would have on the sustainability of the Afghan Government?
20	A Yeah. But, again, I was more interested in it from a standpoint of rather
21	than sort of grading them on these particular conditions, it was more a question of what
22	would their reactions be to our actions and to our efforts?
23	I mean, basically, if the situation on the ground was not deemed stable and secure

enough for us to remain, then I didn't think we would remain unless we could mitigate

whatever our concerns were about their practices.

24

1	But as we all saw, it wasn't just the Taliban that we were contending with as an
2	enemy, if you will. There were other potential outfits operating there.
3	Q So now I want to look at the second timeframe that I mentioned. So after
4	the President's announcement. I'm going to go back to the questions that I provided,
5	and please feel free to answer however you deem fit.
6	After the President made his April 2021 announcement, what was your or SCA's
7	assessment of whether the Taliban was living up to its commitments to cut ties with
8	terrorist groups?
9	A Yeah. Again, I don't remember us making kind of a score sheet for them
10	separate from what Ambassador Khalilzad was doing. The discussion about what the
11	Taliban was doing, how the negotiations for the Doha Agreement and beyond were
12	working, that was very much in his lane.
13	Q So I'll ask the next question differently.
14	What was SCA's assessment of the violence inflicted against the Afghan people on
15	the ground after the President's April 2021 announcement?
16	A I mean, in any situation we were concerned about levels of violence. And
17	to the effect to the extent they were perpetrated by the Taliban, that would be a
18	concern and that would factor into our thinking about what types of enablers we would
19	need to continue our operations on the ground.
20	But how those affected ultimately the agreement and the decision for what the
21	withdrawal would look like, that was not in our bailiwick.
22	Q Did you see the violence against the Afghan people stopping after the
23	President's announcement, waning, or increasing or staying the same?
24	A I don't recall what the like, to categorize it or put a quantifying figure on it,
25	I couldn't do that off the top of my head.

1	. Were you tracking it at the time?
2	Ambassador Thompson. I mean, I would say we were tracking broadly the
3	situation in the country. And certainly we were aware of when attacks happened and
4	there were lots of monitoring of different things.
5	How it was relative in that moment to where it had been before, I couldn't speak
6	to that that off the top of my head today.
7	BY :
8	Q I want to go back to that 3-month interagency review process.
9	What course of action, prior to the President's April 2021 announcement, what
10	course of action did the Afghan Government urge the United States to take during that
11	review?
12	A I'm trying to recall what interactions we would have had with them.
13	Yeah. I would have to defer to Ross Wilson or others as to what specifically the
14	were asking for at that time.
15	I imagine that they would have raised concerns about the ability to continue
16	supporting the Afghan army with both supplies and maintenance and things of that
17	nature. But I don't remember specifically what if they had offered specific insights
18	into their thinking for that process.
19	Q So we don't want you to have to speculate or anything of that sort. Really
20	just to speak to your own firsthand account.
21	Did Ambassador Wilson communicate to you at any point what the Afghan
22	Government stated?
23	A I'm sure probably he did at some point, and I probably then put that into ar
24	email to our team about what was there. I just, off the top of my head today, I can't
25	remember what those conversations looked like.

1	Q	Did Ambassador Wilson ever communicate to you the situation with the
2	Taliban's affi	liation with terrorist groups?
3	Α	I don't remember discussing that with him. It's possible it came up at some
4	point, but I j	ust don't remember a discussion about that.
5	Q	Did he ever communicate to you the violence that was inflicted
6	upon agair	nst the Afghan people by the Taliban throughout that period?
7	Α	I think I recall him raising concerns about violence and ultimately what it
8	meant to the	e ability of the government to function and to move forward with a peace, a
9	negotiated s	ettlement type of deal.
10	Q	What did you assess the sustainability of the Afghan Government and
11	military to b	e without a U.S. military presence in Afghanistan?
12	А	So I was, again, not being steeped in kind of Afghanistan and the process
13	there prior t	o taking on this role, I was depending a lot on our team and on the
14	intelligence a	assessments at the time which, so pre-April '21, I recall being suggesting
15	that the gov	ernment could hold out somewhere from 18 to 24 months.
16	Post	that period, I think that those timeframes started to shorten. I don't
17	remember e	xactly where they ended up. But suffice it to say I don't remember ever
18	seeing anyth	ing that suggested it would be overnight like it basically was.
19	Q	And coming to those assessments, whether it be sort of yours, as stated
20	more broadl	y, or the Department, as it seems there was sort of different efforts
21	throughout 1	the State Department, did the assessment contemplate that the military, the
22	U.S. military	withdrawal would destabilize the Afghan military as it was entirely reliant on
23	U.S. contract	cor support?
24	А	Sorry. Repeat it.
25	Q	Did the assessment of the sustainability of the Afghan Government, which

1	relied upon a military to counter the terrorist influence of the Taliban, did it contemplate	
2	the fact that the military withdrawal would also mean that the Afghan military no longer	
3	had the support of U.S. contractor support?	
4	A It contemplated and looked at the concerns that they probably couldn't	
5	maintain their level of readiness without contractor support. And so I know efforts	
6	were underway to try to figure out how to provide that support in a post-withdrawal	
7	environment.	
8	Q Can you please speak to those efforts, sort of when they began, what they	
9	were, and what the ultimate solution was?	
10	A I can't with great skill right now. I remember DOD was looking at the	
11	question of what could be done, I mean, and at the end of the day, it became a moot	
12	point.	
13	So I don't remember where they ended up. But I remember it coming up	
14	repeatedly in discussions, I would say, in the May, June, July timeframe.	
15	. Would it be fair to say that the problems that the Afghan military	
16	had with the U.S. military leaving, contractors departing, and the need that they had,	
17	would it be safe to say that those problems were not resolved by the time that the	
18	Taliban took Kabul?	
19	Ambassador Thompson. Right. I mean, the army sort of disappeared on us.	
20	So, yeah, I would say that's right.	
21	BY :	
22	Q One of the things that's come to our attention in the course of our	
23	investigation is that there's this idea or this sort of experience that there was a loss of	
24	morale within the Afghan military and Afghan Government, given the events that	
25	followed.	

1	And they have testified that this loss of morale started with the Trump
2	administration, continued throughout the Biden administration, and there was ultimately
3	the April 2021 announcement.
4	Did the assessment, the Department's, or SCA's more specifically, contemplate the
5	impact of the U.S. Government asking the Afghan Government to work and engage with
6	the Taliban would have, specifically as to morale?
7	A Did our assessment of the situation on the ground consider whether asking
8	the government to negotiate with the Taliban would affect morale?
9	Q Or to just engage with the Taliban? Because negotiation had already
10	ensued at that point.
11	A So did it would it affect morale within the armed forces?
12	Q Correct.
13	A I don't remember that specific of a discussion taking place. It very well may
14	have.
15	I can remember asking the question at some point: Do we think they will hold?
16	Do we think they will fight? And the answer was yes.
17	But, again, there was not like me putting this out to the interagency. I think this
18	was me with Mark and maybe a couple people from the desk.
19	Q So hold and fight, despite the loss of morale.
20	A Well, no. I wasn't I don't think I was looking at it as a morale question
21	specifically, but a capability and willingness to stay and continue the fight without U.S.
22	troops on the ground with them.
23	But, of course, what I probably somewhat was factoring into the thinking at that
24	point was if we were still providing contractor support and things that we were actively
25	working to try to continue to maintain for them.

1	Because it was not our intent to leave them just without any capability
2	whatsoever, it was trying to figure out how to support them without the U.S. military on
3	the ground, at least as I recall the framework at the time where we were in the lead-up to
4	the collapse.
5	. But in that May, June, July, and then August timeframe, it was the
6	reality on the ground that U.S. troops were leaving, as well as U.S. contractors, U.S.
7	logistics, and all of those things.
8	Ambassador Thompson. No, absolutely. And at the same time, I mean, in that
9	timeframe, I know DOD and others were looking at this question of who could we
10	maintain, could we get others to come back and stay, could we support them remotely.
11	There were other factors under discussion.
12	I mean, that is very much a technical military sort of process. So I was not
13	steeply engaged other than the desire to see something be able to be put in place so they
14	could continue to fight.
15	BY :
16	Q Did anyone in SCA or, more broadly, the Department convey concerns that
17	we were proceeding with the Doha Agreement despite the Taliban not being in
18	compliance with the terms?
19	A Specifically with regard to the terms, I don't remember if there was any
20	official sort of communication from anybody along those lines.
21	I'm quite certain people were probably thinking and discussing it. But I don't
22	remember putting anything official saying they're not living up to the terms of the
23	agreement, we should walk back where we're headed.
24	Q Thank you.
25	So I'm going to reference an Information Memo that I believe you sent to

Counselor Derek Chollet on February 16th, 2021. I can't enter the entire memo as an 1 2 exhibit, given that it was section marked. Some of the sections were marked SBU. Some of the sections were marked at a classified level. 3 So I'm going to go through some of the un-SBU sections. Because I can't enter it 4 as an exhibit, I'm not going to hold you to the exact terms of this, but more to ask if you 5 recall the sentiments being conveyed or what your thoughts on this were. So --6 Α Am I able to see it, or you're going to read it to me? 7 Q I'm happy to read it to you. 8 9 Α Okay. 10 O And, again, I'm not holding you to the direct quote. I just want to first ask if 11 you recall ---Α Yeah. The sentiment --12 13 Q Exactly. Α -- so to speak? 14 Exactly. 15 Q Α And this was February 21. So this would have been something up to 16 Derek --17 Correct, it's to Counselor Derek Chollet. 18 Q 19 Α -- early in the administration about what was going on? 20 Q February 16th, 2021, exactly. 21 . February 16th. There's no departmental prohibition on him seeing the record in this context 22 23 because of its classification. That doesn't mean you have to show it to him, but that's permissible because it's not going into the record. 24

. Apologies?

1	I'm saying there's no prohibition that I know of on him seeing the
2	record because of its markings.
3	<u>.</u> Okay.
4	. It's just that it can't go into the record.
5	But I'm not suggesting that's up to you as to whether you don't want to show it
6	to him, but he might remember it better if he sees it.
7	. We'd, again, like to state our preference that if a witness is being
8	examined on a document that such document be furnished to him, his counsel, and the
9	minority to authenticate it and, as well, so we have a chance to create rebuttals and make
10	our own analysis as to the document itself.
11	So we do have a classified portion. Again, I'm not seeking to
12	enter the quoted language. I'm just asking you if you remember.
13	, I would be happy to have entered it, but, unfortunately, there are
14	classification markings. So as a matter of as we understand how we do classifications
15	with the Department, I think L would oppose me entering an exhibit like that into the
16	record.
17	. No, and I wasn't commenting on entering it.
18	I was saying I know of no rule of the Department or the executive branch that
19	would prohibit him from seeing the record in this context.
20	<u>.</u> Okay.
21	BY :
22	Q So would it be helpful if I showed you the language, or how would we like to
23	proceed? I just want to have a way to best accommodate.
24	A I mean, do you have the memo or no?
25	Q I can't the memo is part of it is classified. So I don't I can't enter it.

1 Α So you can't produce it here. 2 Q Yes, exactly. Α I mean, no. Well, let's go ahead and let's see. 3 Q Let me read the language. Α Yeah. 5 6 Q And then to the extent. Α Yeah. That's fine. 7 8 Q So this February 16th, 2021, Information Memo, in the sensitive but 9 unclassified portion of the memorandum, you wrote: "As the U.S. military attenuates, it 10 becomes even more critical to sustain a diplomatic presence to further our efforts to reach a political settlement, provide security assistance, and promote Afghanistan's 11 continued transition, stability, sustainability, and self-reliance." 12 Do you recall those sentiments being conveyed to Counselor Chollet? 13 I definitely recall those sentiments, yes. I can't recall specifically if I used 14 those words. 15 Q Not the words, exactly. 16 17 Α But, yeah. How viable at that time did you believe a political settlement following the 18 Q 19 military withdrawal to be? 20 I mean, personally, I was -- I mean, I don't want to say optimistic. I was 21 trying to retain optimism that we could get there, that the Taliban and the government would recognize and be tired of the fight and not want to continue to slog this way. 22 23 If the U.S. was finally leaving, that might open the door to getting them to figure something out. But it wasn't to be at the end of the day. So --24

And did you continue to believe this by late July 2021?

25

Q

1	A Certainly the situation was deteriorating to such a degree that it was
2	concerning. But at the same time, I sort of retained this open question with the team of
3	can they hold Kabul and can we continue to operate there.
4	And the feeling was, yes, that the Afghan military, 300,000 strong, lots of U.S.
5	support over the years, would have the ability to do that.
6	Now, there's still efforts underway to figure out how to support them, what could
7	be offered on those fronts through DOD as they went down.
8	But as you would have seen by our efforts to step up the SIV processing and
9	everything else, we had to plan for all eventualities.
10	BY :
11	Q So part of your continued assessment in the summer of 2021 was that the
12	Afghan military was 300,000 strong and that factored into your belief about Kabul?
13	A Yeah, I would say that, and just there were some discussions about
14	the sorry. I've got to think through for a second here about what's classified and
15	what's not.
16	I think, yeah, the sorry. Now I've lost my train of thought.
17	Repeat the question again.
18	Q So part of your one of your underlying assumptions was that the Afghan
19	military was 300,000 strong in the summer of 2021 into July, 2021. And that assumption
20	was part of why there was the belief that the Afghan military that the Afghan military
21	and Afghan Government could hold Kabul.
22	A Yes. And the fact that there were some discussions taking place and I'll
23	just leave them leave that very broad for the moment and I think some
24	understandings that some personnel changes were going to take place that would make
25	them more effective in what they were doing, in protecting Kabul in particular.

1	BY :
2	Q In another sensitive but unclassified portion of the memorandum you wrote
3	that: "The Department remains concerned DOD and some other agencies assume that if
4	troop levels go down, if troop levels go to zero, the full closure of the embassy will
5	inevitably follow."
6	Do you recall
7	A Read the first part again.
8	Q Of course.
9	"The Department remains concerned DOD and some other agencies assume that if
10	troop levels go to zero, the full closure of the embassy will inevitably follow."
11	Do you recall these sentiments being conveyed?
12	A Yeah.
13	Q Do you recall why DOD assumed this?
14	A I felt a little bit at the time like they just didn't we'd operated together for
15	so long, they just didn't see the fact that the State Department had this broader mission
16	that it would still want to pursue and find, you know, see value in pursuing for American
17	interests.
18	And it's not a it's not an unfair assumption on their part. I mean, they were a
19	huge part of the security platform and package. And what we were contemplating
20	putting in place to be able to stay were significantly, probably much bigger than anything
21	we would ever normally do in a typical setting.
22	So, anyway, I think, though, we had very candid discussions with them about our
23	risk tolerance and what we intended and what we hoped we would still be able to
24	accomplish.
25	And I believe so this was February, right?

1		Q	Jh-huh.	
2		Α	believe by much further in they were very much on board wit	h what our
3	planni	ng wa		
4		Q	Do you recall what other agencies assumed this, as well?	
5		Α	Off the top of my head, I mean, very possible some in the intel	community
6	might	have	s well. But I don't remember having conversations with anyb	ody to that
7	effect.			
8		Q	Γhat's okay.	
9		Α	Yeah.	
10		Q	n another sensitive but unclassified portion of the memorando	ım, you
11	wrote:	"D	has significant questions about the Department's ability, albeit	: at
12	unpred	ceden	ed risk, to remain securely in the current footprint, in the curre	nt location, in
13	an acti	ive wa	zone without DOD support."	
14		Do y	u recall you conveying these concerns?	
15		Α	Yeah. And I think I can't speak to this particular memo but,	I mean,
16	probal	oly if I	vere characterizing it more broadly, that they would have thes	e concerns
17	but th	at the	were also an active participant in helping us figure out what w	ould be
18	neede	d to n	tigate those circumstances so we could remain.	
19		Q	And what inputs did DS ultimately provide on how to mitigate	those issues?
20		Α	Oh, well, I think they were an active part of the planning that A	cting Under
21	Secret	ary Ca	ol Perez was running with us at the time.	
22		And	o I think the questions about some of the surveillance machine	ry that would
23	remair	n in pl	ce, taking over the RS compound and what it would enable us	to do, how to
24	harder	n stru	ures at the airport, yeah, I think there were other sort of, let's	say, more

clandestine resources that were being looked at, as well. So --

1	<u>.</u> Thank you.
2	At this time I want to introduce I believe we're at exhibit 2 into the record.
3	This is a letter that Secretary Blinken sent to President Ghani.
4	[Thompson Exhibit No. 2
5	Was marked for identification.]
6	. Give you an opportunity to take a look.
7	Ambassador Thompson. I'm sorry. Am I missing? Is there a date on this?
8	_ Do you recall when he sent this?
9	Our understanding is that this was sent, I believe, in March 2021.
LO	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> March '21. Okay.
l1	BY :
12	Q And we'll walk through some of the specific language.
13	Ambassador, are you familiar with this letter?
L4	A I feel like I saw it at the time. At least certainly what's in it is not news to
15	me.
16	Q Can you please explain for the record what it is, to the best of your abilities?
L7	A Yeah, a letter to President Ghani from Secretary Blinken outlining sort of the
18	U.S. way forward and steps that we intended to take in involving other nations in the U.N.
19	to find a lasting solution and then sort of expectations, if you will, of some procedural or
20	processes that could happen, the Turkiye conference, developing a roadmap, and then
21	reducing violence.
22	Q What was the context of relations between the United States Government
23	and the Government of Afghanistan at the time this was sent, which was March 2021?
24	A What was the context?
25	Q Yeah. What was the status of sort of the relationship between the U.S.

1 Government and Afghan Government at the time? 2 I think very good, excellent. I mean, we were working closely together and Α trying to promote a way forward on the ground in Afghanistan. 3 I know that Ambassador Wilson and his team and Ambassador Khalilzad and the 4 SRAR team were working closely with President Ghani and his people, Mohib in 5 6 particular, the National Security Advisor, to sort of find a way forward to make progress on the discussions and negotiations. 7 8 Why did Secretary Blinken send this letter to President Ghani? 9 Α I mean, best of my recollection, it was a way to lay out for the President how 10 the U.S. viewed the situation on the ground and how to proceed. I don't remember a specific triggering mechanism that said, "Oh, I've got to send 11 this letter right now." I think it was an effort to stay engaged and let President Ghani 12 13 know the direction the U.S. Government was moving at the time. O Do you recall if the letter came at the prompting of any State Department 14 officials? 15 Α I don't recall. It might have. I just don't recall. I mean, it's 16 very -- entirely -- well, I shouldn't speculate. But, yeah, it's possible it did. I just don't 17 remember. 18 19 Q What was SCA's role in the preparation of the letter? 20 Α It could be that we drafted it. Probably we did. I don't remember 21 specifically. If you did, would you have reviewed it? 22 Q 23 Α Oh, yeah, I'm sure. And it looks familiar. I just can't remember the process exactly. But my guess is that it would have been something put together with 24

our team and with Ambassador Khalilzad's team.

- 1 Q So I'm going to point you to page 1, paragraph 5.
- 2 A But, again, I should just state the concepts that are in it are familiar to me.
- 3 I think I've seen it before.
- 4 Q Uh-huh.
- A I can't recall specifically how we tasked it out and if we did do it or if it was mostly an SRAR product.
- Q And we won't hold you to that. It's only what you can recall to the best of your ability, of course.
- 9 So I'd like to point to you page 1, paragraph 5. It's the second to last paragraph 10 on that page.
- 11 A Uh-huh.
- Q So the letter states: It's believed that Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India, and the United States "share an abiding common interest in a stable Afghanistan and must work together if we are to succeed."
- Did you agree that Russia, China, Pakistan, and Iran were partners of the U.S. with shared interests in the future of Afghanistan?
  - A I don't know that I would have called them partners, but I would have agreed they had a common interest in a more stable Afghanistan, as I understood the situation at the time.
- 20 Q Why is that?

17

18

- 21 A Why did they have this interest?
- Q Why do you think that they shared a common interest? What was that common interest?
- A Well, I think for Pakistan and Iran it had to do with regional stability issues.
- 25 I think for China it had to do with business interests.

