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

INTERVIEW OF: JONATHAN MENNUTI

Thursday, July 20, 2023

Washington, D.C.

The interview in the above matter was held via Teams, commencing at 8:33 a.m.

1 Appearances:

2

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4 For the COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS:

5

6 [REDACTED]

7 [REDACTED], SUBCOMMITTEE

8 ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

9 [REDACTED]

10 AND [REDACTED]

11 [REDACTED]

12 [REDACTED], SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]

15 [REDACTED]

16

17

18 For the U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE:

19

20 [REDACTED] OFFICE OF THE LEGAL ADVISOR

21 [REDACTED]

22 [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]. It is 8:33 on Thursday, July 19th, and this is the transcribed interview of Mr. Jonathan Mennuti.

House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul has requested this interview as part of the committee's investigation of the Afghanistan withdrawal.

Can the witness please state his name for the record.

Mr. Mennuti. Sure. My name is Jonathan Mennuti.

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

My name is [REDACTED]. I [REDACTED] on Chairman McCaul's Staff for the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

I now welcome the committee staff from both the majority and the minority to introduce themselves before going over some ground rules.

[REDACTED]. I am [REDACTED], [REDACTED] the Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability.

[REDACTED]. I am [REDACTED]. I'm helping with the Afghanistan investigation for House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight and Accountability.

[REDACTED]. [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for Oversight and Accountability Subcommittee.

[REDACTED]. [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for Mr. Meeks.

[REDACTED]. Hi. [REDACTED]. I'm the [REDACTED] for Mr. Meeks' staff.

[REDACTED]. I am [REDACTED]. I'm the [REDACTED] for Ranking

1 Member Meeks.

2 [REDACTED]. Great. That's noted.

3 I'd like to go over a few ground rules for today's interview, which will hopefully be
4 helpful for guiding our discussion.

5 Our questioning will proceed in rounds. The majority will ask questions first for 1
6 hour, and then the minority will have an opportunity to ask questions for an equal period
7 of time, if they choose. We alternate back and forth until there are no more questions
8 and the interview is over.

9 We'll take a short break at the end of each hour, but if you'd like to take a break
10 apart from that, Mr. Mennuti, please just let us know and we'd be happy to
11 accommodate.

12 We will also be taking a lunch break midday. Please let us know when you'd like
13 to do so, though we understand that lunch may have already passed for you at that point.
14 But the lunch break will be a bit longer, so please let us know when you're ready for that.

15 Mr. Mennuti. Okay.

16 [REDACTED]. As you can see, there's an official court reporter transcribing the
17 interview for a written record, so we ask that you give verbal responses to all questions.
18 Does that all make sense?

19 Mr. Mennuti. Yes.

20 [REDACTED]. I briefly want to touch on your preparation for this interview.
21 How did you first learn of the committee's interest in conducting a transcribed interview?

22 Mr. Mennuti. I received a copy of the chairman's letter.

23 [REDACTED]. What was your reaction?

24 Mr. Mennuti. I didn't have any reaction.

25 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], this should be part of your time block, so the clock should

1 have started. The preamble precedes official interview questions.

2 [REDACTED]. I include the preparation as part of it, but I'm happy to move on.

3 There's a couple other points I wanted to make, if that's okay. So --

4 Mr. Mennuti. Sorry. I just -- I wanted to let you know I have a bit of a
5 hardware problem on my end. The sound is not great. So I just wanted to ask
6 everybody to please speak up, especially in these big conference rooms.

7 [REDACTED]. Okay. Of course, we'll do that. Is that a bit better?

8 Mr. Mennuti. Yes.

9 [REDACTED]. Okay. No problem.

10 [REDACTED]. And, I'm sorry, for the reporter -- this is [REDACTED]
11 speaking -- just a reminder, this is an unclassified interview.

12 [REDACTED]. That is correct.

13 Okay. So there are a couple other instructions, if that's okay with the minority,
14 that I'll go over and I'll go back to that question. I apologize for the confusion,
15 Mr. Mennuti.

16 So the court reporter can take down a clear record, we'll do our best to limit the
17 number of people to those people on the staff whose turn it is. We just ask that you
18 speak clearly, as will we, so the court reporter can understand and so everyone can hear
19 you.

20 The court reporter, unfortunately, cannot take nonverbal responses, as I'm sure
21 you're aware, such as shaking your head, so please answer each question with an audible
22 verbal response.

23 Additionally, it's important for the record that we don't speak over one another or
24 interrupt each other.

25 Witnesses who appear before the committee have the opportunity to, of course,

1 freely consult with counsel if they so choose.

2 And it's my understanding that you're appearing here today with agency counsel,
3 correct?

4 Mr. Mennuti. Yeah, I suppose so.

5 [REDACTED]. Mr. Mennuti, you understand that agency counsel represent the
6 State Department and not you personally, correct?

7 Mr. Mennuti. That's right.

8 [REDACTED]. Could the agency counsel and note taker please identify
9 yourselves and state your names for the record.

10 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], Office of Legal Adviser at the Department of
11 State.

12 [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], [REDACTED]
13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]. Thank you. We want you to answer our questions in the most
15 complete and truthful manner as possible, so please take your time. If you have any
16 questions or if you do not understand one of our questions, please let us know.

17 Our questions will cover a wide range of topics. So if you need clarification at
18 any point, we'd be happy to do so.

19 If you don't know the answer to a question or don't remember, please give us
20 your best recollection and share with us who, to the best of your knowledge, might be
21 able to provide a more complete answer to that question.

22 Additionally, if it's okay to tell us if you learned information from someone else,
23 please do so. We just ask that you communicate how you came to know the
24 information.

25 Although this interview is not under oath, by law, you are required to answer

1 questions from Congress truthfully.

2 Do you understand that, Mr. Mennuti?

3 Mr. Mennuti. Yes, sure.

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

6 Do you understand that?

7 Mr. Mennuti. I do.

8 [REDACTED]. Witnesses that knowingly provide false testimony could be
9 subject to criminal prosecution for perjury or for making false statements under 18 U.S.C.
10 1001.

11 Do you understand this, Mr. Mennuti?

12 Mr. Mennuti. Yes, I do.

13 [REDACTED]. Is there any reason you are unable to provide truthful answers
14 to today's questions?

15 Mr. Mennuti. I'm sorry, could you repeat that?

16 [REDACTED]. Of course. Is there any reason you'd be unable to provide
17 truthful answers to today's questions?

18 Mr. Mennuti. I can't think of any, no.

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

22 Does that make sense to you, Mr. Mennuti?

23 Mr. Mennuti. I understand.

24 [REDACTED]. And I just wanted to ask a couple of logistical points. Where
25 are you taking this interview from?

1 Mr. Mennuti. I'm at my residence in Sarajevo.

2 [REDACTED]. Okay. All right. That is all the majority has to say on this
3 topic.

4 Is there anything that my colleagues on the minority would like to add?

5 [REDACTED]. No. You can go ahead and start the clock.

6 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

7 EXAMINATION

8 BY [REDACTED]:

9 Q I briefly want to touch on your preparation for the interview. How did you
10 first learn of the committee's interest in conducting a transcribed interview?

11 A I received a copy of the chairman's letter.

12 Q And what was your reaction?

13 A I really didn't have much of a reaction before my colleagues in H contacted
14 me to explain what it was and what I should expect.

15 Q What kind of preparations did you take for the interview?

16 A I had some preparation with Department colleagues in H and L. I also
17 consulted our union and our -- a private attorney.

18 Q Thank you. What State Department officials were involved in your
19 preparation?

20 A Some of the people that are here today. Yeah. I'm sorry. I'd have to
21 consult my notes to see who else was involved. They were all people from H and L.

22 Q Thank you. Were any officials from outside the Department involved in
23 your preparations?

24 A Officials from outside the Department? No.

25 Q Or individuals from outside the Department. Apology.

1 A No. As I mentioned, I consulted our union and a private attorney.

2 Q Is there anyone else in the room with you today?

3 A No.

4 Q Do you or will you have any communication systems enabled during the
5 course of this TI in addition to the videoconference, of course?

6 A I have my cell phone nearby.

7 Q Who do you anticipate communicating with, if any?

8 A Only in case of an emergency, I think.

9 Q You are, of course, able -- as we noted, able to consult with counsel.

10 However, we ask that you do so during breaks in questioning. You, of course, are free to
11 ask for those breaks in questioning.

12 Does that make sense?

13 A Sure.

14 Q And we ask that you not communicate with anyone other than counsel, Mr.
15 Mennuti. Can you please confirm?

16 A Yeah, I understand.

17 Q Thank you. So can you please state for the record what your current
18 position at the State Department is?

19 A Sure. Actually, I'm on a detail, a secondment outside the State
20 Department. I'm serving as the Principal Deputy High Representative and Supervisor for
21 the Brcko district.

22 Q And what was your position prior to that, prior to the detail?

23 A So I had some -- I was assigned to a long-term language training. And
24 before that, I was the director of the Office of Career Development and Assignments in
25 the Bureau of Global Talent Management.

1 During the time of my assignment to that office, I was detailed to the Office of the
2 Under Secretary of State for Management.

3 Q And was that your position at the time of the Afghanistan withdrawal?

4 A So maybe it will be helpful if I explain the chronology.

5 Q Please.

6 A So, as I mentioned, I was assigned as the director of the Office of Career
7 Development and Assignments. Ambassador Perez was the Director General of the
8 Foreign Service. She asked me if I would be detailed to the office of the Under Secretary
9 of State for Management while she served as the Acting Under Secretary. So I
10 went -- when she took that position on the 20th of January, I joined her in that office.
11 And my role at that time was to serve as a kind of senior adviser. Most of what I worked
12 on at that time was COVID-related: vaccine distribution, workplace safety, return to
13 work.

14 In the middle of April, the woman who was serving as the permanent chief of staff
15 to the Under Secretary of State for Management told the -- Ambassador Perez that she
16 wasn't going to be able to continue in that role. And Ambassador Perez asked me to
17 take on that additional role on an acting basis.

18 Q And who was that, the prior chief of staff?

19 A Her name was Assiya Ashraf-Miller.

20 Q Thank you. So you assumed a role with respect to Afghanistan in April. Is
21 that correct?

22 A Well, it wasn't strictly a role in respect to Afghanistan.

23 Q Just generally, the chief of staff position?

24 A The acting -- I was -- started acting as chief of staff in the middle of April,
25 third week of April.

1 Q And when did you leave that position?

2 A I left that, it was the third week of July, maybe the 20th or 21st of July.

3 Q In 2021?

4 A Pardon me?

5 Q In 2021, is that correct, July 2021?

6 A That's right. That's right.

7 Q And why did you leave that position?

8 A I had a -- I had an onward assignment here to Sarajevo.

9 Q And as chief of staff, whom did you report to?

10 A Acting chief of staff.

11 Q Acting.

12 A I reported to Ambass -- I reported to Ambassador Perez.

13 Q And just for -- and what was -- just for the record, what was Carol Perez's
14 position, again?

15 A So she -- she had been serving as the Director General of the Foreign Service.
16 And as of the 20th of January, she was the Acting Under Secretary of State for
17 Management.

18 Q During your time as the acting chief of staff, was there a contingency
19 planning effort in the Department for the withdrawal from Afghanistan?

20 A To the extent that there was that kind of effort, I was either unaware of it or
21 I don't remember it.

22 Q What was the role of the M family bureaus in contingency planning?

23 A It's hard for me to say, since I wasn't aware or don't remember what that
24 contingency planning was.

25 Q With respect to by contingency planning, so the Afghanistan withdrawal.

1 That's sort of what we're encompassing --

2 A Right.

3 Q -- in that chronology.

4 A Uh-huh.

5 Q You weren't aware at that point in time what the role of sort of the Under
6 Secretary's office was in the withdrawal planning. Is that correct?

7 A Yeah. In that -- in that period that we're talking about from mid-April to
8 the third week in July, the focus that I was aware of was on preparing the embassy to
9 continue its operations after the withdrawal of the U.S. military.

10 Q And we're happy to expand to a more broader period, given sort of your role
11 generally in the Department.

12 What was your understanding more broadly of the M family bureaus' role in the
13 Afghanistan withdrawal?

14 A So it's really hard for me to talk about the Afghanistan withdrawal per se,
15 because, to my recollection, that really started after I left this position. At the time that I
16 left this position, we were focused on how to ensure that we were able to stay
17 indefinitely and maintain the safety and secure operations of the embassy.

18 Q Can you speak a little bit more about that, sort of about the planning for the
19 mission in Kabul and sort of what the role of the bureau was in that?

20 A Sure. So just about the time that I assumed this role as acting chief of staff,
21 Ambassador Perez traveled to Kabul. I'm not sure what prompted the trip, because it
22 was already kind of in the works when I started in the role.

23 When she came back from that trip, she was very energized to make sure that the
24 Department, in cooperation with the interagency, was able to do whatever was necessary
25 to ensure that the embassy could continue to operate after the military withdrew.

1 That there were a lot of things that the U.S. military was doing in Kabul, I wouldn't
2 say on behalf of, but that made it possible for the embassy to operate.

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

6 So there were a lot of things -- there were a lot of gaps that the Department was
7 going to have to fill after the military withdrew. So --

8 Q And -- apologies.

9 A Go ahead.

10 Q No, please continue.

11 A So just making sure that we were on track to do that quickly and effectively
12 became -- became a big focus of Ambassador Perez, our office, and the M family bureaus.

13 Q Thank you. And were you involved in the planning of that?

14 A So there was not very much in general that I was an action officer on at that
15 time. When -- when we started this effort, you know, I helped make sure that things got
16 moving, but I didn't attend a lot of the meetings that were on this subject or participate in
17 decision-making per se.

