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5 COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,

6 U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

7 WASHINGTON, D.C.

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12 INTERVIEW OF: JAMES DEHART

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Friday, June 16, 2023

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Washington, D.C.

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The interview in the above matter was held in Room 5480, O'Neill House Office

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Building, commencing at 10:02 a.m.

1 Appearances:

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4 For the COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS:

5

6 [REDACTED]

7 [REDACTED]

8 ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

9 [REDACTED]

10 [REDACTED]

11 [REDACTED]

12 [REDACTED]

13 [REDACTED]

14 [REDACTED]

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16 For the U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT:

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18 [REDACTED]

19 [REDACTED]

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██████████ It is now 10:02 a.m. on June 16th. This is a transcribed interview of Mr. James DeHart. The House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Michael McCaul has requested this interview as part of the committee's investigation of the Afghanistan withdrawal.

Would the witness please state your name for the record.

Mr. DeHart. James Patrick DeHart.

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

My name is ██████████. I am with Chair McCaul's staff on the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

I'll now have everyone else from the committee who is here at the table from both the majority and the minority introduce themselves as well.

██████████. My name is ██████████. I work for Chairman McCaul on the majority staff.

██████████. My name is ██████████. I also work for Chairman McCaul as ██████████ on the majority staff.

██████████. ██████████, ██████████ for Chairman McCaul.

██████████. ██████████. I'm the ██████████ for Mr. Meeks.

██████████. ██████████. I am the ██████████ ██████████ for the minority and ██████████ for the full committee staff.

██████████. ██████████, ██████████ with Mr. Meeks.

██████████. I'm ██████████. I am also on Mr. Meeks' staff ██████████

1 [REDACTED].

2 [REDACTED]: I'd now like to go over the ground rules that we will follow during
3 today's interview.

4 Our questioning will proceed in rounds. The majority -- actually, I think we
5 weren't supposed to start the timer until the beginning of the first round. My apologies.
6 But we'll start -- we're now on the record.

7 The majority will ask questions first for one hour. Then the minority will have an
8 opportunity to ask questions for an equal period of time if they choose. We will
9 alternate back and forth until there are no more questions and the interview is over.

10 Typically, we take a short break at the end of each hour, but if you would like to
11 take a break apart from that please just let us know. As you can see, there is an official
12 court reporter taking down everything we say to make a written record, so we ask that
13 you give verbal responses to all questions.

14 Do you understand?

15 Mr. DeHart. Yes.

16 [REDACTED]: So the court reporter can take down a clear record, we will do our
17 best to limit the number of people directing questions at you during any given hour to
18 just those people on the staff whose turn it is. Please try to speak clearly so that the
19 court reporter can understand and so everyone can hear you.

20 The stenographer, unfortunately, cannot record nonverbal responses such as
21 shaking your head, so please answer each question with an audible verbal response.

22 It is important that we don't talk over one another or interrupt each other if we
23 can help it, and that goes for everybody present at today's interview.

24 Witnesses who appear before the committee have the opportunity to freely
25 consult with counsel if they so choose. It is my understanding that you are appearing

1 here today with agency counsel. Is that correct?

2 Mr. DeHart. Yes, that is correct.

3 [REDACTED]. And, Mr. DeHart, do you understand that agency counsel represents
4 the State Department and not you personally?

5 Mr. DeHart. Yes, I do.

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

8 [REDACTED]: [REDACTED], with the Office of the Legal Adviser for the
9 Department of State.

10 [REDACTED]: [REDACTED], [REDACTED] for
11 Legislative Affairs.

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

15 Our questions will cover a wide range of topics, so if you need clarification at any
16 point just say so. If you honestly don't know the answer to a question, or do not
17 remember, it is best not to guess. Please give us your best recollection, and it is okay to
18 tell us if you learned something from someone else. Just indicate how you came to
19 know the information.

20 If there are things you don't know or can't remember, just say so and please
21 inform us who, to the best of your knowledge, might be able to provide a more complete
22 answer to the question.

23 You should also understand that although this interview is not under oath that, by
24 law, you are required to answer questions from Congress truthfully. Do you understand
25 that?

1 Mr. DeHart. Yes, I do.

2 ██████████: And this also applies to questions posed by congressional staff in an
3 interview. Do you understand that?

4 Mr. DeHart. Yes.

5 ██████████: And witnesses that knowingly provide false testimony can be subject
6 to criminal prosecution for perjury or for making false statements under 18 U.S. Code
7 Section 1001.

8 Do you understand that?

9 Mr. DeHart. Yes, I understand.

10 ██████████: And is there any reason that you are unable to provide truthful
11 answers to today's questions?

12 Mr. DeHart. No.

13 ██████████: Finally, I'd like to make note that the content of what we discuss
14 here today is confidential. We ask that you not speak about what we discuss in this
15 interview to any outside individuals to preserve the integrity of our investigation.

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

19 All right. That is the end of my preamble. Is there anything that my colleagues
20 from the minority would like to add?

21 ██████████: None, thank you.

22 ██████████: Okay. The clock now reads 10:06 a.m. We will start the
23 first -- yes, sir.

24 Mr. DeHart. I'm sorry. I just want to note for the record this is an unclassified
25 setting and unclassified interview in its entirety.

1 [REDACTED]. Yes. This is an unclassified interview. Should a question call for
2 classified information, please answer as completely as possible at an unclassified level
3 and identify that to address it further would require a classified setting. And if need be,
4 we can make arrangements for an appropriate setting to discuss classified information.

5 It is also important to note that Federal law prohibits the use of classified
6 information to conceal information that is embarrassing or damaging to the executive
7 branch.

8 So the clock now reads 10:07 a.m. We will start the first hour of questioning.

9 EXAMINATION

10 BY [REDACTED]:

11 Q What is your current position at the State Department?

12 A I'm the coordinator for is SIV Diplomacy, Special Immigrant Visa Diplomacy,
13 and I'm in the Consular Affairs Bureau.

14 Q Can you please give us a brief description of your professional background
15 prior to August 2021, particularly highlighting your experience involving Afghanistan.

16 A Sure. So I've worked for the State Department about 31 years. I've -- I'm
17 a career Foreign Service Officer. I've worked for every administration in that period.

18 I've spent -- I started out with a pretty strong focus on European security,
19 including working at NATO, also worked later in my career in Norway. I worked on
20 Central Asia and the Caucasus at different times.

21 But I've probably spent more time than any other -- anywhere else working in
22 Afghanistan or on Afghanistan. So starting in 2009, I served as director of the provincial
23 reconstruction team in Panjshir Province in Afghanistan.

24 I then returned to Washington. I worked for -- as the office director for
25 Afghanistan for 3 years. I then went over to the Bureau of International Narcotics Law

1 Enforcement Affairs, and I covered -- I was responsible for Afghanistan programs there in
2 INL.

3 I returned to Afghanistan in 2018 and was there for another year, this time as
4 Assistant Chief of Mission, which was the number three position in the embassy at that
5 time. I then came back to Washington, had other positions.

6 And then I returned for the Kabul evacuation, was there for 9 or 10 days, roughly.
7 Came back to Washington and led the task force for about 1 month.

8 And then last summer, I was asked to take on my current assignment, which is
9 specifically to try to identify new countries that are willing to host large numbers of our
10 Special Immigrant Visa applicants and their eligible family members so that we can get
11 them processed and resettled in the United States.

12 Q Prior to Afghanistan, did you have any previous experience with
13 noncombatant evacuation operations, or NEOs?

14 A I never participated in an evacuation, or was evacuated, but I think in
15 previous -- in previous assignments, I was -- I may have been -- I may have been involved
16 in discussions related to NEO planning, although I can't bring any examples to mind right
17 now.