1	Russia, from its longstanding engagement in Afghanistan, I'm not as expert on that		
2	relationship.		
3	But I know we were looking for levers is that the right word? to best make		
4	progress on peace negotiations. And to the extent Afghanistan's neighbors and other		
5	partners could for Afghanistan, partners for Afghanistan could be helpful, we were		
6	willing to explore that.		
7	Q Do you recall after the Taliban took over Afghanistan, Imran Khan was the		
8	first sort of government official that then visited the Taliban?		
9	A Is that right?		
10	Q I believe so. If you don't recall, that's fine.		
11	A You know, now that you're saying it, it sounds plausible, but I just don't		
12	remember it specifically.		
13	Q Do you believe that those countries had the same understanding of what a		
14	stable Afghanistan meant as the United States?		
15	A Oh, I would hesitate to characterize it that way. I mean, I think they had		
16	their own interests in an Afghanistan that was broadly stable and at peace with itself. I		
17	don't believe for a second that they shared our full interests in Afghanistan at the time or		
18	even now.		
19	Q Do you you know, actually, let's move on to the next. We'll look at page		
20	2, ultimately the last starts on the last paragraph.		
21	A The last paragraph, page 2?		
22	Q Correct.		
23	A "I must also make clear"?		
24	Q The letter states: "As our policy process continues in Washington, the		
25	United States has not ruled out any options. We are considering the full withdrawal of		

our forces by May 1st, as we consider other options.

"Even with the continuation of financial assistance from the United States to your forces after an American military withdrawal, I am concerned that the security situation will worsen and that the Taliban could make rapid territorial gains.

"I am making this clear to you so that you understand the urgency of my tone regarding the collective work outlined in this letter."

A Uh-huh.

Q Can you please explain why the Secretary used the language -- to the best of your ability, of course -- quote: "I am making this clear to you so that you understand the urgency of my tone regarding the collective work outlined in this letter."

A Yeah. I would say something I sort of alluded to earlier was, one, was decisions of personnel and who was in very -- who were encumbering various leadership positions were of concern.

I can't really remember all the specifics right off the top of my head now. But we were wanting Ghani to be more engaged and more determined in finding a way forward on the peace front. And I think this was a way to flag for him that he, by not doing that, he risked the future of the country, which made an impression actually.

Q What did the Department or, more specifically, SCA envision as sort of peace between the Ghani government and the Taliban?

A Well, I mean, that would have been the matter of a negotiated settlement between them. I don't think we had a specific -- I mean, there were efforts to put sort of a roadmap together and to find some sort of -- I don't remember if we used the term "Government of National Unity" but something of that sort of nature at the time so that Afghanistan could move forward in a more positive direction without the U.S. presence there as it had been.

1	So I	think this was just an effort to really push Ghani in that direction, as I recall.
2	Q	Do you recall why the Secretary chose to transmit this letter publicly?
3	А	I don't remember that. He published this letter?
4	Q	This was yeah. So, typically, my understanding, based on the course of
5	our investi	gation, it's come to our attention this was publicly transmitted and then shared
6	with TOLOr	news.
7	But	if you don't recall that, we can move on.
8	А	I don't recall that at all, yeah.
9		BY :
10	Q	Around April 2021, SCA prepared a paper on options for resettlement of
11	Afghan par	tners in a crisis.
12	Are	you familiar with that?
13	А	I mean, it sounds reasonable. I don't remember specifically.
14	Q	Do you recall what options SCA presented?
15	А	This was resettlement options?
16	Q	This was a paper on options for resettlement of Afghan partners in a crisis.
17	А	Yeah, I mean, I remember we were working on the question and trying to
18	think throu	gh how we would be able to support people, move them, things of that
19	nature.	
20	Wit	hout seeing the memo at this point, it has been a few years, so I couldn't tell
21	you what tl	ne specific outlines were that we suggested at the time.
22	Q	Can you speak more broadly to SCA's role in addressing the issue and what it
23	found, wha	t it recommended?
24	А	Well, I think one of the things that we were focused on was trying to push
25	more peop	le through the SIV process who were eligible on that front. And so we picked

- up efforts quite dramatically, increased staffing around that process.
- 2 And then, as I mentioned earlier, we had the beginning stages, if you will, of the
- Afghanistan Task Force when Tracey Jacobson was brought in to kind of help us
- 4 streamline that process.
- 5 Q When was that?
- 6 A I want to say that was June of '21. Does that sound right?
- 7 Q Can you speak to where things stood --
- 8 A Sorry. What was the date of this again?
- 9 Q So the date of the paper was --
- 10 A March.
- 11 Q -- April 20 --
- 12 A April.
- 13 Q April 2021.
- 14 A Uh-huh.
- Q So could you speak as to where things stood on this issue of resettlement of
- Afghan partners in a crisis in April 2021?
- 17 A Yeah. So we were actively trying to, if you will, dig out, I would say, from
- 18 kind of the COVID period where we had to suspend interviews for SIV and stuff, folks who
- 19 qualified under that process. So we were looking at ways to streamline that, those
- 20 procedures.
- 21 And then, more broadly, I remember there being discussions about other Afghans
- at risk. But I don't recall at that time where we were in terms of where we ultimately
- ended up with, like, the P-1, P-2 process.
- 24 Q And do you recall the extent to which the Department had identified the
- 25 need to evacuate a large number of Afghan partners and Afghan -- at-risk Afghans by the

military withdrawal deadline?

A I remember it being a point of discussion. And one of the challenges to it was how you could do something like that when you would have to vet such a large number of people, ultimately the challenge that came up through the whole evacuation phase.

Again, I can't speak to this memo without seeing it. I just don't recall the specifics of it. But that sounds like about the time we would have been thinking about things like getting Doha ready for an influx of SIV applicants and holding there while vetting took place and moving them on after that.

- Q And can you speak as to how the vetting issue that you just mentioned was addressed?
- 12 A Ultimately?
- 13 Q Ultimately.

A I mean, yeah, when we took people out from Kabul during August, we had set up a number of what we referred to as lily pads in Europe and the Middle East. Just Europe and the Middle East, right? Yeah. And people were -- would be housed there until they were vetted by DHS.

1	
2	[12:44 p.m.]
3	BY :
4	Q So I want to move on.
5	What diplomatic efforts was the SRAR engaged on with the Taliban and the
6	Government of Afghanistan during the policy review, the interagency policy review?
7	A What timeframe are we talking about?
8	Q We're talking about between the beginning of the administration and the
9	President's April decision. So the interagency policy review that was conducted to
10	inform that decision.
11	A Yeah. I mean, so I'm relatively certain Zal was engaged in efforts to talk to
12	the Taliban at that time and see where he could move the ball forward.
13	I would really have to defer to him or somebody from his team as regards what
14	the conversation specifically looked like. I don't have a good recollection of where they
15	were exactly.
16	Q There were plans for a conference in Turkiye aimed at advancing
17	negotiations around that time. Are you familiar with that conference?
18	A I mean, I remember it coming up as an effort to try to broaden the
19	engagement of some key potential partners, and I think it's referenced here, isn't it, in
20	this letter the Secretary sent?
21	I don't think it ever came off eventually, if I remember correctly.
22	Q Where did things stand with the conference immediately in advance of the
23	President's April 14th announcement of an unconditional withdrawal?
24	A I don't remember exactly.
25	Q Do you recall how the announcement of an unconditional withdrawal

1	impacted tl	ne conference?
2	А	I don't remember what the final outcome was in terms of how that came off
3	or didn't co	me off. I remember Tom West and Ambassador Khalilzad were focused on
4	that primar	ily.
5	Q	And do you recall why the conference never ultimately came off?
6	Α	I can't remember what derailed it ultimately.
7	Q	On April 14th, 2021, President Biden announced that the U.S. would
8	unconditio	nally withdraw from Afghanistan by September 11th, 2021.
9	Wh	en did you first learn that that would be the President's course of action?
10	А	I think roughly concurrently. We might have had a little bit of an advance
11	notice of ar	n announcement.
12	Q	Do you recall how you got that notice?
13	Α	I mean, I feel like it would have been a conversation with gosh, now I don't
14	recall.	
15	Q	What did you think of the President's decision?
16	Α	Frankly, I mean, I can't speak to it one way or the other. I thought it made
17	sense relat	ive to what we were the course we were already on and in trying to go about
18	it in as ratio	onal a way as you could, given the relative short amount of time that would be
19	involved.	
20	Q	How involved was the State Department in formulating that decision?
21	Α	I mean, I think the information and inputs we provided to the Secretary were
22	probably w	hat he based his ultimate advice to the President on and where that fit in.
23	But that wo	ould have been Cabinet-level decisions, I'm sure.
24	Q	Do you know what that advice was that he provided to the President?
25	А	I don't know what the Secretary's specific advice to the President was.

1	Q	And what was the reaction within SCA to the withdrawal decision?
2	А	"Let's get to work." I mean, this was the President's decision. We
3	were going	to execute it.
4	Q	What was the Afghan Government's reaction to the President's decision?
5	А	I remember on a couple of different occasions Ghani kind of making the
6	statement a	along the lines of we support this approach, no reason we can't I don't want
7	to say depa	rt as friends but something.
8	I doı	n't remember there being a huge blowback as a result of it, but there was sort
9	of an intens	sified set of discussions then, as we talked about earlier, about support for the
LO	Afghan mili	tary, what the post-withdrawal realm would look like.
l1	And	certainly, SRAR and team were engaged pretty heavily in trying to find a way
12	forward for	a I'm trying to remember I can't remember the word or the phrase that
L3	was used.	But, anyway, an Afghan Government that would be acceptable broadly to the
L4	Afghans.	
L5	Q	What was the Taliban's reaction to the President's decision?
16	А	I don't remember if they specifically commented or not, to be honest with
L7	you.	
18		. You don't recall if the Taliban was happy about it or celebrated it
L9	or anything	like that?
20	Amb	passador <u>Thompson.</u> Isn't that funny? I just can't remember if they made a
21	statement o	or I mean, I'm confident that part of the decision involved some sense that
22	they would	accept it and that they wouldn't start attacking U.S. forces before the
23	withdrawal	•
24	But,	yeah, I don't I just don't remember if there was a Taliban reaction sort of
)5	officially at	this point.

1	<u>.</u> Following the President's sorry.
2	What were the what were the reactions of NATO and allied countries to the
3	President's decision?
4	Ambassador Thompson. So I wasn't involved directly in discussions with a lot of
5	the allies at that point. My sense from the discussions that we did have about our plans
6	in going forward were that they were very committed to the "in together, out together"
7	sort of approach, and they wanted to know how they would be factored into that effort.
8	So efforts were made to work with them.
9	When I was out there in April of '21 yeah, April '21 the ISAF rep I think joined
10	some meetings that we were in to understand where we were going. So I think it
11	remained a very, what a unified effort to figure out how to do this.
12	So at the time of the announcement, am I understanding
13	correctly that there had it hadn't been solidified how they'd be factored in, how the
14	NATO countries would be factored in?
15	Ambassador Thompson. I can't speak to I mean, I wasn't factoring that in. I
16	mean, I don't know how they were taken into the President's consideration. I mean, I
17	assume he had them as a factor to consider and that there was input and discussions with
18	them, but I wasn't the one having those.
19	But, based on your recollection, there were inquiries by NATO
20	countries on how they'd be factored in around the period of the President's
21	announcement?
22	Ambassador Thompson. I can't say. I can't say whether there were individual
23	inquiries. When I was out there, the NATO rep who was there was part of some
24	discussions and meetings we had.
25	Sorry, what was the President's date again, May?

1	. The President, April.
2	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> April.
3	. April 14th.
4	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Yeah. So I was out in Kabul about a week or two later.
5	And Nick Dean was the NATO rep out there at the time. And I don't remember him
6	raising any specific concerns. It was more a question of understanding how this was all
7	going to flow and where they would fit into that.
8	Prior to President Biden's April 14th decision, do you recall
9	opposition within NATO or other allied countries to withdrawing all troops from
LO	Afghanistan?
l1	Ambassador Thompson. I don't recall one way or the other, to be honest with
L2	you. I think there were different opinions from different allies probably, but I can't
L3	recall who was lined up where.
L4	BY :
15	Q Following the President's decision of an unconditional military withdrawal,
16	what direction did SCA receive towards implementing it?
L7	A Following the decision?
L8	Q The April 14th decision, what direction did SCA receive towards
L9	implementing it, preparing for the consequences of it?
20	A I mean, the President made the decision, and we would have continued our
21	work to carry out that plan. I don't remember getting, like, a specific set of guidance
22	saying, do these things differently than the path we're already on.
23	Q So the Under Secretary or Secretary or one of the Deputy Secretaries never
24	addressed that this is a consequential decision made by the President, this is what SCA
25	needs to do to help move forward and prepare for it?

1	A I mean, I would say we knew what we needed to do to move forward and
2	prepare for it. And we would have been engaged with the 7th Floor and others to help
3	push that process forward.
4	[Discussion off the record.]
5	Okay, we're back on the record.
6	And, Ambassador, I just wanted to say, if we neglected to do this earlier, thank
7	you for being here. We know you traveled a great distance to Washington from your
8	post in Nepal, and we really appreciate your voluntary participation and engagement with
9	us today.

1		
2	BY :	
3	Q There's a couple things from the last round that I just want to clarify.	But
4	before I do that I just want to note that we are particularly interested in your firsth	and
5	recollection of events and facts.	
6	So if you feel like something would have happened a certain way or if you b	elieve
7	that something might have happened, I think you've noted that, but I just want to	tress
8	that our interest is in your firsthand recollection of events.	
9	A Fair enough.	
10	Q In that vein, I believe you had an exchange with the majority counsel	
11	previously about a number, I think 4,500, that was in your head in terms of the troo	ps
12	that remained in Afghanistan at the point of the transition to the Biden administrat	ion.
13	And I believe the majority asked you a question that implied that President Biden h	ad
14	withdrawn troops further than that to during January 2021.	
15	So let me just introduce an exhibit into the record. I don't know which exh	nibit
16	we're on. Three.	
17	[Thompson Exhibit No. 3	
18	Was marked for identification.]	
19	BY ::	
20	Q I'll give you a minute to read through that.	
21	A [Reviewing.]	
22	Q So I want to call your attention to a few things on this exhibit. You so	e an
23	AP logo at the top, Associated Press. This is an article dated January 15th, 2021, k	у
24	Robert Burns and Lolita C. Baldor.	
25	I'm going to begin reading some of this article into the record, starting with	the

- 1 first paragraph.
- 2 Quote: "The U.S. military has met its goal of reducing the number of troops in
- Afghanistan to about 2,500 by Friday, a drawdown that may have violated a last-minute
- 4 congressional prohibition.
- 5 "The reduction could complicate matters for the incoming Biden administration,
- 6 which must determine how to handle a Trump administration commitment to the Taliban
- 7 to remove all U.S. military, intelligence and contractor personnel from Afghanistan by
- 8 May as a move to spur peace negotiations."
- I want to move a little bit further down to the fourth paragraph in this article,
- which begins, quote: "Christopher Miller, in his final days as the acting secretary of
- defense, announced on Friday the 2,500 troop level, saying it brings the United States,
- 'closer than ever to ending nearly two decades of war,'" end quote.
- Based on your review of this article just now and what I've read into the record,
- does this refresh your recollection that President Trump withdrew troops down to 2,500
- immediately prior to his departure from office?
- 16 A What I would say is this reminds me that I probably had the numbers right,
- might have had the timing wrong. But I would, I guess -- sorry, just to quibble a little bit
- here, -- did the drawdown actually commence with this announcement and was
- 19 completed? I just don't remember the timing on that.
- 20 Q But you do note that this article cites the outgoing Secretary of Defense,
- 21 Christopher Miller --
- A Yes. No, no, I understand that.
- 23 Q -- announcing --
- 24 A Right.
- 25 Q -- the drawdown to 2,500.

1	Is it fair, based on your refreshed recollection of events and your review of this
2	material, is it fair to say that President Trump directed the withdrawal to 2,500 before he
3	left office?
4	A Based on this article, yes.
5	Q Okay. Thank you.
6	BY :
7	Q Do you dispute the credibility of the Associated Press?
8	A Do I I'm not going to make any comment on the credibility of a news
9	source. I mean
LO	Q Do you have any reason to doubt the validity
l1	A I have no reason to doubt what's in this.
L2	Q Okay. Thank you.
L3	. And you also had an exchange with majority counsel a few minutes
L4	ago about I think they asked you about the Taliban's reaction to President Biden's
L5	announcement in was it April, I believe that the U.S. would continue a full withdrawal
L6	of its troops. And I know you said that you couldn't speak to
L7	Ambassador Thompson. I just can't remember whether they made an
L8	announcement or issued a statement or anything like that.
19	. Fair enough.
20	I just want to back up a little bit. Based on the experience you have working on
21	Afghanistan and your familiarization with the Taliban as one of the actors in Afghanistan,
22	was it your understanding that by the time of that announcement from President Biden
23	that the Taliban had reduced violence against American troops in Afghanistan?
24	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Yeah.
25	. We can go off the record and stop the clock.

1	[Pause.]	
2	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> I'm sorry, repeat the question.	
3	BY :	
4	Q So is it your understanding that the Taliban had reduced violence against	
5	American troops in Afghanistan by April 2021, at the point at which President Biden	
6	affirmed the decision to continue the U.S. withdrawal down to zero?	
7	A As I recall, my understanding at the time was that they had reduced violence	
8	against U.S. forces at the time. I think there may have been some question about	
9	actions they took that might have had broader consequences, whether they were aimed	
10	at troops or not. But, as I recall, the prevailing opinion was that they had made an effort	
11	not to target U.S. troops.	
12	Q And you testified previously that there had been several drawdowns of	
13	troops throughout 2020 and into January 2021. Do you recall any concern that the	
14	Taliban would resume violence against American troops in Afghanistan if the withdrawal	
15	were reversed?	
16	A Were halted or reversed?	
17	Q Uh-huh.	
18	A Yeah, I would say that was a concern everybody well, I shouldn't say	
19	everybody but that a lot of folks watching the situation had in mind. And certainly the	
20	Secretary and others have spoken publicly about the fact that that was their belief, that if	
21	they had if we had stayed longer the Taliban would have begun attacks again.	
22	Q And do you think that belief is reasonable?	
23	A I do, yes.	
24	Q Thank you.	
25		

1			
2		BY :	
3	Q	So I want to talk a little bit about the Doha Agreement.	
4	Α	Okay.	
5	Q	The February 2020 agreement.	
6	Wha	t did you understand to be the written terms of the Doha deal signed in	
7	February 2020?		
8	А	Yeah. Majority counsel asked about this a bit as well. And, again, I was	
9	not sort of k	seeping tabs on all the aspects of the agreement. But, broadly speaking, it	
10	was an agre	ement for the withdrawal of U.S. forces in exchange for certain conditions,	
11	including ul	timately the formation of a broader government in Afghanistan. But	
12	reductions of	of violence. There were a few other conditions, as I recall.	
13	Q	Okay. Thanks.	
14	We	conducted some interviews with I think at this point now several senior	
15	officials who	o indicated the Afghan Government disliked the deal. Would you agree with	
16	that characterization?		
17	А	I never had any conversations directly with Afghan Government officials	
18	where they	conveyed that to me, but certainly that was the feeling of many, that the	
19	Afghans did	n't feel that they had been fully consulted all the way through it.	
20	Q	What about the characterization that many officials have indicated that the	
21	opposed the	e deal?	
22	А	The government?	
23	Q	The Afghan Government.	
24	А	I never had that firsthand. So it's possible that they didn't like it, that they	
25	raised it wit	h other people at other times. I never heard that directly from the Afghan	