18 Q Who were some of the key people, the decision-makers that were involved
19 in that process?

20 A Well, so, you know, Ambassador Perez would -- she had regular meetings
21 with M family Assistant Secretaries. And a lot of them had some role to play in meeting
22 these goals, meeting these requirements. These were people like the chief medical
23 officer, the head of our contracting activity, the head of the Diplomatic Security Service.

24 I'm sure it's not surprising, given the kinds of issues that we were dealing with.

25 I'm not sure there's anyone in the M family that didn't have something to contribute to

1 the effort, actually.

2 Q Was there an interagency effort through all of this?

3 A Yeah. At the same time, Ambassador Perez had a regular series of
4 coordination calls and meetings with the interagency. It was mostly with DOD. They
5 were the prime partner in talking about a lot of these issues. And, yeah, I think
6 that's -- that's the main -- that's the main thing to say.

7 Q Was -- were there any other agencies that were involved?

8 A CIA participated in those calls.

9 Q Was the White House involved in the calls as well?

10 A The calls that I'm talking about, which was a weekly interagency
11 coordination call, I don't recall that the White House or the NSC participated.

12 Q Were those efforts led by the State Department, so in this instance, by Carol
13 Perez?

14 A I'm sorry, which efforts?

15 Q Were those interagency efforts or the coordination calls, et cetera, were
16 they led by the State Department or by the Department of Defense?

17 A Oh. I mean, to the best of my recollection, Ambassador Perez agreed with
18 someone who was more or less her counterpart at DOD to convene this call, these calls.

19 But I couldn't say whether we were -- the State Department was leading them or
20 DOD was leading them. It was a cooperative effort from that perspective, I would say.

21 Q And who was her counterpart at the DOD?

22 A I'm sorry. I don't remember. It was -- I think the person that she -- the
23 person who led the call on the DOD side was, like, an Under Secretary of Defense for
24 Sustainment or -- I'm sorry, I'm not -- I'm not as familiar with the hierarchy and the job
25 titles in DOD.

1 Q That's okay. That's no problem.

2 So you noted that at that point in time, so around April, there was this
3 commitment, so sort of focusing on the mission. And please correct me if I'm misstating
4 it.

5 Was there any point a shift in approach during your time as chief of staff, moving
6 from sort of this investment in the mission to withdrawal planning?

7 A If there -- if there was, I wasn't aware of it or I don't remember it.

8 Q I'm going to list -- please go ahead.

9 A Yeah. No, I'm just -- I just want to reiterate that for a lot of these things I
10 wasn't the action officer. I didn't go to every meeting or get every debriefing.

11 BY [REDACTED]:

12 Q Who from the Office of the Under Secretary, the Under Secretary staff was
13 involved in these matters?

14 A So maybe it would be helpful if I described the office a little bit. It's -- some
15 people might find that it's a surprisingly small office.

16 When I was there, we were, I don't know, eight, 10, or 11 people, including me
17 and the acting Under Secretary. We had a couple of administrative assistants, a staff
18 assistant, and then four or five sort of more junior officers that served as special
19 assistants, staff assistants.

20 So a small office like that, a lot of people backed each other up on everything. So
21 I couldn't say that there was one person who was solely responsible for this, especially
22 when it was kind of a broad effort.

23 Q Was there anybody coordinating the M family's efforts on Afghanistan?

24 A Ambassador Perez.

25 Q But under her?

1 A The M -- the M family?

2 Q Yes.

3 A At the time that I was there, I can't think of anybody other than her that I
4 would say was doing that coordination, like as a single point of coordination. The office
5 as a whole is staffing her and making sure that she gets good information and following
6 up on her directives.

7 Q And so, there wasn't one person on her immediate staff tasked with the
8 Afghanistan portfolio?

9 A No, not that I -- not that I can think of. I mean, not to the -- not given the
10 breadth of the activity.

11 BY [REDACTED]:

12 Q Do you know who from the staff did, I mean, if you can recall any specific
13 individuals?

14 A You know, I think -- I think to some extent they all did.

15 Q I'm going to list some names and ask a few questions about a few key
16 Department leaders who were involved in the Afghanistan efforts, ranging from sort of
17 the mission planning to the withdrawal to the evacuation. I'd appreciate if you could
18 answer my questions to the best of your recollection.

19 Does that all make sense, Mr. Mennuti?

20 A Yes.

21 Q So I'll begin with Acting Under Secretary for Management, Carol Perez.
22 And, you know, we've been using that sort of acronym. Can you please explain to us
23 what the responsibilities of M generally are in the Department?

24 A Broadly speaking, it's to coordinate the activity of the M family of bureaus,
25 which are responsible for a broad range of administrative and security and consular

1 functions.

2 I think -- I'd have to consult the Foreign Affairs manual, but I'm sure there's a list of
3 formal responsibilities. I'm sure one of them is advising the Secretary and other
4 Department principals on matters related to the area of responsibility.

5 Q Is it fair to characterize a lot of those responsibilities as sort of the
6 operational functions of the Department?

7 A Largely, but not exclusively, I would say.

8 Q In your experience, do those responsibilities change across administrations?

9 A I think, broadly speaking, they remain consistent, but some of the functions
10 change from time to time.

11 Q Okay. And it's -- and I guess the point I'm trying to get at, in some
12 administrations the role of M may be combined with the role of the Deputy for
13 Management and Resources. Is that correct?

14 A Yeah, that's absolutely true.

15 Q And, to the best of your recollection, who selected Carol Perez to serve as
16 Acting Under Secretary?

17 A I really don't know.

18 Q In your opinion, why do you think she was selected for that position?

19 A I think that she was -- she's very capable and was qualified for the job. She
20 was also one of the few people in the Department that were serving in a
21 Senate-confirmed position that was related to the function. So I think the candidate
22 pool was probably pretty small.

23 Q And we sort of discussed what the role of M is more generally in the
24 Department. Can you please speak to what Carol Perez's responsibilities were
25 specifically?

1 A I don't -- I can't think of any way that they significantly differed from what I
2 outlined.

3 Q As her chief of staff, how often would you two engage?

4 A Pardon me?

5 Q As Carol Perez's chief of staff, how often would you two engage?

6 A Daily.

7 Q Did you provide her briefings on a daily basis?

8 A I was seldom her briefer on things other than discrete assignments, shall we
9 say.

10 Q What were some of those discrete assignments, if you can share?

11 A Some of them were personnel-related.

12 Q Do you know who her briefer was? Were there multiple people or one
13 specific individual?

14 A Well, she -- she met regularly with her direct reports across the M family to
15 discuss a range of issues. She would often have special meetings or briefings organized
16 on topics where there would be subject matter experts from within the M family or
17 elsewhere.

18 Sometimes, the special assistants would debrief her on things that they had
19 learned from the -- the bureaus or -- yeah, from different bureaus.

20 She had a daily security briefing from the DS Assistant Secretary. She also got
21 intel briefings, but since I was in a temporary acting role, I didn't have the clearance to
22 participate in them. So I don't know who that briefer was.

23 Q Thank you. And who did Carol Perez report to?

24 A I'm not sure what the Department's org chart might say formally, but she
25 met regularly with the Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources.

1 Q Was that Brian McKeon?

2 A Yes, it was.

3 Q How would you characterize their relationship, their working relationship?

4 A I would say that it was open and productive, as far as I could tell.

5 Q And you noted previously that she met regularly with some of her direct
6 reports. Who were some of those individuals?

7 A So, honestly speaking, I could try to remember some of the names of people
8 and probably could, but I'm sure the Department could furnish you with a list of -- a
9 complete list of the names of the people who served in these roles at the time.

10 Larry Padgett was the chief medical officer. Doug Pitkin remains the director of
11 the Office of Budget and Planning. To the best of my recollection, was it Todd Brown
12 was the DS Assistant Secretary at the time.

13 I mean, I could go on, but you might find it more useful to get a really
14 definitive -- definitive information from the Department.

15 Q I guess I'll narrow the scope of it. Some of the direct reports that
16 specifically worked on Afghanistan with Carol Perez, can you name some of those
17 individuals, other than the DS Assistant Secretary, of course, who you've already named?

18 A Yeah. So there was a lot of effort around the issue of medical facilities in
19 Kabul and medevac, and so the chief medical officer was engaged on that.

20 Q Were you in any of those meetings?

21 A Any of which meetings?

22 Q The meetings with the chief medical officer or Diplomatic -- Assistant
23 Secretary for Diplomatic Security.

24 A So -- so to be clear, she would have a weekly or biweekly meeting with all of
25 these people. For the most part, I did not attend those unless there was a topic where I

1 would add some value.

2 You know, at that time, I was focused a lot on COVID vaccine distribution,
3 workplace safety, which I'd carried with me from my time in this kind of senior adviser
4 role.

5 So I did end up sitting in a lot of her meetings with the chief medical officer. I
6 would very often join her morning briefing with Diplomatic Security. But other than
7 that, it was -- my attendance was kind of ad hoc and based on the agenda.

8 Q Would there be meeting minutes of these, these meetings that were done?

9 A No, I don't think there are any minutes from those.

10 Q What would be discussed during those meetings? Were there any
11 conversations about Afghanistan specifically that you were privy to?

12 A You know, so these meetings are kind of like the broad general meeting that
13 a supervisor has with a direct report about what's happening, what are the -- what are
14 the activities, what are the priorities, what are the roadblocks that they need help with.

15 So yeah, to the extent Afghanistan was part of that and it wasn't covered in one of
16 these other formats, like these twice-a-week calls, then -- then they'd be discussed in
17 those meetings, I'm sure.

18 For that matter, I don't think they were exclusively discussed in those meetings.
19 I'm sure they were discussed other times in other meetings.

20 Q Were worst-case scenarios discussed at those meetings in Afghanistan?

21 A I never heard anybody -- let me rephrase that. I don't recall being part of a
22 conversation about worst-case scenarios. To be honest, the worst case scenario -- I
23 shouldn't say that. I shouldn't say it's the worst-case scenario, but a scenario that
24 concerned us was that we would not be able to have these so-called key enablers in place
25 to -- for the embassy to continue operating by the time the U.S. military withdrew.

1 Q What were some of these key enablers that you all were concerned about?

2 A Yeah. Those are those things I was talking about earlier, like operation of
3 the airport, adequate medical facility, adequate physical security, medevac capability.

4 Q And were any responsive steps taken thereafter when those concerns were
5 voiced?

6 A I think the contingency was to negotiate for -- to discuss with DOD the
7 possibility of having those services, those capabilities maintained by DOD until the State
8 Department could fill in the gaps, or outsource filling in the gaps.

9 Q And this was past the planned withdrawal date, correct, the military?

10 A The -- yes.

11 Q Were there any communications about an evacuation during your time as
12 chief of staff?

13 A What do you mean by evacuation?

14 Q Shutting down embassy operations. So just evacuating Afghanistan more
15 generally.

16 [REDACTED]. Including potential contingencies to prepare.

17 A I can't say that there were or there weren't. Just that if there were, I
18 wasn't -- I wasn't part of it or don't recall hearing about it.

19 BY [REDACTED]:

20 Q Do you recall any other options that were presented in addition to sort of
21 maintaining embassy operations?

22 A No. To be honest, the task of replacing the military with these key enablers
23 was -- was really very daunting, and that really required the lion's share of the focus
24 during the period that we're talking about.

25 Q Was a NEO ever discussed? And by NEO, I mean non-combatant

1 evacuation operation.

2 A Again, if it was, I wasn't -- I wasn't aware of it or I don't remember, or maybe
3 it was referred to with some other terminology. The -- one thing that I do remember at
4 some point hearing about some review that was conducted about the -- the potential
5 capacity to move a lot of people out of Afghanistan.

6 And it -- it stuck with me 2 years later, because it was something that I hadn't
7 thought about. And it was the idea of using a small number of military aircraft for short
8 flights to get people to intermediate points, and then using a larger number of
9 commercial aircraft to transport people by longer flights.

10 So I don't -- I don't recall the context in which I heard about that, but it's -- it's
11 something that 2 years later I remember, because it was striking to me at the time.

12 Q Do you know who conducted that review?

13 A I don't. I know that part of it was done in the Bureau of Administration,
14 because they -- part of what I recall is that the Bureau of Administration confirmed that
15 there would be adequate commercial capacity to take the second half of that method.

16 Q Do you know when that review was conducted?

17 A I'm sorry, I really don't remember when I heard about it.

18 Q You mentioned before that there was sort of this interagency effort with the
19 DOD. Was there one person on Carol Perez's team who was primarily responsible for
20 communicating with DOD?

21 A No, I can't recall one person being responsible. You're talking about on
22 issues of substance, not, like, logistics of scheduling the call or participation.

23 Q On issues of substance, exactly. Specifically --

24 A No.

25 Q -- I'm focused on Afghanistan.

1 A No. I just want to reiterate I typically did not join those calls because I
2 didn't add a lot of value and I had plenty of other things where I could add value.

3 But, to the best that I recall, the action and follow-up and working-level
4 coordination was delegated through the M family or other -- other bureaus.

5 Q And I definitely appreciate that. I guess my question was, as chief of staff,
6 would you have known who was responsible, so which employee would have been
7 responsible for that liaising with the DOD?

8 A No. Like I said, I can't think of one person who was responsible for liaising
9 with all of DOD on substance. I mean, for example, I can recall there were some issues
10 about -- there was some service that DOD had outsourced. And we had a discussion
11 about taking over their contract rather than the State Department letting a new contract.

12 So that was identified at a higher level as a good solution to the problem of quickly
13 meeting that need. And then the issue was worked out between -- on the State
14 Department side, the head of the contracting activity, the procurement executive is his
15 title, and then the competent authority in DOD.

16 So it's not like all the issues like that were coordinated through one person in the
17 M office. It would be much too big of a job.

