

Methodology

This report presents the findings of the committee majority’s investigation into the Biden-Harris administration’s withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan is understood to encompass the U.S. military retrograde, beginning with the “Go to Zero” order officially announced by President Biden on April 14, 2021, through the noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO) ordered by President Biden on August 15, 2021, as well as related planning by the White House, U.S. Department of State, and other federal agencies and their decision-making processes. The withdrawal culminated in the Abbey Gate terrorist attack on August 26, 2021, which killed 13 U.S. servicemembers, wounding another 45, and killed more than 170 Afghan civilians. The withdrawal concluded on August 30, 2021, when the last U.S. military aircraft left Afghanistan.

Congress’s oversight and legislative powers are derived from the U.S. Constitution and have repeatedly been affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court.ⁱ Pursuant to 22 U.S.C. § 2680, “The Department of State shall keep ... the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives fully and currently informed with respect to all activities and responsibilities within the jurisdiction of these committees. *Any Federal department, agency, or independent establishment shall furnish any information requested by ... such committee relating to any such activity or responsibility.*” Rule X of the House of Representatives furnishes the committee with oversight authority over, in relevant part, “[r]elations of the United States with foreign nations generally,” the “[d]iplomatic service,” and the [p]rotection of American citizens abroad and expatriation.”ⁱⁱ

The withdrawal from Afghanistan occurred during the 117th Congress — which spanned from January 3, 2021 to January 3, 2023. During that period, the Democratic party held the majority in the U.S. House of Representatives and in the U.S. Senate. Accordingly, the Democratic majority controlled the chairmanships of all Congressional Committees.

During the withdrawal, the House Foreign Affairs Committee was chaired by Representative Gregory Meeks (D-New York). Under Chairman Meeks’ leadership, the House Foreign Affairs Committee did not launch an investigation into the withdrawal; the committee majority held one hearing on Afghanistan and conducted no transcribed interviews.

In an effort to conduct oversight over the withdrawal in the 117th Congress, Ranking Member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Representative Michael McCaul (R-Texas), launched an investigation into the Department of State’s planning, decision-making, and execution of the Afghanistan withdrawal. Pursuant to that effort, the committee minority produced an interim report of its findings.ⁱⁱⁱ Because only the committee majority wields subpoena authority necessary to compel information and testimony from relevant stakeholders, the committee minority was limited in its pursuit of oversight during the 117th Congress. Accordingly, the interim report reflected the committee minority’s limited capacity to pursue information from the Department of State.

In the 118th Congress— spanning from January 3, 2023 to January 3, 2025 — the Republican party secured the majority of the U.S. House of Representatives. In January 2023, Representative McCaul assumed chairmanship of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and launched an investigation into the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Chairman McCaul’s investigation is divided into three components: (1) public hearings, (2) transcribed interviews, and (3) document discovery. Under his leadership, the committee has sought documents and testimony from the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the White House, in pursuit of an official account of the policy-making processes and execution of the Afghanistan withdrawal. The investigation aims to provide accountability to the American people and inform legislative efforts to help ensure another such catastrophe never occurs.

The committee majority has held seven public hearings and roundtables on the withdrawal from Afghanistan, affording witnesses from the Department of State, Department of Defense, White House, and relevant stakeholders the opportunity to testify before Congress and the American people regarding the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. These public hearings were held pursuant to Chairman McCaul’s commitment to transparency throughout this investigation. Chairman McCaul afforded witnesses reasonable accommodations in order to secure their timely public appearance. The public hearings held on the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan were the following:

1. March 8, 2023: “During and After the Fall of Kabul: Examining the Administration’s Emergency Evacuation from Afghanistan”
 - a. Addressing: The operations, volunteer efforts, and experiences of the Afghanistan NEO.
 - b. Featuring: Francis Q. Hoang, Executive Chairman of Allied Airlift 21; Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) David Scott Mann, founder of Task Force Pineapple; Sergeant Tyler Vargas-Andrews, U.S. Marine Corps, serving in the Afghanistan evacuation; Aidan Gunderson, Specialist, U.S Army, serving in the Afghanistan evacuation; Peter Lucier, Team America Relief; Camille Mackler, Executive Director of Immigrant ARC.
2. July 27, 2023: “A Failure to Plan: Examining the Biden Administration’s Preparation for the Afghanistan Withdrawal”
 - a. Addressing: The military operations and logistics planning throughout the Afghanistan withdrawal.
 - b. Featuring: Colonel (Ret.) Seth Krummrich, Chief of Staff of Special Operations Command Central during the Afghanistan withdrawal; Command Sergeant Major Jacob Smith, 4-31 Infantry, 2nd BCT of the 10th Mountain Division, U.S. Army, who as the senior enlisted leader for the Area Support Group – Afghanistan, was responsible for the life support functions of HKIA during the NEO.
3. August 29, 2023: “A Gold Star Families Roundtable: Examining the Abbey Gate Terrorist Attack”
 - a. Addressing: The Abbey Gate attack and the Gold Star families’ calls for accountability.
 - b. Featuring: The Gold Star families of the 13 fallen servicemembers, including Darin Hoover and Kelly Barnett, Steve Nikoui, Coral Briseno, Alicia and Herman Lopez, Cheryl Rex, Christy Shamblin, Paula Knauss Selph, Greg Page, Mark and Jaclyn Schmitz.
4. November 14, 2023: “Go-to-Zero: Joe Biden’s Withdrawal Order and the Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan”

- a. Addressing: The impact of the U.S. military retrograde on the Afghan government and military.
 - b. Featuring: Lt. General (Ret.) Sami Sadat Chairman of the Afghanistan United Front and former Commanding General of the Afghan National Special Operations Corps; Bill Roggio the Senior Fellow and Editor of the Long War Journal at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies; Dr. Dipali Mukhopadhyay, Associate Professor at the University of Minnesota.
5. January 31, 2024: “Roundtable on Taliban Reprisals”
- a. Addressing: The campaign of reprisals being conducted by the Taliban against Afghans who supported the U.S. mission in Afghanistan.
 - b. Featuring: Amy Marden, the Moral Compass Federation; Andy Sullivan, No One Left Behind; Thomas Kasza, 1208 Foundation; Justin Sapp, Badger Six; Michael Cizmar, Rafiq Friends of Afghanistan; Elizabeth Lynn, Operation Recovery; Joe Maida IV, the NATO Afghan Justice Sector Group; Sanjar Sohail, 8AM Media.
6. February 15, 2024: “Behind the Scenes: How the Biden Administration Failed to Enforce the Doha Agreement”
- a. Addressing: The Biden-Harris administration’s interagency review of the Doha Agreement, and their assessments of compliance with its conditions.
 - b. Featuring: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, the Former U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation at the U.S. Department of State.
7. March 19, 2024: “An Assessment of the Biden Administration’s Withdrawal from Afghanistan by America’s Generals”
- a. Addressing: The assessments and recommendations of senior military leaders on the withdrawal from Afghanistan.
 - b. Featuring: General Mark A. Milley (Ret.), former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; General Kenneth F. McKenzie Jr. (Ret.), former Commander of United States Central Command.

On May 22, 2024, Chairman McCaul requested U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken appear for a public hearing in September on the committee’s report. The Chairman restated his request on August 12, 2024. Secretary Blinken asserted his intention to not appear on September 3rd, triggering the issuance of a subpoena by the committee that day, mandating his appearance for September 19th. Appropriate measures, including congressional contempt, shall be pursued should Secretary Blinken not appear.

The second component of the investigation consists of closed-door transcribed interviews from current and former officials at the Department of State, Department of Defense, and White House, involved in the policy and execution of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. Although the committee exercises statutory authority for oversight over the Department of State, the department did not produce witnesses without threat of compulsory process. The White House similarly sought to limit the committee’s ability to interview government witnesses, purporting to exercise control over appearances from the Department of State and Defense Department, in addition to the White House.