18 Q What was your role in the August 2021 evacuation from Afghanistan?

19 A I was essentially, in effect, deputy to Ambassador John Bass, who was
20 leading the evacuation for State.

21 Q And when did you assume that role?

22 A I arrived in Kabul on the 19th or 20th of August, I believe in the early hours
23 of August 20.

24 Q And to whom did you report?

25 A To Ambassador Bass.

1 Q And how many staff were under your and Ambassador Bass' leadership?

2 A I can't -- I'm not confident that I can provide an accurate figure, because --

3 Q Approximate is fine.

4 A Well, there were -- there were certainly dozens. However, there was also a
5 residual embassy presence and personnel coming over from there as well
6 that -- that -- that we were also supervising and giving directions to. So it's difficult to
7 provide a number when we did not have time to develop an organization chart.

8 Q Sure. And -- but overall, the total group, you would say in the dozens?

9 A Yes, certainly -- certainly in the dozens, but I think that officials that were
10 there at the residual embassy presence could -- could advise more specifically on
11 numbers.

12 Q And who were your direct reports providing the name and position?

13 A Jane Howell was -- was the consular chief for the evacuation. Jean Akers
14 was her deputy. We had a significant number of consular officers who were there.
15 We had members of diplomatic security, political officers, management, others.

16 But again, we didn't -- we didn't have time to establish the formal supervisory
17 mechanisms that we would normally do in a Bureau.

18 Q How did you communicate with your direct reports and your staff?

19 A We -- one way was that we had usually two shift change meetings a day,
20 generally one in the early morning, and then one in the evening where the officers
21 coming off their shifts and coming onto their shifts, particularly the consular officers,
22 would gather.

23 And we would, either Ambassador Bass or myself, or both of us, would talk to
24 everybody as a group. But, of course, throughout the day and night all the time we
25 were communicating instructions and talking to everybody who was there.

1 Q And did you use email, text, you know, written communications?

2 A I used certainly email communications for colleagues in Washington. With
3 people on the ground, generally it was direct discussions.

4 Q Direct discussions. So not so much --

5 A Face-to-face.

6 Q Face-to-face?

7 A Yes.

8 Q And did you also use cables for Washington and other posts, or just emails?

9 A From -- from the evacuation hub, where Ambassador Bass and I were, we
10 were not communicating via front-channel cables. We -- there were -- we did some
11 communications by email. We did some communications by WhatsApp. I think by far,
12 the majority were face-to-face.

13 Q What were the circumstances under which you were selected to serve as
14 deputy to Ambassador Bass for the evacuation?

15 A Ambassador Bass was Chief of Mission when I was in my previous
16 assignment as assistant Chief of Mission. So I worked for him there from 2018 to 2019.
17 And so when he -- and I remained in contact with him.

18 And so when he informed me and -- that he was going out to lead the evacuation,
19 I volunteered to go with him as his deputy.

20 Q And when was that?

21 A Probably the 16th or 17th of August, something like that.

22 Q And so, you volunteered yourself. And, to the best of your knowledge, why
23 were you chosen to be the deputy?

24 A Well, I -- I think Ambassador Bass would have to answer that, but I think that
25 I felt that I had the right experience to go help.

1 Q And you were a trusted hand, I would imagine?

2 A Yeah. And I have great respect for Ambassador Bass and -- from working
3 for him previously. And so -- so I think, you know, his -- the decision that he would be
4 going to lead the evacuation was significant for me.

5 Q At the time you were selected, what was your impression of the situation on
6 the ground in Afghanistan?

7 A My impression was that it was extraordinarily difficult, complex and difficult.
8 And the images that I was seeing were -- were disturbing.

9 Q Had you been involved with the withdrawal in any aspect before you were
10 chosen to be Ambassador Bass' deputy?

11 A When I was there in 2018 to 2019, we -- reporting to Ambassador Bass, I led
12 the effort to downsize Mission Kabul and to reduce our numbers on the ground.

13 And -- and part of our thinking in that exercise was that if we -- if we ever needed
14 to evacuate, it would be better to be smaller, and to be as lean as we possibly could be.

15 Q But you weren't involved in the efforts in 2021 leading up to the emergency
16 evacuation?

17 A I was -- until I went -- went out to Kabul to help with the evacuation, I was
18 the coordinator for the Arctic region. So I was not involved right before the evacuation
19 in any of -- you know, in any of the official work.

20 Q And how did you personally feel about the mission that you were
21 undertaking?

22 A You mean my -- the mission to Kabul?

23 Q Yes. It was a significant mission, you know, to Kabul and how did you feel,
24 you know, about undertaking that?

25 A I felt -- I felt it was important. I was -- I was -- I was nervous about doing it,

1 but I thought -- I felt that I should do it because I felt that I knew the place, that I could
2 contribute. I felt that I could help.

3 Q So at the time that you were selected, who were the key State Department
4 leaders involved in the Afghanistan evacuation?

5 A I'm sorry, can you repeat?

6 Q At the time that you were selected to be the deputy to Ambassador Bass,
7 who were the key State Department leaders involved in the Afghanistan evacuation?

8 A Well, there was a -- there was a task force. Dean Thompson, who I believe
9 was the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary at the time, was -- was very involved.
10 Ambassador Bass, of course, was involved. Deputy Secretary Brian McKeon was
11 involved.

12 I mean, as the -- when I volunteered, I didn't -- I didn't have the greatest picture
13 of -- of who was doing what at that time, because I had not been working on Afghanistan
14 at that time.

15 So -- so it was really -- it was really only after I volunteered and then visited the
16 task force to get briefed on what was happening that I started to learn who was doing
17 what.

18 Q So you mentioned Ambassador Bass. At the time of the withdrawal, what
19 was Ambassador Bass' position before he was selected to undertake the mission?

20 A Actually, I don't recall.

21 Q What was Ambassador Bass' role in the evacuation?

22 A He was the lead for the State Department.

23 Q And why was he asked to go to Afghanistan and by whom?

24 A He was -- and let me just -- let me rephrase. He was the lead for the State
25 Department on the ground in Kabul is how I would describe his role. I don't know

1 specifically who asked him to go or what -- or how that exchange took place.

2 Q Do you have any knowledge of when he first learned that he might go to
3 Afghanistan for that role?

4 A It was -- I think it was middle of August.

5 Q And once in country, what were Ambassador Bass' responsibilities?

6 A Well, he was in charge for the State Department on the ground in charge of
7 doing what we could to get American citizens out, to get Afghan allies out, to get the right
8 people out and evacuated, and also, for keeping our people safe while doing this work.

9 And in very, very close coordination with the military there. We had -- I felt that
10 we had an exceptionally close and exceptionally good collaboration with our military
11 colleagues when we were there: Admiral Vasely, General Donahue, also Colonel Matt
12 Hardiman, who was located very close to our office.

13 Q Who did Ambassador Bass report to?

14 A From a formal -- from a formal supervisory perspective, I don't know exactly.
15 But -- but, of course, he was responsive to -- to the Secretary, to the Deputy Secretary,
16 both Deputy Secretaries, to the principals who were involved in this effort.

17 Q So those were the main people that he was, in practice, reporting to?

18 A Yes.

19 Q And when you say the principals, were there any others aside from the
20 Secretary and the two Deputy Secretaries that you mentioned?

21 A Yes, yes. It would be difficult for me to -- it would be difficult for me to
22 recall and to list everybody who was involved at some -- you know, at any point in the
23 evacuation.

24 But Under Secretary for Political Affairs was, of course, involved. Yeah. Both
25 Deputy Secretaries, I think multiple Assistant Secretaries, other Under Secretaries.