18 BY ██████████:

19 Q Who were the key people on Afghanistan within the M family?

20 A I mean, I can only say who the heads of the bureaus were. And then I'm
21 trying to think of other key people in more subordinate roles. I mean, the only other
22 person in a subordinate role that comes to my mind is the procurement executive, who's
23 a senior officer in the Bureau of Administration.

24 Q And who was that?

25 A I mean, not to say there weren't a lot of people who were responsible or

1 working on these things. It's just I didn't know them or I can't remember their names.

2 Q And who was the procurement individual that you identified?

3 A I'm sorry, I really can't remember his name. And the whole time we've
4 been talking I've been trying to remember, but I can't.

5 Q And what was that individual's role, you know, specific to Afghanistan, the
6 role of procurement?

7 A Well, he's responsible for overseeing all contracting activity carried out by
8 the Department of State and setting policy for delegated contracting officers. So any
9 contract that we solicited or signed for Afghanistan would have been -- would have been
10 touched by his office.

11 BY [REDACTED]:

12 Q I want to shift gears a little bit. What was Carol Perez's view on the role of
13 diplomacy in Afghanistan during the period in question? So as you were sort of serving
14 as her chief of staff.

15 A Her view on diplomacy in Afghanistan?

16 Q On a bilateral relationship. I guess let me rephrase.

17 Was she planning for an increased or continuing presence in Afghanistan following
18 the military withdrawal?

19 A I don't recall talking to her about any changes. You know, we -- for all of
20 our posts, we adjust the operating posture and the staffing based on threat level. And I
21 recall that was an exercise that they went through for Afghanistan, either just before this
22 time or around this time.

23 But I don't recall a conversation with her about the future, the long-term footprint
24 of the embassy there, so to speak.

25 Q So I want to backtrack to the April trip you previously noted. You said

1 when she came back --

2 A Yes.

3 Q -- she felt energized. So let's start from there. What was her position at
4 that point in time?

5 A What do you mean, her position?

6 Q On Afghanistan specifically, on the mission, on its continuing presence in
7 country.

8 A I think her position was that the embassy was not on track to have what it
9 needed to operate after the military withdrew, and that she needed to energize,
10 particularly the M family of bureaus, to meet that need before the military withdrew.

11 Q What responsive steps did she take thereafter?

12 A So, as I mentioned, there was this -- there were these so-called key enablers,
13 which were the key things that the embassy was going to need to continue to operate.

14 And then I think -- and to be honest, I don't know how -- how we arrived at them.
15 I don't know if it's based on some standard practice or it was based on some other
16 assessment.

17 And then she organized this method of regularly consulting with the M family of
18 bureaus, posts, and the bureau and the interagency to find solutions to ensure these key
19 enablers and keep advancing them or find alternatives.

20 Q What did you think of that approach?

21 A You know, I have to say it's not really my area of expertise, and I've never
22 served in Afghanistan or in any kind of crisis area, but it seemed -- at the time, it seemed
23 like a good approach to me.

24 Q Did anyone object to that approach that you're aware of?

25 A No, I don't recall anybody objecting to it.

1 Q Did anyone voice concerns about that approach?

2 A You mean the approach of trying to make sure that the embassy was safe
3 and secure after the military left?

4 Q Correct. That maintaining the embassy would be sustainable at any point.

5 A I'm sorry. Can I ask you to repeat the question? I kind of lost the thread
6 of it there.

7 Q Of course. No problem.

8 So my understanding is that the main goal was continued embassy operations,
9 based on sort of what you've shared with us.

10 Did the Department or Carol Perez ever discuss a plan for how the Taliban
11 takeover would impact this?

12 A If they did, I wasn't part of it.

13 Q And following up on sort of my prior question, I guess I'm wondering did
14 anyone voice concerns that it would not be possible for the United States to maintain an
15 embassy in Afghanistan following the military withdrawal?

16 A No, I don't remember anybody saying that -- saying that. I recall talking to
17 colleagues informally who weren't sure that maintaining an embassy over the long term
18 was going to be feasible.

19 Q Did Carol Perez, at any point, think that the U.S. embassy would collapse?

20 A I don't remember her saying that to me.

21 Q Did you think at any point that the U.S. embassy would collapse?

22 A You mean, like suddenly as it did in August?

23 Q Sure. We'll start more just that the fact that the embassy
24 wouldn't -- whether it be in the short or the long term, that we wouldn't be able to
25 maintain our presence in Afghanistan.

1 A So I just want to say again, like, I'm not really an expert on this kind of thing.
2 You know, I'm not a security expert or a regional expert. In most of my experience,
3 these kinds of crises have longer lead -- have long lead times and signals that -- warning
4 signs over a period of time.

5 Q Did anyone highlight the need to ramp up contingency planning?

6 A It's possible, but I'm not -- I'm not aware of it, or don't remember hearing
7 about it.

8 Q Can you please explain to us who Will Doc Walters is?

9 A Oh, sure. So Dr. Walters was the head of operational medicine in the Med
10 Bureau.

11 Q Okay. And what was your -- what was your general impression of him?

12 A He's a good physician and a very capable administrator.

13 Q Did he and Carol Perez meet at any point to discuss the Afghanistan
14 withdrawal?

15 A Yeah, I believe so. Or -- excuse me, the withdrawal or --

16 Q About the incidents generally.

17 A Yeah. I just want to say just to reiterate, withdrawal in the way that I think
18 you're talking about it, meaning like complete withdrawal of all U.S. personnel and
19 others, wasn't something that I really recall talking about or working on.

20 But if you're talk -- if you want to talk about Afghanistan more largely, then I
21 would say yes, Dr. Walters did talk to her about that. I recall that they had some specific
22 conversations about how we could provide adequate medevac capability in Kabul.

23 Q And what was his guidance or advice to Carol Perez?

24 A So I can't recall many of the details, but he -- to the best that I recall, he
25 developed some ideas about contracting for medevac, additional medevac capability, and

1 positioning different aircraft, medevac-capable aircraft in Kabul.

2 But I'm sorry, I can't remember the details of the alternatives that they discussed
3 or if he had a particular recommendation or cited any particular pros and cons.

4 Q How regularly would they meet, Doc Walters and Carol Perez?

5 A I -- I can't remember how often they would meet. Sometimes he would
6 accompany the chief medical officer on his -- his meetings, his more general meetings.
7 I'm sorry, I can't remember. I -- I know that he had regular access to her when he
8 needed it.

9 Q Was DMR McKeon ever part of those meetings?

10 A Which meetings?

11 Q The meeting with med, Doc Walters in particular. You had noted that they
12 would sort of engage in regular meetings.

13 A I can't remember him attending any of these routine meetings. I can't say
14 that he -- yeah. I don't -- I don't recall him attending any of those routine meetings.

15 But as far as, you know, DMR McKeon's meetings, I really don't have any insight
16 into what he might have -- who he might have met with or what he talked about.

17 Q Did you speak with -- ever speak with Carol Perez about the elevation of the
18 operational medicine to the Bureau of Contingency and Crisis Response?

19 A Yeah. I mean, we -- we talked about that in general terms, I guess. That
20 was an issue that got reviewed during my -- during my time in this role. But she -- she
21 didn't play a direct role in that review. So it's not something we discussed in a lot of
22 detail.

23 BY [REDACTED]:

24 Q Who did?

25 A So DMR McKeon's office led that review.

1 BY [REDACTED]:

2 Q Do you know if Carol Perez opposed or supported the creation of this new
3 bureau?

4 A I would hesitate to say that her -- her views were so singular on the subject --

5 Q What were her views?

6 A -- as simply supporting or opposing.

7 I don't know. I remember this as a pretty complex issue. It didn't have a --

8 Q Could you please elaborate on what her views were?

9 A Pardon me?

10 Q Could you please elaborate on what her views were?

11 A What her views were? I think -- I recall that she had some concerns from
12 the human resources and process perspective. I don't know if she felt that this was
13 the -- that a bureau was the best way to meet this need.

14 But, as I said, I don't recall having a specific discussion with her where the pros
15 and cons were toted up and she had a clear-cut position on the issue.

16 BY [REDACTED]:

17 Q Can you walk us through some of the complexities of the issue? You
18 mentioned it was a complex issue.

19 A I have to confess, this isn't something that I thought I'd be talking about
20 today, so I hadn't thought about it in a long time. So two things that I recall: One was
21 ensuring the effective management of Department aircraft assets, and the other one was
22 ensuring kind of continuity of authority and responsibility for medical services.

1 [9:35 a.m.]

2 BY [REDACTED]:

3 Q The creating of a bureau wouldn't meet its need, you mentioned that
4 previously.

5 A No, I think what I said was that another bureau wouldn't be the best way to
6 meet this need.

7 Q Okay. Do you know -- so the off med was ultimately not upgraded to the
8 bureau of contingency crisis response, correct?

9 A I am sorry, could you speak up a little bit?

10 Q So following the review that you previously mentioned, off med was not
11 upgraded to the bureau of contingency and crisis response, correct?

12 A That's right.

13 Q Do you know who made the decision against off-grading it to the bureau?

14 A I, I hesitate because I don't want to tell you something that is wrong. I
15 can't recall if DMR made that decision or DMR made a recommendation to the Secretary.

16 Q Is it true that some people at the Department believe the Department only
17 should be focusing on diplomacy and leave operation to other agencies?

18 A I am sorry, could you say that again?

19 Q My question is, was it true with respect to this bureau, the creation of this
20 bureau crisis contingency response, that some people within the Department believe we
21 should only be focusing on diplomacy and leave operation to other agencies?

22 A That is -- I am sorry, but I find that like a really broad question. Like I am
23 sure that there were some people in the Department who think that. I am really not in a
24 position to say how many. And if you wanted to ask me if particular people held that
25 you view, I might know, but I am certainly not in a position to speak for the whole

1 workforce.

2 Q So I am going to share a statement with you just and just ask a couple of
3 follow-up questions. I know we are running close on time. Does the Department need
4 to shift away from operations and focus on foreign policy and bilateral relationships?
5 Did you ever hear that statement?

6 A I don't remember. I mean, maybe, but do you have any context that might
7 help me remember it?

8 Q Of course.

9 A What is that?

10 Q Did Carol Perez ever, to your recollection, make that statement, or a
11 statement like that?

12 A I don't know. Maybe. I don't remember. I don't remember that
13 statement.

14 BY [REDACTED]:

15 Q Was it representative of her overall view that the Department should be
16 focused more on foreign policy instead of operations; and that operations would be
17 better left to other entities, such as the Department of Defense?

18 A I don't recall having a conversation with her on that subject.

19 BY [REDACTED]:

20 Q Did she ever imply that operations with the DOD problem?

21 A I am not really sure what that might look like, or I should say, sound like. I
22 can't recall that kind of implication.

23 Q Do you agree with that statement?

24 A You know I am really not an expert on that, and I am not in a position to
25 judge it.

1 Q Do you think that Carol Perez worried that the Department would be blamed
2 if the contingency planning did not go according to plan?

3 A What contingency planning are you talking about?

4 Q Sort of the operational planning in Afghanistan?

5 A I think that she felt like the State Department had a responsibility to meet
6 this requirement, and to keep the embassy personnel safe and secure over the long term.

7 Q And that included a potential continuing presence in a country, correct?

8 A Yeah, I think that was our -- that was the contingency that we were planning
9 for was that we would need an ongoing diplomatic presence in Afghanistan.

10 Q I think we are coming close on time.

11 ██████████. So we are now off the record. It is 9:40 a.m. We could take a
12 short break, if you would like, before we turn it over to the minority for their round.

13 Would you like that?

14 Mr. Mennuti. No, I am okay to keep going for now.

15 ██████████. The minority would like a 5-minute break. Thank you.

16 ██████████. No problem.

17 Mr. Mennuti. No objection from me.

18 ██████████. Be back at 45 then?

19 ██████████. That is great. Thank you so much.

20 [Recess.]

21 BY ██████████:

22 Q So my name is ██████████. I am here with ██████████, and we will be
23 asking you some questions from the minority. As an initial matter, we wanted to clarify
24 some terms that have been used to ensure that we are all on the same page. So when
25 you say the term "withdrawal," are you referring to the withdrawal of USG troops from

1 Afghanistan?

2 A Yes, for the most part, given the work that I was engaged in during this
3 period, when I talk about withdrawal, it is the withdrawal of the U.S. military from
4 Afghanistan.

5 Q Okay. Thank you. And then when you use the word "evacuation," does
6 that refer to the evacuation of USG personnel and other Afghan allies?

7 A I think that is kind of context-dependent, but for the most part, yes. There
8 may have been a context where I meant that in terms of USG personnel.

9 Q Okay. And then in terms of the contingency plan you were discussing, so
10 that would be, if I understand correctly, nonmilitary personnel remaining in the country
11 for the purpose of diplomatic continuity. Is that correct?

12 A I'm not sure of the context that I used, but the term, "contingency." What
13 we were working toward was maintaining, let's say, diplomatic, as opposed to military
14 presence in Afghanistan over the longer term. At some point it was foreseen that there
15 could be a small military presence there to bridge the time between when the military left
16 Afghanistan with a large, and the State Department was able to take over all of the
17 functions essential to safe and secure operation.

18 Q Great. Thank you. I also wanted to discuss your background and
19 experience briefly. I believe that you testified that you are not a security expert. Is
20 that correct?

21 A That is right.

22 Q And I believe you also testified that you are not a regional expert as related
23 to Afghanistan policy. Is that correct?

24 A That is also right.

25 Q I believe you also said that Afghanistan is not your area of expertise. Is that

1 correct?