Transcribed interviews led by the committee majority lasted approximately eight hours per witness, including alternating rounds of questioning from the committee majority and minority. The transcribed interviews were conducted by committee majority and minority staff and made available to committee majority and minority members. Transcribed interviews were made available to agency counsel representing the federal government and, as applicable, private counsel. All transcripts of the interviews were released to the public and remain available on the committee's website. The committee interviewed the following witnesses:

1. June 16, 2023: James Dehart, *Consul General Vancouver*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, State Department leadership tasked Mr. DeHart on August 17, 2021, to assist with the NEO as Ambassador Bass's deputy.
2. July 20, 2023: Jonathan Mennuti, *Director of the Office of Career Development and Assignments*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, Mr. Mennuti served as Chief of Staff to Acting Undersecretary of Management of State Carol Perez.
3. July 28, 2023: Jayne Howell, *Consul General Pakistan*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, Ms. Howell volunteered to assist with the NEO, and State Department leadership sent Ms. Howell to Kabul as the lead consular officer on the ground at HKIA on August 17, 2021.
4. August 23, 2023: Mark Evans, *Deputy Chief of Mission Sweden*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, Mr. Evans served as the Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the South and Central Asia Bureau at the State Department. Mr. Evans was responsible for supporting U.S. Embassy Kabul's operations.
5. August 31, 2023: Dan Smith, *Ambassador (Ret.)*. Ambassador Smith led the State Department's after-action review of the Afghanistan withdrawal, upon his selection by Secretary Blinken.
6. September 18, 2023: Samuel Aronson, *U.S. Foreign Service Officer (Fmr.)*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, Mr. Aronson served as a diplomat in the State Department's Foreign Service. He volunteered to assist with the State Department's NEO, arriving in Kabul on August 20, 2021, after which he assisted with consular operations and supported Consul General DeHart.
7. October 12, 2023: Salman Ahmed, *Director of Policy Planning Staff at the State Department*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, Mr. Ahmed served as the Director of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff and was responsible for the State Department's strategic planning and coordination, in addition to the policy debate and development process. The Policy Planning Staff are the keepers of the Dissent Channel.
8. October 24, 2023: Ross Wilson, *Ambassador (Ret.)*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, Ambassador Wilson served as the Chief of Mission to U.S. Embassy Kabul. Ambassador Wilson was the highest-ranking U.S. government official in Afghanistan in the absence of a Senate-confirmed ambassador to the country. Ambassador Wilson held overall responsibility for the security of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan and protecting all U.S. Government personnel on official duty (other than those personnel under the command of a U.S. area military commander) and their dependents.

9. October 26, 2023: Dean Thompson, *U.S. Ambassador to Nepal*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, Ambassador Thompson served as the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Bureau and was responsible for overseeing State Department activities in Afghanistan and planning for how to maintain an Embassy presence in Afghanistan after the military withdrew.
10. November 8, 2023: Zalmay Khalilzad, *Ambassador (Ret.)*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, Ambassador Khalilzad served as the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation and was responsible for the 2020 Doha Agreement and negotiations with the Taliban throughout 2021.
11. November 15, 2023: Carol Perez, *Ambassador (Ret.)*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, Ambassador Perez served as the Acting Under Secretary of State for Management, where she was responsible for helping maintain a safe platform for the ongoing diplomatic presence.
12. November 29, 2023: Brian McKeon, *Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources (Ret.)*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, D-MR, Mr. McKeon was the third-highest ranking member at the State Department and was responsible for oversight and coordination of U.S. foreign assistance and overseas diplomatic operations. Secretary Blinken delegated the responsibility for the State Department's planning of Afghanistan withdrawal to D-MR McKeon.
13. December 12, 2023: Ned Price, *Deputy to the U.S. Representative to the United Nations*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, Mr. Price was the State Department spokesperson, responsible for communicating the State Department's official positions on U.S. foreign affairs.
14. December 14, 2023: Suzy George, *Chief of Staff to Secretary of State Blinken*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, Ms. George served as the chief of staff to Secretary of State Blinken, where she worked to structure the Secretary's office, to facilitate communications across the agency, and to coordinate with the interagency.
15. December 19, 2023: Derek Chollet, *Chief of Staff to the Secretary of Defense*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, Mr. Chollet served as Counselor to Secretary of State Blinken. Counselor Chollet was delegated responsibility for the State Department equities in a continued counterterrorism operation in Afghanistan and shared responsibilities for the State Department's overall withdrawal planning with D-MR McKeon.
16. January 22, 2024: John Bass, *Acting Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, State Department leadership tasked Mr. Bass on August 17, 2021 to assist with the leading the State Department's NEO. Mr. Bass served previously as U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan from 2017 to 2020.
17. April 15, 2024: Austin Scott Miller, *U.S Army General (et.)*. General Miller was the final Commander of NATO's Resolute Support Mission and U.S. Forces – Afghanistan through July 2021. General Miller was the longest-serving U.S. commander of the war in Afghanistan.