1 Q And so, the ambassador did not report to Ambassador Wilson?

2 A No.

3 Q And who reported to Ambassador Bass? Did he have any other reports
4 besides you?

5 A All of us who -- all of us State officers who were there on the ground
6 specifically to undertake the evacuation reported to Ambassador Bass.

7 Q But as direct reports?

8 A You know, I think the challenge here is that, again, we didn't have an org
9 chart. We didn't set up the normal processes that we would have in a regular
10 environment in the State Department, where you have a direct report and -- you know,
11 and then an authority beyond that. We were in a -- we were in a crisis environment.

12 Q How often did he and you communicate with the State Department
13 principals, including Secretary Blinken, Deputy Secretary Sherman, Deputy Secretary
14 McKeon?

15 A Ongoing, with a lot of frequency, but the interaction directly I think with the
16 Secretary, with the Deputy Secretaries, with the Under Secretaries was largely done by
17 Ambassador Bass directly rather than me. Sometimes I was in the room for those -- for
18 those calls, those conversations. Sometimes I wasn't.

19 Q And were they in charge, you know, on a daily basis, hourly basis, numerous
20 times throughout the day?

21 A Numerous times throughout the day, as needed.

22 Q And how often did he communicate with the White House and National
23 Security Council?

24 A We had -- we had near daily interagency discussions at a very high level.
25 Where there was an exchange, there were discussions, which Ambassador Bass

1 participated in and which -- and most of which I was in the room to hear, but generally
2 not participate.

3 Q Were those, you know, formal National Security Council meetings, other
4 kinds of interagency meetings? What were those?

5 A I would say that they were -- they resembled National Security Council
6 meetings, but I wouldn't say they were -- I'm not sure I could say they were official or
7 formal, because they weren't. As far as I know, they weren't scheduled according to
8 normal processes, because, again, we were in a crisis.

9 Q Right. And how were they convened?

10 A I think we -- we would pick up the phone and be participating.

11 Q And who were the main people involved at the White House and NSC?

12 [REDACTED]: I'm sorry. I need to make a note for the record that the
13 composition and content of those meetings implicates executive branch confidentiality
14 interests, which, as yet, would be indeterminant, because I don't know exactly what his
15 answer would be. But at this point, we would object to an answer in this setting without
16 us having the opportunity to review whether or not any of that information has an ability
17 to be restricted by assertion, which I am not making now, but I'm noting that there is that
18 possibility.

19 [REDACTED]: So this is a voluntary appearance. As the witness, you have the
20 right not to answer questions should you choose to do so. You also do have the ability
21 to -- counsel may not instruct you not to answer the questions. It is your choice. And
22 your right to answer the question is fully legally protected.

23 Should you choose not to answer questions, and it's necessary for the committee
24 to obtain that information, the committee may have to compel your appearance to
25 provide information compulsorily.

1 [REDACTED]: I would just like to correct the record on a point which we don't
2 have to debate. But as to information that is the property of the Federal Government,
3 agency counsel can instruct the witness not to answer, based on the potential of an
4 executive confidentiality interest.

5 [REDACTED]: We don't have to debate that at this time.

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q So can you -- are you going to choose to answer the question or not to
8 answer the question?

9 A Can you repeat the question?

10 Q Who were your main points of contact -- who were the main people in
11 the -- at the White House, the NSC in those meetings?

12 [REDACTED]: Again, I need to reiterate that that -- I specifically said that the
13 composition and content of those conversations and meetings is potentially subject to
14 executive branch confidentiality interests.

15 And that information is not in the sole control of the witness. And as agency
16 counsel, I am instructing him not to answer that question.

17 [REDACTED]: There are Federal laws which prohibit the instruction of Federal
18 employees not to provide information to Congress. We don't have to get into that
19 debate now, but it is the witness' decision whether or not to answer the question and,
20 you know, as I said this is a voluntary appearance.

21 [REDACTED]: So at some point we will need to have --

22 [REDACTED]: The witness needs to be given the opportunity to answer the
23 question or not. And if he chooses not to he can choose not to, but it needs to be his
24 decision.

25 [REDACTED]: Again, we're going to have to have some other discussion because,

1 in fact, if the information does not belong to him, and the Federal laws you reference
2 recognize restrictions on information going to Congress based on certain jurisprudential
3 principles, then the way you have stated it is simply not my understanding.

4 And I think it's very unfair to place the witness in that position without us having
5 sorted out what seems to be a fundamental difference in legal analysis.

6 [REDACTED]. We can move on to the next question and return to that issue.

7 [REDACTED]:

8 Q How often did you communicate -- or, sorry, did Ambassador Bass
9 communicate with the military leaders on the ground and who were his main points of
10 contact?

11 A Constantly. He and I were in constant communication with -- and
12 particularly Ambassador Bass with Admiral Vasely, with General Donahue, as the key
13 Civ-Mil leadership team on the ground. I had a lot of contact with Matt Hardiman,
14 Colonel Hardiman.

15 Q And what was Colonel Hardiman's role?

16 A I don't know if I -- I don't know if I know the full scope of his duties, but the
17 role that was most important in our interaction was that he was in charge of coordination
18 cell. He had a -- he had a team that was managing entry through the south gate of the
19 airport and in communication with all those on the -- on the outside, including our NATO
20 allies and partners, who were trying to get people in through south gate.

21 Q And how often did Ambassador Bass communicate with military leaders
22 outside of the country, including but not limited to, the Pentagon and CENTCOM?

23 A Well, there was -- there was participation by DOD and -- and combatant
24 commands in the -- in the interagency discussions that I mentioned before. So those
25 discussions took place there. I don't know -- I don't know the extent of his

1 communications directly with CENTCOM or others outside of those discussions.

2 Q And were there any other key leaders within the executive branch, key
3 officials within the executive branch outside of the State Department, DOD, and the
4 White House, that Ambassador Bass had significant communications with?

5 [REDACTED]: Again, to the extent your answer would involve DOD, I have no
6 objection, but to the extent it involves the White House, that would open up the same
7 issues.

8 [REDACTED]: It excluded the White House. It was --

9 [REDACTED] I misheard. Thank you.

10 Mr. DeHart. So I was in the room for some of his discussions, but certainly not all
11 of them. And so, I think it would be best to ask Ambassador Bass what other agencies
12 he was in touch with.

13 BY [REDACTED]:

14 Q So at the time of the withdrawal, what was Ambassador Ross Wilson's
15 position?

16 A Well, he remained Chief of Mission to Afghanistan.

17 Q And what were his duties in that role?

18 A So I interacted with Ambassador Wilson, but usually with his deputy, Scott
19 Weinhold, throughout the evacuation. I interacted with Scott, in particular, on things
20 that were relevant to our evacuation efforts.

21 But I didn't have a -- I didn't have a good sense of what -- of what they were doing,
22 you know, throughout the day over on the embassy side of the airport. I only visited
23 the -- the residual embassy presence when I departed the country at the end of the
24 evacuation.

25 Q To the best of your knowledge, who reported to Ambassador Wilson?

1 A All those who had been at the embassy, but then were located to their part
2 of the airport and State.

3 Q And did either who he reported to or his reports change over the course of
4 the evacuation?

5 A I don't know. I -- yeah, I don't know.

6 Q Do you know who Ambassador Wilson reported to?

7 A Well, he had been -- he had been charge before. He was -- he was
8 reporting back to Washington principals.

9 Q And what -- at the time of the evacuation, what was Special Representative
10 for Afghanistan Reconciliation Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad's role?

11 A I think that he was -- I think that he had communication with the Taliban in
12 Doha at the time, but I was not -- I was not following his efforts.

13 Q And could you describe the roles and how often you and Ambassador Bass
14 were engaged with Derek Chollet?

15 A I don't -- I don't recall a specific instance of communication with -- that I had
16 with Derek Chollet during the evacuation, but -- but it's certainly possible that I did.