2 A That is true.

3 Q And I believe you also testified that you have not served in a crisis. Is that
4 correct?

5 A That is right.

6 Q Were you aware that a task force was stood up in response to the
7 Afghanistan withdrawal and evacuation efforts?

8 A You mean at any point?

9 Q Yes.

10 A I know that there was a large, multiple efforts. I am not sure that I knew
11 that it was a task force, per se, but in some context that has a very specific meaning.

12 Q Are you aware of task forces stood up within the Department of State to
13 respond to specific crises or issues?

14 A You mean as a general matter?

15 Q Yes, as a general matter.

16 A Yes, I am familiar with that.

17 Q Do you find that approach of developing a task force that is comprised of
18 regional and policy experts in the field to be reasonable?

19 A You know, just to reiterate, I am not an expert on crisis management, but it
20 strikes me as a reasonable approach.

21 Q Would it be reasonable to comprise a task force of individuals who have a
22 broad breadth of experience related to Afghanistan to be in that task force?

23 A Yes.

24 Q And for the record, just to be really clear, the timeframe in which you were
25 serving as an acting chief of staff was mid-April through July -- the third week of July

1 of 2021. Is that correct?

2 A That is right. I think I went back to my actual assignment around the 20th
3 or 21st of July to wrap up my affairs there and then transfer overseas.

4 Q Is it your understanding that the withdrawal of USG troops from Afghanistan
5 commenced in August 2021?

6 A I don't recall when it started, or what the tempo of it was. I am sorry.

7 Q Would your time serving under acting under Secretary Perez have predated
8 the evacuation?

9 A Yes, if by "evacuation," you mean like wholesale withdrawal of USG
10 personnel and a lot of Afghans, yes, it predated that.

11 [REDACTED]. Majority, you need to turn your camera back on because you have
12 the clock.

13 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

14 BY [REDACTED]:

15 Q I also wanted to go back because you have previously testified that Ms.
16 Perez took a trip to Kabul. Is that correct?

17 A Yes, that is right.

18 Q Do you recall the dates of that trip?

19 A Not precisely, no. I remember it was middle of April, 2021.

20 Q Do you recall how long the trip was?

21 A No, I don't. No, I'm sorry, I don't.

22 Q Would it have been a few days?

23 A Yeah, it was a few days. I mean, I don't recall that it was as long as a week,
24 and I know it was more than just a day.

25 Q And do you have any sense of who she met with while she was there?

1 A To the best of my recollection, she met with a range of people at the
2 embassy, the U.S. military. I don't recall whether she met with any first country officials,
3 but that is possible.

4 Q Did you have the --

5 A I am sorry. It is also possible that she met with some officials from other
6 countries, but I don't recall exactly.

7 Q I just want to pause briefly.

8 [REDACTED], I just got your text. Our camera appears to be on on our end. Can you
9 see it okay? Could we stop the clock, please. Please stop the clock.

10 [Discussion off the record.]

11 BY [REDACTED]:

12 Q So we can go back on the clock and back on the record. Great. All right.
13 So we were talking about the Kabul trip that Ms. Perez took. So you have identified she
14 was there for a few days, probably less than a week, and that was a range of people at the
15 embassy, perhaps some military folks. Were you involved in the planning of this trip at
16 all?

17 A No. Just to clarify, I am sure that she met with some U.S. military folks. I
18 was not involved in the planning. I think I had mentioned earlier that the trip was
19 already in motion when I stepped into this acting role.

20 Q And what did you understand the purpose of the trip to be?

21 A At the time, I don't recall that I knew why she was going. But when she
22 came back it was clear to me that her intention was to get firsthand understanding of
23 what the situation was there in terms of the functions that she was responsible for. And
24 then, as I said, the conclusions that she drew was that the M family, the Department, the
25 interagency had needed to work with more urgency to create the conditions for the

1 embassy to continue to function after the military left.

2 Q Really helpful. So to focus a little bit further on this contingency -- I'm
3 sorry, continuity planning for the embassy, who directed this effort upon Ms. Perez'
4 return to D.C.?

5 A You mean in terms of the M family response meeting the administrative and
6 security needs?

7 Q Correct.

8 A She did.

9 Q She did. Okay. And how did you know this?

10 A I'm not aware of anybody else who was responsible for it or who took that
11 role. And I saw that she organized the efforts in the M family to identify these needs
12 and meet these needs.

13 Q Okay. And what was your understanding of the rationale for keeping the
14 embassy open?

15 A I don't know of a rationale other than what is very typical for us that the
16 United States has interest in Afghanistan that are best protected and advanced by the
17 presence of a diplomatic mission.

18 Q Do you agree with that statement for the mandate?

19 A As a general principle, I think that that is true, but I don't know enough
20 about Afghanistan or specific interests there to say that that is the best way to meet them
21 or advance those interests.

22 Q Fair enough. And what did this effort to ensure embassy continuity entail?

23 A So I mentioned earlier that we had identified these so-called key enablers.
24 Some of them were -- had a pretty big scope, and some of them were pretty specific.
25 Unfortunately, I can't really remember the whole universe of what they were, but a lot of

1 them had to do with a safety, security, travel, transportation, adequacy of medical
2 facilities, adequacy of housing and office facilities.

3 Q Okay. And to be pretty clear for the record, so these efforts to ensure
4 embassy continuity would have been different and separate from efforts related to the
5 evacuation itself?

6 A Yes. I could conceive of some areas of overlap. For example, maintaining
7 the operation of Kabul International Airport.

8 Q Okay.

9 BY [REDACTED]:

10 Q Okay. I just have a quick follow-up. You testified earlier that in your
11 experience, most crises have longer lead times and warning signals. Can you clarify
12 what you meant by that?

13 A Yeah, I mean, I could kind of use an example from where I am now. You
14 know, if you start thinking about the need to change the operating posture of an
15 embassy, you look out for certain kinds of warning signs. So, for example, if you see
16 that there are a lot of anti-American protests, that is a first sign. If you see that those
17 protests are violent and that they are in front of or near the embassy or targeting
18 American citizens, that is kind of an escalation. And then, if you see that the host
19 country authorities are unwilling or unable to protect the diplomatic facility in accordance
20 with their obligations under the Vienna Convention, that is another sign. So that kind of
21 thing, typically, you don't skip right to the last thing, you see the other things unfolding
22 over some period of time.

23 Q And during your tenure in M through the third week of July, did you see any
24 of these sorts of signals with respect to Afghanistan and the embassy's operations?

25 A So I should say that each post and mission has its own set of warning signs.

1 I am not familiar with what they were in Afghanistan. So it is hard for me to say what
2 kinds of things post the Department would be on the lookout for.

3 Q To your --

4 A A place like Afghanistan, they are already operating in a high-threat
5 environment. So a lot of the things that would be typical warning signs for me are not
6 really relevant in that environment.

7 Q Thank you for that clarification. But, to your knowledge, by the end of your
8 tenure in the third week of July, 2021, you understood the directive to continue embassy
9 operations to be a viable one?

10 A Yes.

11 Q And you understood it to be one toward which extensive efforts in M were
12 being made?

13 A Yes, exactly.

14 BY [REDACTED]:

15 Q We also wanted to ask about -- you had mentioned interagency planning call
16 that stemmed from Ms. Perez's trip to Kabul, and those calls included M and DOD.
17 Could you describe to us in a bit more detail of scope of those calls?

18 A So, I just want to reiterate that I joined some of those calls at the beginning
19 of the process, but then for the most part, I didn't participate in them. Because as I said,
20 I didn't add value to the calls, and we had other people to do the follow-up. The calls
21 aimed to bring together people from the Department and from DOD, including people
22 from posts to review the status of the key enablers as they overlapped with DOD to
23 discuss what their plans were for winding those functions down; to trade information
24 about how they accomplish functions; to cooperate on the Department taking over those
25 functions; or providing us some best practices for how to outsource them; or as I

1 mentioned, to discuss the possibility of DOD maintaining those functions for some
2 interim or indefinite period.

3 But the discussions, to the extent that I was involved or I remember them, were
4 very specific and operational about really concrete issues. And then the office made an
5 effort to ensure that the right people from the Department were on those calls to convey
6 the information to others and to execute the right follow-up.

7 Q Okay. I just want to acknowledge, briefly, you have been asked to opine on
8 a lot of topics that you don't have firsthand knowledge of, so we appreciate that. Thank
9 you for doing your best to articulate what you do have firsthand knowledge of. With
10 that said, do you have a sense of how often these calls were taking place?

11 A Oh, yes, I do. They were -- the intention was to have each of these calls
12 every week. So I mentioned that there was a department call and an interagency call.
13 And my recollection was the schedule was to have each of them every week.

14 Q And so, on the interagency calls, M was always on it. Is that correct? To
15 the best of your knowledge?

16 A Yeah, to the best of my recollection, I can't say that she never missed a call
17 or they had it without her for some reason.

18 Q Understandable. I want to talk a little bit -- oh southern I go ahead.

19 A I just want to say I think that the process and the continuity was more
20 important than her actual leading it. So it wouldn't surprise me to hear that she had to
21 miss a call, and they had it without her and still had a productive meeting.

22 Q Understandable.

23 BY [REDACTED]:

24 Q Just quickly follow up on this point, you were asked earlier by our colleagues
25 about Carol Perez's views. And I think a statement was read you were asked to react to

1 about whether she held the views that the Department should only be involved in
2 diplomacy and not operational matters, correct?

3 A Yes, I recall that statement being made.

4 Q And what you are testifying to about these calls is that M was generally on
5 them, correct?

6 A Yeah, or maybe always on them.

7 Q And running them, at least co-leading with her counterpart and DOD,
8 correct?

9 A Yes, that is correct.

10 Q And that the calls -- the nature of the calls were, you just testified, specific
11 and operational about concrete issues?

12 A That is true. I have to say in the statement that was read, I didn't really
13 understand what was meant by operational.

14 Q But from your understanding of these calls, did you perceive Carol Perez to
15 have an interest in the operations of the Department?

16 A I think, broadly speaking, that is the responsibility of the M family of
17 bureaus.

18 Q And in this case, specifically, you testified her interest was in energizing the
19 M family bureaus on these operational matters?

20 A Yeah, I specifically remember her saying that she needed to inject a sense of
21 urgency into the Department, into the M family bureaus about these issues.

22 Q Which were by their nature operational questions about continuing up
23 embassy?

24 A Yeah, if by operational you mean things like operating a hospital, operating
25 an airport, operating a guard force, operating a housing stock, then, yes.

1 Q Thank you.

2 A If operations are something else, you know, I would need to know what is
3 meant by the term.

4 Q I would refer back to your earlier testimony where you said some of the
5 concerns that she was trying to address were what you just referred to. The contracting
6 issues, I think you mentioned previously those were the operational matters I was
7 referring to.

8 A Okay.

9 BY [REDACTED]:

10 Q In terms of Ms. Perez, it sounds like you worked with her on a couple of
11 different contacts. Is that correct?

12 A That is true.

13 Q Did you work with her closely in those contacts?

14 A That is definitely a relative term, I guess. So I first worked with her quite a
15 long time ago, like, around 2003 or 2004. I was relatively junior, and she was even at
16 that time was relatively senior. So we didn't work that closely together. I had regular
17 contact with her starting in 2015 when I had a job. She was the principal deputy
18 assistant secretary in that HR bureau, and I worked in a bureau executive office. So we
19 worked together occasionally on human resources matters. And then, when she was
20 the director general and I was in the office of career development assignments, we had
21 very fairly regular contact, but it was still during the time of a lot of telework.

22 Q Understandable. So given that you have known Ms. Perez since 2003, is it
23 a fair characterization that you would be a good judge of her professional character and
24 aptitude?

25 A Yeah, yes, I would say so. I would say also by dint of the role that she had

1 as director general, you know, her -- the kind of work that she did and how she did it was
2 pretty well known to a lot of people in the workforce.

3 Q And could you describe for the record what that professional reputation
4 was?

5 A I would say that her reputation is to be -- that she is extremely capable, and I
6 might say tenacious, and that she cares very deeply about the Department as an
7 institution and all the people that work in it, their family members as well. And, yeah, I
8 think maybe that is a good thumbnail.

9 Q And focusing on your time as acting chief of staff, specifically, you had
10 testified that you communicated with her daily. Is that correct?

11 A That is right.

12 Q Through what channel of communication did that reporting take place.

13 A It was typically face to face.

14 Q Okay. And did you find her communication style to you effective?

15 A Yeah, I mean, for my purpose, it was effective. She is typically quite
16 straightforward and direct.

17 Q Did you find her leadership style effective?

18 A Yes.

19 Q What informs that opinion?

20 A You mean in terms of the results that I observed or what about the style did I
21 find effective.

22 Q You mentioned that she was straightforward in her communications style
23 and that you found her leadership style to be effective. Are there examples that you
24 could describe for the record that indicate her leadership was indeed effective, that she
25 achieved results?

1 A I would have to give some thought to her specific accomplishments as the
2 director general. In general, she is regarded as one of the most effective director
3 generals in memory because of her accomplishments. A lot of those have to do with
4 sensible changes to human resources, policy and bureaucracy that made the Department
5 more effective and made life easier for employees and their family members without
6 impairing the Department's effectiveness. You know, one thing that I am proud of from
7 the time that I was in this role that I can ascribe to her leadership is the fact that we
8 successfully vaccinated the whole workforce and overseas family members really
9 remarkably quickly.

10 In January, the forecast was that that be done by the end of the calendar year,
11 and my recollection is that it was done in April.

12 Q You just testified that Director General Perez was considered to be one of
13 the most effective director generals of foreign service in memory. Do you agree with
14 that?

15 A So just to clarify my comment. I know there are people who consider, who
16 hold that opinion. I don't want to overstate how many people feel that way, or even
17 how many people have an opinion on the question. But I have trouble thinking of
18 someone who did more in that role personally.