1	Governme	nt.
2	Q	You didn't engage with the Afghan Government at all in your position as
3	А	Well, again, remember Doha was signed well before I took over. And so b
4	the time I v	vas involved, things were already moving forward.
5	Q	But in Washington?
6	Α	Yeah.
7	Q	You didn't have any engagement with the Afghan Embassy?
8	Α	I had engagement with the Afghan Embassy, but we never discussed the
9	deal. Yea	h.
LO	Q	Okay. From your sense, whether it was from reporting that you received
l1	from Kabul	, firsthand reporting or news or others, was there a sentiment that the Afghar
12	Governme	nt was sidelined from the deal?
13	Α	From the negotiation of the deal or the implementation or
L4	Q	From the composition and negotiations of the deal.
15	Α	I think there were some that had that opinion. I don't I didn't have
16	enough inf	ormation or firsthand engagement on it to be able to make a characterization
L7	of that mys	self.
18	Q	Okay. What about after the signing of the deal, you take over. What
19	were your	priorities in SCA that you were pursuing with respect to implementation of the
20	agreement	?
21	А	Well, I think, as I've stated earlier, the State Department had a strong
22	interest in	seeing if we could continue our engagement with Afghanistan in a
23	post-withd	rawal, post-U.S. military withdrawal environment.
04	Δης	I so I was very much engaged with the effort to try to figure out what kind of

enablers would we need, how could we mitigate risks and continue an embassy

1	operation, assuming a permissive enough environment. And that included then also
2	discussions of different environments that we might face.
3	Q Okay. Thanks.
4	I wanted to turn a little bit to this would be exhibit 4.
5	[Thompson Exhibit No. 4
6	Was marked for identification.]
7	So if you could turn first to page 10. This is a copy of opening
8	statements that were provided by members of the State Department during a June 15th,
9	2022, classified briefing on Afghanistan. These opening statements were provided to
10	the committee and they're unclassified.
11	So if you could take a look at page 10 and 11. I wanted to bring up a quote from
12	Molly Phee, who I believe you referenced was Zal's deputy at that time.
13	Start with the line that says: "In mid-July" did you find it on page 10?
14	Ambassador Thompson. "In mid-July"?
15	. It says: "In mid-July we met the 135-day deadline."
16	Ambassador Thompson. What paragraph are you on?
17	. The last paragraph, midway through.
18	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Oh, here we go.
19	
20	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Yeah.
21	<u>.</u> Great.
22	. "we met the 135-day deadline to draw down to 8,600 troops.
23	The Trump administration then decided unilaterally to withdraw to 4,500 troops by
24	September. The release of Taliban prisoners, as well as Afghan government soldiers
25	detained by the Taliban, finally took place in early September, allowing the start of

1	intra-Aighair negotiations between the parties to begin on September 12.
2	"Once the agreement was signed, we set up an interagency group to monitor and
3	assess compliance, which I chaired. We found the Taliban's compliance with the
4	agreement to be mixed. I have no knowledge that any Principal in the previous
5	administration factored these assessments into decisions to withdraw troops below
6	8,600.
7	"It is my judgment that the unilateral decision to reduce troops" sorry "to
8	reduce to 4,500 troops by September, without explicitly tying this move to a requirement
9	for the Taliban to act, significantly weakened the prospect for successful intra-Afghan
10	negotiations as the Taliban appeared to conclude that President Trump was intent on
11	withdrawal regardless of their conduct."
12	Would you agree with that characterization?
13	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Let me say that I would put a lot of stock in Molly's
14	assessment of the situation. I just I did not have sufficient direct discussions with the
15	White House or anybody at that senior level in the Trump administration to draw a
16	conclusion on her characterization.
17	But I would note Molly was much more directly involved in the discussions and the
18	engagement than I would have been at this point.
19	_ Okay. Thank you.
20	I'm going to introduce one last exhibit, which is 5.
21	[Thompson Exhibit No. 5
22	Was marked for identification.]
23	BY :
24	Q So I just wanted to follow up on sorry. This is an article from the AP
25	outlining some statements by President Trump regarding troop withdrawals. It's dated

October 26th -- sorry, October 8th, 2020.

And I just wanted to piggyback on I think you made a comment earlier that you spent time chasing down some of the President's tweets. And then I believe you clarified that it was President Trump's tweets that you chased down. Is that correct?

A Yeah. I mean, this was a case where one of the tweets suggested a timeframe and an action that was separate from what we were working towards.

And, I mean, to say we chased it down, I think we were pretty quickly able to determine that DOD didn't have an order to draw down in this regard. So we kept moving in the direction that we were previously going.

Q Let me just read the title of the article, and then maybe I can read the tweet into the record and then we can take it from there.

But it says: "Taliban Cheer Trump Tweet Promising Early Troop Withdrawal."

And then the tweet statement itself says: "We should have the small remaining number of our BRAVE Men and Women serving in Afghanistan home by Christmas."

The paragraph following says that he was later asked about that tweet on television and he said: "We're down to 4,000 troops in Afghanistan. I'll have them home by the end of the year. They're coming home, you know, as we speak. Nineteen years is enough. They're acting as policemen, OK?"

Just in terms of the Taliban response and their inner negotiations, do you have any sense, either from different reporting from the Embassy in Kabul, from interacting with Zal's team, on how public statements announcing a full withdrawal when there's an agreement with conditions-based withdrawals laid out might impact negotiations?

A I mean, there's -- so I would say we're now getting into the realm of my opinion on matters, not --

Q Correct. Okay.

1	A not anything necessarily factual. But I think one of the things that we try
2	to do is operate in with as much clarity as we possibly can. And so certainly if the
3	President tweets something or says something or remarks on something, it gets
4	interpreted. We've seen this with many Presidents.
5	And so, yeah, it certainly could have an effect on how the parties you're
6	negotiating with interpret your intentions, everything else, and it factors into it.
7	Q Okay. Thank you.
8	BY :
9	Q Pivoting to a different topic, we want to discuss the SIV program with you.
10	When you started your tenure in SCA, what were some of the biggest challenges
11	facing the Afghan SIV program?
12	A Well, I think COVID was probably the biggest, because they had suspended
13	interviews at Embassy Kabul as a result. And I think there were also some challenges
14	with Afghans that had worked for us and being able to verify their employment and their
15	status.
16	As so many elements of the U.S. Government had operated there for so long, not
17	all the recordkeeping was even agency to agency. So I think that was part of the
18	challenge.
19	And then just the process itself, I think, was a number of different steps, involved
20	different agencies that had to be consulted with.
21	So it was just a it was a pretty complex process to make sure people that were
22	deserving of an SIV got an SIV.
23	Q Were there sufficient staffing resources dedicated to SIV processing at that
24	time?
25	A I don't think so. I think our assessment was we well, I mean, in order to

1	get out of the backlog and really process the numbers as they would come in, I think	we
2	tried to staff up, though I can't remember exactly when that staffing up happened.	ı

think it was -- it may have been into the new administration, because I can't remember
when interviews were able to resume in Kabul because of the COVID situation.

Q How was the backlog created?

A Well, I think it's a combination of -- I didn't study the backlog personally, but my sense is a combination of the interviews slowing down, the need for vetting of the employment veracity, the veracity of the employment claims made by local staff.

I don't remember the exact number, but a fairly high number of folks didn't qualify once the papers got to the COM approval process. So it was a pretty exacting effort to figure out if people really qualified or not.

Q And when you asked for more staffing resources, what was the response to that?

A I got to be honest. Our EX office did a lot of this. I don't remember their -- I remember us staffing up. I don't remember if we asked for so many and it got turned off or turned back or anything like that. But I do know we increased. And then later on, when we got to Tracey Jacobson's efforts in wherever that was, June-July timeframe --

Q Of which year?

A 2021. We had increased numbers considerably, as I understand it.

Q Okay. So the staffing issues you're referring to would have occurred in 2020. Is that correct?

A I'm not sure. I'm not sure. Like, I don't know which was more impactful, the COVID stopping of interviews or staffing levels to do the work on moving the process forward.

25 forward

1	BY :
2	Q Sorry, just one quick interjection.
3	Were you aware of a congressional notification that was sent by the State
4	Department to cut staffing at Embassy Kabul by almost 40 percent in 2019?
5	A I don't remember that specifically, but I may have come across it at some
6	point in our discussions. I just don't remember it being
7	Q But were you aware?
8	A a factor of discussion. I just don't remember that.
9	Q Were you aware of any staffing cuts that were implemented at Embassy
10	Kabul?
11	A I can't say that I had looked at the staffing pattern for Kabul over the years to
12	understand where they were relative to the other and I certainly don't remember it
13	hinging around the SIV process.
14	Q Okay.
15	BY :
16	Q Understanding that you don't have a complete recollection of all of the
17	questions we're asking, but to be clear, the staffing increase occurred in 2021, which in
18	effect helped with the backlog we're discussing.
19	A Yeah. But then, of course, the case numbers went up again after things
20	started to deteriorate. So I know that they looked at staffing again at that point. I
21	don't remember what the outcome was from that.
22	Q Understood.
23	I also wanted to briefly touch upon the topic of Operation Allies Refuge.
24	Are you familiar with that program?
25	A Yes. This was the welcoming effort to bring folks in, Afghans at risk.

1	Q	Do you recall when that program was stood up?
2	Α	I honestly can't remember if we took that up before the task force started o
3	during, but	around that timeframe, I think.
4	Q	Does mid-July 2021 sound right to you?
5	А	It sounds reasonable, yeah.
6	Q	Okay. Fair enough.
7	А	So a little before the task force started, yeah.
8	Q	And what was the SCA Bureau's role in standing up this operation?
9	Α	I would have to go back and I'd have to refer to our EX office to see what
LO	types of sta	ffing we might have provided for it.
l1	If m	emory serves yeah, I'm afraid all of that sort of period runs together for me
12	l just I do	n't remember what specifically we brought to the table on that at the time.
L3	It got sort o	f exploded then during the task force period, and we had lots of different
L4	people wor	king on it.
L5	Q	Understanding that's a little fuzzy, could you just identify what the overall
16	objective of	the operation was?
L7	А	Well, I mean, I think it was to help in resettling our Afghans at risk that had
18	worked with	h us and had ties to us that put them at risk in Afghanistan.
L9	Q	Do you know whether there was a strong demand signal from Afghans to be
20	on these flig	ghts?
21	Α	The
22	Q	The Operation Allies Refuge flights.
23	Α	Allies Refuge flights? I mean, I think they were targeted at primarily SIV
24	recipients.	So I think it would have been dictated by who had SIVs at the time. I don't

remember the demand level at that point. But, I mean, given the backlog, I think it's

1	safe to say it was high.
2	Q Safe to say it was high. Okay. Great.
3	Do you know whether these flights were leaving with every seat occupied?
4	A I don't know that.
5	Q You don't know.
6	Pivoting to a different topic here.  Just give me one moment.
7	You had previously testified about messaging to AMCITs that went through the
8	task force in Washington. We'd like to talk about that in a little bit more detail.
9	What was the messaging that went out to AMCITs in the lead-up to the
LO	withdrawal?
l1	A I mean, so the way I've looked at messaging to AMCITs, Afghanistan, since
L2	we went in 20-some years ago, has been on the do not travel sort of list.
L3	I want to say since January of 2021, there were some number of messages going
L4	out noting that the situation could deteriorate and urging people to leave. And I think
L5	even noting that there could be a point this may have been more during the task force
L6	time but that there could be a point where the U.S. wouldn't would be more
L7	constrained in its ability to be helpful than while we were on the ground.
L8	But I know we did extensive messaging to try to get Americans to consider their
L9	stay in Afghanistan and to get out while I mean, as I mentioned earlier, our emphasis is
20	always on trying to get people out while it's safe and commercial means are available.
21	But then once that was no longer viable, the Consular Affairs Bureau put just
22	extraordinary efforts into trying to contact Americans and let them know that they were
23	there and willing to help and wanted to help them in that particular moment, and also
24	noting that past the end of the withdrawal we would still help but the ability to help

would be constrained considerably.

1	Q	Thank you.
2	I'd I	ike to introduce into the record this is exhibit No. 6.
3		[Thompson Exhibit No. 6
4		Was marked for identification.]
5		BY :
6	Q	Exhibit No. 6 is a series of travel advisories and security alerts dated January
7	17th, 2021,	to October 2021. They're pulled from State.gov.
8	Hav	e you seen
9	Α	Travel.state.gov.
10	Q	Yes, travel.state.gov. Thanks for the clarification.
11	Hav	e you seen documents like this before?
12	А	Oh, yeah, absolutely.
13	Q	And I think you had previously mentioned that messaging to AMCITs started
14	in January 2	2021. Is that correct?
15	А	Yeah, I would say related to this entire episode and period. I'm sure there
16	had been m	nessaging previous to that as well.
17	Q	Understood.
18	А	But certainly, this is a more accelerated pace of information to AMCITs.
19	Q	I'd like to read into the record an excerpt from page number 1. Midway
20	through the	e paragraph, it reads, in part: "The Embassy reminds U.S. citizens that the
21	Travel Advi	sory for Afghanistan is Level 4-Do Not Travel due to crime, terrorism, civil
22	unrest, kidr	napping, armed conflict, and COVID-19. U.S. citizens already in Afghanistan
23	should cons	sider departing."
24	Who	o would have drafted language such as this?
25	А	It almost well, more than likely it would have come from our Consular

1	Affairs Bure	eau folks in Kabul as a starting point. It then gets cleared through a process
2	at the State	e Department before it's issued.
3	Q	Fair enough. I also wanted to draw your attention. It says: "The
4	Embassy re	minds." Given the context of the word "reminds," is it fair to say that the
5	Level 4 trav	rel advisory would have also predated this January 17th, 2021, security alert?
6	А	I believe so, yes.
7	Q	If you can recall, when was the earliest date in which the State Department
8	issued a Lev	vel 4 travel advisory to Afghanistan?
9	А	I got to imagine it goes back decades, but I'm
10	Q	Why do you say you have to imagine? What informs that opinion?
11	А	Well, the situation on the ground in Afghanistan hasn't been safe for
12	decades.	
13	But	the reason I'm hesitating slightly is I'm trying to remember if this Level
14	4 that the	ese levels, if that was a COVID process and they may have been called
15	something	else previously. But I think it's safe to assume for a long time we have
16	advised aga	ainst travel to Kabul or to Afghanistan.
17	Q	And on that point of COVID-19, do you dispute that in addition to the Level 4
18	warning be	ing issued as related to COVID, it also says to not travel due to crime,
19	terrorism, o	civil unrest, kidnapping, and armed conflict?
20	А	Do I dispute that it says that?
21	Q	Yes.
22	А	No.
23	Q	Great.
24	Whe	en do you recall any STEP-related messaging being disseminated to American

citizens related to the evacuation specifically?

1	A I mean, so we operate under something called the "no double standard"
2	policy. So the minute we're thinking about something well, not thinking about but
3	making decisions related to our own staff security, we have an obligation to alert
4	American citizens to that effect.
5	I mean, I can't remember off the top of my head, but I'm sure it was within hours
6	of initial decisions to move our staff we would have alerted Americans to that effect,
7	because it also changes then our footprint in the country and our ability to provide
8	services to them.
9	Q And so what timeframe would that have been?
10	A Well, let's see. We were already moving we were already on an ordered
11	departure a couple probably a couple weeks before the August dates began. So, I
12	mean, let's call it July.
13	Q Of which year?
14	A 2021.
15	Q Thank you.
16	And could you clarify for the record what STEP is, the STEP program?
17	A Smart Travelers Enrollment Program. I hope I got that right.
18	Q It's not intended to be a pop quiz.
19	A But it's a registration system that Americans can use when they're traveling
20	abroad so they can be alerted to what's going on from a State Department perspective in
21	the country to which they're traveling.
22	So if we have warnings, if we have information that we think Americans need to
23	know about, texts and emails and those types of things, it gives them the chance to
24	receive that.
25	So it's something we encourage all Americans to do when they travel abroad for

1	their own sa	fety and for the safety of their families. Yeah.
2	So it'	s I would say it's really important and critical to us when we have it, but I
3	can't tell you	what percentage of Americans actually do it. I wish it were higher because
4	otherwise w	e have to make lots of assumptions about and use other information to figure
5	out how Am	ericans are traveling.
6	Q	Okay. And using ballpark numbers, what percentage of the outreach to
7	AMCITs was	handled in Washington versus on the ground in Kabul?
8	Α	Well, let's so operating in the August 14 forward evacuation timeframe, I
9	think most o	of it was handled out of Washington, and then utilizing excess capacity from
10	embassies a	round the world, because I don't remember the numbers, but thousands of
11	calls or tens	of thousands of calls were made to try to reach out to people. And we
12	would have	tried to preserve Embassy Kabul's ability to deal just with what was
13	happening o	n the ground.
14	Q	So most of the messaging, if I understand correctly, came from Washington.
15	Is that corre	ct?
16	Α	If you mean contacting them directly, yes.
17	Q	Yes, direct contact.
18	А	And then working directly with Embassy Kabul on what the messaging
19	should say.	Yeah, that's probably right.
20	Q	And that's because the folks in Kabul were dealing with issues on the ground
21	so you were	working to, in effect, support them.
22	А	Yes, absolutely.
23		BY :
24	Q	How long have you been in the Foreign Service?
25	А	Thirty years.

1	Q In any previous instance or crisis, had you found a situation where you
2	actually called a task force where you called AMCITs?
3	A Not that I recall. But, I mean, I do I really just because we're on the
4	record, I feel like I have to say the efforts made on behalf on the part of the Consular
5	Affairs Bureau were remarkable in this instance.
6	I mean, just in terms of mobilizing people to Kabul to go into the dangerous
7	situation in order to help on the ground, and then to do the outreach they did to
8	Americans to try to quantify how many Americans were there, despite the fact that many
9	weren't registered, it was really an undertaking unlike anything I've ever seen.
10	Q So it would be safe to call it unprecedented?

A Yes.

1	
2	BY :
3	Q Could you speak a little bit further about how you made an effort to get in
4	touch with AMCITs who were not part of the STEP program?
5	A I think I mean, I would actually refer you to the Consular Affairs Bureau as
6	to their best practices on these fronts.
7	But typically what we do is we reach out to the funny thing is none of this really
8	applies in the Afghanistan context exactly. But we reach out to hotels, we reach out to
9	places where Americans might be, in an effort to try to put that together.
10	In this case, we have a lot of people calling in. My brother, my cousin, my
11	constituent, my you know, whoever was traveling is there. And so we would follow
12	up on those cases, or CA, I should say, would follow up on those cases, to try to find out
13	did those people were they there? Did they want help?
14	In a lot of cases, it turned out they weren't there. It was really interesting. I'm
15	trying to remember. I think there was one case they called and the person was actually
16	in New Jersey when they reached them. So good, you're home. That's great. But,
17	yeah, it was a huge undertaking.
18	Q Okay. And I think you have previously testified that there were over a
19	hundred individuals in the task force. Part of their job included this exact work we're
20	talking about. Is that correct?
21	A Yeah. It's a little hard to break it out and quantify, because the hundreds of
22	people I was talking on the task force were all over the place, including Dulles, including
23	the continuation of the SIV process efforts, all those things.
24	On any given shift, I would say there were about 20 to 30 people who were

manning phones in the main task force room, and they would often get calls like this and

T	then consolidate them in a means of trying to get that out.			
2	And I think at one point yeah, we started trying to provide some scripts to then			
3	to give exact the exact same advice on how to be contacted and followed if there wer			
4	in fact, people that were saying, "Yes, I'm here and I want to get out."			
5	Q Great.			
6	I'd also like to introduce into the record one more document on this point, exhib			
7	No. 7?			
8	[Thompson Exhibit No. 7			
9	Was marked for identification.]			
10	BY ::			
11	Q Exhibit No. 7 is entitled "U.S. Embassy in Afghan." For "American Citizens			
12	Only." There's a picture at the bottom and some text in the middle. If you could just			
13	take a moment to familiarize yourself with the document.			
14	A [Reviewing.] What date was this one issued?			
15	Q We do not have a date for it. Do you know what this document is,			
16	however?			
17	A I mean, what it is is a notification to American citizens. I don't remember			
18	specifically, but			
19	Q Have you seen a document that looks like this before?			
20	A Well, there were lots of efforts to try to get information out to folks and to			
21	share information and figure out how to get people to the airport and to gates that were			
22	safe and the like.			
23	So I don't know for sure I just don't know for sure if this came, if this was			
24	something developed in Kabul or in D.C. or where.			
25	Q Would you agree, however, that it's a message to American citizens about			

1	how to evacuate Kabul?			
2	A Yes, it is. The reason I'm curious, a little more curious about it is that it			
3	became very difficult to convey information to Americans in Kabul without it getting out			
4	to much broader communities and then people trying to use that information.			
5	So, again, I just I don't I may have seen this. I don't remember seeing this			
6	specifically. And I'm not sure you know, when it says we're in the final days of the			
7	military presence			
8	Q I could just read a couple of these paragraphs to you and you can let me			
9	know if it sounds familiar to you.			
10	Looking at the last paragraph, it reads: "If you need emergency assistance,			
11	please contact the call center at" provides a phone number.			
12	Does the call center, by chance, reference the call center we just discussed based			
13	in Washington, D.C.?			
14	A Based on the number, it looks like it, yeah.			
15	Q Okay. And you had identified previously that there was, in fact, a call			
16	center based within the task force for individuals to call for assistance?			
17	A Well yeah. One of the things that we, as I've and as I mentioned to the			
18	AAR, I think that we could have used is a true call center, staffed with like hundreds and			
19	hundreds of people that could have taken all these types of calls.			
20	I feel like at one point we put out some messaging I don't know if this message			
21	was it or part of it where a number got out and it forced us to have to change some of			
22	the numbers, because basically the call volume incoming just collapsed the capacity of			

But that looks like a State Department number. So, again, I don't know the origin of this. There's a few things about it that I'd have to -- I'd want to substantiate with

the lines.

other folks to understand how it was developed and where it came from. 1 2 Q Fair enough. That makes complete sense. Turning to the After Action Review, we have a couple of excerpts we'd like to read 3 for you. 4 Before we do, however, are you familiar with what the After Action Review is? 5 This is the Dan Smith effort? 6 Α Q That's correct. 7 Α Yes. 8 9 Q And we'll be introducing a copy of the AAR as exhibit No. 10. 10 Α And just to clarify, this is the public release version of the AAR. Yes. So this is the publicly available, unclassified portion of the fuller AAR. 11 Q It's entitled "After Action Review on Afghanistan, January 2020 -- August 2021," dated 12 March 2022. 13 Excuse me. So we're on exhibit 8. My apologies. Introducing this into the 14 record as exhibit No. 8, the After Action Review. 15 [Thompson Exhibit No. 8 16 Was marked for identification.] 17 BY 18 19 Q Have you reviewed the unclassified portion of the AAR? 20 Α The unclassified portion, yes. 21 Q You have, in fact, read it? Α This version, yes. 22 Yes. 23 Q 24 Α Yes. 25 Q Okay. Do you know who the drafter of this document is?