17 Q Acting Under Secretary Carol Perez?

18 A Yes. I can -- yeah. Well, I know that -- I know that we had contact with
19 her, yes.

20 Q And what was the nature of that?

21 A The only specific communication I remember is at the end of the evacuation,
22 I emailed Carol Perez and I suggested to her that she might want to authorize business
23 class home for everybody who had been on the ground for the last -- for the evacuation.
24 And there were probably other communications, but I don't remember what those were.

25 Q And, to the best of your knowledge, what were the roles of Secretary

1 Blinken, Deputy Secretary Sherman, Deputy Secretary McKeon? Was there any division
2 of responsibilities or was one more focused on the evacuation than the others?

3 A My impression was that they were all extremely focused on the evacuation,
4 but I didn't have insight into those conversations that were taking place in Washington.

5 Q And who were --

6 A Except, except during the calls that I mentioned before.

7 Q And who were you and Ambassador Bass' key points of contact at the
8 following bureaus, and to what extent did you engage with them: First, Consular
9 Affairs?

10 A I was in direct contact with Assistant Secretary Rena Bitter a number of
11 times, as was Ambassador Bass. She played a very important role, because she was
12 overseeing from Washington the steps that we were taking to get -- or she was -- she was
13 overseeing Washington's part of the efforts that we were making to get American citizens
14 out.

15 Q And the Bureau of Diplomatic Security?

16 A I can't think of any specific contact I had with Diplomatic Security in
17 Washington, although I may have. Ambassador Bass may have also had. I don't know.

18 Q The Bureau of Medical Services?

19 A None that I specifically recall.

20 Q Are there any other key bureaus or offices in Washington that you had
21 significant contact with?

22 A The J Team under Secretary Uzra Zeya, who I think was in the position at the
23 time. Not necessarily her personally, but her team was -- was, of course, highly
24 interested in the challenge of getting at-risk Afghans out.

25 Q Who were the key individuals on her team?

1 A The individuals in -- like Ambassador Christine Elder I really remember more
2 from my time on the task force, not -- not from my time on the ground in Kabul.

3 Q And were -- did you have significant engagement with any other posts?

4 A With any --

5 Q Any other diplomatic posts?

6 A U.S. diplomatic posts?

7 Q Yes, U.S. diplomatic posts.

8 A We had some, yes.

9 Q Which posts?

10 A Embassy Bratislava, Ambassador Bridget Brink. Kristina Kvien in Kyiv at
11 that time.

12 Q And why those in particular?

13 A Well, because our allies, like the Slovaks, partners like Ukraine had their
14 own -- had people on the ground that they were also hoping to evacuate. And so -- and
15 there were other governments as well that were approaching our embassies for
16 assistance and support.

17 And then we would hear from our ambassadors or others at those embassies
18 asking -- asking for information or whether any assistance could be provided to assist
19 these allies and partners.

20 Q And did you also engage with foreign officials significantly?

21 A Well, we engaged very frequently and significantly with our allies on the
22 ground in Kabul whose ambassadors or deputies were also at the airport. And, in fact,
23 we had regular NATO meetings with -- that were chaired by the NATO senior civilian
24 representative there.

25 Q And who was that?

1 A I don't recall his name.

2 Q And who were the key allies and the key individuals that were your main
3 points of contact of those foreign officials that you mentioned?

4 A Well, the -- it was the ambassadors, or -- generally the ambassadors or
5 deputies who had been in country when the evacuation -- already before the evacuation
6 started, who then stayed on at the airport to undertake efforts to --

7 Q And what countries?

8 A Well, many of our NATO allies. Germany was still there. Norway was
9 there and did -- was doing tremendous work. I don't know that I could recount them all.

10 Q Let's move on to your mission to Afghanistan. What did you understand
11 the purpose of sending you and Ambassador Bass to have been?

12 A To evacuate American citizens and permanent residents, and also Afghans
13 who were most at risk for working with us, for their association with us, and Afghans with
14 a legal status to resettle in the United States, specifically SIV cases that were qualified.

15 Q Upon assuming your role, what direction and guidance were you given?

16 A I was offered briefings in the task force, which I -- which I did. So I
17 was -- mainly, I was briefed up on the situation from a whole number of people on the
18 task force.

19 Q And who are the key folks on the task force who briefed you?

20 A I think that Dean Thompson was running the task force when I departed for
21 Kabul for the evacuation, but -- but it's also possible he stepped in slightly later. Karen
22 Decker was very involved in the task force.

23 We had some DOD liaisons in the task force who had an important understanding
24 of -- from the DOD perspective, of what was happening on the ground and how DOD was
25 supporting. So it was a number of -- it was a number of different people on the task

1 force.

2 Q And what -- what were the main takeaways from those briefings that you
3 had?

4 A That -- I think that the situation was very fluid and it was -- and by the time I
5 got to Kabul the circumstances might, again, be different. So we would have to be very,
6 I think, adaptable and flexible and a little improvisational, I think, to figure out how to
7 conduct the evacuation most successfully.

8 But -- but the briefings were also helpful in understanding who we could reach
9 back to for help or support on whatever issue.

10 Q What impression were you given of the situation on the ground in the
11 country prior to your departure?

12 A That it was extraordinarily challenging.

13 Q In what ways?

14 A Well, I'm not quite sure of the impression I had as I was departing
15 Washington, but when I arrived on the ground, the -- the situation was -- was very
16 chaotic. I would distinguish that from our response to the situation, which I don't think
17 was chaotic, but the situation was chaotic.

18 We had -- there were very, very large numbers of Afghans that were -- that had
19 mobbed the perimeter of the airport, that were surrounding the entire airport that were
20 trying to force their way to the gates, trying to get in.

21 There were Taliban in those crowds. There were thugs in those crowds that
22 were preying on people that were trying to get to the gates. There was -- there was a
23 lot of gunfire constant that was ringing overhead in the crowds.

24 So it was a -- it was a -- it was a spectacle that I -- the likes of which I'd never seen
25 before.

1 Q What was the timeline under which you were operating and who set it?

2 A Well, we were -- we were operating to complete the evacuation by August
3 31st. And that was the -- that was -- that was the guidance that we had from, you
4 know --

5 Q Was there ever any consideration of changing the timeline?

6 A There was certainly discussion.

7 Q And what did that entail?

8 A I mean, I think that -- I mean, there -- I think there were a number of factors
9 considered, but I was not -- I would say that the discussions I was in were more about just
10 talking about the timeline, not actively -- not an active discussion on whether the timeline
11 should be changed. I didn't -- I don't think that -- I wasn't participating in deliberations,
12 official deliberations of whether the timeline would be changed.

13 Q Did anybody ever recommend that the timeline be changed, either to move
14 it back or move it forward?

15 A Well, I think -- I think the sense on the ground, you know, the -- that I heard
16 when I was on the ground was that the timeline was very challenging. It was very
17 difficult. Could we -- questions about whether we could get it done in that timeline.

18 But also talked about the downsides of trying to change the timeline, and what
19 that would mean for the -- the -- the relative peace that we had with the Taliban at that
20 moment if we were to change the timeline.

21 So, I mean, I would say we were ruminating about the timeline.

22 Q Who made those concerns about the timeline known?

23 A I'm sorry, known to who?

24 Q Known to you, to Department leaders.

25 A It may have been discussed in those interagency meetings. I don't -- I don't

1 recall. And I don't -- I mean, it was -- the timeline was just sort of a constant, I think a
2 constant ongoing discussion, because it was -- it was -- it was the -- August 31st was our
3 marker the entire time we were there, so it was just -- it was -- it was always present, I
4 guess, in our -- in our conversations.