19 Q So in your memory at the Department, she was arguably the most be
20 effective director general you saw?

21 A I can't think of anybody more effective. Go ahead.

22 Q Please, finish.

23 A I was just going to say, I concede that earlier in my career, I may not be
24 aware of the difficulties or the accomplishments of particular directors general.

25 Q How long have you served in the Department?

1 A I joined the State Department in 1999.

2 Q Thank you.

3 BY [REDACTED]:

4 Q You ascribed a lot of her successes to HR field. Could you describe for the
5 record your understanding of Ms. Perez' areas of professional expertise?

6 A So she does have really a deep experience in human resources. She also
7 served for a time in the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Bureau. And so, I
8 know that that gave her some expertise on their particular subject matter as well as
9 program management and aviation. She served overseas, I am not sure how many
10 times, but in a number of leadership roles, including as a counsel general and
11 ambassador.

12 Q And to be clear, so her expertise would not cover Afghanistan policy?

13 A You mean, like Afghanistan like foreign policy or relations? No.

14 Q Correct. But her expertise would cover duties as related to embassy
15 continuity in country?

16 A Yes, I would say that her expertise would cover a range of management,
17 so-called management or administrative functions. Also, you know, experience with
18 leadership and directing big teams. And then as ambassador, of course, one develops a
19 broad range of skills related to the operation of the embassy and the care and the
20 security of the people who work there.

21 Q Thank you.

22 BY [REDACTED]:

23 Q I want to step back a bit. You referred a few times in your testimony to the
24 M family of bureaus and offices. At a high level, can you describe your organizational
25 structure of the so-called M family?

1 A Sure. So the -- I am sure you are aware that the Department is structured
2 into bureaus and kind of undersecretariats, for lack of a better term. So that the M
3 family of bureaus includes the bureaus that provide administrative services or support,
4 manage the Department's operations, both domestically and overseas. So I believe
5 there is 12 or 13 of these bureaus. It is -- to my knowledge, the biggest, or I should say,
6 of all of the undersecretariat collection of bureaus, it is the largest in terms of budget and
7 personnel and scope, arguably. It includes, as I have mentioned, the Bureau of Medical
8 Affairs; Diplomatic Security; Overseas Building Operations; the Bureau of Administration,
9 which does our contracting and property management functions; the Bureau of Budget
10 and Planning; Consular Affairs, of course, is a massive operation within the M family. It's
11 got about a \$4 billion budget and, 13,000 employees in the U.S. and abroad.
12 Information Resource Management is another big and complicated bureau. I feel like
13 there are some others, but I am having trouble remembering them right now.

14 Q Fair enough. Do you know, approximately, how many staff worked in total
15 in M bureaus?

16 A I really don't.

17 Q But you testified earlier that, to your knowledge, it is just a collection of
18 bureaus under one other secretary at the State Department?

19 A Yeah, that is -- as far as I know, it is the largest, especially considering how
20 large Consular Affairs, Diplomatic Security, and Information Resources Management are.

21 Q Can you describe the relationship between M family bureaus and the Office
22 of the Under Secretary For Management?

23 A Describe the relationship? Could you make the question a little more
24 specific, please?

25 Q Sure. What responsibilities does M have vis-à-vis its constituent bureaus

1 and offices?

2 A Oh, okay. Yeah, the Under Secretary is the direct supervisor of the
3 assistant secretaries or their equivalents. The office -- I mentioned earlier that the office
4 is quite small. So mostly the office is planning a coordination role among the M family
5 bureaus and as needed, between the M family bureaus and other bureaus or the
6 interagency.

7 Q And does M issue directives to its constituent bureaus?

8 A If by directives you mean, give instructions and more guidance, yes.

9 Q And does it direct resources -- budgetary resources to constituent bureaus?

10 A Yes. I mean, I would stipulate that both of those things are sometimes
11 contingent on approval at higher levels of authority. You know, the budget process in
12 the Department, I am sure you can appreciate this, is complicated. And not as simple as
13 the Under Secretary for Management just deciding.

14 Q And does the under secretary for management hire staff in M bureaus?

15 A So I am not sure what the universe of possibilities you mean by hiring staff.
16 In my experience, somebody senior over like such a large workforce does not get involved
17 in day to day or routine hiring. I think if your question pertains to leadership roles, you
18 know, the answer might be a little more case by case.

19 Q Thank you. What subject matter areas, or duties, take the bulk of the
20 Office of the Under Secretary for Management's time, in your experience?

21 A Well, I would say during the period that I was there, Afghanistan was
22 probably the single biggest focus of the acting Under Secretary and of the office, in
23 general. I think a second place would go to the basket of issues around COVID or play
24 safety, vaccination, telework, return to work, that kind of thing. And then after that, it is
25 really incredibly broad range of issues, and also a lot of responding to unexpected events

1 or problems.

2 Q You testified that during your tenure, Afghanistan was the single biggest
3 focus of the Office of Under Secretary of Management. Is that correct?

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

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

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

14 BY [REDACTED]:

15 Q So if I understand correctly you are saying that none of the duties stopped,
16 but what happened in fact was you took on more duties in order to free up space for Ms.
17 Perez to focus on Afghanistan-related tasks.

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

21 BY [REDACTED]:

22 Q But it is your testimony today that Carol Perez spent the majority of her time
23 on Afghanistan issues of --

24 A I want to be precise, but by majority, you mean more than half? I am not
25 prepared to say that.

1 Q Let me say it differently. The largest share of her time?

2 A That is right. I can't think of anything over that period that took more of
3 her time. Of course, there may have been, like episodically things that demanded, you
4 know, some sustained focus. But over the period that we are talking about, I can't think
5 of anything that collectively she spent more time on.

6 Q And your testimony today is that none of her other duties and
7 responsibilities as acting Under Secretary for Management disappeared or went away
8 during this time?

9 A No, I can't think of anything that disappeared. There may have been things
10 that got deprioritized or delegated down. But it is not like we stopped worrying about
11 issuing passports for Americans because of this, or stopped building new embassy
12 buildings overseas, if that goes to your question.

13 Q It does, thank you. And just to close on this, can you describe the work
14 environment in the Office of Under Secretary for Management? Were employees
15 generally busy?

16 A Yes, generally employees were extremely busy. I would say that there was
17 a lot of work to be done. I am really pleased to say this: Everybody that I worked with
18 at the time was really dedicated and committed. And really, I can't think of anyone who
19 did less than everything they could and carry out their responsibilities. I think that is a
20 product of having a small team that is dedicated to a really meaningful mission, and
21 frankly, having good leadership in Ambassador Perez.

22 Q Thank you. Would you describe the staff in M as experienced?

23 A So I think I mentioned earlier that there is a relatively small staff. As I
24 mentioned, I have been in the Foreign Service for, gosh, almost 25 years. The office
25 managers there were very experienced. The special assistants were relatively junior

1 officers. The selection for those positions is quite competitive, so the people doing
2 those jobs were very capable. But they typically have sort of, like, maybe 12 years of
3 experience in the Department.

4 Q And would you describe the staff in M as hard workers?

5 A Yes, I would.

6 Q And self-starters?

7 A Yes, indeed.

8 Q Let me go back to another subject that our majority colleagues raised. The
9 proposed Bureau of Contingency and Crisis Response. You testified that Under
10 Secretary -- Acting Under Secretary Perez had concerns regarding the proposal to stand
11 up this new bureau?

12 A Yeah. To the best of my recollection, she had some concerns or some
13 unanswered questions.

14 Q And these concerns and unanswered questions included whether a bureau
15 was the appropriate structure to stand up, correct?

16 A Yeah, I have to confess, I hesitate a little bit to speak on her behalf, but that
17 is to the best of my recollection.

18 Q And you testified earlier that you also understood her to have questions or
19 concerns around the effective management of aircraft assets?

20 A I can't recall exactly if that was a concern of hers. I think it was, but it was a
21 concern that I heard, if not from her, than from others.

22 Q So you had knowledge of concerns about the proposed CCR bureau being
23 held by individuals beyond Acting Under Secretary Perez?

24 A Yes.

25 Q Who were some of the individuals that you recalled having concerns about

1 the proposal to stand up this bureau?

2 A You know, I have difficulty remembering exactly, because this is kind of in
3 the nature of informal conversations with people. And to be honest, most of this
4 predates my tenure in the M front office. So I recall this proposal had been circulating
5 for a little while.

6 Q But it is your general understanding that the proposal had been circulating in
7 the Department, and that individuals, including Acting Under Secretary Perez had
8 concerns about it?

9 A Yeah, I think it is fair to say that the proposal was not without some
10 controversy.

1 [10:39 a.m.]

2 BY [REDACTED]:

3 Q Do you recall the substance of the proposal and specifically who would head
4 the new bureau?

5 A I have to confess, I don't recall very much about the specifics, other than it
6 would take some of the capabilities that were in the Bureau of Medical Services and
7 maybe some of the capabilities and authorities from the Bureau of Administration and
8 the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement and collect them in this
9 bureau, which I recall was forecast to be pretty small vis-à-vis other bureaus.

10 I recall that Dr. Walters was -- I believe he was selected to head the bureau, but
11 my recollection is that somehow that selection was not finalized or made official. But I
12 have trouble remembering the details of that. I can't remember why that was so.

13 The creation of the new bureau and selection of senior executive service to head it
14 is pretty -- pretty complicated and not something that I'm 100 percent knowledgeable
15 about, and I think a lot of that happened before January of 2021.

16 Q Were you aware of any congressional concerns about the proposed
17 Contingency and Crisis Response Bureau?

18 A I have a general recollection that there were supporters and skeptics of the
19 concepts on Capitol Hill.

20 Q Were you aware of any holds that congressional committees had placed on
21 congressional notifications related to the proposal to stand up a CCR Bureau?

22 A I don't recall. It's really -- really not really my area, so I don't really recall.

23 Q Fair enough. But your testimony today is that you understand there to
24 have been concerns about the proposed bureau inside the Department and among some
25 skeptics on Capitol Hill. Is that correct?

1 A Yeah. I mean, I'm speaking kind of generally on this subject rather than
2 specific to my role as the acting chief of staff.

3 Q Okay. And you understood that the proposed new bureau -- that Dr.
4 Walters had been selected at some point to head the bureau if it were stood up?

5 A Yeah. I -- I'm sure there's a technical term for what stage of that process it
6 was at, and so I'm not really -- I'm not really sure what the right term for it was. But it
7 wasn't finalized, that's for sure.

8 Q And to your knowledge, is Dr. Walters still at the Department?

9 A No. To my knowledge, he -- he resigned from the Department. It was -- I
10 can't remember when exactly, if it was -- well, let me just say, before I left that position,
11 he told me of his intention to resign from the Department, but I don't recall when that
12 happened, and I've heard informally that he did resign.

13 Q So before the third week of July 2021, you understood from Dr. Walters that
14 he was planning to leave the Department?

15 A Yes.

16 Q And you understood at that time that the proposed new CCR Bureau that he
17 at one point had been selected to lead was not going to be stood up?

18 A That's right. My -- I recall that before I left, M -- the final determination
19 had been made about the -- about the bureau and the proposal for the bureau.

20 ██████████. Thanks.

21 So I think we can give you 3 minutes and 6 seconds back, and we'll go ahead and
22 conclude our questioning round here.

23 Mr. Mennuti. It's because you want to ask longer questions later, I bet.

24 ██████████. We want to pass the baton back to our majority colleagues. Thank
25 you.

1 Mr. Mennuti. Can I get a 5-minute break, please?

2 [REDACTED]. We were just about to propose the same.

3 Mr. Mennuti. Okay.

4 [REDACTED]. Let's just -- well, I guess 11:01.

5 10:51, if that works for everyone.

6 Great. Thank you.

7 [Recess.]

8 [REDACTED]. So we can go back on the record. We will start the time.

9 BY [REDACTED]:

10 Q All right. Mr. Mennuti, I want to clarify some of the discussion in the
11 previous rounds.

12 During your time as chief of staff, the Department was involved in planning for the
13 departure of military forces from Afghanistan, correct?

14 A Acting chief of staff, yes.

15 Q Acting chief of staff.

16 [REDACTED]. Oh, we lost --

17 [REDACTED]. Can we go off the record?

18 Mr. Mennuti. Yes, that's right.

19 [Discussion off the record.]

20 [REDACTED]. Okay. We'll go back on the record and start the time.

21 Mr. Mennuti. You were saying? Sorry. Go ahead.

22 BY [REDACTED]:

23 Q Yeah. During your time as acting chief of staff, the Department was
24 involved in planning for the departure of military forces from Afghanistan, correct?

25 A That's right.

1 Q Can you describe what planning efforts were occurring within the State
2 Department for the planned departure of military forces?

3 A To be honest, I've described a lot of them already to the best of my
4 recollection. And I think I've also mentioned that a lot of the details of that planning
5 was delegated down to a working level that I wasn't tracking or engaged with.

6 Q What were the roles of different entities within the Department in these
7 efforts to plan for the military's departure from Afghanistan?

8 A Could you be more specific about which entities you have in mind?

9 Q Different, you know, bureaus, families of bureaus, senior officials, or offices?

10 A Sure. I can really only talk about the things that I -- that I saw, obviously, or
11 that I'm aware of, and most of that has to do with the things that Ambassador Perez was
12 doing or directing or that my colleagues in the M family were doing.

13 You know, for example, the Bureau -- the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations
14 was working on hardening the housing at the embassy compound. It's my recollection
15 that the issue was, after the withdrawal of the military, the embassy was going to need to
16 consolidate its footprint, and there wasn't adequate hardened housing on the embassy
17 compound. So I know that the acting director of OBO at the time was engaged in
18 advancing a project to harden that housing.