I think I had heard it was one of the members of the AAR group from the 1 Α 2 Historian's Office, if I'm correct. Q Would you be surprised to hear that it is Dan Smith who drafted the AAR? 3 The whole thing? That would shock me. Α He was the lead of the AAR, the After Action Review. 5 Q Well, yeah, I know that. 6 Α What is his professional reputation? 7 Q 8 Α Of the highest order. I mean, he was -- I barely have words to describe 9 how much esteem I hold him in. 10 Q Fair enough. 11 I'd like to draw your attention to the AAR, page 14? 12 Α So, sorry, just to be clear. 13 Q Sure. Α Are we just saying this is a product of Dan Smith's team's work. 14 It is, correct. 15 Q Α Not necessarily that Dan was the drafter. 16 He was the lead on the After Action Review. Q 17 Α Right. 18 19 Q He contributed to the final draft --20 Α Yes, okay. 21 Q -- as submitted, correct. Α 22 Okay. 23 Q Turning to page number 14, I want to draw your attention to paragraph 21. It's the first full paragraph on page 14. I'd like to read into the record. 24

"Nevertheless, in response to this crisis, the Department undertook a massive

1	effort involving tens of thousands of phone calls to contact directly as many private U.S.			
2	citizens as possible to determine their whereabouts, whether they wanted to leave			
3	Afghanistan, and to provide information on how they could be evacuated. This was an			
4	extraordinary response to a unique situation."			
5	Do you agree with this assessment?			
6	A Yes.			
7	Q Do you agree that there were tens of thousands of phone calls made to			
8	directly contact AMCITs?			
9	A Yes.			
10	Q And to prior point, this was, in fact, an unprecedented effort as			
11	compared to other crises?			
12	A Certainly in my experience.			
13	Q I'd also like to draw your attention to page 19. Page 19, the first paragraph			
14	under number 10.			
15	"The AAR found that official warnings to private U.S. citizens throughout the			
16	review period were clear about the dangers of remaining in Afghanistan.			
17	"Most who remained were Afghan-Americans who had made their own			
18	calculations about the risks involved or had compelling reasons to remain			
19	notwithstanding the inherent dangers. This is the case in many crisis situations.			
20	'What was unique in the evacuation of Afghanistan, however, was the effort to			
21	identify and reach out directly to these U.S. citizens repeatedly.			
22	"Going forward, the Department must consider if it will follow this model and, if			
23	so, what are the privacy and resource implications."			
24	Do you overall agree with this finding?			
25	A Yes, I do.			

- 1 Q Is there anything that you'd like to offer for the record that expands upon
- 2 any of these sentiments?

1				
2	[1:44 p.m.]			
3	Ambassador Thompson. I mean, I stated earlier my highest regard for the			
4	Consular Affairs Bureau and the work they did.			
5	I mean, I would just reiterate that protecting American citizens is our highest			
6	priority. It will remain so. But at the same time, as a Nation, you know, we don't track			
7	people, we don't, you know, get in their business every day on every issue.			
8	And so I do think it's worth determining what our modus operandi is going to be			
9	going forward and if we would go to such extents in the future given the resource			
10	implications that would have.			
11	BY :			
12	Q Okay.			
13	And what is your impression of the consular team who was on the ground in Kabul			
14	helping to evacuate folks?			
15	A Remarkable. I mean, their efforts, they I mean, in fact, in certain			
16	instances, they were taking far greater risks than we ever intended anybody to			
17	take wading into the crowds trying to extract people, looking for passports, looking, you			
18	know, to help wherever they could. It was amazing. And when you consider many of			
19	them flew into Kabul just to deal with this, yeah, they've got my gratitude forever.			
20	Q And were you interviewed as part of the AAR?			
21	A I was.			
22	Q And in terms of its overall findings, do you feel that it incorporated your			
23	perspective as to the evacuation and the NEO?			
24	A Yes.			
25	Q Do you take any issue with any of the findings that were set forth in the			

- 2 A No, I don't -- I mean, I'd have to go through it again just to double- -- if they
  3 are, they're insignificant.
- 4 Q Fair enough. So it'd be fair to say that you found the AAR to be credible?
- 5 A Yes.
- 6 Q And comprehensive?
- A Yes. And very useful, I think, for the Department to consider how it conducts its efforts going forward.
  - Q Thank you.

With the last little bit of our time, I wanted to offer you the opportunity if there's anything you'd like to affirmatively share with the committee as to your experiences or perspectives.

- A With regard to the After Action Report, or --
- Q With regard to any of the above. So it could be as related to the task force, your assessment of the evacuation and the NEO, the withdrawal writ large -- anything that you would like to affirmatively share or maybe we haven't asked you about yet.
- A No, I would simply say that, you know, I think, in many ways, for some of the terrible tragedy that was associated with it, you know, there were amazing people trying to do really amazing work under tremendously difficult circumstances.

I'm very proud of all the work everybody on the task force did. I will note that those of us here in Washington, while they were extraordinarily long and convoluted hours and everything else, we were doing it in air-conditioning with nobody shooting at us, whereas, you know, the situation on the ground in Kabul was quite dicey. And the people that went in and did this work deserve our, you know, great appreciation for everything that they did.

1	At the same time, we all know the events of August 26 and what transpired. And				
2	it's still hard to think about what happened on the ground there.				
3	But, you know, I think it was interesting, that day. I don't know if any of you				
4	were on the calls. The 26th just happened to be a day I was scheduled to do four				
5	separate briefings with the Hill. So, you know, I was able to at least provide what we				
6	knew as we knew it in those particular instances.				
7	But I think that's all I'll say.				
8	_ Thank you.				
9	So, reserving our right to ask some followup questions, this does conclude our				
10	questions. On behalf of Ranking Member Meeks and the minority staff, we thank you				
11	very much for your service and also appearing today voluntarily. Thank you very much.				
12	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Sure. Thank you.				
13	. We can go off the record.				
14	[Recess.]				

1				
2	[2:27 p.m.]			
3	_ Just wanted to say thank you, Ambassador Thompson, for			
4	speaking with us today.			
5	Any questions we do ask are, you know, very deliberative, and we took our time to			
6	sort of formulate these inquiries. And on behalf of the chairman, thank you. I			
7	promised we wouldn't keep you here longer than necessary, so thank you for indulging			
8	us.			
9	And, with that, I'd refer to my colleague.			
10	BY :			
11	Q What withdrawal plans were in place at the time of the President's decision			
12	to withdraw unconditionally?			
13	A Sorry			
14	Q Sorry. Let me go a little slower.			
15	What withdrawal plans were in place at the time of President Biden's decision to			
16	withdraw unconditionally from Afghanistan in April 2021?			
17	A What withdrawal plans were in place? I'm sorry.			
18	Q Yes, what withdrawal plans.			
19	A So, from a State Department perspective, at that point, you know, we would			
20	still have been looking at the question of, I would say: Anticipating, probably, that			
21	things would continue along these lines, what would we need to do to stay without a			
22	military presence? So, you know, what was the status of the Resolute Support			
23	compound mission going to be? What kind of medical facilities would we need in			
24	Kabul?			
25	And then I know Zal was still working the question of, you know, could they get to			

1	a negotiated settlement. I don't know in that date and time, I don't know where his			
2	negotiations were exactly.			
3	But that's my recollection of that period, was, you know, we weren't just sort of in			
4	a "hold everything, wait and see," but "keep planning for the possibility that they will			
5	draw down." Because if you don't draw down, then that, obviously, is a different set of			
6	questions that you would deal with.			
7	Q And what planning efforts commenced within the State Department			
8	following the President's April 2021 decision?			
9	A I don't remember anything new commencing so much as kind of accelerating			
10	the process for figuring out the enablers and what we would need to do.			
11	And then, about that time, things were really picking up in interest on SIVs and			
12	trying to start clearing through the backlog. Because I think it was a month or two after			
13	that that we put the task force in place to start that process.			
14	BY :			
15	Q So, in terms of nothing new being initiated by the Department, is this			
16	because prior to President Biden's April 2021 announcement the Department was already			
17	operating under the assumption that there would be a military withdrawal?			
18	A Well, I mean, there was a military withdrawal underway, right?			
19	Q Or, a complete military withdrawal.			
20	A Yeah, so and so I think, from our standpoint, we had to plan as though it			
21	would move in that direction. You know, I mean, I don't think the trigger wasn't			
22	pulled on anything in particular, as I recall. But, you know, a lot of effort, I would think,			
23	was also just going into, you know, putting the information out there so the			
24	administration would know what the decision would mean, right			
25	Q Uh-huh.			

1	A in terms of, you alluded to some of the memos that got sent to say, here's			
2	some of what needs to be considered if the President does move in this direction. So			
3	we wouldn't have wanted just to turn it all off, just to wait and see where we were.			
4	Q Thank you.			
5	BY :			
6	Q And what planning efforts commenced across the whole of government			
7	following the President's April 2021 decision?			
8	A Well, I will say, you know, in the immediate month or two that followed, you			
9	know, there was a pickup in the SIV effort to figure out how do we process more of the			
10	Afghans at risk; putting the enablers in place that would be needed to keep the embassy			
11	functioning, you know, if a stable situation was available to us.			
12	And then that's also when, as I recall, some discussion started in Kabul and, I think,			
13	at the working level with the Afghan desk and others, you know, about what certain NEO			
14	operations might look like and, you know, what would be involved. Because, ultimately,			
15	when we got to some of the contingency planning exercises, you know, that's as I recall,			
16	DOD decided to put some forces make them more available closer to the theater in			
17	case we needed them, which then, as it turns out, we did.			
18	BY :			
19	Q And was that at the direction or request of the State Department, or was			
20	that initiated by DOD?			
21	A I would say that was the result of a pretty large interagency discussion that			
22	took place at the Pentagon and that yeah, I mean, I would say it was a DOD decision			
23	based on what they heard in discussions at that exercise.			
24	Q Thank you.			
25	BY ::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::::			

1	Q Well, do you remember when that exercise was?		
2	A I knew you were going to ask me that.		
3	There was one set of discussions that was SIV-focused; that was more like May, I		
4	think. I want to say early July, maybe, would've been this exercise, if I'm remembering		
5	correctly.		
6	I just I mean, that period, I've got to tell you, everything just started moving fast		
7	and a lot of those dates run together for me.		
8	Q Are you familiar with the annual fighting season in Afghanistan?		
9	A I'm familiar with the concept that there was one. I don't know exactly the		
10	parameters, when it was. But I think basically it tapered off in the winter, is what I		
11	understood.		
12	Q To what extent did the policy review consider that the planned military		
13	withdrawal timeframe coincided with the annual fighting season?		
14	A I honestly don't remember that being a point of discussion. It may have		
15	come up in somebody's take on it. I don't remember if we offered that as part of our		
16	assessment at all.		
17	Q Do you recall anyone at any point conveying concerns that the military		
18	withdrawal would coincide with the annual fighting season?		
19	A I don't.		
20	Q Are you familiar with Acting Under Secretary for Management Perez's visit to		
21	Afghanistan in late April 2021?		
22	A Yeah. I was with her.		
23	Q And what was your role as a participant on that trip?		
24	A Well, it was primarily the Acting Under Secretary; myself; and Carlos Matus,		
25	the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Diplomatic Security, to, again, look at the		

1	question of what would be needed to maintain the embassy presence in the wake of a			
2	withdrawal.			
3	So, you know, we were looking at the RS compound. We were looking at			
4	housing and the hardened structures or lack of hardened structures out at HKIA.			
5	We were looking at the hospital that was in place and run by NATO and what we			
6	would need to do at the embassy, on the RS compound, in order to I don't I think, if I			
7	remember correctly, we couldn't come to the full level of the hospital that was in place			
8	there, but we could come closer to it as something to stabilize people before being			
9	evacuated if need be.			
10	I'm trying to think, what else was there? Oh, and then there was the larger			
11	question of perimeter security and, you know, what types of functions would be needed			
12	that the State Department now would have to pick up and contract with.			
13	And what I can't remember exactly is if it was prior to this or after this and			
14	maybe you mentioned it in one of the earlier or somebody maybe mentioned it in one			
15	of the earlier timeframes. But there was, if I recall correctly, there was a decision to			
16	keep a smaller number of military ultimately on board if, you know, the State Department			
17	was going to stay, but acting more as embassy security, not in a, you know, sort of,			
18	military-footprint capacity.			
19	Q How long was the trip?			
20	A Three days? 24, 25, 26 or thereabouts.			

Did SCA have any involvement in helping prepare Under Secretary Perez for

Oh, yeah. I'm sure we did memos with her staff for her meetings and for

the discussions. I think, if I recall, we also did, like, a townhall-type thing with

Embassy Kabul staff. We did a meeting with General Miller about, you know, the

Q

Α

her trip?

20

21

22

23

24

1	withdrawal progress and timeframe that he was looking at, so I think she had points from		
2	us for that.		
3	Q	These were meetings on the trip?	
4	Α	In Kabul.	
5	Q	In Kabul.	
6	Α	I'm sorry. Was that your question?	
7	Q	Well, that was going to actually be my next question, was what meetings	
8	А	Oh.	
9	Q	My question was, what was the role in preparing in advance of the	
10	Α	Yeah, we would've helped with the memos and discussions in prepping her	
11	for that trip.		
12	Q	Yeah.	
13	So, in discussing the meetings that took place during the trip, I'd like to introduce		
14	exhibit 9.		
15		[Thompson Exhibit No. 9	
16		Was marked for identification.]	
17		BY :	
18	Q	So this is a memorandum concerning an April 24, 2021, meeting with Senior	
19	RSO Fernando Matus and RSO leadership.		
20	I'll gi	ive you a second to look that over.	
21	Was	this a meeting that took place during Under Secretary Perez's trip?	
22	Α	Yes. We definitely met with Fernando and his team. We might've met	
23	with them r	nore than once. I think we maybe had an initial meeting and then, later on,	
24	a bit of a br	oader briefing from all the various RSO elements so we could have a better	
25	nicture of v	you know, the roles that they were currently doing and then what they would	

1	need to pick up as part of the military not being there anymore.	
2	Q And what were your main takeaways from that meeting?	
3	A Well, I mean, simply what I recall was, there was going to be an effort to	
4	harden structures at HKIA in case we needed to move people there to be safe, you know	
5	because things became more difficult in Kabul itself.	
6	We needed to make sure we had an ability to have the same kind of perimeter	
7	visibility that we had with some of the military equipment that was there.	
8	Oh, and we talked a little bit about what do you call it I'm going to call it	
9	"search and rescue." That's not the right term. But, basically, you know, the capacity	
10	that, if somebody goes missing, to be able to go out and rescue, which is a military	
11	component that was there at the time and that we would have to replicate through DS	
12	means.	
13	Q I now want to introduce exhibit 10 into the record.	
14	[Thompson Exhibit No. 10	
15	Was marked for identification.]	
16	BY :	
17	Q This is a memorandum of an April 24, 2021, meeting with General Scott	
18	Miller.	
19	A Yeah. And can I just	
20	Q Yes, absolutely.	
21	A I think, just to be clear, yeah, these are memos to prepare for those	
22	meetings, with suggestions for the Acting Under Secretary of points she might want to	
23	raise or issues. I don't think these are minutes from those.	
24	Q No. Yeah. These are briefing memos.	
25	A Right. Yeah.	

1	Q Were there separate written minutes or readouts from them?
2	A I don't remember any specific things coming from that. I know that Carol
3	tasked things after the you know, after we got home, we had a call with that group that
4	I mentioned earlier, which is her and all the various management and DS components,
5	and we reviewed, you know, what had been found and sort of tasked out contracts and
6	things that needed to be looked at.
7	Q Do you recall the major taskings that were issued by her?
8	A I think the things I just mentioned: the hardening of facilities at HKIA; the
9	work on getting the hospital up and going; the need for yeah, what's that blimp thing?
10	<u>.</u> Extraction.
11	Ambassador Thompson. Oh, the extraction team. And then
12	<u>.</u> Sorry.
13	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u>
14	
15	BY
16	Q So I want to return to the
17	A There may have been more, but those are the big ones that I recall.
18	Q So I want to return to the memorandum for the meeting with General Miller
19	A Uh-huh.
20	Q Do you recall that meeting?
21	A I do.
22	Q And can you discuss your main takeaways from that meeting?
23	A Well, one, that it was an awfully impressive effort, right, to wind down and
24	move as many pieces as they were trying to move in the short time that they were doing
25	it.

1		l see	m to recall taking away that I don't know that he said it explicitly, but that
2	there	was a	n effort that, if they could wrap up the withdrawal faster, they would like to
3	do tha	t for s	security reasons. And so, you know, I think it provided us a little more of a,
4	yeah, v	we ne	ed to be thinking about how we put things in place to be ready to take over
5	any fu	nction	ns that they may have.
6		But	as I mentioned a minute ago, what I can't remember is if at that point we
7	alread	y kne	w the 400 or so were going to stay or if that came later. Just, I can't
8	remen	nber v	when that happened.
9		Q	Did he say how much faster they wanted the withdrawal to take place?
10		Α	I mean, don't get me wrong. We're not talking months. We're talking
11	days.	But	as I recall at that point, they were working towards the August 31 or early
L2	Septer	nber	deadline, and so, you know, that it would probably be a little bit ahead of that
L3	by, say	, a w	eek or two.
L4		Q	And what was the specific security rationale for that?
15		Α	I think just that, you know, when you're moving, as you have fewer people
16	on boa	ard to	support what's happening, the risks are higher, so the faster you get people
L7	out, th	e bet	ter.
18		Q	And
19		Α	I mean, that's my understanding of it. You could talk to DOD to understand
20	better	their	rationale.
21			BY ::
22		Q	By "getting people out," you're referring to getting the military out, correct?
23		Α	Military out. Sorry. I'm totally, 100 percent talking about the military
24	withdr	awal	at this point, nothing else.

What ramifications did that have for the embassy and the diplomatic mission

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in	<b>Afghanis</b>	stan?
	,Ba	Jean.