5 Q And no one on the ground ever recommended that that date should be
6 moved further out or, you know, sooner?

7 A I don't know. I don't know what communications Admiral Vasely may have
8 had on the topic or General Donahue. I don't know whether Ambassador Bass made
9 any recommendation.

10 But my recollection is that generally it was accepted among leadership on the
11 ground in Kabul that that was -- that was the timeline and that we would get it done
12 within that timeline.

13 And so it was not -- I don't recall that it was -- yeah. Well, I don't know what
14 they may have recommended in conversations that I was not a part of.

15 [REDACTED]. Do you personally think August 31st was an appropriate pullout
16 date?

17 Mr. DeHart. I don't know. I think that once we set the date, it would probably
18 have been difficult to change it. But --

19 [REDACTED]. If it were up to you, would you have chosen a different date?

20 Mr. DeHart. I don't know, because I'm not quite sure when -- I'm not quite sure
21 when the date of August 31st was chosen.

22 BY [REDACTED]:

23 Q Did you receive any briefing materials or other documents to review at the
24 time of your departure, or prior to your departure?

25 A Prior to my departure for Kabul, did I review documents?

1 Q Yes, yes.

2 A I'm sure that I did, but I don't remember. So I probably -- I'm sure that I
3 reviewed the sitreps that the task force was putting out at that time.

4 Q Were you aware of the July 2021 dissent channel cable on Afghanistan?

5 A I don't recall when I became aware that a dissent channel had been sent. I
6 don't know if I was aware of it at that time. I may have been.

7 Q Do you recall if it was before or after it was publicly reported?

8 A I don't know. I don't recall.

9 Q And have you ever had the opportunity to read it?

10 A I have not, no.

11 Q Did you speak with any of the officials on the ground in Kabul prior to your
12 departure?

13 A No, I don't think that I did. Not that I recall, and I don't think I would have.

14 Q In retrospect, how adequate do you think that the preparation that, you
15 know, you were given was for your mission?

16 A I -- about as -- about as adequate as it could be under the circumstances.
17 I -- and I also had limited time to devote to preparing for -- for my trip out there, because
18 I had personal things I needed to attend to before I flew to Kabul. I needed to pack.

19 Q Numerous other State Department officials were deployed to Afghanistan
20 around the same time, correct?

21 A Yes.

22 Q And approximately how many officials had already been sent prior to your
23 arrival?

24 A I think -- I think a more exact number could be -- could be provided by our
25 residual embassy, because they were handling those -- those HR issues.

1 Q And generally, what role did they perform and how were they chosen?

2 A The individuals who went?

3 Q Yes.

4 A My impression is that most volunteered. And -- and there was, I believe, an
5 effort to identify consular officers, specifically those with consular commission, so that
6 they would have the requisite experience to -- to adjudicate, you know -- to make
7 decisions about Afghans who could enter the airport.

8 Q And were Ambassador Bass and you given the opportunity to assemble a
9 team yourself for your mission?

10 A Well, Ambassador Bass was able to, agreed to my volunteering and -- and I
11 don't know whether -- whether he had conversations with others about -- about the fact
12 that I had volunteered and would be going out there, but he was able to accept my offer.

13 And I think that -- I think that if we had specific people in mind that we really
14 wanted to bring, it was in our power to do so within limits. We didn't want to
15 have -- we didn't want to have any more people there than was necessary to complete
16 the job, because everybody who was there was at risk.

17 Q Did you bring anyone?

18 A I do not recall trying to recruit anybody. I don't think I tried to recruit
19 anyone. I had -- there were a couple of -- I can think of I think a couple of officers who
20 reached out to me and were interested in coming to Kabul and could they.

21 There were a lot of volunteers. There were a lot of other State Department
22 officers, I believe, who wanted to come and who wanted to help, but were turned away
23 because we -- we had -- we felt we had the numbers we needed.

24 Q Could you please walk us through the Department's withdrawal plan and
25 evacuation plan, as you understood it?

1 A I can't, because I was not involved in those matters in the immediate run-up
2 to the evacuation.

3 Q Were you executing off of a specific plan?

4 A I would say not really. Well -- and I cannot speak -- I cannot speak for the
5 military for this. I didn't -- I didn't see their NEO plan directly prior to the evacuation, so
6 I don't know for that -- for that part of it.

7 But for -- but for the part of the evacuation that the State Department was so
8 heavily involved in, we were -- we had to, I would say, create from scratch tactical
9 operations that would get our priority people into the airport.

1

2 [11:00 a.m.]

3 BY [REDACTED]:

4 Q Do you think that that was a lapse that that had to be created from scratch;
5 there wasn't something in place to execute off of?

6 A So I would say that nobody predicted the situation that we faced, and the
7 main challenge that we had was that -- was that it was extraordinarily difficult to get
8 people into the airport. That was the fundamental challenge.

9 So I -- I don't know whether -- I don't -- I don't know whether that was anticipated
10 or unanticipated, I guess, directly before the evacuation because I was not part of the --

11 Q Did you, you know, at -- having been there, did you think that there was a
12 insufficiency to the planning that had been done in advance?

13 A I guess I would say it -- I didn't -- I didn't really think about that. It wasn't
14 relevant to what I was doing because all we were trying to do when I -- when I got there
15 and what Ambassador Bass was already trying to do, of course, before I got there, and
16 others, was figure out how to get -- get the right people into the airport so that we could
17 evacuate them.

18 Q And was there, you know, support and coordination in place with
19 international allies and regional partners?

20 A Yes. There were -- the daily or, actually, twice daily NATO meetings that
21 were taking place that I mentioned before, chaired by the senior civilian representative.

22 Q What about countries like Pakistan, Qatar, India, other countries in the
23 region?

24 A There was significant discussion and coordination with Qatar. The
25 Ambassador of Qatar there -- I did not -- I did not myself have any direct contact

1 with -- with representatives of Qatar, but I was aware that they were assisting in bringing
2 people in through the -- their vehicle movements.

3 BY [REDACTED]:

4 Q When did that coordination with Qatar start?

5 A With Qatar?

6 Q Yeah.

7 A I don't -- I don't recall exactly, but it may have -- it may have been
8 throughout the evacuation period. But I particularly remember it probably about
9 halfway through when -- when we were trying to overcome challenges of getting as many
10 people as we could in through South Gate. And that's where Qatar was -- was helpful in
11 including different people in their vehicle movements.

12 Q Did the Pakistani Government ever offer their help?

13 A I don't recall -- I don't really remember doing anything of significance with
14 Pakistan. They may have, but I don't -- I don't remember anything with them.

15 BY [REDACTED]:

16 Q Did we ever decline offers of support from any other countries?

17 A Not that I recall, but there -- there may have been simple cases where -- you
18 know, where an offer was made to include some group or individual in their movement,
19 but where we already had a plan for that -- that person, which would -- would have
20 resulted in a "thank you, but we've got this."

21 Q The August 2021 evacuation was officially a NEO, correct?

22 A I would -- I would have to defer, I think, to -- I would defer to DOD or others
23 to -- I think to label it. But, I mean, that's -- it's how I understood it, but official --

24 Q Was your understanding --

25 A I'm stopping on your word "official."

1 Q Was your understanding that there was a formal request for a NEO and that
2 the evacuation was proceeding under, you know, the terms of a NEO?

3 A I don't know.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q A NEO -- just to confirm, am I correct in understanding a NEO is typically
6 requested by the State Department, the Department of Defense, correct?

7 A I don't actually know the precise mechanisms of -- of implementing a NEO.

8 BY [REDACTED]:

9 Q Was that ever discussed with you? Were you briefed on that before you
10 were sent on a mission?

11 A No. I don't think so. It -- I -- the -- yeah. I mean, the -- the precise
12 modalities of it had no relevance to me.