19 I mentioned the military had been providing a hospital facility, and the senior
20 leaders of the Med Bureau were engaged in devising a solution to provide that capacity in
21 some other way. I recall that they developed different possibilities that involved DOD
22 maintaining some kind of facility for some period of time.

23 I think at one point, there was a proposal for another NATO member to provide
24 access to their hospital facility. In collaboration with the Procurement Executive and the
25 Overseas Building Operations, they were looking at the possibility of building and fitting

1 out a medical facility that would be -- that meets some minimal -- minimum requirement.

2 I hope these are the kinds of things that you're -- that you're asking about. If
3 not, please correct me.

4 Q That's helpful to know.

5 One other thing I would like to ask about is, you know, was there a, you know,
6 specific family of bureaus or a particular bureau or bureaus within the Department that
7 were principally responsible for leading the Department's efforts or coordinating the
8 Department's efforts to plan for the military departure from Afghanistan?

9 A So I can really only say what the responsibility of the M family of bureaus
10 was and what they were doing. I know that the regional bureau participated in our
11 efforts. They and post were aware of what the M family was doing and contributing to
12 that. But I can't say what other bureaus or families of bureaus were doing in this regard.
13 I just -- I didn't have enough bandwidth to be aware of it.

14 Q So then -- so, you know, to the extent of your knowledge or -- you know, it
15 was not the case that M was leading these efforts or P was leading these efforts or a
16 specific bureau was designated as the lead of Afghanistan coordination efforts?

17 A You know, as I said, the M office and I had pretty broad responsibility for a
18 lot of issues and coordination among the M family and with other bureaus. I can't -- I
19 can't say what other bureaus or under secretaries were charged with doing or how they
20 did it.

21 Q And I'd like to also ask about a couple of specific bureaus.

22 Could you elaborate on the role of DS, Diplomatic Security, in planning for the
23 military departure?

24 A Yeah. Again, I can only speak to the best of my recollection. I know that
25 one of the issues that they were responsible for was the physical security of the -- of the

1 embassy compound. And I remember that the issue of how that -- who was going to
2 provide that physical security and how it was going to be managed was an issue that
3 Diplomatic Security was engaged on.

4 I'm sure that there were others, but I -- either I wasn't engaged on it or I don't
5 recall what they were.

6 Q And then I also want to ask about the Bureau of Consular Affairs and what its
7 role was.

8 A I don't remember that they had any specific role in terms of ensuring these
9 key enablers.

10 Q But Consular Affairs was under M, correct?

11 A That's right.

12 Q And Consular Affairs -- you know, there was obviously a significant effort
13 involving SIVs and other visas for Afghan allies. Was that something that M was
14 involved in planning?

15 A I'm sorry, I just don't remember to what extent she was or wasn't.

16 Q Would there have been, you know, other entities in the Department -- I'm
17 sorry. When I say M, I mean, you know, kind of -- did you have any insight into, you
18 know, what the bureau was doing? Would there have been other entities within the
19 Department that this would have been more pertinent to that would have been leading
20 on this as opposed to Consular Affairs?

21 A Leading on what? I'm sorry.

22 Q On planning for SIVs, Afghan allies, getting visas, you know, planning in
23 advance of the military departure?

24 A I'm sorry. I really -- I don't know.

25 Q And then how closely were you tracking the U.S. military's retrograde from

1 Afghanistan during your time as acting chief of staff?

2 A Me personally, I don't recall tracking it with any granularity.

3 Q Was there somebody else, you know, within the office on the team that was
4 tracking it with granularity?

5 A To be honest, I'm not exactly sure what tracking it would look like. I mean,
6 nobody there was a military or security expert. I don't -- I don't recall anybody within
7 that small M office that was keeping track of troop levels or deployment schedules, per
8 se.

9 Q Was Ambassador Perez?

10 A I don't know.

11 Q Were you or staff within M tracking the base closures during that timeframe,
12 including the closure of Bagram?

13 A I remember -- I remember that Bagram closed or that it was announced to
14 be closed, but I don't know if anybody was tracking bases one by one.

15 Q Were you tracking the rapid Taliban advances across Afghanistan?

16 A I remember receiving reports about Taliban advances and setbacks, but I
17 can't remember in any specificity what the -- what the details of that were.

18 Q Did you have a general perception of conditions on the ground in July 2021?

19 A Me personally, I did not. As I said, I was not an action officer on this issue,
20 and for the most part, I didn't participate in detailed activities.

21 Q And, you know -- and I know this covers some ground that, you know, you
22 addressed before, but just want to be, you know, specific.

23 Since action officer is a specific term, who would have been the action officers?

24 A For the most part, the action officers were in the bureaus. I mean, if what
25 we're talking about is developing strategies to ensure these key enablers and executing

1 those strategies, that was, for the most part, done in and between the bureaus.

2 Q Was the need to plan for a potential evacuation discussed?

3 A I don't -- I don't recall being part of any discussion like that. Or I should -- I
4 should say -- yeah. No, I'll -- I'll stick with that.

5 Q Was there something that, you know, was maybe not in response to that
6 exact question, but -- you know, which is relevant that, you know, could be helpful to
7 add?

8 A No. What I was thinking about was what I mentioned earlier, that,
9 informally, some people weren't sure how long it was realistic to have a mission after the
10 military withdrew in terms of a long-term presence.

11 Q Could you elaborate on that and who, you know, expressed those concerns,
12 and --

13 A No, it's just something that I recall hearing informally. But since I'm really
14 not an expert on the area, it wasn't anything that I was equipped to evaluate at the time.

15 Q As chief of staff, what percentage of your time in the under secretary's office
16 was spent on Afghanistan?

17 A I really could not say.

18 Q Could you say if it was over or under, you know, 20 percent, 10 percent?

19 A I'm sorry, it's just really difficult for me to judge. I mean, you're talking
20 about a period of a few months about 2 years ago. So I really -- I don't recall how much
21 of my day-to-day time I spent actually working on this.

22 Q Was it a major portion or a minor portion? Would the fact you don't recall
23 indicate that it was, you know, a minor portion?

24 A Maybe it's helpful if I say I have much clearer memories of working
25 on -- working directly on other -- other bigger things, which, you know, I was happy to do

1 to the extent that it freed up Ambassador Perez' time and attention to work on
2 Afghanistan.

3 Q What were those things?

4 A So the major thing I mentioned before is the workplace -- workplace safety,
5 distribution of vaccines, and doing planning about the so-called future work or return to
6 the workplace or telework. I remember being involved in a lot of personnel issues.
7 Also, some budget -- budget issues as we prepared the budget proposal for the next fiscal
8 year.

9 Q How did planning for the military departure rank among the under
10 secretary's priorities?

11 A During the period that we're talking about, I can't think of anything that
12 ranked higher.

13 Q So what percentage of her time would you estimate was spent on it?

14 A It's really difficult for me to judge that without reviewing her calendar from
15 that period.

16 Q Would you say that it was something she was dealing with on a daily basis,
17 on, you know --

18 A Yeah, absolutely, it was a daily focus.

19 Q And what percentage of Under Secretary Perez' staff's time collectively was
20 spent on it?

21 A Oh, I really don't have -- I can't recall enough information to judge that.

22 Q And -- sorry.

23 A No. Go ahead.

24 Q And also, you know, could you elaborate when you said -- you know,
25 was -- during your time there, was the top priority on, you know, how that manifested in,

1 you know, her work and, you know, her focus?

2 A So I think, to the best of my recollection, she had a lot of regular and ad hoc
3 meetings on the subject, and it was a frequent agenda item on other broader meetings
4 that she had.

5 Q So there was a regular Afghanistan meeting or multiple regular Afghanistan
6 meetings on her schedule during your time there?

7 A Yeah. I mentioned earlier that she had a call -- a coordination call that was
8 mostly for the M family bureaus, which included a post and the bureau once a week.
9 And she had a call -- so-called interagency call, which was mostly DOD, with a collection of
10 people in State and DOD also once a week.

11 Q And who from M, to the best of your knowledge, attended that interagency
12 call?

13 A You mean from the small immediate staff?

14 Q Well, sorry. From, you know, also the bureaus within M.

15 A Sure. From the bureaus. You know, typically, it was a mixture, I would
16 say, of the bureau leaders or their designees in their absence. So here, I'm talking about
17 the assistant secretary for DS or his deputy, the acting director of OBO, the procurement
18 executive, as I recall. Other people participated based on their -- their expertise. For
19 example, I remember, at one point, the specific contracting officer who was going to carry
20 out a particular action joined the call.

21 But I need to remind you that I didn't participate in these calls other than the first
22 few. And here, I'm going on what I recollect from the ongoing participation and the
23 agendas.

24 Q So --

25 A I also don't exclude the possibility that others participated or that, over time,

1 the participation changed.

2 Q Sure. You said that in your role as acting chief of staff, you had a significant
3 focus on COVID-related issues.

4 A That's right.

5 Q What impact did COVID have on Kabul embassy operations during your time
6 there?

7 A I recall that Embassy Kabul had been vaccinated early in the process, maybe
8 in December or January. So to the best of my recollection, I think most of the
9 operational impact had to do with maintaining the healthy situation that they had there
10 rather than coping with the outbreaks of disease the way we saw in some other posts
11 that were vaccinated later.

12 Q Did -- did COVID or, you know, COVID-related restrictions have any negative
13 impact on contingency or security planning --

14 A You mean within the Department?

15 Q -- for the military departure?

16 A You mean for the planning within the Department that I've been talking
17 about?

18 Q Yes. And including the operational -- the operational aspects on the
19 ground.

20 A Yeah. No, I can't recall any COVID-related restrictions that impaired our
21 ability to develop these strategies or execute them.

22 Q Did COVID-related restrictions or COVID itself impact the SIV process?

23 A I don't have any basis to judge that. I'm sorry.

24 Q So by your own statement, you know, you say you're not a security or an
25 Afghanistan expert. Was there one on Ambassador Perez' staff as acting under

1 secretary?

2 A I mean, to the extent that you consider the assistant secretary of DS a
3 security expert and on her staff, yes.

4 Q Do you -- but was there one in the immediate staff or detailed, you know, to
5 serving, you know, specifically the under secretary as an advisor?

6 A No.

7 Q Do you think that it would have been helpful had there been one, given, you
8 know, the prioritization of the issue and the significant security challenges, you know,
9 that Afghanistan was posing?

10 A No, not inasmuch as the acting under secretary had daily access to the senior
11 leadership of the bureau. I don't see how another advisor would have added value.

12 Q You mentioned that you were not involved with the planning or the lead-up
13 to Ambassador Perez' trip to Afghanistan. Do you know what staff or, you know,
14 officials within M, including the bureaus within M, accompanied her on that trip?

15 A I remember that we sent one of the special assistants to accompany her. I
16 can't recall if anyone from the bureau or, for example, Diplomatic Security accompanied
17 her as well. I can't remember.

18 Q Do you recall which special assistant accompanied her?

19 A I can't recall with certainty. I'm sorry.

20 Q And did you get a readout of her trip?

21 A Yes.

22 Q And what were the takeaways?

23 A So I think I've already outlined kind of the major conclusions that
24 Ambassador Perez came back with, which was that the M family had a significant amount
25 of work to do to ensure that the embassy was going to be able to operate safely and

1 securely after the military left.

2 Q Was the under secretary -- the acting under secretary's belief that embassy
3 staffing should be expanded or downsized? The embassy footprint.

4 A I'm sorry. Could you repeat the last part of your question?

5 Q Was it the under secretary's belief that embassy staffing and the embassy
6 footprint should be down -- should be expanded or downsized?

7 A I couldn't say whether she had a considered opinion on the subject.

8 Q You departed the position of chief of staff on July 21st, 2021, correct?

9 A To the best of my recollection, it was around then. Might have been a day
10 or two before.

11 Q On or about. Yes.

12 So what was the reason for your transition and the timing?

13 A So I -- I had been assigned to the position that I am in now for quite some
14 time. I think I was assigned the previous September or October. And to be honest, I
15 didn't think I would be there as long as I was there. I didn't think I would be in this role
16 from -- or I didn't think I would be detailed from my assignment in human resources from
17 January until the time I left. And for that matter, I don't think Ambassador Perez
18 thought that she would be there that long either.

19 So -- but the timing of my departure was based on sort of the usual schedule of
20 change in assignment and the requirements of the post I was going to.

21 Q So in July 2021, you know, to the best of your knowledge or recollection,
22 were there concerns, you know, within M and its bureaus regarding the stability of
23 Afghanistan by delaying [inaudible] its government beyond the military's departure?

24 A I'm sorry. I have to ask you to speak up a little bit, please. I can't hear you
25 very well.

1 Q In fact, let me actually ask a different question.

2 Who replaced you as chief of staff or acting chief of staff?

3 A So at the time I left, a woman named Jennifer Johnson took that role.

4 Q Was it --

5 A I can't -- I can't say how long she held it.

6 Q And was that in an acting capacity or a permanent?

7 A Certainly when she started, it was in an acting capacity, but I don't know
8 how long she served in that role and if she changed from acting to permanent.

9 Q And in July 2021, you know, were there concerns, you know, within M, you
10 know, including by, you know, Under Secretary Perez, the staff, the bureaus, about the
11 state of conditions on the ground, the stability of Afghanistan [inaudible] by delaying its
12 government beyond the military's planned departure?

13 A Concerns -- concerns about security in general? Yeah, of course.

14 I'm sorry. Maybe I didn't hear the full question. You mean security on an
15 ongoing basis after the military left?

16 Q Was there -- was there, you know, a particular alarm at what was occurring
17 in July of 2021? You know, the developments that were unfolding in July 2021.