A Well, I mean, it certainly raised the risk profile, given all the security pieces that we relied on the military for. So that's why I'm saying I think it gave everybody a strong sense of, yeah, we need to really get these contracts and other systems in place so we can mitigate, when they are gone, what we will need if we're going to be able to stay.

Q In terms of security, were they concerned about security regarding, sort of, acts of aggression by the Taliban, or which entity specifically were they concerned about?

A I don't remember him specifying a particular, say, enemy; just that, sort of, safety dictated that you move expeditiously. When you start doing something like this, you don't dawdle.

Q Uh-huh.

And how do those considerations not apply -- and if they did, please feel free to elaborate. But how did they not apply to the embassy continuing? Because if a threat was posed to the military, why was that threat not posed to the diplomatic mission?

A Well, I think, fundamentally -- I mean, look, the threat was constant in Kabul there. That just -- that was a reality of operating. We knew we were going to be operating in a high-threat environment.

But I think this is why we wanted to be able to have -- I don't think we were in a position to, say, let the military leave and then start standing up our security apparatus, right? We needed things to be in place so, when they went, there was already a replacement facility there for it.

Q Thank you.

## BY :

Q And did General Miller express any concerns regarding a continued diplomatic presence after the military departure?

1	Α	I don't remember that he did. Going back to something we discussed
2	earlier, I thi	nk there were some feelings within the military of, "Surely, State can't stay if
3	we're going	to not be here with them." I don't know that he personally harbored that,
4	and I don't	remember him saying that, but
5	Q	Do you recall any other generals or senior military officers expressing that?
6	А	I never got that directly, but I know from members of our team, sometimes
7	there were	sentiments along those lines.
8	Q	I want to now continue to introducing exhibit 11, which is a tweet
9	concerning	an April 25, 2021, meeting between Hamdullah Mohib, the National Security
LO	Advisor of A	Afghanistan, as well as you.
l1	Α	Uh-huh.
12		[Thompson Exhibit No. 11
L3		Was marked for identification.]
L4		BY ::
L5	Q	Do you recall that meeting?
L6	Α	I do. I met with Mohib that trip rather briefly. And then we had a bit of a
L7	meeting wi	th President Ghani, Ambassador Wilson, and I think one of the political officers
L8	from the er	nbassy were also part of those meetings.
L9	Q	So the tweet says that "Mr. Thompson conveyed Pres. Biden's message of
20	continued l	JS commitment to ANDSF, development assistance for Afghanistan, and
21	US-led inter	rnat'l engagement to support peace."
22	Α	Right.
23	Q	Is that an accurate representation of the meeting?
24	Α	Yeah, I would say so.
25	You	know, in both meetings, without, you know, getting into the just because,

1	you know, i	in not a military person, i can't get into the details with milit of all the specific	
2	things that	would be offered we had this broad message of, look, our intention is to	
3	continue ou	r support for the security forces.	
4	We	wanted to be part of continued development assistance that would, we	
5	hoped, encourage others to also continue to play an important role there as well. And		
6	so, you know, urging them to continue working with Zal and others to try to find a path		
7	for a peaceful resolution that would allow this to all happen and allow us to stay was a big		
8	part of that message.		
9	Q	Can you elaborate further on what the Biden administration communicated	
10	to the Afghans and what the Afghans communicated to the Biden administration?		
11	Α	I mean, in terms of	
12	Q	Well, were there any specific guarantees?	
13	Α	I don't think we talked about specific programs or this was really an	
14	encouragement, I think, to try to get them to continue making some of the effort on the		
15	peace process and on the Doha Agreement process. You know, we didn't get into, like,		
16	specific amounts of money or specific programs that would be at least as I recall.		
17	Q	Were there any specific guarantees made?	
18	Α	Guarantees?	
19	Q	Or assurances?	
20	Α	I would say, I expressed a commitment on our part to continue to work and	
21	support the	m. But I would not have been in a position at that point to say, you know,	
22	here's speci	fically what's going to happen next.	
23		BY :	
24	Q	And by "supporting them," was the support geared toward Afghanistan as a	

country more broadly or Kabul? Because based on, sort of, what we've discussed

1	today
2	A Uh-huh.
3	Q and what we've learned in the course of our investigation, I think those
4	two are distinguishable.
5	A Yeah. And it was a somewhat difficult scenario, I would say, because we
6	wanted it to be something where we would be able to operate more broadly. We
7	wanted a situation on the ground where we could continue to offer assistance broadly to
8	Afghanistan. We didn't discuss it in terms of doing things only in Kabul.
9	And a lot of it, at this stage, was focused on enabling the Afghan military to
10	continue in its role defending Afghanistan, defending Kabul in particular at that point, and
11	then continuing our development assistance in such a way that it would also encourage
12	others to stay in the mix and avoid, well, some of what we've seen in the aftermath of,
13	you know, the full evacuation of folks from Afghanistan.
14	Q And although it wasn't communicated, necessarily, in the course of that
15	meeting, what assumptions was the State Department operating under at that time?
16	A Well, I think, that the situation in Kabul would remain relatively stable, that
17	we would be able to operate there, if not in our full well, certainly it wouldn't be in our
18	full capacity, but in a somewhat moderated capacity; that there would be a continued
19	effort towards a deal through the Doha Agreement; and, as a result, that Afghanistan
20	could perhaps, you know, for lack of a better word, start to operate like a normal country,
21	right, with recognition and everything else, with whatever new government was in place,
22	which was not going to be the case, as we've seen, from a full Taliban takeover.
23	Q Uh-huh. Thank you.

Q I think you had said that you weren't in a position to offer specific

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1	guarantees at that time
2	A Well, I wouldn't have been able to offer like, I as I recall, at that point in
3	time, right, they were still looking at what support they could offer to the military for
4	maintenance, for development, training, all those types of things. So I don't think I was
5	able to say to him: We'll do X, Y, and Z.
6	It was: More broadly, we're committed to continuing this relationship and to
7	continuing these efforts. But I think it was also, if I recall correctly, you know: We
8	need you all to continue to make efforts and find a way forward through the negotiations
9	to get to a settlement.
10	Q So those specifics just hadn't been worked out yet by
11	A As I recall. Because this would've been April yeah, end of April. So, you
12	know, they worked on that, I think, well into the June-July timeframe.
13	Q Were those specifics ever fully worked out?
14	A I don't think so. Again, I'd refer you to DOD for all the details on that, but I
15	don't think we got to a point where we had it all nailed down just yet.
16	BY :
17	Q When we presented you with the tweet of your meeting with Hamdullah
18	Mohib, you mentioned there was also a meeting with President Ghani.
19	Could you please give us your takeaways from that meeting?
20	A Well, it was interesting. It was the first time I'd ever met Ghani. And I
21	probably got about a sentence or two in, and then he gave me quite a lecture on Afghan

I delivered much the same message to him, over the course of that time, as I did with Mohib. And then -- but, you know, there were no, sort of, outcomes, right, "I'll do

history and, you know, sort of, the direction he wanted to take things. And it was very

friendly, it was very pleasant.

this; you do that" type of thing. He relayed a lot of his perspective on the situation as it had developed over the years and where they were headed.

He certainly seemed -- I will say, he seemed optimistic about the direction that things were going to be able to go and committed to trying to work with us on a way forward. What I can't say is I came away thinking he was committed to a process with the Taliban. He wasn't negative on it; he just -- you know, I didn't have from him, "I'll work with them," as I recall.

## BY ::

Q So, in terms of his lecture, statements, his rhetoric, as an Afghan-American, I can attest to the fact that Afghan history is very complex and has a way of repeating itself throughout history.

Would you say that his concerns were centered on the fact that he didn't believe -- or, he thought that, you know, the Afghan perspective, outside of Ambassador Khalilzad, was not being taken into account?

A I don't think I would go quite that far. I think I was a completely new entity for him and probably, given my background, someone he just didn't have any sense of.

Because he'd worked with, you know, so many Americans over so many years in various different roles. I think he felt compelled to share his perspective with me on where things were headed.

Yeah. I didn't, kind of, catch a dual meaning or a separate, kind of, "You need to take this back and factor in these new things." I can't say that what he shared with me, you know, was fundamentally different than factors that Zal would've absolutely known and been aware of as well.

Q Did you engage with President Ghani at any point in the future after that meeting?

1	A I sat in the meeting that he had with Secretary of Defense Austin was that
2	June of '21, I think, when they came to the U.S.? And that was my only other time that I
3	saw him.
4	That meeting was pretty straightforward at that point. The Secretary laid out
5	that we were still committed to trying to find a way forward to support troops. Ghani
6	was pretty straightforward that, you know, he understood the President's decision, that
7	he was committed to making the adjustments that needed to be made to enable the
8	government to continue to function.
9	That meeting didn't get into as much on the negotiation and peace process stuff,
LO	just because of, you know, what it was and where we were.
L1	And he also, as I recall I think CEO Abdullah Abdullah was with him, and
12	Vice President is it Saleh? And I think they may have done some interventions as well.
13	It seemed clear they wanted to present a pretty unified kind of picture of where they
L4	were.
L5	Also, it was interesting; Ghani seemed to be quite a U.S. Civil War buff. And so I
16	think there was a press spray at the top or something like that, and, as they were leaving,
L7	some of the press shouted questions to him about the future of Afghanistan, and I
18	remember he made a reference to Lincoln and the U.S. Civil War as a way of expressing
L9	optimism and confidence in the direction that things were going to go from there.
20	Q Uh-huh.
21	BY :
22	Q During that meeting, did Ghani or the Afghan officials make specific requests
23	for assistance from the U.S. to support the Afghan military?
24	. "That meeting" being the Austin meeting?
25	Ambassador Thompson. The Austin meeting?

1		BY :
2	Q	Yes.
3	А	Did they make specific requests? They might've. I don't recall thinking at
4	the time, "	Oh, that's new," or, "That's different." I mean, if they did, it was probably to
5	reiterate so	ome of the support they wanted in terms of maintenance and other issues
6	related to	their Air Force.
7	Q	And, at that point, the U.S. still had not come up with a plan
8	Α	Austin said he was committed to trying to find a path forward. I think he
9	outlined so	ome of the issues they were having. I don't really remember the details of
10	what they	were, but that he was optimistic he was going to be able to find a way forward.
11		BY :
12	Q	Was Ghani still optimistic in June?
13	А	I thought he was. I mean, I found his mood and everything else to be quite
14	positive.	
15	I re	member thinking at the time you know, you think about these things in
16	terms of w	hat's reported and how many filters something goes through and how accurate
17	is this info	rmation that I'm reading versus when you hear directly from people on the
18	ground.	
19	And	d, anyway, I remember thinking, wow, well, they certainly seem like they're
20	committed	I to moving forward and trying to make a go of a you know, find some sort of
21	deal. So,	you know, my hope was that Zal was going to be successful working with them
22	in that dire	ection. Yeah.
23	Q	So, moving on, was there a plan for what would happen to the embassy if
24	the Talibar	n would take power?
25	Α	You mean, sort of, specifically like what transpired on August 14th?

1	Q If the Taliban were to take control of Afghanistan, seize power, not through
2	a power-sharing agreement.
3	A Yeah. So I would say, that fell into the category of not a stable
4	environment where we could continue to operate, you know, unless there had been
5	some sort of deal worked out ahead of time and an understanding of how that was going
6	to work.
7	So, at that point, I think we're into evacuation status or, at the very least,
8	hunkering down at the airport to see what might've happened. Because there's a
9	scenario where that could happen, where I suppose the Afghan Army is still fighting and
10	there's just a lot of uncertainty. Or there's the scenario that happened, which is they're
11	able just to come in and essentially take over.
12	Q How long did the State Department believe that the Afghan Government
13	could hold off the Taliban in the absence of the U.S. military?
14	A Well, by the time we got to June-July and saw the movements happening, I
15	think most assessments were 6 months to a year, is what was being discussed. You
16	know, there were so many factors at play at that point.
17	And then, like I said, I remember specifically going home the night of the 13th
18	without any expectation that I was going to get a call from the ops center, you know,
19	saying Kabul has fallen, but that's exactly what happened that, you know, middle of the
20	night, early the next morning, so
21	BY :
22	Q Was there a plan in place if it did transpire the way the State Department
23	predicted, based on your testimony? Was there a plan in place for what would happen
24	to our Afghan allies?
25	A Well, I mean, that's where the effort was being ramped up to keep I mean,

- in fact, I think the whole -- I don't want to say the "whole point." The whole point
- would've been a totally successful outcome that would've been good for all of
- Afghanistan. But, at the very least, right, we wanted to be able to keep operating so
- 4 that we could process the SIVs and move people out in a somewhat orderly fashion.

5 Where we, you know, came up short, if you will, is the fact that the government

6 melted away, and we had to try to figure out how to bring people into an airport through

a chaotic situation in the city so that we could, you know, keep things moving, set up the

8 lily pads, all the things we did as part of the task force.

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Q So it wasn't a matter of if Afghanistan and ultimately Kabul would fall in the hands of the Taliban, but a matter of when?

A Well, again, it depended on the situation. So, if there was no deal, no good-faith effort on the part of the Ghani government and you were simply talking about a fighting scenario -- that's how I understood it, at least -- that the Afghan National Army could probably hold them off 6 months to a year.

If -- what we had hoped would take place is a negotiated settlement, some sort of arrangement for a different government structure, maybe combined with the fact that people just got weary of fighting, if it looked like the Afghan Army was able to hold its own -- I mean, I would say, think a Ukraine, right, type scenario -- that that would be an incentive for people to stick to trying to find a deal.

This is how -- I mean, this is kind of how I interpreted it. I can't speak for Zal and everybody else's thinking exactly, but this is how I was kind of thinking about it at the time. And my sense is that's what we hoped for as an outcome time.

- Q So I think Ukraine is a bit different, given that --
- A Oh, totally different.
  - Q -- the fact that we had a 20-year presence and very reliant upon the other.

1	But we keep you know, there's this we keep focusing on, you know, the
2	good-faith effort on behalf of the Afghan Government, if they adhered to the promises
3	that they made and the conditions, et cetera. But wouldn't that necessarily implicate
4	the bad-faith effort of the Taliban in that instance? Because, ultimately, it was that
5	which led to August 15th, correct, the bad-faith conduct of the Taliban?
6	A By continuing to march through and take capitals?
7	Q Uh-huh.
8	A Yeah, I mean, I don't know. That process was sort of underway,
9	but yeah, I mean, I never I mean, I don't think there was ever a sense that the Taliban
10	was on the same kind of level or the same type of part I mean, they weren't a partner,
11	right? They were an adversary with whom we were trying to negotiate some sort of
12	positive way forward that would be good for the country as a whole.
13	Obviously, the model that we had hoped for was not going to be the outcome.
14	You know, that was in place already and hadn't been able to sustain.
15	Yeah, I don't I mean, I don't remember talking about it in terms of
16	good-/bad-faith efforts in that regard.
17	Q Would you say holding the Taliban and Afghan Government to two different
18	standards caused the Afghan Government to be destabilized?
19	A I don't think so. I mean, I think we were holding everyone to fairly high
20	standards on one level. And, you know, I don't know for sure, but I think I don't think
21	it's unfair to say there was more the Afghan Government could've done to bolster its
22	credibility and its strength in the lead-up to what happened.
23	Q So how were we holding the Taliban to a high standard?
24	A Well, we were fundamentally trying to bring them into an agreement that
25	was completely anathema to their general principles, right? I mean

1	d but an agreement they didn't runy agree to.
2	A I'm worried you're I'm no fan of the Taliban. I'm just trying to
3	Q No, no, no, no. That's not my that was not my intention to imply
4	whatsoever, but more so, an agreement that they didn't wholly comply with.
5	A Well, I mean, yeah, I think there probably were concerns along those lines.
6	But, you know, decisions were made on moving forward with the withdrawal. We had
7	to try to figure out a way forward that would work. And what we hoped for was
8	something that would work that would provide a peaceful solution for the country.
9	. So I'm comfortable if you're comfortable.
10	We've strayed a long ways from extracting facts from a witness
11	. I just want to speak in terms of regional
12	to having a philosophical debate, which
13	. No, in terms of
14	you know, if you're comfortable, Dean, that's okay.
15	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Well, I just want to be clear that I'm not really speaking
16	for the administration or anything on those particular points. I'm just kind of
17	conveying
18	BY :
19	Q No, no. And that's not my intent. It's more so, sort of, as the regional
20	bureau responsible for Afghanistan policy
21	A I understand.
22	Q it'd be and if we do speak about anything, it'd be, sort of, SCA
23	sentiments, which we'd defer to you ultimately.
24	A Yeah.
25	Q But that's, sort of, what we're interested in, trying to better understand,

1 what were the considerations as this was transpiring, given -- were there Afghan Government expectations for the Taliban. 2 No, and I think it's fair. I think the issue is, you're getting some opinion 3 4 from me on this, but there are folks far more expert in that process than I was, right, who were far more engaged in the actual day-to-day with the Taliban. So I think, you know, 5 to extract those ideas and sentiments is going to be better coming from them. 6 Q Uh-huh. 7 8 Α But our fundamental hope was that we were going to be able to be in a 9 position where we could stay and continue to help Afghanistan and continue to pursue 10 some of the goals and principles and policies that the U.S. had been pursuing for some time there. 11 It wasn't to be, but -- but it was the goal. I mean, I strongly believe it was the 12 13 sincere goal of this administration -- well, and, you know, of the U.S. Government writ large -- to find a solution like that. 14 15 Q Thank you. I'm happy to move on to the next subject. 16 17 BY Did Under Secretary Nuland or any other senior Department leaders visit Q 18 19 Afghanistan between President Biden's announcement and the start of the emergency 20 evacuation in August 2021? 21 Α Oh, goodness. I'm afraid I just don't remember. I believe Secretary Blinken did, didn't he? 22 Q 23 Α I think he did. Gosh, I can't remember if Under Secretary Nuland visited at

all. And then, of course, Acting Under Secretary Perez was there with our visit a couple

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weeks later.

1	Q	And did you make any other visits separately?
2	Α	No. That was my only one.
3	Q	And can you describe any other meetings or discussions you had with Afghan
4	officials fro	m the beginning of or, from President Biden's announcement to mid-August
5	2021, aside	from the ones that we've already discussed?
6	Α	So there were the two in Kabul; there were the two in Washington. The
7	only other o	discussions in that timeframe that I might've had I can't I probably spoke
8	with the An	nbassador once or twice about different things, but I can't recall specifics.
9	It's just	
10	Q	Ambassador Rahmani?
11	Α	Yeah. Yeah.
12	Q	And what moving on, what regularly scheduled meetings or briefings were
13	in place wit	hin SCA to plan for the withdrawal?
14	Α	Well, our Afghan team had, you know, a regular set of meetings that they
15	were in tha	t Mark Evans would've been able, probably, to detail for you all.
16	You	know, we had a weekly briefing with Mark and the front office to understand
17	where thing	gs were. We had the weekly call with Carol Perez to kind of keep that
18	process mo	ving forward.
19	And	, again, just to be totally clear on it, this was planning for our ability to stay
20	after a milit	ary withdrawal, at that point.
21	Q	And so, in those meetings, you know, with SCA and the front office, the
22	Afghan tear	m, who were the participants?
23	Α	It would've been Mark Evans; probably his director, who I'm just blanking all
24	of a sudden	or his acting director, because everybody was up a level; myself; and

occasionally our PDAS, Erv Massinga.

1	Q	And were minutes or other briefing documents provided?
2	Α	Generally not for those meetings. They were kind of standing meetings
3	just to cato	h up and see what needed to be done.
4	Q	And could you elaborate also on the weekly call with Ambassador Perez?
5	Α	Yeah. It was a pretty standard, sort of, just update from everybody. So
6	she had a p	oretty simple agenda, which was, I would usually give I'm trying to think if I
7	think Kabu	I was on those calls as well, if memory serves. So I think either I would start
8	or Kabul w	ould start with just an update on, you know, what the latest was from the
9	embassy.	And then she would go around and just get an update from each office or
LO	bureau tha	t had a particular function that they were going to need to do to fulfill, kind of,
l1	some of th	e lists I've gone over earlier.
12	Q	And were there minutes or readouts of those calls?
13	А	Not that I recall. There may have been a notetaker from her office. I
L4	don't reme	mber.
L5	Q	So what tabletop exercises took place in that period from President Biden's
L6	announcer	nent through the ultimate evacuation?
L7	Α	Yeah. There was one that I participated in, which I think is the one I
18	referenced	earlier, that July sticks in my mind. I might have to
L9	Q	Do you remember, early July or late July?
20	Α	I think it's got to be early July, in order for some of the takeaways to have
21	been put ir	n place in time for August.
22	And	I then I want to say there was something called a rehearsal-of-concept exercise
23	that I did n	ot attend. Mark Evans attended for us and, I think, DMR, Deputy Secretary
24	Brian McKe	eon, if memory serves. I don't remember when that was, but I think that was

earlier, like, maybe -- like, soon after the -- or, I shouldn't say "soon," but sooner after the

,	L	announcement t	han t	he Ju	lly.
		announcement t	nan t	ne Ju	IIV.