13 Q And there were never, you know, specific rules or procedures, you know,
14 that were communicated in accordance with that or lines of authority?

15 A What we were doing was working in -- extremely closely with the military to
16 try to evacuate as many of the right people as we could. It was -- the mission to me was
17 very straightforward and to keep people safe in the process.

18 Q And what did -- and, when you say the right people, who were the right
19 people?

20 A Our initial focus was American citizens and their family members, which
21 included great many legal permanent residents, and so they were our top priority.

22 And then, as we -- as we moved along and -- and felt that we had evacuated every
23 American citizen that wanted to leave, because there were some who did not, we were
24 able to then move on to some dedicated operations specifically for our Embassy local
25 engaged staff, and -- and also the staff of some of the Federal affiliates who were

1 basically LES equivalent.

2 And then we were trying to get to a point where we could have a dedicated focus
3 on -- on SIV applicants who had -- you know, clearly had permissions to move to the
4 United States, have visas or clear permission.

5 But I -- but I want to make a point here for context, because we spent a lot of time
6 on those dedicated operations for these large groups of people who we were able to
7 move, large number of American citizens and -- and LES in particular. And -- but there
8 were other things happening at the same time that we were supporting.

9 The -- there was also the continuous movement through South Gate, which was
10 really the preferred movement, the preferred way to bring people into the airport,
11 and -- and we were -- I was in close coordination with Colonel Hardiman on all those
12 movements, and so we were trying to tuck a lot of our -- a lot of people into those
13 movements coming in through South Gate. But that's also where our NATO allies were
14 moved -- bringing in their folks.

15 And then, additionally, there were other gates at the -- at the airport, like Abbey
16 Gate and North Gate, where people were mobbed and some people were making it
17 through the crowds and up to the gate, where essentially these were targets of
18 opportunity. And so, if we -- our consular officer, working together with the Marines,
19 could spot somebody that we wanted to bring in, then we would do so at those gates.

20 So kind of three -- in my mind, it was always three sets of gates or efforts -- South
21 Gate; these other very dangerous gates where people were making their own way in, and
22 then we had targets of opportunity; and then our -- our designed operations that we
23 came up with to move large groups of people in through other gates that were more
24 protected or -- or not as well known to the public.

25 [REDACTED]. So our hour is --

1 [REDACTED]. Time has expired.

2 [REDACTED]. Yes. I was going to say that.

3 So it is now 11:10. The round has expired, so it will now be the minority's round.

4 Would we want to take a break, or --

5 [REDACTED]. Yes, please.

6 Mr. DeHart. Okay.

7 [REDACTED]. Great. How long is the break?

8 [REDACTED]. Five, 10 minutes?

9 [REDACTED]. Great.

10 [REDACTED]. So should we say we want 11:15, 11:20? It's now 11:10.

11 Mr. DeHart. 11:20.

12 [REDACTED]. 11:20.

13 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

14 [REDACTED]. Okay. Thanks.

15 [Recess.]

16 [REDACTED]. All right. We're back on the record at 11:20. This is [REDACTED]

17 [REDACTED] for the minority staff.

18 EXAMINATION

19 BY [REDACTED]:

20 Q Thank you very much, Mr. DeHart, for voluntarily testifying here today.

21 We just want to remind you in our section, please only testify to things that you
22 have firsthand knowledge of. We don't expect you to opine on anyone else's opinion or
23 what they were viewing or seeing in a room, et cetera.

24 So, in that vein, we just wanted to loop back quickly on your general experience.

25 You had testified that you have experience in Afghanistan policy dating back to 2019. Is

1 that correct? Oh, sorry, 2009.

2 A Yes. Correct. 2009.

3 Q And so, given that large span of time, is it a fair characterization to say that
4 you're an expert in Afghanistan policy?

5 A I don't -- I don't consider myself an expert, per se, but I think I know more
6 about Afghanistan than -- than most in the State Department.

7 Q Would it be a fair characterization to say that you have extensive experience
8 related to Afghanistan policy?

9 A Yes.

10 Q And could you also describe for us your experience related to the region
11 more broadly?

12 A Yes. So I was also deputy director for the caucuses in Central Asia. And,
13 in that role, connectivity to Afghanistan was important. I was director of the NSC staff
14 for Central Asia during George W. Bush administration, and we also had what we were
15 doing with some of the Central Asian countries, including Kyrgyzstan, connected to our
16 Afghanistan policy and efforts.

17 So I -- I worked at NATO headquarters in Brussels, and Afghanistan was on the
18 agenda there. So I was exposed to it at that time in the early 2000s, although I didn't
19 work directly on Afghanistan in NATO at that time. But -- but certainly a number of my
20 other positions have bumped up against our Afghanistan efforts.

21 Q Understood. Would it be a fair characterization to say that you have
22 extensive experience in the region?

23 A Yes.

24 Q Great. And, I also wanted to loop back.

25 You had testified previously that you've never participated in an evacuation. Is

1 that correct?

2 A That's correct.

3 Q Have you participated in any task force at the State Department outside of
4 the one we're talking about today?

5 A Yes.

6 Q Could you quantify about how many you've participated in?

7 A Probably a couple, but the -- my participation in earlier task forces was really
8 much earlier in my career.

9 Q What about any sort of activities related to crisis management?

10 A Well, I also had an assignment in the State Department Operations Center,
11 the 24-hour watch. That was back in '98 to '99. And, of course, working on
12 Afghanistan, whether in Afghanistan or in Washington, entails a fair amount of crisis
13 management awareness and planning and -- so there's that experience as well.

14 The operations center was very much about helping principals react, respond to,
15 address whatever crisis of the day.

16 Q Given that experience, did you feel qualified to be going to Afghanistan to
17 assist with the evacuation?

18 A Yes. I felt very well-qualified to be going. And, when -- when I was
19 previously in Kabul as the assistant chief of mission, my responsibility was actually not
20 policy and political matters. It was -- it was management of the Embassy. It was
21 security of the Embassy. It was our foreign assistance programs. It was CONSULAR
22 AFFAIRS. It was really everything -- and also law enforcement. It was mostly
23 everything in the management and security domain and fundamentally keeping people
24 safe.

25 Q Understood.

1 And do you have any experience in war zones?

2 A Really just Afghanistan.

3 Q Okay. As related to that, you had mentioned that Dean Thompson was the
4 lead of a task force in D.C. prior to your departure. Is that correct?

5 A I believe he was at that time. When I took over the task force, it -- he -- I
6 took it over from Dean. But I don't recall when he started on the task force.

7 Q Okay. Are you aware of any prior experience that Dean Thompson had
8 related to crisis management?

9 A I -- I don't know. I don't know. I really -- I really -- I really only got to
10 know Dean in the context of the -- of the evacuation and especially the task force.

11 Q Did you feel that he was performing at expectations as related to setting up
12 a task force for the withdrawal?

13 A Yes. I mean, I -- I felt Dean was -- was very effective, yes.

14 Q And what informed that belief?

15 A Well, we had a -- primarily it was the period that we were engaged in a
16 handoff from -- of the task force leadership from him to me. And so he was -- so I had
17 the chance to see him leading the task force for a period of time before I moved into the
18 seat. We were both doing it together for -- for at least several days.

19 Q Could you describe any methods of his management in terms of briefing
20 folks and preparing them to go to Kabul and participate in the evacuation?

21 A I -- I don't think that -- I'm not sure that I saw Dean in that role prior to my
22 departure to Kabul. What -- I really saw him working after I returned from Kabul, and
23 then we had that handoff period of the task force.