18 A I can't remember my own feelings about the subject.

19 Q Would it be fair to say that it was a, you know, major -- you know, major
20 alarm that that would have been memorable?

21 A For me personally, yes. But I can't -- I can't be sure that -- I can't be sure
22 what level of information I had at the time.

23 Q And was there ever any discussion of, you know, delaying your departure or
24 transition in, you know, reaction to what was occurring, you know, with Afghanistan?

25 A Did you say, like, departure? You mean like evacuation?

1 Q From your transition out of that position as acting chief of staff.

2 A Yeah. I really apologize. I'm not sure why I'm having so much trouble
3 hearing you.

4 Q Let me try to -- let me try to --

5 A Okay.

6 Q Is this better?

7 A Yes.

8 Q Was there any -- was there ever any discussion of delaying your transition
9 out of the position given what was occurring on the ground in Afghanistan?

10 A No.

11 BY [REDACTED]:

12 Q We already know that Carol Perez, she went to Kabul in April, and she came
13 back, and she had -- she sort of had a readout of what needed to be done to continue,
14 you know, the embassy diplomatic presence post the military withdrawal. But were
15 there any other meetings between Carol Perez and the assistant secretary of Diplomatic
16 Security to discuss, you know, this sort of contingency planning in Afghanistan?

17 A What kind of contingency planning?

18 Q Like diplomatic presence post-military withdrawal, keeping the embassy up
19 and running.

20 A I don't know if there was a specific meeting solely on that topic. I'm sorry.
21 I'm having a little trouble kind of mapping the question on to my experience. I mean,
22 she -- she met with Diplomatic Security every day. If you're asking, did she convene a
23 meeting on the subject of -- what was it -- like physical security?

24 Q Or just -- or just -- like the ability -- I mean, you said that they needed
25 medevac capabilities, keeping the airport open, you know, physical security of the

1 embassy as well. I mean, were these -- I mean, did the assistant secretary of Diplomatic
2 Security have these discussions with Carol Perez?

3 A Yes. I mean, he participated in these calls. To the best of my recollection,
4 they -- they discussed it at their regular meetings, along with other issues, to the extent
5 that I have any knowledge of it.

6 I hope that's responsive to the question. I'm not sure what else you might be
7 asking about.

8 Q Yeah. And to the best of your knowledge, in these calls, daily meetings
9 with the DS, they would have told Carol Perez the risks and dangers of maintaining
10 diplomatic presence in Kabul after the military withdrawal, correct?

11 A You know, I -- I wasn't present at that kind of briefing or that kind of
12 discussion.

13 Q Okay. Did DS -- do you know, to the best of your knowledge, did DS make
14 any recommendations in terms of downsizing embassy personnel, reducing equipment,
15 considering alternative embassy locations, and planning for or considering a NEO?

16 A So I'm -- I'm aware that there was a constant review of the staffing level to
17 make sure that the current staffing could be kept safe, given the environment, and that
18 that's a discussion that DS is deeply involved in.

19 And then as to some of the other things that you're asking about, I'm sorry, I just
20 don't know.

21 Q Do you know if the assistant secretary of Diplomatic Security ever
22 recommended or raised the issue of deploying a foreign emergency support team?

23 A I can't recall. I'm sorry.

24 Q Okay. And so just to clarify, the plan was to maintain an embassy and our
25 diplomatic presence in Kabul post-military -- after the military leaves were we're staying

1 indefinitely?

2 A That's right.

3 Q So the publicly released sections of the Department's afteraction review on
4 Afghanistan discussed the issue of mitigating the loss of both key enablers and stated,
5 quote, Some officials questioned how and whether the Department could sufficiently
6 mitigate the loss of military support, and the Bureau of Diplomatic Security warned of a
7 level of risk that the Department would be accepting.

8 Can you elaborate at all on DS' warnings?

9 A No, I can't. I don't know -- I either didn't receive them or don't remember
10 them, or they might have been given after my departure.

11 Q Did DS warn against continuing the continuation of embassy operations in
12 the wake of the loss of military support?

13 A I don't recall hearing that.

14 Q Okay. So the plan is to maintain embassy and diplomatic presence in
15 Kabul, correct?

16 A That's right.

17 Q Was that plan mapped out and distributed to those involved?

18 A I don't know what that would look like.

19 Q Did the plan for Afghanistan change at any point regarding events on the
20 ground?

21 A During my time in the office, there was no change to that kind of concept.
22 Of course, a lot of the strategies to achieve it changed, even during the short time that I
23 was there.

24 BY [REDACTED]:

25 Q Are we correct in understanding that until July 2021 -- or until the end of July

1 2021, on or about, there was no shift in plan in terms of maintaining embassy operations?

2 A So I just want to reiterate that I was not involved in every aspect of the
3 planning or all the discussions on this issue. So, of course, I can only talk about what I'm
4 directly aware of.

5 Q Of course. That's definitely -- that's definitely our assumption as well.

6 A So -- yeah.

7 Q So from what you were aware, to the best of your recollection.

8 A So, to the best of my recollection, when I left the office, what I remember
9 was that this was still the primary plan.

10 Q I know you've already -- you've already noted to us that you're not a security
11 expert or a regional expert on Afghanistan. But what was your impression of the
12 situation on the ground from January up until your departure? So sort of the
13 progression of that.

14 A Yeah. I'm really -- I really regret -- like, I'm not in a position to offer an
15 opinion. I mean, I just -- I don't have enough --

16 Q From a personnel perspective, from the perspective as to the bureau that's
17 responsible for the flow and influx of Department employees, what was sort of your
18 impression?

19 A It's not -- it's not something that I had enough information to formulate a
20 really educated opinion on. I just don't have the context or the skill to say with any level
21 of surety.

22 Q Okay. No, that's fair.

23 Was there a seventh floor principle that was sort of named for this purpose, for
24 the withdrawal and crisis response, so more generally Afghanistan?

25 A You know, as I said, Ambassador Perez took responsibility for energizing the

1 M family, and I don't remember or maybe don't know if other principals were given
2 specific tasks in this regard.

3 Q So to the best of your recollection, there wasn't one individual who sort of
4 took the lead on Afghanistan across the board?

5 A I'm not -- I'm not sure what more I can say. I -- if there was, I -- I don't -- I
6 don't remember knowing about that.

7 Q Did you in your capacity as acting chief of staff or Carol Perez ever engage
8 with Ambassador Wilson?

9 A Yes.

10 Q How often did you all engage, as an estimate? Sort of a weekly basis?

11 A So I recall that he was a regular participant in these calls. I also recall that
12 they spoke directly and that they would correspond.

13 I really -- even at the time, I probably didn't have the full picture of how often they
14 were in contact, and I certainly don't remember. But I would say that they were
15 definitely in touch as much as either of them wanted to be.

16 Q As sort of a charge in Afghanistan, what was his role in sort of the
17 withdrawal planning as the military operations were sort of winding down?

18 A You know, as chief of mission, he has overall responsibility for the safety and
19 security for the -- of the employees there. I don't have any visibility on what he
20 specifically did in Kabul to carry out that responsibility.

21 Q Did he ever share his views regarding the possibility of an evacuation
22 through all U.S. Embassy personnel?

23 A I don't know.

24 Q In the publicly released AAR, the Department found that there was
25 insufficient senior level consideration of worst-case scenarios and how quickly those

1 might follow.

2 Why do you think that this was -- to the best of your recollection, why do you
3 think this was the case?

4 A I really don't have any basis to judge that. I'm sorry.

5 Q Were you a part of the discussion about building up the Hamid Karzai
6 International Airport?

7 A I'm sorry. Could you repeat that?

8 Q Were you or Carol Perez at all privy or part of the discussion to build up the
9 Hamid Karzai International Airport as a way of getting people --

10 A Yeah. I need to ask you what you mean by building it up. You mean
11 increasing the capacity?

12 Q Correct. Correct.

13 A I don't -- I don't remember participating in any discussions about that. I
14 have some memory of discussions about who could operate the airport after the military
15 withdrew and what that might look like.

16 Q And what were those discussions?

17 A Yeah. Again, my recollection of details is kind of limited because it wasn't
18 something I was directly involved in, and 2 years has passed.

19 But I remember one option was to see if Turkiye would continue to operate it or
20 to explore under what conditions they'd be able to do that. I have a vague memory of
21 the possibility of outsourcing it but, unfortunately, I really can't remember any details.

22 Q What were the biggest challenges you faced with respect to Afghanistan
23 from January 2021 to July 2021?

24 A I just -- I just want to repeat that. The biggest challenges that we faced in
25 Afghanistan from January 2021 to July 2021?

1 Q Correct. In your experience. So that was the period when you were
2 serving as acting chief of staff. So what were the biggest challenges you faced as acting
3 chief of staff?

4 A I think the biggest challenge -- the biggest challenge was just the short
5 timeframe to get a lot of really complicated, important things done. I think that -- that
6 was the challenge that I saw from -- from April to July, was just there was no luxury of
7 time to do anything other than really work all out on these issues.

8 Q Do you think the Department would have benefited from having more time
9 to plan?

10 A I think that's usually true as a general principle, yes.

11 Q Do you think that the evacuation would have resulted the way it did if you
12 had had more time to plan?

13 A I don't really know enough about how the evacuation happened or the
14 planning to speculate about that.

15 Q Okay. Mr. Mennuti, do you know what a NEO or a noncombatant
16 evacuation is as a concept?

17 A I mean, I have a personal understanding, but I can't say for sure that that's
18 the textbook definition.

19 Q Okay.

20 A I did an assignment in Seoul, South Korea, and we were trained on being on
21 the receiving end of that kind of thing.

22 Q And you stated earlier in our questioning, when asked whether the
23 possibility of a NEO had come up, you said something, and I don't want to misquote you.
24 You don't know in exactly those terms, but potentially an evacuation.

25 Can you speak to us just generally about whether a NEO or an evacuation or

1 anything of that sort of thing came up within your timeframe either to yourself or Carol
2 Perez?

3 A Yeah. I mean, in reference to what I said before, I just want to be precise
4 because some of these terms have really precise meanings to different people. And
5 that's what I meant when I said, like, my understanding of what a NEO is isn't necessarily
6 the textbook. Evacuation, I think, also has a different meaning to different people. In
7 the State Department, we have authorized departure, ordered departure, that kind of
8 thing.

9 So the -- as I mentioned, you know, there was a constant evaluation of the staffing
10 at the embassy, and I think it's because the embassy was in some kind of departure
11 status. I don't recall whether anybody talked about changing that status. But that has
12 a kind of -- that includes a process within the Department.

1 [11:45 a.m.]

2 BY [REDACTED]:

3 Q Was there a lead planning officer that was responsible for that, to the best of
4 your knowledge?

5 A For what?

6 Q For the departure or evacuation of embassy employees, or at least planning
7 for it.

8 A I mean, I think I said at the outset that if it was -- if there was, I wasn't aware
9 of it or I don't remember it.

10 Q Were you aware of a June 30th plan put forward by OpMed to charter 100
11 flights over a span of 25 days to get American citizens out of Afghanistan?

12 A Specifically that, I -- I don't recall. I mean, that -- that may be associated
13 with what I was talking about earlier with the availability of commercial aviation to move
14 people from intermediate flights. I just don't remember if that was it or if it was
15 something separate.

16 Q That would be run through the M family bureau, though, correct, if there
17 had been such a plan to get American citizens out of Afghanistan?

18 A I'm hesitating to say because it's -- it's not something I've ever done before.

19 Q Would that be a Consular Affairs issue?

20 A Yeah. Now you're getting much more detailed than I'm willing to go.

21 Q Okay. No, no. I understand.

22 So members of the Department of Defense have expressed frustration of the
23 unwillingness of the Department to plan for a potential NEO early enough as the security
24 situation was deteriorating.

25 To the best of your knowledge or best of your recollection, why do you think

1 members of the DOD believe this or attribute it to the Department?

2 A You know, I really don't have any basis to judge that complaint.

3 Q So going back to the AAR, the publicly released AAR.

4 A Uh-huh.

5 Q It indicated that the NEO planning process, so the planning process, not just
6 the NEO itself, was hindered by the fact that it was unclear who in the Department had
7 the lead. I know we discussed a bit about, you know, was there one principal officer.
8 So can you explain why this was unclear?

9 A No.

10 Q Did the Department at any point figure out who did have the lead?

11 A This is all things that happened after I left, right?

12 Q This is the planning process, so I can't speak to exactly when that time, but
13 the evacuation happened mid-August, so in the lead-up to that --

14 A Yeah.

15 Q -- big evacuation.

16 A Okay. Can you repeat your question? I'm sorry.

17 Q Of course. So in the AAR, the AAR admits that the NEO planning process
18 was hindered by the fact that it was unclear who in the Department had the lead, who in
19 the Department had the lead over Afghanistan and the NEO.

20 And my question was -- first question was: Why was it unclear, and did State at
21 any point figure out who did have the lead?

22 A Okay. I'm really -- I'm not in a position to answer that. I've said before
23 that, to whatever extent planning was going on, I wasn't aware of it or I don't remember
24 it. And as a result of that, I really can't say whether there was one person responsible or
25 not, and, if not, why not.

1 Q So if you don't recall my next question, please feel free to say so. But the
2 AAR also stated that a major challenge for the NEO planning was that senior
3 administration officials had not made clear decisions regarding the universe of at-risk
4 Afghans who would be included by the time the operation started, nor had they
5 determined where those Afghans would be taken.

6 Do you know who these senior administration officials were?

7 A I do not.

8 Q Do you know why it took so long to make these decisions?

9 A I really don't know. It's really not possible for me to offer opinions about
10 why things happened the way they did after I left. I'm sorry.

11 Q No, that's completely fine.

12 Do you know what level of reliance the Department had on sort of outside private
13 volunteer-led organizations during this period?