- 2 Q Do you remember the takeaways from the rehearsal of concept?
- 3 A I don't. Mark would probably have a better recollection on that.
- 4 Q Over the course of 2021, prior to the emergency evacuation, did any
- 5 Department officials provide direction for U.S. Embassy Kabul to reduce its footprint
- 6 and/or staffing?

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- 7 A Dates again? Sorry.
- 8 Q Over the course of 2021, prior to the emergency evacuation.
  - A Yeah. So there -- well, I think the request might've come from Kabul; I don't remember exactly. But we started an ordered departure sometime in July, if memory serves, to draw down, you know, the number of folks that were on the ground.
- 12 Q And that was initiated by the embassy, not from --
  - A I mean, typically, those are initiated by an embassy in preparation for, you know, circumstances that they want to have more control for. So that would've been something Ross -- but I can't say there wasn't some discussion that might've influenced them. I just don't remember that.
    - Q Did SCA have a position more broadly on the need to reduce -- or, the wisdom of reducing the embassy's footprint and/or staffing?
      - A Well, we were always kind of looking at our staffing patterns. And, you know, I think one of the -- I can't remember if it was the AAR or one of the OIG inspections -- you know, commented that one of the challenges that we faced was everything moved ahead with the normal summer staff turnover at the embassy, so you had people with experience leaving and brand-new people coming in just days before everything kind of went to hell.
        - I want to say there were positions that Embassy Kabul was thinking about trying to

1	add to th	eir roster that got put on hold, but I can't remember when that decision was
2	exactly.	But I think it was after you know, it would've been after the decision point.
3	Q	Do you remember the nature of those
4	А	I don't. I mean, it was a litany of positions that I'm sure met various
5	functions	around the embassy.
6		BY :
7	Q	Do you know who put the hold?
8	А	I don't know that there was or, I think I want to say the embassy said
9	they thou	ght it made sense to hold on them.
LO	Q	Uh-huh.
l1	А	We usually would defer to the folks on the ground for things like that. I just
L2	have this	vague recollection of some number of positions that we decided to wait and see
L3	before w	e actually filled.
L4	Q	Makes sense. Thank you.
L5		BY :
16	Q	So, moving on, did the Biden administration ever implement a plan in 2021
L7	that fully	addressed the needs of the Afghan military and the Afghan Air Force?
18	А	I don't think we got to that I don't think we were able to get to that point.
19	I mean, I	think I would defer to DOD in terms of how best to answer that question on a
20	technical	standpoint. But I think the situation was OPE by the time they would've been
21	able to ge	et around to that.
22	Q	Do you believe that the Biden administration upheld its commitment to the
23	Afghan m	ilitary?
24	А	I don't think it ultimately had the chance to, because the Afghan military sort

of melted away. I think every effort was being made to figure out how to support them.

And I guess we'd have to you know, we'd have to sit back and define what do
we mean by "commitment." I mean, we expressed a commitment on a number of
political levels to continue supporting them even after our withdrawal, but, of course,
there were lots of, probably, assumptions built into that, including, you know, continued
negotiations on a post-withdrawal government, you know, changes to their overall
structure and how they were prosecuting their efforts against the Taliban.
Yeah. So, I don't know, that's a bit of a hard question to answer in a "yes" or
"no" way.
Q All right.
When did you first get the impression that the situation on the ground in
Afghanistan was deteriorating and that the Taliban was making significant military gains?
A Well, I want to say it was probably June where we started to really see, you
know, progressive advances on areas starting to get closer to Kabul, June-July.

1		
2	[3:20 p.m.]	
3	BY :	
4	Q And what was your reaction to those rapid Taliban gains in June and July?	
5	A Well, I would say concern. And this, I think I mentioned earlier, prompte	
6	me to kind of ask for folks that knew the situation there much better than I, you know,	
7	what did they think, you know, was it possible to hold, you know, even a smaller portion	
8	and still be able to function there?	
9	But I think it also prompted the effort to pick up the processing on SIVs and	
10	thinking about what a bigger NEO operation might look like.	
11	Q And who were the folks you turned to as the experts for that assessment?	
12	A That would've been my Afghan team, Mark Evans and his folks.	
13	Q And what was Mark Evans's background and expertise in Afghanistan?	
14	A That's a good question. I'd have to go back and refresh my memory. I	
15	can't remember if he served there or not previously. But he was our Acting DAS at the	
16	time. He'd been the director of the Afghan office for about a year when this all kicked	
17	up.	
18	Q What actions did you take in response to the rapid Taliban gains?	
19	A I mean, I would say everything we've just outlined: trying to work within	
20	our process to figure out how we get the SIV process turned on and or, I should say,	
21	reinvigorated and streamlined; figure out how to work with you know, planning	
22	towards an ability to withdraw if need be or to evacuate if need be.	
23	But, again, Zal was still very engaged with the process of negotiation, as I recall,	
24	and so we wanted to give that every opportunity to succeed. So supporting, you know	
25	whatever he would've needed would've been high on our priority list as well.	

1	Q	Did you follow military reporting and periodic updates on the situation in
2	Afghanistar	n, such as the commander's placemat?
3	А	I think I saw it occasionally. I don't recall how often it would've been
4	updated an	d I would've seen it.
5	Q	Do you recall what indicators they showed between April and August 2021?
6	Α	No, I wouldn't be able to tell you that.
7	Q	Did you follow intelligence community reporting on the situation in
8	Afghanistar	n?
9	А	Yeah, I was provided regular read-ins by our intelligence and research folks
10	on a range	of issues in SCA but including Afghanistan.
11	Q	How regular?
12	А	Probably once, twice a week at least.
13	Q	Without providing any classified details, what were your takeaways from the
14	indicators t	hat they showed?
15	Α	From the indicators that I saw, you saw a progressive, kind of, decline from
16	when I star	ted in the position to estimates of, you know, if the U.S. withdrew
17	completely	, the ANA could hold things for anywhere from 18 months to 2 years. I think
18	that progre	ssively got shorter and shorter until, towards the end, it was more like 6
19	months to	a year, if memory serves.
20	Q	Did it depict a worsening situation in the country?
21	А	Well, I mean, certainly in the case of more, you know, Taliban holding more
22	territory, ye	es.
23	Q	And did that alarm you?
24	А	It was concerning, absolutely, and, you know, I think, something that we
25	tried to fac	tor into our thinking. And I think it certainly had to be influential in terms of

- decisions that were made about how to pursue the negotiations that were going on at the time.
- Q Are you familiar with the July 2021 dissent channel cable sent by State

  Department officials from U.S. Embassy Kabul?
- A So I was aware -- I had heard that there might've been a dissent channel cable. I think I reached out to post to ask if they were aware of it. There's a -- and so -- maybe I should start back with, yes, I'm aware that there was a dissent channel cable.

At the time, you know, I reached out to ask if post was aware and knew any of the concerns that were in it.

There's a pretty set, cut-and-dried process at the State Department for dissent channel. You guys may have already heard a lot about this. So, you know, in order to protect the integrity of the process, you don't really go looking for "let me see it"-type stuff. S/P runs a very detailed thing. I don't recall them ever coming to me with this particular one for comment or reaction. So I don't -- I never -- I don't recall ever seeing it.

And I've seen comments the Secretary has made about it, you know, after the fact, but I can't speak to how he came to the assessments he did about certain points. I think he said that, you know, it was helpful, that it was something they took into account in their planning, but that, also, many of the issues that it raised were being addressed in other ways. But I haven't seen it, so I don't know which respects --

Q How did you learn of it?

A I think somebody on the Afghan team had heard, probably, that it was out there or that somebody had drafted one. As I recall, it wasn't just -- sometimes these are just one person, you know, sort of floating their idea. I think this may have had

1	some additional folks involved. So probably somebody mentioned it to someone.			
2	And I think it was raised up to my level, just, "Hey," to be aware of. And then I			
3	think I talked to I don't know if it was Ambassador Wilson or Scott Weinhold, but I think			
4	I raised with Kabul that I'd heard about it, and I think they had been aware of it as well.			
5	Q Do you know			
6	A And, at that point, you know, we would've said, well, let's see where the			
7	process takes it.			
8	Q Do you know if any other officials from SCA read the dissent cable?			
9	A I doubt it, but I don't know for sure.			
10	_ I just want to when you say "other officials" he just said he			
11	didn't. So I haven't heard an SCA official named anywhere in this entire proceeding that			
12	read that cable.			
13	. We're asking him for			
14	. No, I understand. Were you trying to say it implies that he			
15	read it?			
16	Do you know if anyone in SCA read it?			
17	Ambassador Thompson. I did not read it, and I'm not aware of anyone else I'm			
18	not aware of anyone else who read it, period, other than the Secretary and probably the			
19	S/P director.			
20	. That's fair. And we definitely understand the process, so			
21	thank you for that.			
22	Are you aware of to what extent the dissent cable influenced the Department's			
23	decision-making?			
24	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> The Secretary says that, you know, he took it into			
25	account. I can't tell you to what degree, and without knowing what's in it, it's hard to			

1	say specifically, on, this or that looks like it was influenced.
2	. I think we are now out of time, so we'll stop the clock.
3	Ambassador Thompson. You've got 10 seconds.
4	. We'll go off the record.
5	Ambassador Thompson. Games have been won in less.
6	[Recess.]
7	. Should we start the clock and go back on the record?
8	BY :
9	Q How often did you engage with SRAR Khalilzad throughout the withdrawal?
LO	A Sorry, the military withdrawal? I would say when he was in town. I had
1	more interactions with Molly Phee, his deputy, when he was traveling.  If she was back,
L2	she would come in and keep us apprised of some of his discussions. I would call it
L3	monthly, maybe, just because he was on the road so much.
L <b>4</b>	Q Monthly with Zal. And with Molly Phee, how often?
15	A Well, let's call monthly it with SRAR
16	Q Monthly with SRAR.
L7	A one of them. Yeah.
18	Q Okay. And what was discussed during those engagements, and what were
19	your takeaways?
20	A Generally that, you know, they were making efforts to try to cut a deal; that
21	think they were focused on what steps would need to be taken by the Taliban, what step
22	would need to be taken by the government.
23	You know, based on some of the conversations with Zal, I would say he was
24	optimistic but realistic about what it is he was, you know, trying to accomplish. I think
25	he felt like well, I don't think I should characterize his feelings. But from things he said

1	to me, I got the sense that, you know, it was tough to convince Ghani to move in some of				
2	the directions he thought would be best in order to move forward.				
3	But, you know, we didn't dive deep into this. I mean, Zal's far more experienced				
4	in terms of that process and the situation on the ground than I was when I came into this				
5	So, you know, I was taking on and Molly was very well-versed in, sort of, other peace				
6	processes and, sort of, strategies and tactics that had worked in that. So it was				
7	interesting to hear from her occasionally about, you know, efforts that they would try to				
8	make to move the ball forward.				
9	Q And what were those things that Zal thought that Ghani needed to do that				
10	Ghani wasn't willing to do?				
11	A I think some of it had to do with well, I think some of it just had to do with				
12	directly negotiating with the Taliban, providing the right level of person and				
13	decision-making. I think there were asks on the part of the Taliban that maybe he				
14	wanted to do. I just I wasn't steeped in the details of it. I don't remember the				
15	specifics, but				
16	Q You don't recall what any of the asks were?				
17	A No, not off the top of my head. I'm sure there's probably records of it and				
18	Zal's probably talked about it, but I just don't recall.				
19	BY :				
20	Q We're going to change course a bit in the chronology of things.				
21	Ambassador, you're familiar with what a noncombatant evacuation, or a NEO, is,				
22	correct?				
23	A Yes.				
24	Q We've been referencing it throughout the course of the TI, so I imagine so.				
25	A Yeah.				

1	Q In the course of the Department's withdrawal planning and your				
2	involvement in it, when did the possibility of a NEO come up?				
3	A Well, sorry, this is a little pedantic on my part. NEOs are always, right, part				
4	of the planning scenarios, right? They're part of an EAP, an emergency action plan, and				
5	something that has to be taken into consideration.				
6	And, as I talked about earlier, they're always the last resort, right? You're always				
7	hoping that you'll be able to identify, we used to call them tripwires, now they're called				
8	decision points, and identify when you would move people and want to warn people to				
9	get out, and take things out of the military's hands as much as possible.				
10	But I would say, sort of, serious planning for a noncombatant evacuation started				
11	to ramp up probably early spring of 2021				
12	Q Uh-huh.				
13	A as, you know, we thought about what the footprint was like, the direction				
14	that things might likely go.				
15	You know, just again, we were trying to balance a number of challenges at one				
16	time, from the option of negotiations working and coming out with a plan that would				
17	allow us to stay, all the way to having to take everybody out.				
18	Q Uh-huh.				
19	A What I think started to happen later in the spring was this thought				
20	that typically when you're doing a NEO, you would be taking out the staff, the American				
21	staff, American citizens, and if we had MOUs with other countries that, you know, we had				
22	agreed to help them evacuate.				
23	What ended up, of course, happening was a combination of a NEO and sort of a				

humanitarian airlift. And so there was some thinking that started about, you know, how

could we do that, which is what I think prompted DOD to have some assets placed closer

24

- to the region, so that they could react as quickly as they did in August.
- 2 Q And that's exactly what I'm asking about. Because the way that sort
- of -- my understanding of it is that there was a point at which -- up until probably the very
- 4 end, there was a big emphasis on how to maintain the U.S. diplomatic mission in
- Afghanistan. And, obviously, there are priorities in sequence, just given the resources.
- 6 When did that scale -- so when did focus start shifting more toward a NEO? Or,
- 7 at the very least, when did resources start being dedicated towards serious NEO
- 8 planning?
- 9 A Yeah. Mid/late spring 2021.
- 10 And, then, through that July exercise I mentioned, there was a lot of discussion
- about what that would potentially look like. Again, I think in everybody's mindset,
- though, it still was within a 6-month-to-a-year period probably, not, oh, 3 weeks from
- now. But that was the reality that we ended up with.
- 14 Q Was there an Afghanistan NEO working group?
- 15 A So there was a -- I think the Afghanistan desk and its military counterparts
- and Embassy Kabul had sort of a group that was looking at stuff. And Embassy Kabul
- was working with U.S. forces in Kabul, because, of course, one of the issues that had to be
- 18 contended with is, a NEO while U.S. military forces were in country is a different scenario
- than if they had completely withdrawn and were gone. And so there was some thinking
- and planning about what would be needed in both those scenarios.
- 21 Q And other than the Afghanistan NEO working group, who else in the
- 22 Department was involved in NEO planning?
- 23 A Well, I would say Brian McKeon, Carol Perez -- sorry. Deputy Secretary
- 24 Brian McKeon, Acting Under Secretary for Management Carol Perez, Assistant Secretary
- 25 Gentry Smith, PDAS Carlos Matus from DS. I was there.

1	l'm	basically trying to think who all was at this planning meeting at the Pentagon.
2	Yea	h. And then Mark's team, the folks in Kabul, and then the DOD components.
3	Q	That's helpful. Thank you.
4	In te	erms of the working group, did Mark Evans lead that group in the Department,
5	or who led	that?
6	А	I don't remember if Mark led it or if one of his folks was the point person on
7	it and if he	was in and out. I don't remember that.
8	Q	Did you oversee the group in any capacity?
9	А	I mean, no, not in a day-to-day sort of well, I don't think it was a
10	day-to-day	group, necessarily. But, you know, we would get updates occasionally from
11	their planni	ing process and purposes.
12	Q	How often did the group meet, to the best of your recollection?
13	А	I'd have to defer to Mark on that. I want to say probably weekly or maybe
14	even a coup	ole times a week in some cases, but I don't remember for sure.
15	Q	Do you recall when it was formed and then when it dissolved?
16	А	Oh. Well, when it dissolved was the day it all went into action, more or
17	less. Whe	en it started, I don't remember off the top of my head. Again, I have
18	early-spring	g/late-spring timeframe in mind.
19	Q	Was it around June, or was it earlier than that?
20	Α	I feel like it was earlier than that, but I if somebody else has said June, it
21	could be Ju	ne.
22	Q	When the working group was first stood up, was DS represented in it?
23	А	I honestly don't remember.
24	Q	What did the planning
25	А	It would surprise me greatly if they weren't, but I just don't remember.

1	Yeah.	
2	Q	What did the planning in the working group contemplate?
3	Α	Well, I think they had to look at the question of, you know, what were the
4	circumstand	ces on the ground, what would be needed to move X number of people under
5	certain diffe	erent conditions.
6	I thi	nk, you know, one of the questions that started after July was, if it advanced
7	to a larger a	airlift, you know, where would these birds actually go. Because they
8	couldn't i	f it's just Americans, right, you can come all the way back to the U.S. If you
9	have people	e that need vetting before they can come onto U.S. soil, then you need to have
10	interim stop	os, things of that nature.
11	But,	yeah, beyond that, I couldn't give you a lot of detail.
12	Q	So, going back to my prior point, in terms of there were two parallel
13	tracks on	e being maintaining the U.S. diplomatic presence, and the other, the
14	NEO whic	h one ultimately took priority in that, sort of, June-July timeframe?
15	А	Well, again, I would argue, you know, sort of, it was walking and chewing
16	gum at the	same time. You had to have both in mind, because we didn't know which
17	direction it	would ultimately go.
18	But	certainly by July, discussions of and planning and thinking about NEOs had
19	risen much	higher on the priority list. But I wouldn't say it had overtaken planning for
20	remaining i	n place. Because, remember, remaining in place would've still needed
21	options if th	nings had gone bad, right?
22	Q	Uh-huh.
23	Α	So, again, it's part and parcel of your continuing engagement, whether you
24	use it imme	diately or 6 months or 2 years down the road.

Did any of those paths become a priority at one point?

24

25

Q

Α Which one? 1 2 Q Did any of those two paths become a priority at one point? Α I mean, in August the NEO became the de facto reality, right? Yeah. 3 That's helpful. And would you say at the beginning of August or as it sort 4 Q of --5 The 14th. 6 Α Q The 14th? 7 8 Α Yeah. 9 Q Okay. 10 When did you first learn that a NEO would be requested? I mean, had to be the 14th. I mean, we knew at that point that's the only 11 Α way we can move people. 12 Were there ever discussions about avoiding using the term "NEO" at any 13 Q point during either the withdrawal planning or ultimately the evacuation throughout the 14 Department? 15 Α Avoiding using the term? 16 The term "NEO." Q 17 Α I don't remember anything like that, no. 18 19 Q Was there a plan in place for a NEO prior to the August 2021 emergency 20 evacuation? 21 Α Was there a -- I mean --Q Let me back --22 23 Α -- there was planning going on for how to conduct one. So let me backtrack. Had a plan been solidified, so finalized, that the 24 Q 25 individuals on the ground were working off of during the August 2021 emergency

## evacuation?

A I think portions of a plan were in place that they were working off of, but
part of the challenge, right, anytime you're talking about these is, every plan like that is
situation-dependent. And so, you know, it's one thing if, you know, you're because, in
this case, you're conducting a NEO that's more than just moving people from point A to
point B. You're also still continuing the withdrawal of U.S. forces, and then you're
adding the component of Afghans at risk. So that's a different scenario than just if, let's
say, the withdrawal had been done and you were going in.

So, yeah, I think portions of a plan were in place that they could draw from, but then there was some improvising that had to happen given the timing and the circumstances of what came up.