24 And, at that time, I thought one of his strengths was that he was -- he was a good
25 communicator, that he had put his arms around the whole operation, that he had a

1 well-organized system where everybody from the smaller task forces, because there were
2 actually multiple task forces, would gather for the -- a couple of times a day and brief on
3 what they were doing. And I thought the way that Dean was handling those discussions
4 was very effective.

5 Q So you -- you mentioned his communication. I actually want to touch upon
6 that. Prior to your departure to Kabul, did you have a clear directive as to what your
7 mission would be on the ground?

8 A Yes. It was clear to me what we -- what I was going out there to do.

9 Q Could you identify for the record what that directive was?

10 A It was to go and help Ambassador Bass lead the evacuation so that we could
11 get as many American citizens and legal permanent residents and Afghan allies out as we
12 could in a safe manner while looking after the team that we had there as well.

13 Q Did you confer with Ambassador Bass about this directive prior to your
14 departure?

15 A Not extensively. It -- things were moving very quickly, and he -- he
16 departed ahead of me because the decision was made for him to go before the decision
17 was made for me to go. And so our -- our exchanges at the time were very quick.

18 Q Okay. Given the brevity, do you feel that it was adequate to inform your
19 ability to get to work immediately upon your arrival?

20 A Yes, because the important thing was to -- was to get on the ground and
21 understand the situation there. There were significant limitations to really
22 understanding the situation without actually being there.

23 Q And did you have confidence in Ambassador Bass in terms of leading the
24 directives that were set forth for you all --

25 A Yes.

1 Q -- during the evacuation?

2 A I had very high confidence.

3 Q And what informed that opinion?

4 A Our time together for one year in Embassy Kabul when I worked for him
5 then.

6 Q Could you identify for the record any specific actions that he took or
7 instances which built your confidence in his ability to serve?

8 A Well, I think one of -- one of his strengths is that he's -- he's -- has a -- he's
9 very operational, and he -- he is always very good at forging a productive relationship
10 with our military leaders. It's something that he excels at. It's -- I saw him do that
11 very, very effectively. He -- he brings that credibility, so he builds that trust with them
12 and without being a pushover.

13 And so, when you gain that trust and, you know, you're able to work effectively
14 with the military and have that civilian-military cooperation, then you can have a very
15 highly effective operation. I saw that in Kabul. I knew that it was his reputation before
16 I went to Kabul, so I wasn't surprised by it.

17 And then he and we were able to do that again, I think, in the evacuation.

18 BY [REDACTED]:

19 Q To follow up on this point, in your overall professional experience, did you
20 find that that civ-mil cooperation was generally very challenging for State Department
21 leaders to effectuate?

22 A In -- in my experience of -- the cooperation has been mostly positive.
23 When I was -- when I was the director of the provincial reconstruction team in Panjshir,
24 my military counterpart was a lieutenant colonel, Eric Hommel. We had a fantastic
25 relationship.

1 And I think, quite often -- quite often in the field, it can be -- it can be better than
2 sort of back at policy levels. I think, you know -- and so my experience in Panjshir
3 Province was very positive from the perspective of civ-mil cooperation. My experience,
4 again, in Kabul, both 2018 and 2019, was very positive.

5 But there are different cultures between the military and the State Department
6 and also U.S. Agency for International Development, and, you know -- and I -- there
7 are -- certainly, when you have such different cultures and ways of doing business, there
8 can -- there are certainly seams that arise sometimes and misunderstanding.

9 Q But it's your impression that Ambassador Bass was better than most State
10 Department officials at managing that dynamic?

11 A Yes. He is -- he is particularly good at that, yes.

12 BY [REDACTED]:

13 Q I also wanted to go back to a bit of your prior testimony. I recall you
14 mentioning that your initial impressions or perhaps impressions before you arrived was
15 that the situation was extremely difficult, complex, and disturbing.

16 Could you unpack for us a little bit what it looked like on the ground?

17 A Yes. I mean, the -- the thing that was so extraordinary was the -- were
18 the -- were the mobs that were gathered outside the perimeter of the airport and what
19 that looked like and what that sounded like. So, you know, big, big crowds of people.

20 And, when -- when the Afghans who were trying to get through these crowds to
21 the gates, it would -- you know, it might take them a full day of pushing and shoving to
22 get through the crowds to the gate in 90-something-degree heat, sometimes beaten on
23 the way. And, by the time they would get to the gate and if they were fortunate enough
24 to then get in, you know, people were staggering and crying, distraught, sunburned.

25 And -- and our Marines, who were given the task of controlling the gates, had to

1 be very -- they had to be very tough in making sure that only the people that we wanted
2 to get in would come in because the challenge was that a gate could be overrun at the
3 risk of a lot of people already inside the airport. And so it was -- you know, it was quite
4 a scene to have the Marines maintaining that control of these -- of these gates.

5 And it was loud. Whenever you were at a gate or even quite a distance from the
6 gate, you could hear the people outside, and you could -- and you could hear the gunfire
7 constantly going at all times.

8 Q Were you surprised by the chaos?

9 A Well, I don't know that I was surprised by it because I think I had been
10 advised of roughly what it was like. But -- but it was something I had never seen before,
11 so it's -- it leaves a mark on you.

12 Q You also testified that the situation was chaotic, but you felt that the State
13 Department's response was not chaotic. Is that a correct characterization of your
14 statements?

15 A Yes.

16 Q Could you describe for us the initial steps that were taken to inform this
17 opinion of State really navigating to make the situation not chaotic?

18 A Well, I -- we were -- we were actively, proactively formulating plans,
19 strategies in an orderly way in consultation with Washington, in close collaboration with
20 our military colleagues on specific steps and measures to get people to safety through the
21 operations I mentioned and also to give guidance to our consular officers and to other
22 officers on the ground who were working at the other gates and picking targets of
23 opportunity.

24 So we were providing that guidance. And we were receiving their feedback on
25 what they were experiencing so that we could understand how our guidance was being

1 interpreted and implemented.

2 So I think that we had good communication. I think we had plans that we
3 developed as best we could, and we implemented those. And so -- so I think we were
4 as -- we were roughly as effective as we could be under the circumstances.

5 Q Would it be fair to say that the plan as operationalized was organized?

6 A Well, we took steps every day to be organized, yes.

7 Q Could you clarify for the record what those steps were?

8 A Well, it -- exactly what I've outlined. I think to -- to ensure that everybody
9 understood the intent, what we were trying to do; understood the guidance; understood
10 where we were setting the bar in terms of allowing people to enter the airport; and -- and
11 were -- you know, and, when it came to the specific operations, that everybody involved
12 in an operation was on the same page and knew what -- what it was that we were trying
13 to do and when we were trying to do it.

14 Q How do you know that the directive was understood by those reporting to
15 you on the ground?

16 A I think the most important communications were face to face, so it was
17 direct confirmation that what we were instructing was understood.

18 Q And you had previously testified that you had not had a chance to meet all
19 the staff as you would in normal settings. Did this affect your ability to operate?

20 A It -- probably. I think that -- that ideally, if I'm in charge of an organization,
21 which I had been before, I want to know who all the people are and what their strengths
22 are and what they can do and what maybe they can't do, and just -- and just -- and also
23 have a rapport with the person.

24 But, in this environment, frankly, one of my regrets was that, when I departed
25 Kabul, I didn't know the names of many people who were doing what I thought was -- was

1 pretty heroic work. So -- you know, so I would have -- I would have liked to know each
2 and every person and what -- you know, and their strengths, but just didn't have the
3 luxury.

