

## Re: Congressional Inquiry into What Went Wrong in Afghanistan

Senator Robert Menendez, Chair  
Senator Jim Risch, Ranking Member  
Committee on Foreign Relations  
U.S. Senate  
423 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Gregory Meeks, Chair  
Representative Michael McCaul, Ranking  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2170 Rayburn House Office Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20515

*August 31, 2021*

Dear Chairmen Menendez and Meeks and  
Ranking Members Risch and McCaul,

As your committees begin to investigate what went wrong with the U.S. evacuation of American citizens and Afghan partners from Kabul, we want to bring to your attention several contributing factors that should be part of the investigation. While it is easy to point at the Biden administration, and they certainly bear responsibility for missteps during the evacuation, the road to the Kabul airport was twenty years long. Your efforts should not be limited to the events of the last few weeks but should examine the deeper issues that plagued the whole 20 years of America's war effort and which were at the heart of the rapid collapse of the U.S.-supported government in Afghanistan.

The U.S. government must institutionalize the lessons of the Afghanistan experience regarding efforts to re-make other governments and societies through the force of arms and money. These lessons require investigation not simply of tactical choices in the final withdrawal but two decades worth of corruption and failure. It is imperative to be honest with the American people regarding fundamental strategic flaws in our nation-building mission in Afghanistan.

Specifically, how was it that the U.S. government was surprised to learn that there were – apparently – not 300,000 Afghan forces, but rather [maybe only 100,000](#)?

How was it that those Afghan troops, in some cases, were living off of [rotten potatoes](#) and insufficiently armed while the United States was providing approximately [\\$4 billion](#) annually to support them?

How was it that the regular reporting of the [Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction](#) was routinely ignored, particularly given that the *Washington Post* revealed in December 2019 that U.S. leaders themselves understood that the rosy projections were a lie and that the war was unwinnable?

Why did Congress not exert oversight based on the SIGAR findings, which questioned both the clarity and feasibility of the Afghanistan mission? Specifically, in a [May 2018 report](#), SIGAR

said, “Congress should use its oversight authority to scrutinize how U.S. funds are being spent and to what effect.” (p. 204)

How will the government ensure that caregivers, survivors, veterans, and their families can cope with ongoing issues related to this war, given the demonstrable inadequacies of care in both the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs?

Why were Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) applicants, who were at risk even before the U.S. withdrawal, subjected to a convoluted process that took years to complete in the first place?

Reporting on endemic corruption in Afghanistan was plentiful. As Vanda Felbab-Brown, a senior adviser to the congressionally mandated Afghanistan Study Group, [wrote](#) recently in *Foreign Affairs*, “[t]he dramatic meltdown of Afghanistan’s army only exposes the rot that had been festering in Kabul’s halls of power for years.” Why were we taken by surprise then that there was no loyalty to the government? How did we expect to “win”?

The scenes from Kabul’s airport are the culmination of twenty years of mismanagement and dysfunction. Your investigation should help ensure that the American people – and the people of another country – are not again put in this situation. Any investigation which fails to delve deeply into these matters will be incomplete at best, and at worst, a continuation of the failure which led us to this moment.

We would be glad to provide you with a list of suggested witnesses for a public hearing or experts whom you should contact for your investigation.

Sincerely,

Center for International Policy  
Common Defense  
Concerned Veterans for America  
Defense Priorities  
Project on Government Oversight  
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft  
Secure Families Initiative  
Win Without War

< For response, please contact Brandon Angel at [brandon@quincyinst.org](mailto:brandon@quincyinst.org) >