- Q Did you ever see the plan?
- A I feel like at some point I saw some drafts of where they were in terms of thinking about, you know, where DOD would have to place aircraft, things of that nature.
- 15 Q Do you recall the level of detail in the plan?
- 16 A Not off the top of my head, no.
  - Q And to what extent did the plan account for worst-case scenarios, and what were those scenarios?
- 19 A Well, I mean, sorry, I'm not being funny here. It's just, by definition, a NEO 20 is worst-case scenario, right? So --
  - Q So let me be more specific. There are NEOs, and then there are factors that are considered in the NEOs -- for example, the magnitude of that evacuation, the number of Afghans who would be waiting outside of HKIA seeking --
- 24 A Right.
- 25 Q -- to go to another country, or the security situation, the threat of ISIS-K, all

- of the above. And without having to go through all the various factors, that's sort of what we're contemplating --
- 3 A Yeah. So --

- 4 Q -- in those worst-case scenarios.
- A So I would say, certainly the threat scenarios -- ISIS-K, those types of
  thing -- were a known concern and always, always on mind, right, with everything that we
  were looking at.
  - The situation as it existed of kind of no control in the city, chaotic situation around HKIA, an inability to move people in some sort of orderly fashion in and out, that was sort of unique to the circumstances in the moment that we had to deal with. I don't recall having a specific plan for -- you know, there's no support -- there's no existing -- there's no legacy support anymore from the Afghan National Army.
  - Q So is it fair to say that the plan didn't contemplate conducting a NEO with the Taliban controlling everything but for HKIA?
  - A Yeah. It didn't contemplate a complete -- I mean, here's the thing. I'm not sure I would go so far to say the Taliban were controlling everything either, right? I mean, they had, sort of, roadblocks and different things set up, but I don't know, at that stage, how much control they had in Kabul either.
  - So, you know, whether we -- you know, because we -- I know Zal was talking to their folks in Doha, and they were talking to their folks in Kandahar probably. But yet, when we said we wanted to move a bus from point A to point B, it didn't always work out smoothly, right? So that's why I'm saying it's just hard to say, in that scenario, that they were in control.
- 24 Q Of course.
- And I don't mean to say that NEOs aren't inherently a worst-case scenario, but

1	there are	
2	Α	Sure.
3	Q	you know, the images that we've seen, the experiences the consular
4	officers had	
5	А	Right.
6	Q	obviously, there are differences amongst different NEOs.
7	Α	Absolutely. I mean, I've seen NEOs come off where everybody lined up
8	orderly, you	get on the plane, you take them out, and it's pretty straightforward. But
9	this was just	not that case.
LO	Q	Were there potential events that the Department identified as decision
l1	points that v	would need to trigger a NEO?
12	Α	Yeah, every EAP has decision well, every EAP has decision points that
L3	acknowledg	es, you know, a point where discussions and decisions have to be made.
L4	And there a	re ones that get to such a dire point that you don't have any option anymore
L5	but to go in	to request a noncombatant evacuation and involve the U.S. military.
L6	So Ei	mbassy Kabul's EAP certainly would've had that. And I think, certainly, the
L7	breakdown	in order that took place in Kabul overnight would've fallen into that category.
L8	Q	Do you recall what some of those other decision points were?
L9	Α	I mean, I don't recall Kabul-specific ones, but it certainly would involve things
20	like, you kno	ow, the ability of local security forces to continue support for embassy
21	security ope	erations. It would involve things like the availability of electricity, food,
22	water, road	access around town.
23	Agai	n, Kabul's unique because we moved a lot by helicopter. There were a lot of
24	factors in Ka	abul that were different than you would find in a lot of places.

Did anyone in the Department or in the Biden administration more broadly

25

Q

1	call for a NEO to be initiated before August 15th?			
2	A I can't say nobody was thinking about that, but I don't remember anybody			
3	raising, should we I mean, before August 15th, I mean, commercial flights were still			
4	going. The circumstances under which you would justify a NEO I don't think were really			
5	in place. So I just don't remember anybody raising it, that question.			
6	Now, there was a discussion of trying to further facilitate and streamline and			
7	speed up SIV processing, things of that nature. So there was an effort to try to move			
8	more people. But the hope was you could do that in a more orderly way over a period			
9	of time.			
10	BY :			
11	Q So, prior to August 15th, the situation in Afghanistan, with provincial capitals			
12	falling in rapid fashion and the Taliban moving towards Kabul, those were not			
13	circumstances that would necessitate a NEO?			
14	A No, because you could still move people commercially, right? You could			
15	still charter planes to come in and out. And so you wouldn't necessarily need			
16	U.S. military to go in and effect a you know, have a show of force to ensure that you can			
17	move everybody safely.			
18	But after August 14th, the airport was shutdown, there was no more way to move			
19	people in and out like that. That's where you need the military to be involved.			
20	Q So you were operating under not the potential of a threat to Kabul and HKIA			
21	being something that would initiate a NEO but the threat actually materializing as to what			
22	would initiate the NEO?			
23	A I'm sorry. Say that again. The threat of a			
24	. Potential threat.			
25	BY ::			

1	Q	So, bas	sed on what you just said	d, it sounds like the potential for a threat to
2	Kabul and I	HKIA did	not necessitate a NEO.	It was only when that threat actually
3	materialize	d that yo	ou believed a NEO was n	ecessary.
4	Α	Yeah.	I mean, let's say I me	ean, we could run all sorts of hypotheticals a

A Yeah. I mean, let's say -- I mean, we could run all sorts of hypotheticals and it's probably not the best use of our time. But, yeah, the fact that there were still viable commercial options to move in and out and ability to do that through a functioning commercial airport, typically you wouldn't. Because, at that point, doing a NEO would mean disrupting everything that existed. I mean, I don't know how we really even would've necessarily done that without, in effect, taking over Kabul, right? And then you're in a very different set of circumstances altogether.

## BY

- Q I want to point you to the minority's exhibit 8, I believe -- well, general exhibit 8, but introduced by the minority -- "After Action Review on Afghanistan" --
- 14 A Yeah.

- Q -- and specifically page 11 on the "Findings."
- 16 A Yeah.
  - Q So bullet point 1 states, "Those decisions are beyond the scope of this review, but the AAR team found that during both administrations there was insufficient senior-level consideration of worst-case scenarios and how quickly those might follow."

Why do you think the Department was deficient in anticipating and being prepared for the worst-case scenarios?

A Well, I don't know that we were completely deficient, but I think we were probably engaged in a certain degree of probabilistic thinking, right, which is, you know, if there's zero chance of something versus if there's some chance of something, what would it be.

And, again, the information we were working on at the time	was that the army
would hold, the government would be able to, you know, sustain its	self in power. The
complete, you know, fall of the government, the Ghani exit scenario	o, the melting away o
the military, I mean, I admit, it's kind of a classic black swan, right?	Kind of, everything
that could go wrong did go wrong.	

And so we probably do need to start factoring more of that into some of our thinking. I think somewhere else in here there's a call for -- it was either in here or one of the IG reports -- like, a red cell, red team, you know, alternative-thinking component. Maybe not a bad idea.

Q That's helpful. Thank you.

So, in the course of our investigation, members of the DOD have expressed frustration at the unwillingness of the Department to plan for a potential NEO early enough as the security situation deteriorated in Afghanistan.

Are you personally aware of why members of the DOD would assert this?

A So, to be honest with you, without being able to talk to them directly, I'd actually probably want to go back and understand what do they think a NEO is and, you know, what were the circumstances they were looking at that they would think that.

Because I don't know -- given the circumstances on the ground and given what we had to decide to do in a very quick situation, you know, I don't know what NEO planning would've changed.

Because the way it is, right, starting on the 14th or 15th of August, we had planes coming in and going out pretty regularly -- I mean, so quickly, in fact, that the military sort of made its own de facto decisions to just grab people, put them on the planes, and take them out.

So I guess I'd need to argue -- I'd have to go deeper with somebody's -- what they

1	think would've been different with a different planning scenario.
2	Q And I don't want to speak for members of the DOD
3	A No, no, I understand. That's why I'm just
4	Q Yeah. Yeah.
5	A arguing that I probably would need to go deeper on that to understand it
6	better.
7	Q Did you take part in or were you aware of any internal meetings at State and
8	with the DOD regarding the decision to shut down Bagram and leave HKIA as the only
9	serious option for conducting a NEO?
10	A I don't remember being part of any discussions on Bagram, and I honestly
11	don't remember off the top of my head exactly when it shut down. But, you know, I
12	would have to leave it to the military to discuss what that would have enabled or
13	provided.
14	I would just note that, in terms of all our planning, it always involved moving our
15	people to HKIA, to areas where we had hardened facilities and the ability to sort of
16	shelter in preparation to take them out.
17	I mean, I can't remember off the top of my head, but Bagram is 30, 40 miles
18	outside the city, so I don't know I don't know what it would've bought us to keep that.
19	But maybe the military has some idea. I just don't know what it was.
20	Q Given the State Department's equities in terms of the consular functions
21	and, sort of, the evacuation of civilians, was the magnitude of the evacuation considered
22	in that decision or contributed by the State Department?
23	A Are you talking about Bagram?
24	Q Correct.

A I don't know. I wasn't part of that discussion.

T	Q Did anyone in the State Department raise concerns about conducting a NEO
2	through HKIA?
3	A Not that I'm aware of.
4	Q Do you have any knowledge or insight into the decision-making process that
5	led to the decision by the chief of mission to request the NEO on August 16th?
6	A I mean, yeah, I think the circumstances on the ground were such that no
7	longer could you contemplate moving people to safety via commercial means. The
8	situation had deteriorated to such a level that we couldn't reasonably ensure the safety
9	of our folks on the ground. We were already in an ordered departure scenario. So I'm
10	confident that those all factored into his thinking in asking for that.
11	Q Did Department leaders ever communicate to you directly that a NEO was
12	going to be requested?
13	A I mean, it came in from Ross. It was part from the get-go on August 14th,
14	it was part of the discussion. So I wouldn't say it was communicated to me. It was
15	something we were all aware of, the circumstances we were in and were working
16	towards.
17	You know, the process for that involves, kind of, a request to the NSC and then
18	over to the DOD from the Department. There's a whole internal process that does all
19	these things.
20	Q From the Executive Secretary to the State Department
21	A Right. Yeah.
22	Q to the Secretary of DOD?
23	A So I think we were all aware of that process.
24	I believe that, if I remember correctly, something kind of got there was some
25	sort of glitch in the paperwork on it, and the paper actually ended up catching up with the

1	process. Because it had already been worked out ahead of time, that we knew this is
2	the direction we had to go.
3	Q So I want to go back to exhibit 8, the After Action Review, and specifically
4	page 12. And we're going to look at number 9 on that page, if you want to take a look.
5	A Uh-huh.
6	Q So the publicly released AAR states that the NEO planning process was,
7	quote, "hindered by the fact that it was unclear who in the Department had the lead."
8	As someone who was involved in this process, why was this unclear, per the AAR?
9	A Hm. I don't know. I mean, it's a pretty simple kind of scenario, in the
10	sense of chief of mission knows the circumstances on the ground and would make the
11	request; SCA would be the bureau to, you know, help focus on that. I don't remember
12	this coming up as an issue. I'd have to yeah, I'd have to go back and understand
13	better what the concern was.
14	Q Did you think it was clear who in the Department had the lead?
15	A Well, again, I mean, the lead for planning, or the lead for the NEO? Right?
16	I mean, the chief of mission, in conjunction with his counterparts on the ground, has, sort
17	of, the lead for requesting the NEO. DOD runs it. Chief of mission has, sort of,
18	oversight of who's involved in being taken out. Planning for it, SCA was working it with
19	DOD and with post. So I'm not 100 percent sure who else would've played in that.
20	know Deputy Secretary McKeon was well-involved.
21	Sorry, I hadn't really focused on this one before. I'd have to I'd want to know a
22	little more about where people thought the breakdown was there.
23	. Who within SCA was involved in the planning?
24	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> It would've been Mark's team. I don't remember
25	exactly who. But the Afghan desk would've been engaged with that, and probably, to

1	some degree, our military advisor.	
2	BY :	
3	Q So, moving on to bullet point 10	
4	A Uh-huh.	
5	Q I'll give you a moment to take a look at it.	
6	A Yeah.	
7	Q So the publicly released AAR also states that a major challenge for the NEC	)
8	planning was that, quote, "senior administration officials had not made clear decisions	
9	regarding the universe of at-risk Afghans who would be included by the time the	
10	operation started nor had they determined where those Afghans would be taken."	
11	Can you speak to this?	
12	A Yeah. So I would say, there was a lot of discussion in the early days about	t,
13	you know, who exactly fit the bill of an at-risk Afghan. We had focused a lot on SIVs,	
14	people that had worked for the U.S. Government. Then, of course, there were P-1s,	
15	P-2s, folks that would qualify, sort of, for refugee status, hadn't worked for us directly,	
16	that were part of, say, issues in which we had an enduring interest and would be at risk	
17	because of their affiliation, things of that nature.	
18	A lot of these cases had to go up, or groups of these cases had to go up, for	
19	decisions at higher levels really in the interagency, I mean, I think more at the Deputies	
20	Committee level than in the Department itself.	
21	And so, you know, if possibly we had known the scope and scale of what those	
22	groups would've looked like before everything had come down and we had had clearer	
23	guidance that, yes, you know, everybody can go out on a military plane, or, yes, we're	
24	going to facilitate individual charter flights, you know, of certain groups.	

Part of the challenge we ran into was, turns out it's more than just the U.S.

1	military that has airplanes. Lots of other groups are able to get them as well. And they
2	were coming to us and saying, "Hey, we've got a planeload of SIVs." Well, turns out
3	these weren't necessarily always folks that were SIVs. But they might well have been
4	Afghans with reasonable risk, maybe P-1s, P-2s. So how you vetted those people, how
5	you coordinated their movements. And then, in this particular case, you couldn't take
6	them directly to the U.S. You had to take them to go through the vetting process and
7	everything else.
8	So, you know, I think yeah. I don't know how well we could've known the full
9	scale of that universe ahead of time in these circumstances as they existed. But an
10	earlier decision that was very clear about who would be included, you know, I think

Q And in terms of getting guidance from up top, are we referring to the NSC?

The White House?

A Yeah, I think this would've been, sort of, a Deputies Committee discussion and ultimately a decision coordinated by the NSC. I mean, that's what happened in the cases that, you know, were developed in the early days, so --

Q Do you recall how many outstanding Special Immigrant Visa folks that had applications were there throughout 2021?

A I want to say 18,000 is what sticks in my head.

20 Q So --

A Which would be, sort of, the pending number, right --

22 Q Uh-huh.

would've been useful.

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A -- that was in place when this kind of all started. I think it was, like, early August, or maybe it was even that week of the NEO beginning, applications kind of spiked up, and so there was a larger number there by the end. But I think 18,000 is where we

1	were at the time that we were trying to eat away at that number.
2	Q So, looking at May 2021, why did the State Department only seek to expand
3	its SIV slots from 4,000 to 8,000, especially considering the fact that the U.S. troops were
4	departing just a few months later?
5	A To increase its slots?
6	Q To increase its, yeah, SIV slots, expand its SIV availability. I believe that's
7	the number that was available at that time.
8	A I don't remember that issue. I'm afraid I'd need to know SIVs are
9	numerically limited by law, if I'm remembering correctly. So I don't know if that's what
10	that means or if I'm not sure what that number refers to.
11	Q Okay. Thank you.
12	BY :
13	Q If the NEO had been initiated sooner, before the Taliban had taken Kabul,
14	would it have been easier to get Americans and Afghan allies out?
15	A Again, sorry, I'm not trying to avoid the question. I'm just I'm really
16	having trouble understanding how a NEO could've taken place prior to when it did.
17	Because up until that point, we had a functioning government and an airport, and so, just
18	under our normal procedures, right, we wouldn't have gone in that direction.
19	Yeah. To suggest otherwise the implications of what we would've had to do to
20	conduct a NEO seem I mean, I don't know. There are so many unintended aspects to
21	what could've happened in those cases, I'd be reluctant to try to guess what that
22	would've looked like.
23	Q Should the effort to find consular officer volunteers to go to HKIA should
24	that process have started before the Taliban took Kabul?
25	A Again, I don't know what exactly we I mean, CA has a pretty sophisticated

mechanism, as I understand it, for -- sorry. Bureau of Consular Affairs is pretty adept at identifying people and getting folks to go into situations like this.

If we had, you know -- I don't know. Maybe if you had known it was going to break the way it broke and you could've gone out a week earlier, something like that could've been helpful. But, otherwise, you would've risked taking a lot of folks away from other functions and not knowing if you needed them right away or not.

As it was, you know, we were able to surge them up relatively quickly, I thought.

And a lot of the issues weren't a function of how many consular officers we had at the airport, I don't believe. I think it was getting Americans into the airport and being able to convince Americans to actually leave.

Q You had noted that the Afghan task force, I think your words had been that it was "all stood up in that moment," in mid-August 2021?

A Well, it had -- an Afghan task force had stood up for the SIV process I think roughly in June that was very focused very much just on streamlining and getting the SIV process back up and going in a more robust way.

But the rest of the operation was very much a function of pulling that function into what we were doing with a task force that would monitor the situation on the ground, the Dulles Expo Center and bringing the Afghan refugees and SIVs into the country, the work with -- oh, earlier, I forgot to mention the work with veterans groups and others who were also trying to help Afghans get out. We were incorporating their efforts into what we were doing. Yeah. But all those pieces kind of got put together over the course of that first week.

Q Should Operation Allies Refuge have been started before late July 2021?

A I'd have to go back and look at how that was all structured. I can't -- I don't have an opinion on that.

1	Q	You had said that you were surprised by the number of Americans who
2	reached out	about Afghans that they wanted to get out. Should that sort of thing have
3	been predict	ed, given the 20-year war and number of Americans that have worked with
4	Afghans?	
5	Α	Well, you know, I think we thought we had predicted some of it. It just was
6	bigger than a	anything we imagined.
7	I mea	an, just we were talking earlier about Ohio. From my wife's small town in
8	Ohio, a fami	ly that we had known well for years, we had no idea that they had a tie to an
9	Afghan fami	ly that was trying to get out, and, you know, I got a call from them one night.
10	l just I just	wouldn't have expected and this was not a military family. These were
11	folks who ha	d other ties, right?
12	So it'	s something I think we want to try to work on and figure out, how we do this
13	and how we	capture that data and information. I would love to. But, again, the
14	numbers we	re just massive, in terms of call volume that we got in.
15	Q	Would it have been
16	Α	And part of it, too, I think, to be fair, is, often when you have a task force in a
17	crisis situatio	on like this, people, even if they don't know the full set of circumstances
18	they're callir	ng in about, will call in because they think they might have a friend or
19	somebody ir	a circumstance or situation. Hence the number of requests we got to help
20	AMCITs that	, when we finally got a hold of them, said, "Oh, no, I'm good. I'm planning
21	to stay."	
22	Q	Would it have been helpful for State or the U.S. Government more broadly
23	to begin out	reach to veterans groups or SIV advocacy groups beforehand?
24	А	Might've been. I don't know how much we were doing with them

separately. We weren't directly, through SCA, that I recall. But that might've been an

1	interesting thing, for us to have engaged with them more.
2	BY :
3	Q What was SCA's role in consular operations related to the withdrawal,
4	including in providing visas for Afghan partners and at-risk Afghans, as well as consular
5	operations during the emergency evacuation?
6	A Well, so SCA's role would've been in facilitating consular officers who were
7	on the ground in HKIA and, you know, providing them the same support we were
8	providing to everybody else who was on the ground there.
9	SCA had a unique role in the SIV process. There's a unit in our executive office
10	that sort of oversees moving all the pieces that need to be coordinated and then sending
11	things in for chief of mission approval and running the process through.
12	But Consular Affairs is its own bureau. So, in terms of its operations, they would
13	make the call as to how best to utilize their people. And they're the experts on issuing
14	visas, visa eligibilities, all the pieces that go into that.
15	Q What's that unit called, and how large is it?
16	A I don't know how big it is now. I want to say, at the time that I took over, in
17	was 10 or 12 people. I know it's been expanded. I think it was just called the SIV unit.
18	It's just a team that's in our EF (ph) shop there.
19	Q And what role did you play regarding consular issues related to the
20	withdrawal and evacuation?
21	A I mean, as head of the task force at that time, it was trying to ensure that we
22	were synced up with CA. The CA Assistant Secretary and a lot of their front office and
23	their task force people were co-located with us so we could exchange information and,
24	you know, sort of coordinate resources where they were needed.
25	I would say I had to adjust my thinking somewhat quickly in terms of the

1	traditional mindset of what State does in a	situation like this for American citizens. I	t
2	became very clear that our Consular Affairs	Bureau was going to go to much greater	
3	lengths than I'd ever seen previously. And	I so trying to figure out how we could be	

supportive of that effort and exercise was critical.