18. July 26, 2024: Jen Psaki, *MSNBC Host and Contributor*. During the Afghanistan withdrawal, Ms. Psaki served as the White House Press Secretary and an advisor to the President, where she was responsible for speaking on behalf of the White House and president.

In addition to public hearings and transcribed interviews, the investigation was comprised of a third segment: document discovery. The committee majority pursued and analyzed over 20,000 pages of documents produced by the State Department. Through compulsory process, the committee majority obtained internal State Department memoranda, interview notes from the State Department’s After Action Review (AAR), and a Dissent Channel Cable sent by U.S. Embassy Kabul staff in July of 2021, all of which were available for review by both majority and minority Representatives and staff. In order to secure these documents, the majority was forced to issue two subpoenas to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, threatening contempt on both occasions. Prior to the issuance of these subpoenas, the State Department’s document productions consisted of duplicative documents, over-redactions, over-classification, and impertinent information.

Throughout the investigation, members of the public had the opportunity to submit their stories and information to the committee through the committee’s website. On several occasions, committee majority staff further conducted informal interviews and phone calls with these individuals.

In addition to the committee majority’s primary investigative efforts, this report also draws from the Department of Defense’s After-Action Review of the Abbey Gate terrorist attack. The Department of Defense’s investigation, which included interviews with officers on the ground and military leaders, shed additional light on the topics covered by this investigation. After this committee’s hearing on March 8, 2023 — and as a result of pressure by Chairman McCaul — the Department of Defense reopened its Abbey Gate investigation, thereby interviewing missing witnesses and revealing critical information.

Throughout the investigation, the committee majority endeavored to pursue this information with investigative integrity and in good faith for the benefit of the American people. The synthesis of these investigative efforts — public hearings, transcribed interviews, and document review — served as the basis for the findings of this report. It is Chairman McCaul’s hope this report brings forth the necessary legislative and policy solutions to prevent another such catastrophe.

ⁱ See U.S. CONST. art. I; *McGrain v. Daugherty*, 273 U.S. 135, 174 (1927) (holding that “the power of inquiry—with process to enforce it—is an essential and appropriate auxiliary to the legislative function”); *Eastland v. U.S. Servicemen’s Fund*, 421 U.S. 491, 504 (1975) (holding that “the power to investigate is inherent in the power to make laws”); *Barenblatt v. United States*, 360 U.S. 109, 111 (1959) (holding that “the scope of power of inquiry . . . is as penetrating and far-reaching as the potential power to enact and appropriate under the Constitution”).

ⁱⁱ CLERK OF THE H.R., 118TH CONG., RULES OF THE H.R. Rule X (Jan. 10, 2023),

<https://cha.house.gov/cache/files/5/3/5361f9f8-24bc-4fbc-ac97-3d79fd689602/1F09ADA16E45C9E7B67F147DCF176D95.118-rules-01102023.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Congressman Michael T. McCaul, *House Republican Interim Report, A “Strategic Failure”*: Assessing the Administration’s Afghanistan Withdrawal, 117th Cong. House Foreign Affs. Comm. Republicans (Aug. 2022). <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/HFAC-Republican-Interim-Report-A-22Strategic-Failure22-Assessing-the-Administrations-Afghanistan-Withdrawal.pdf>