14 A During what period?

15 Q During sort of the summer of 2021.

16 A Can you say that again? What kind of reliance on outside --

17 Q The Department relied on outside or private vet-led volunteer organizations
18 during the summer of 2021 to assist with the withdrawal.

19 A No, I don't have any information about that.

20 Q I do have one question. Do you consider the withdrawal a success, a
21 failure, or neither?

22 A I really don't have any basis to judge that in kind of an overall way.

23 Q Do you think anything should have been done different, in retrospect?

24 A I'm sure there are things that should have been done different, but I'm not in
25 a position to second-guess, because I don't have enough information.

1 [REDACTED]. That's everything I have for us. We can -- happy to give you
2 back the minute and a half.

3 Mr. Mennuti. I'll take it.

4 [REDACTED]. Okay. And we can just go off the record.

5 [Discussion held off the record.]

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q Thank you very much for your testimony. We're going to endeavor to ask
8 you new questions and hopefully not sort of rehash questions that have been asked by
9 the majority or the minority prior.

10 That said, just as an initial matter, we'd like to kind of re-level set in terms of two
11 terms, the first being the withdrawal. Our understanding is that the withdrawal relates
12 to, in your opinion, the removal of U.S. military from Afghanistan. Is that correct?

13 A That's right. I mean, because of the context that I was working in,
14 withdrawal was typically talking about the withdrawal of the military.

15 Q And the evacuation was as related to U.S. personnel. Is that correct?

16 A That's right.

17 Q And you had no firsthand knowledge of this issue. Is that correct?

18 A Of?

19 Q Of the evacuation.

20 A The evacuation? No. I mean, I've talked about a couple of things that I
21 remember. Other than that, I -- as I've said, I may have been informed about some
22 things but don't recall them.

23 Q Right. But you were aware of planning related to the withdrawal. Is that
24 correct?

25 A That's right.

1 Q And that's because you had firsthand knowledge of efforts to, indeed, keep
2 USG personnel operating safely and securely in Afghanistan. Is that correct?

3 A That's right.

4 Q Great.

5 BY [REDACTED]:

6 Q So you were asked a few times in this last round about a single point of
7 contact in the Department overseeing everything related to Afghanistan during your
8 tenure. I believe it was your testimony that you weren't able to provide an answer on
9 whether such a contact existed and who that person would have been, correct?

10 A That's right. I -- I want to be precise, because I don't want to mislead
11 anybody, but I just -- I don't recall anybody being given that role while I was in this job.

12 Q But it was your testimony earlier that all M bureaus were engaged
13 intensively on Afghanistan as it related to their responsibilities and --

14 A Yeah.

15 Q -- duties, correct?

16 A Yeah. I certainly don't want to overstate the case. I mean, the Office of
17 Protocol is also technically an M family bureau. And, I mean, other bureaus -- to be
18 precise, some bureaus were more engaged than others because of the subject matter and
19 area of responsibility.

20 Q So it would be fair to say, then, that bureaus in the M world with relevant
21 responsibilities and expertise were engaged intensively on Afghanistan during your
22 tenure?

23 A Yes, that's true.

24 Q And who oversees the M bureaus? You testified earlier that was the Acting
25 Under Secretary for Management?

1 A At that time, yes.

2 Q And who oversees the Acting Under Secretary for Management?

3 A I mentioned earlier, you know, the formal org chart may show something
4 different, but --

5 Q During your tenure.

6 A -- in my experience -- in my experience, the Under Secretary of Management
7 reported most directly to the Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources.

8 Q And the Deputy Secretary for Management and Resources, during your
9 tenure, reported to the Secretary, obviously, correct?

10 A I wasn't in those meetings, but, yes, to my knowledge, that's --

11 Q So to your knowledge -- to your knowledge, for the intensive work that the
12 M bureaus were doing on issues related to Afghanistan at the time, there was a clear
13 chain of command and oversight of their work in the Department?

14 A Yes, to my knowledge.

15 Q Thanks. And just to clarify, were you aware of a task force stood up in July
16 2021 focused on various aspects of Afghanistan?

17 A I -- I can't remember that.

18 Q Okay. I also want to go back quickly just to clarify. You were asked by our
19 majority colleagues previously about your knowledge of reports of Taliban gains in
20 Afghanistan in 2021, and I believe you testified that you had general knowledge of those
21 reports. Is that accurate?

22 A That's true.

23 Q By the end of your tenure in late July 2021, did you have any knowledge of
24 reports of an imminent Taliban takeover of Kabul?

25 A No. I'm pretty sure I would remember that.

1 BY [REDACTED]:

2 Q Could you describe for us your duties as you understood them when you
3 began your role as acting chief of staff?

4 A So the office is really dedicated to making sure the under secretary or, in this
5 case, the acting under secretary has -- sorry.

6 [REDACTED]. Do you need a minute? We can stop the clock and go off record.

7 Mr. Mennuti. Yeah, I just --

8 [REDACTED]. Let's stop the clock, majority, and go off record for a minute to let
9 the witness respond.

10 [Discussion off the record.]

11 [REDACTED]. We're back on the record.

12 Mr. Mennuti. Yeah. Could you repeat the question for me? Sorry for the
13 interruption.

14 BY [REDACTED]:

15 Q Sure. No problem.

16 The question was: When you began your role as acting chief of staff, what did
17 you understand your duties to include?

18 A Oh, okay. Yeah. So the office is dedicated to supporting the under
19 secretary or, in this case, the acting under secretary, to making sure that she has the
20 information that she needs, that decisions that are -- that she needs to make are keyed
21 up in the most effective way, that she has the information that she needs to make
22 decisions, and that her policy priorities or her directions are effectively transmitted to the
23 functional bureaus and carried out.

24 The office also has a role in coordinating between the M family bureaus and
25 between -- occasionally helping with coordination between M family bureaus and other

1 bureaus.

2 So my role was to try to manage that process and, also on specific topics, provide
3 the acting under secretary with advice or opinions to the extent she wanted it or needed
4 it.

5 She -- I think it's idiosyncratic, but for me and Ambassador Perez, she would, time
6 to time, ask me to take on specific responsibilities, either areas of, for lack of a better
7 term, policy or kind of discrete assignments to follow very closely and make sure got
8 carried through to completion.

9 Q So is my understanding correct that when you were hired into this role, you
10 were not tasked with any duties related to Afghanistan specifically?

11 A That's correct.

12 Q During your tenure in this position, which I believe you testified was less
13 than 3 months, did your job duties include Afghanistan-related tasks?

14 A I mean, to the extent that Afghanistan was something that the office was
15 working on, yes, but not to a degree that was different than a lot of -- a lot of other issues
16 that we were managing, in terms of me personally.

17 Q Okay. So based on the information that you've detailed thus far in this
18 interview, you stated that you were briefly working under Ms. Perez when she was the
19 Acting Under Secretary for Management, and that timeframe included less than 3
20 months. I believe you said mid-April to mid-July. Is that correct?

21 A So just to be precise, I worked for her in the capacity as a senior advisor from
22 January 20th until the middle of April. And then when the permanent chief of staff
23 curtailed their assignment, I added that responsibility as acting chief of staff to my duties.
24 And that combined period was another 3 months.

25 Q I understand. Why do you think you were called to testify today?

1 A I -- I don't -- I don't know. I think probably because I was in that role or, I
2 should say, in that office at the beginning of the year. Yeah, I couldn't -- I couldn't
3 speculate.

4 Q The majority indicated that calling you to testify today was an informed
5 decision. Do you agree with that assessment?

6 A I don't dispute it.

7 Q Do you feel that you -- oh, sorry. Continue.

8 A No. I think what I was going to go on to say is relevant to your next
9 question.

10 Q Do you feel that you have adequate firsthand knowledge regarding the
11 withdrawal and evacuation to participate in a transcribed interview related to the
12 withdrawal and evacuation?

13 A You know, with humility, I don't want to say what Congress needs to carry
14 out its oversight responsibilities. So if the testimony that I've given today is helpful or
15 necessary, I'm not in a position to dispute that.

16 Q I recall that you testified previously that you were not in a position to
17 second-guess whether or not the withdrawal was a success because you didn't have
18 enough information. Is that correct?

19 A That's right. I mean, to be precise, I think what I was trying to say is I'm not
20 in a position to second-guess the actions or the decisions that were made in that regard.

21 ██████████. Understood. Thank you.

22 BY ██████████:

23 Q So I don't think we'll have more questions for you beyond the next few
24 minutes, although I'll reserve the minority's right in future rounds if we do have additional
25 questions. But I just want to make sure we're making the absolute most effective use of

1 your time here. I want to recap and be crystal clear on just the core elements of your
2 testimony.

3 So to recap from your testimony today, during your tenure in the Under Secretary
4 for Management's Office and specifically as her acting chief of staff from April to July
5 2021, you understood both Acting Under Secretary Perez and M bureaus to be primarily
6 and extensively engaged on Afghanistan. Is that correct?

7 A That's true.

8 Q And specifically, their engagement related to plans to safely and securely
9 operate the U.S. Embassy after an expected U.S. military withdrawal at the end of August.
10 Is that correct?

11 A That's also true.

12 Q And your understanding of that engagement and planning was that it
13 specifically sought to address gaps or vulnerabilities in the embassy's ability to operate
14 safely and securely after a U.S. military withdrawal. Is that correct?

15 A Yes, that's true.

16 Q And you understood the plans focused on embassy continuity in the near
17 term to be viable, as you testified earlier. Is that correct?

18 A I don't recall any reason at the time that I doubted it.

19 Q Okay. And did you understand the plans related to embassy continuity to
20 be detailed?

21 A Detailed in terms of how these functions were going to be carried out?

22 Q Yes.

23 A Yes.

24 Q And did you understand these plans for embassy continuity to be informed
25 by a sense of, quote, urgency?

1 A Yes.

2 Q And to clarify your earlier testimony, you had no knowledge by the end of
3 your tenure of any imminent takeover of Kabul that could impact the U.S. Embassy's
4 ability to operate, correct?

5 A I don't recall that, no.

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q And I believe your testimony also is that Ms. Perez is capable, tenacious,
8 cares very deeply, and is an effective leader. Is that correct?

9 A Yeah. I definitely stand by that.

10 [REDACTED]. Thanks. We don't have any more questions for you at this time.
11 We'll go back to the majority if they want to do an additional round.

12 Thank you for your time on behalf of Ranking Member Meeks.

13 Mr. Mennuti. Okay. Thanks.

14 [REDACTED]. So we don't have any additional questions either, Mr. Mennuti.
15 We wanted to thank you for your time in answering our questions. And we wanted to
16 reiterate, as the majority, we did make an informed decision when we called you today.
17 We think you performed a really important role in the Department, and we appreciate
18 your service.

19 So thank you again, especially with the time difference. And we thank the rest of
20 the State Department staff for their time as well, as well as the minority, and hope you
21 have a wonderful rest of your day/evening.

22 Mr. Mennuti. Thanks. Thanks very much.

23 [REDACTED]. What time is it there? Is it still daylight out?

24 Mr. Mennuti. It is still daylight. I mean, it's after 6, but the sun is still shining.
25 Listen, I just want to say that I really appreciate my responsibility to help you in

1 your oversight role. Sorry.

2 [REDACTED]. And we appreciate, you know, your coming voluntarily to testify.

3 And, you know, we'll let you get out there and enjoy what remains of the daylight.

4 Mr. Mennuti. Yeah. Now, what I wanted to say is I've lived a lot of places

5 where it doesn't exist and it's not better, so --

6 [REDACTED]. Mr. Mennuti, I want to say I'm Afghan American myself. So

7 having you here today and have you willing to take your time to speak about such an

8 important issue is a great service. So thank you.

9 [REDACTED]. Thank you, sir. Thank you very much.

10 [Whereupon, at 12:11 p.m., the interview was adjourned.]

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Certificate of Deponent/Interviewee

I have read the foregoing ____ pages, which contain the correct transcript of the answers made by me to the questions therein recorded.

*subject to correction of errors identified
February 25, 2024*

[Redacted Signature]

John [Redacted]

Witness Name

2/26/2024

Date

Errata Sheet for the Transcribed Interview of Jonathan Mennuti dated 07/20/2023

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

Page	Line	Change	Reason
3	19	Change “special” to “professional”	
9	21	Add accent mark over “c” in Brčko.	
11	25	Remove “by” before “contingency planning”	
19	11-12	should read "it was Todd Brown that was the..."	
29	15	Change "toted" to “totaled”	
30	7, 10	Change "off" to “op”	
30	20	Add “of” in front of “crisis”	
30	7	Change “off med” to “Op Med”	
30	10	Change “off med” to “Op Med”	
30	25	strike “you”	
31	20	Change “with the DOD problem” to "was the DOD’s problem”	
32	7	Strike “a” before “country”	
33	6	Change "amsted" to “AMCITS”	
33	8	Change “by” to “been”	
33	6	Strike "amstead"	
33	6	strike "amstead"	
34	11	should read “contexts”	
36	2	Revise “first” to “host”	
36	14	replace “that” with “than”	
36	14	Change "that" to "than"	
36	2	should read “any host country officials...”	
39	2	Add “or” between “post” and “the Department”	
39	22	should read “post”	
40	18	Change “bet oh southern I go ahead” to “bit—oh sorry go ahead”	
42	11	Change “contacts” to “contexts”	
42	13	Change “contacts” to “contexts”	
45	10	Change“counsel” to “consul”	
46	18	Change “other” to “under”	
47	23	Change “play” to “workplace”	

47	23	Change “play” to “workplace”	
50	21	Change “than” to “then”	
53	18	Strike the comma after “left”	
61	8	Strike “a” from “a post”	
80	20	Change "keyed" to "tee'd"	