- Q Did SCA play any role in determining which populations were eligible to be evacuated?
- A I mean, I would say -- sorry. I'm trying to think of who -- I mean, so we would've deferred to the chief of mission as far as who was staying and going from Embassy Kabul. That's a chief-of-mission sort of prerogative.

We would have sought -- if there were certain functions that they needed on the ground in Kabul, we would've sought to help find people to serve those functions and, of course, to facilitate the travel of consular personnel to get there.

In terms of the question of prioritization of people leaving, I mean, it's always kind of a cut-and-dry situation. It would be American citizens, green-card holders, you know, embassy staff and personnel, countries with which we have MOUs. And then there is that broader category of Afghans at risk, which, as I recall, was more of a function of who we were able to get into the airport, less about, you know, where they fit on a hierarchy of "you worked for us" versus "you worked with us" type of scenarios.

1	
2	[4:20 p.m.]
3	<u>.</u> Was that intentional?
4	Ambassador Thompson. What, getting them into the airport?
5	. That it was less a function of who they were and more of whether
6	they could get into the airport.
7	Ambassador Thompson. Well, no, our intention would have been everybody
8	gets into the airport as quickly as possible. But the situation on the ground surrounding
9	it proved very, very difficult, especially in the early days.
LO	. The byproduct of the environment?
l1	Ambassador <u>Wilson.</u> Right.
12	BY ::
L3	Q Let's talk a bit more about the large U.S. airlift from HKIA during the NEO.
L4	Can you provide a breakdown on the evacuees by category? And we're not
L5	looking for specific numbers unless you remember them, but if you could give us your
L6	best approximation. How many were U.S. citizens?
L7	A Oh, gosh. Sorry. I probably could have quoted you numbers a year and a
18	half ago. I don't remember now.
19	The total number was 125,000. I want to say somewhere in the neighborhood of
20	60,000, 70,000 were Afghans that will be resettled in the U.S. Some number was U.S.
21	Government employees. I do not remember the final number of AMCITs and green card
22	holders.
23	And to be very honest, when you're talking about green card holders, I don't know
24	how easily we were able to differentiate them from the broader just category of Afghans
25	at risk.

1	Yean, that's as far as I'm comfortable going with numbers. I'm sure they're
2	available somewhere.
3	Q Do you have a sense of a percentage of the number, of the broader pool,
4	what percentage were AMCITs or green card holders?
5	A I just don't know off the top of my head. I really don't want to steer you
6	in a bad way.
7	Q Sure.
8	A Because I'm sure those numbers are available somewhere.
9	Q Sure. And many people have suggested that the Afghans who were
10	airlifted out of Kabul were individuals with ties to I guess without ties to the U.S., while
11	many actual Afghan allies were left behind.
12	Do you believe that to be correct or incorrect?
13	A I think it's well, I think, broadly speaking, my opinion is it's incorrect.
14	I do think, especially in the first day or two, there was an effort to clear. Because
15	so many people got to the airport, DOD took a lot of people out and just put them on
16	planes and got them out. And we had to catch up with them after the fact, once they
17	were in Doha.
18	But I would say after the first couple of days we had a much better handle on who
19	was coming in, where and when and how.
20	And Ambassador Bass' effort on the ground at HKIA was really focused on
21	coordinating with the military and coordinating with all the different flight arrangements
22	that were happening, so helping partner countries and allied countries move their people.
23	In some cases I think there were instances of, "Oh, hey, Poland's going to take a
24	plane out and they have ten extra seats.

Things of that nature.

1	So I think there were a lot of efforts to make sure we had good control over who
2	was getting on except in the early days. But, I mean, as an overall percentage of the
3	evacuees, I would guess that number's low.
4	Q How consistent do you believe the vetting was of the individuals entering
5	the U.S.?
6	A I would have to defer you to DHS for that. But, I mean, I'd have
7	trouble I'd be surprised if it was different from one place to another.
8	Q And one last question. To what extent were American citizens who wanted
9	to leave Afghanistan unable to get out by the August 31st departure?
10	A So I don't recall specific cases of people who wanted to go being unable to
11	get out. CA may have had some folks that couldn't get to HKIA for various reasons. I
12	don't remember that being the case.
13	I know they worked really hard, even with folks that were outside of Kabul, to try
14	to help figure out ways either for them to get to Kabul or to get out via the Uzbekistan
15	border or sometimes through Pakistan later on in the process.
16	Q Do you remember how many known Americans were still in Afghanistan
17	when the U.S. left at the end of August 2021?
18	A No. CA would have those numbers. I don't remember off the top of my
19	head.
20	BY :
21	Q Do you know how many potential SIV-qualifying Afghans
22	A I'm sorry. Just to be clear, when we say known, it would only be those that
23	we know that either we'd been in touch with or contacted us. There probably were a
24	greater number than whatever that number was. Sorry.
25	Q That's okay.

1	How many exactly how many potential SIV-qualifying Afghans did the Biden
2	administration and the State Department believe were in Afghanistan in 2021?
3	A Oh, I don't remember if we put a number on that. I think we operated with
4	assumptions. I mean, we had, what was it, something like 18,000 in the backlog.
5	Yeah. I mean, when you think about the number of different agencies that had
6	operated there and who was eligible and the recordkeeping, I'm not sure. There
7	probably is an estimate. I just don't know it.
8	Q And you don't recall an effort to put together a universe of potentially
9	A Oh, I recall an effort to do it. I just don't recall if they were ever successful
10	at really coming up with a firm number that they had great confidence in.
11	Q Do you think I mean, do you think that that number would have been
12	significantly higher than 18,000?
13	A Yeah. Yeah, probably.
14	Q Did the State Department believe it was important to protect HKIA,
15	especially given it would be the only possible site of a NEO following the closure of
16	Bagram?
17	A You mean sort of physically defend it?
18	Q Yes.
19	A Yes. It was not part, as I recall, of our I don't think we had plans for, say,
20	a larger security force. We would have our planning would have assumed that the
21	Afghan military would protect the perimeter. We would have had security on the
22	portions that we controlled for where we were going to put the hardened structures and
23	things like that. But, yeah, it was a critical node for us.
24	Q Did you believe or the State Department believe U.S. troops would be
25	allowed to stay to protect HKIA following the August 31st deadline?

1	A So I believe there were some discussions about that. I think Ambassador
2	Khalilzad may have actually even raised that question with the Taliban.
3	My recollection is that they were not positive on that discussion and so we looked
4	perhaps to other options. But you probably better double-check that with him.
5	Q Had any of those other options been worked out such as security
6	arrangements with the Turks or anyone else? Had those been finalized?
7	A They had not been finalized because, in fact, there was a lot of discussion
8	about who might run the airport, who might provide equipment that was needed.
9	think we even got some contractors to go back in, in order to help get it up and running
LO	again.
11	But, yeah, Turkiye and Qatar were both sort of vying for that opportunity. I don't
L2	think it got finalized. If it got finalized, it was after my time.
L3	Q Do you think that finalizing things such as protecting the airport, which was
L4	the lifeline for the Embassy and the potential site of a NEO, do you think that it would
15	have been helpful to work out those arrangements sooner?
16	A Theoretically, I suppose, sure, if we had known for sure the Turks were going
L7	to stay and that we could have had that all in place.
L8	What I don't know is whatever we had worked out, if it would have survived kind
L9	of the first contact of the military and the security forces dissolving, because, again, even
20	with whatever we would have worked out, that would have been part of the assumption,
21	is that they would have had a role.
22	. We're out of time. We'll stop the clock. Go off the record.
23	[Discussion off the record.]
24	<u>.</u> Back on the record. Thanks.
)5	RY RY

1	Q	We talked a little bit earlier about Operation Allies Refuge. That was the
2	effort stood	d up by the Biden administration to fly out SIVs that began in July 2021,
3	correct?	
4	Α	Yes.
5	Q	And I think we went through this a little bit, but each of those flights leaving
6	Kabul carrie	ed up to 250 people. Were you aware of that number?
7	Α	That sounds right. I mean
8	Q	Just also my understanding is that each of those flights, no more than 200
9	seats were	full on a 250-seat flight. Were you aware of that number?
10	А	I recall there being some discussion about trying to get as many people onto
11	the flights a	as possible. There may have been, but I don't remember.
12	Q	Would you, I mean, would you be surprised if someone said there was not
13	enough der	mand to fill those planes?
14	Α	No. I mean, again, depending on the timeframe we're talking about, even
15	into June a	nd July there didn't seem to be a mass desire to exit Kabul.
16	And	I think people thought they still had time to put affairs in order. I mean, you
17	heard stori	es of people trying to sell houses, sell cars, make arrangements for more
18	elderly fam	ily members.
19	So i	t wouldn't surprise me that of the pool that were totally cleared and available,
20	who had SI	Vs available to them, that there wouldn't have been a full demand. But the
21	more we co	ould have done, we probably could have filled those seats.
22	Q	And then, just in terms of the sequencing, I just wanted to clarify a couple of
23	things.	
24	Und	lerstanding that the criteria for a NEO, that is, flights were still going, all of it,

potentially the people that would have left on a NEO at that time, the demand wasn't

1 there in, say, in July for the same amount of people to leave, correct? 2 I'm not aware of a specific demand signal we could have pointed to, to Α say -- I'm trying to think about, like, how we could have done that without, in effect, 3 4 making an even more chaotic situation, if that makes sense, to basically say, "We give up. We're taking everybody out who wants to go. We're taking over the airport." 5 I mean, it also just would have required -- well, I'm not an expert on the logistics 6 of something like that. But I just think it would have required lots of additional military 7 8 effort. I'm having trouble envisioning how that would have even worked. 9 Q Right. And then, just as to the sequencing a little bit, at the end of July of 10 that year, of 2021, were you familiar with the Allies Act? Α 11 Sounds familiar, but I can't put a --It's legislation that -- I think you mentioned this earlier -- there was a cap put 12 Q 13 in by Congress on the amount of SIVs that were allowed to enter and the criteria on how they were allowed to enter every year. The Allies Act --14 Α I knew there was a cap, but I don't know that I knew it was part of that. 15 Okay. 16 Well, the Allies Act actually lifted, it changed the cap. It increased the cap. Q 17 Α Okay. 18 19 Q Which I think allowed for the criteria to change to let different types and 20 categories of people in. 21 So that, I think, given that legislative change, do you anticipate that that would have increased the numbers of people that would be able to leave? 22 23 Α If there was no cap on the --

If the cap increased?

I suppose, yeah.

Q

Α

24

Q 1 Okay. 2 I mean, well, it sounds like we're saying by default it would have, it would have enabled it. Whether that would have meant more -- yeah, I don't know how that 3 number compares then to the number of foils that had been issued at that point. 4 can't speak to what the demand would have been. 5 Okay. That's all I had. 6 Q 7 Α Thank you. 8 . Thanks. 9 <u>.</u> That concludes our round. Thank you. 10 . We have probably just 10 more minutes. Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Yeah, sure. 11 . And I'll also just say before we go back on the record, I don't 12 think we'll be needing the classified segment today. So hopefully that cuts your day a 13 14 bit shorter. Ambassador Thompson. There's not a whole lot of classified stuff. 15 [Laughter.] 16 . So we'll start. 17 Ambassador Thompson. All right. 18 19 BY 20 I want to briefly go back into the point about the planes, the purportedly 21 empty planes, the purported lack of demand by the Afghan people. 22 23 Α That's when we were working that. 24 Q Okay. 25 Α That's when we had sort of kicked off that process, yeah.

1	Q	And in that timeframe, the U.S. Government was operating on this idea that
2	Kabul woul	d still subsist, correct, based on our prior your prior testimony?
3	Α	Yes.
4	Q	Okay.
5	А	Well, it was our intention to try to put in place circumstances that would
6	make that p	possible, yeah.
7	Q	So the circumstances pursuant to which Afghans were making decisions not
8	to fly were	very different than the circumstances that they then encountered on August
9	15th, corre	ct?
10	А	Sure, yeah, absolutely.
11	Q	Okay. Thank you.
12		BY :
13	Q	If the NEO had been initiated sooner, U.S. troops would have flowed to HKIA
14	sooner, cor	rect?
15	Α	Well, I got to be honest. I don't remember how many went in versus how
16	many were	going out at that point. But the military would have put in place whatever
17	they neede	d on the ground, yes.
18	Q	When the NEO was initiated, thousands of U.S. troops then flowed into
19	HKIA, corre	ct?
20	А	Right.
21	Q	And that was the plan that you were aware of for conducting a NEO?
22	Α	Yes. But, again, the environment probably made that a different scenario
23	than if we v	vere conducting it under more permissive terms.
24	Q	Sure.
25	А	Anyway, at the end of the day I think this is probably more a military

1	question in terms of how they would secure an airport and operate in those settings.		
2	But, yes, they would have taken in whatever they needed to conduct the operation.		
3	Q And you were aware of that at the time.		
4	A That they would do that? That they would		
5	Q Yes.		
6	A I mean, yeah, yes.		
7	Q If thousands of U.S. troops had flowed to HKIA sooner, do you believe the		
8	airport would have been overrun the way that it was?		
9	A I have no way of really making that judgment. I mean, again, I go back to		
10	this whole scenario of we would have gone from a situation where HKIA was an operating		
11	airport with commercial flights and normal demand and traffic and things like that to the		
12	U.S. Government taking it over completely, altering operation.		
13	I mean, I imagine it's conceivable it would have created even a different kind of		
14	panic. But I just we're really into a hypothetical now that I can't answer.		
15	. We don't want you to speculate. If anything, informed		
16	assessments are obviously sort of hopefully our		
17	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> No, I		
18	. But we don't want you to speculate.		
19	Ambassador Thompson. No, I think I appreciate the context of what we're trying		
20	to get at here is how could we have avoided the challenges that were in place, given the		
21	way things transpired.		
22	Just on my own, with what I know about how these things operate, I'm not really		
23	personally convinced that sort of declaring a NEO earlier would have given us anything		
24	and made the situation any better.		
25	. Where did your impression that the Afghan military was at		

1	300,000 strong in July 2021 come from?
2	Ambassador Thompson. I think that was kind of common numbers we were
3	using and seeing. I'd have to further what was in my briefing papers and things like that.
4	. Ambassador, I'd like to briefly touch upon your preparation for
5	this interview.
6	How did you first learn of the committee's interest in conducting a transcribed
7	interview?
8	Ambassador Thompson. As I recall, I got an email from that didn't include
9	the letter from Chairman McCaul.
10	It just said something about, "I'll be helping you through this process." And I was
11	like, "What process?"
12	[Laughter.]
13	. I knew he was very good when dealing with uncertainty.
14	Ambassador Thompson. So, yeah, so L contacted L and H both contacted me
15	to let me know Chairman McCaul, I think, had sent a letter to the Secretary requesting
16	myself and a few other people to come up.
17	BY :
18	Q So once you learned of the context of that request, what was your reaction?
19	A I mean, I don't know. I just asked them what it was about, what was
20	expected of me.
21	And I don't know. I've always tried to have as good a possible relationship with
22	the Hill as I can. And it seems like the process you all are doing, and if we can be helpful,
23	I want to be helpful.
24	Q And what kind of preparations did you take for this interview?
25	A I worked with and to understand or sorry for Legal Affairs

1	office and Bureau of Legislative Affairs to understand the process. I read a couple of old		
2	accounts of the operations from HKIA. I think The New Yorker and the Atlantic had		
3	done some reporting at the time we thought had been pretty good, just trying to refresh		
4	my memory.		
5	Yeah. Looked over some old timelines that SCA had had at the time about when		
6	certain meetings took place.		
7	But to be honest with you, there were so many different angles of things going on		
8	at the time, some I was involved with, some I wasn't. So I ended up finding that wasn't		
9	all that helpful. So decided I'd be better off working from memory for the most part.		
10	Q Were any individuals from outside of the Department involved in your		
11	preparation?		
12	A No, we didn't have everybody, right?		
13	<u>.</u> Uh-huh. No.		
14	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> No.		
15	. No, I mean, we didn't introduce everybody.		
16	Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> No. Yeah.		
17	BY :		
18	Q What were you most proud of about the withdrawal and the subsequent		
19	evacuation?		
20	A I mean, look, using words like "proud" and everything else in the context of		
21	everything that went down are a little hard to do.		
22	But I was very proud of the team on the ground at HKIA and everything they tried		
23	to do to get as many people out as they possibly could. I was extraordinarily proud of		
24	our friends and colleagues in the military for the way they conducted themselves.		
25	I was if I'm being very honest, and I know we're on the record but when the		

1	events transpired on August 26th, it was hard for me to imagine we were going to keep				
2	going at the pace and range we were going given what that we'd lost 13 people.				
3	And yet I think 2 hours later we were back up and moving people around, and				
4	people were still doing their jobs a hundred percent. It was inspirational, as sad and				
5	tragic as the moment was.				
6	And I suppose that's what I hope ultimately we all take away from this, is honoring				
7	the memory of those that gave that last full measure to try to help people they probably				
8	didn't even know, but from a circumstance they knew was untenable in that situation.				
9	Q What was your biggest regret?				
10	A It feels a little mundane to talk about, but I think that we didn't have quite				
11	the capability I would have wanted to really take on that call volume I talked about and				
12	coordinate as much of that inflow of information as we were getting.				
13	I think that there may be a way to streamline that. But, of course, fingers				
14	crossed, you hope we never have an operation of this size and magnitude again. So I				
15	know you don't always build your systems for the worst-case scenario. But that was my				
16	biggest concern and one of the main issues I raised with the AAR.				
17	Q Ambassador, on behalf of Chairman McCaul and on behalf of the majority,				
18	we appreciate you coming to D.C. to answer our questions and taking the time today, for				
19	your genuine contributions.				
20	And we have a lot more we could ask. I think we've asked enough. We				
21	understand it's getting late, and we'll give you sort of an opportunity for a closing remark.				
22	A No. Just I'm very thankful for the opportunity. And I know you're talking				
23	to a lot of people that were involved in the process. And I hope that ultimately the				
24	things we learn will help us as we go forward.				
25	_ Thank you.				

- 1 Ambassador <u>Thompson.</u> Thank you.
- 2 Off the record.
- 3 [Whereupon, at 4:44 p.m., the interview was concluded.]

1	Certificate of Deponent/Interviewee
2	
3	100
4	199 I have read the foregoing pages, which contain the correct transcript of the
5	answers made by me to the questions therein recorded.
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	Witness Name
11	
12	
13	02/28/2024
14	Date

## Errata Sheet for the Transcribed Interview of Dean Thompson dated 10/27/2023

1) majority errata, (2) minority errata, (3) State/agency counsel, (4) private counsel (as applicable) and witness errata

Page	Line	Change	Reason
		Change "Counsel" to "Counsel and Chief	
2	8	Investigator"	
2	13	Change "Staff Director" to "Senior Investigator"	
10	21	Change "charge" to "chargé"	
41	7	Strike "as well"	
47	13	Change "one specifically?" to "one specifically within CMS?"	
48	21	Change "discussed yet the task force" to "discussed the task force yet"	
51	22	Change "our basis" to "your basis"	
55	6 and 8	Change "Tory" to "Toria"	
56	12	Change "lead the task force in a way that was meaningful" to "lead the task force in a meaningful way?"	
101	4	Mark the start of a new round, transitioning from majority to minority	
113	16	Strike "of all of the questions we're asking, but to be clear"	
114	15	Strike "just"	
119	20	Change "issues on the ground so you were working to, in effect, support them." to "on the ground? So you were working…support them?"	
138	13-14	Classification	
156	19	Change "OPE" to "OBE"	
183	18	Change "EF" to "EX"	