4 Q Is it fair to say that the situation was dynamic?

5 A Yes.

6 Q Would it be fair to say that the plan was changing in real time?

7 A Yes.

8 Q Do you feel that, as the plan was changing in real time, the team was
9 adapting?

10 A Yes.

11 Q Could you describe any situations which informed your opinion that folks
12 were adapting on the ground?

13 A We -- the guidance for who we could let into the -- to the airport did change
14 more than once. And so, initially, at the very start of the evacuation, the guidance was
15 that -- that we should not leave women and children outside the gate. If they had made
16 it all the way through the crowd and they had gotten all the way to the gate, we should
17 let them in from a humanitarian perspective.

18 And, as the -- as more and more people came into the airport, the population in
19 the airport grew, and -- and this was the result of some different factors,
20 including -- including the lack of lily pads, different countries for aircraft to travel to.
21 And, as the situation within the airport got more difficult, the guidance raised the bar on
22 who we could allow into the airport.

23 And -- and it changed more than once. And that was -- you know, that was
24 very -- that was very difficult also for -- for consular officers, you know, to -- to realize that
25 maybe they -- they just turned away somebody that -- that now could be admitted, or had

1 admitted somebody that now would be turned away. On a human level, that's quite
2 frustrating, but it was a -- it was required because of the circumstances and -- that we
3 were dealing with in the dynamic situation, that the circumstances were constantly
4 changing.

5 Q And so, if my understanding is correct, you received the guidance and were
6 sharing that guidance with the folks on the ground. Is that correct?

7 A Yes. Ambassador Bass was the main recipient, I would say, of guidance
8 from Washington.

9 Q And then Ambassador Bass would inform you of the change in guidance?

10 A Yes. If I was -- had not been in the room or privy to the conversation, he
11 would inform me.

12 Q Did you feel that the changing guidance was appropriate?

13 A Generally, yes. I was very concerned, among many others, about the
14 situation within the airport as the numbers just kept climbing of people who were still in
15 the airport. And, personally, I had concerns about the supply of food and water and
16 asked -- asked a member of our team to look into that.

17 So, I mean, let me put it this way. I -- I understood the reasons why -- why the
18 guidance changed at every step.

19 Q That sort of leads to our next bucket of questions.

20 Could you describe for us, as you understood them, your general responsibilities
21 once you were on the ground?

22 A Well, my general responsibilities were to look after the team, to
23 communicate with the team, ensure that everybody understood what -- what we were
24 doing, what they needed to do. People had different roles. Consular officer's role was
25 different than the role of a couple of our political officers who were designing ways to

1 bring in these other large groups.

2 And -- and I was problem solving. And so, if we -- there was a problem that
3 needed to be solved, I would work -- find the right person and work with that person to
4 try to solve the problem.

5 Q Do you feel that you had the support that was required to problem solve?

6 A Yes. I felt that we -- I felt that we had the numbers of people that we
7 needed, and we had some really -- we had some very good people on the ground
8 that -- that did a lot of great work. So I thought we were -- in terms of -- in terms of
9 staffing and capabilities, yes, we had the right people.

10 Q And do you think what was being asked of you was reasonable?

11 A I -- yes. I think what was being asked was -- was necessary.

12 Q Do you feel that you were successful in carrying out the objectives?

13 A I think that we were successful and we were effective. But that doesn't
14 mean that we -- that I feel that -- totally satisfied by how things came out.

15 Q Even if you weren't entirely satisfied, do you feel that you did all that you
16 could to accomplish the directives given to you?

17 A Yes.

18 Q And then just talk a little bit more about the responsibilities. Which
19 responsibility took the bulk of your time?

20 A I think the -- I think the bulk of my time was problem solving and planning
21 and coordinating in connection with the specific operations that we were -- that we were
22 designing and then implementing to get, first, American citizens and LPRs and then our
23 locally engaged staff in by the thousands.

24 Q And so, in terms of your problem solving, were you in direct consultation
25 with anyone repeatedly about it?

1 A Yes.

2 Q Could you identify who or what?

3 A I'm sorry. Can you just rephrase that question?

4 Q In terms of the problem solving -- you said it was the largest chunk of your
5 responsibilities -- was there an individual or an entity that you consulted with while
6 problem solving?

7 A Many. Many people. I mean, Ambassador Bass, military colleagues,
8 people on Colonel Hardiman's team, action officers, our own action officers. So a large
9 number of people depending what the problem was. Washington, colleagues back in
10 Washington.

11 Q So it sounds to me like a very multipronged effort in terms of your problem
12 solving. Is that accurate?

13 A Yes.

14 BY [REDACTED]:

15 Q Quickly to follow up, you testified earlier to essentially three lines of efforts
16 that were part of -- that were your focus -- moving individuals through South Gate,
17 moving individuals through other dangerous gates, and designing and implementing
18 operations, particularly for AMCITS and locally employed staff.

19 So is it your testimony today that that third line of effort comprised the bulk of
20 your time?

21 A Yes. Although that third line of effort of those -- of operations and all that
22 that entailed, I think that's where I spent more time than on anything else.

23 On the -- on the second -- the -- the other gates and the people coming in, I
24 wouldn't use the word that we were moving people necessarily, but we were seizing the
25 opportunity, if they made it to the gate, to bring them in.

1 Q Thank you for that clarification.

2 BY [REDACTED]:

3 Q Do you think that third bucket that Laura just mentioned was the
4 appropriate number-one priority in terms of your bulk of responsibilities?

5 A Yes.

6 Q Why -- why or why not? I'm sorry. Why?

7 A Well, because South Gate was mostly managed by our military colleagues
8 and Colonel Hardiman and his team. So he was the lead on that -- on managing the flow
9 of people and convoys through there. And our consular officers were hard at work on
10 the other gates, and we just needed to -- we needed to tend to their welfare and ensure
11 that they had the guidance they needed.

12 But the most time-consuming activity was figuring how to move people in very
13 large groups. That was just -- it was a more -- in a sense, a more complex challenge.

14 Q And was that bulk of responsibility -- was that a priority set by you, or
15 someone else?

16 A It was -- I would say it was a priority that was set by Ambassador Bass --

17 Q And --

18 A -- in --

19 Q Sorry.

20 A In consultation with Washington colleagues.

21 Q Uh-huh.

22 A They knew -- they knew exactly what we were -- what we were doing, and
23 we needed their support in order to do it.

24 Q And what was the second largest proportion of your responsibilities?

25 A I think -- I think just a more general communication with everybody and

1 problem solving.

2 Q And, when you use the word "everybody," who are you referring to
3 specifically?

4 A Well, mainly our State Department team. I'm not sure I -- I'm not sure I can
5 bundle the other work into any single coherent basket of -- to -- you know, to describe
6 the second priority.

7 Q Okay. So, if I asked you what the third bucket of priority would be, is that a
8 little amorphous?

9 A That would also be difficult.

10 Q Difficult. And, again, that perhaps could be because the situation was
11 dynamic, correct?

12 A The -- yes. The situation was extremely dynamic. The -- the overarching
13 priority was to get people out.

14 Q Uh-huh. I'd also like to ask about your typical day. Could you describe for
15 us if you had a typical day and, if you did, what it looked like?

16 A It wasn't necessarily a day. I -- so I slept -- I slept about 3 to 4 hours, I think,
17 for a 24-hour period, and -- and it changed. Typical activities changed, I think, as we got
18 forward to the -- you know, from the start of the evacuation to the end. I think -- I think,
19 when we first got there, it was about -- it was probably a little bit more about conveying
20 guidance to our officers, especially the consular officers, on who we should be bringing in,
21 what their plan is, what the strategy is.

22 But then we had to turn immediately to figuring out how to -- you know, how to
23 get larger numbers of Americans in. You know, we had to tend -- we had to tend to all
24 sorts of, you know, related issues, like if we were going to move our locally engaged staff
25 by bus, we needed buses.

1 We had a GSO, a general services officer, on the ground, whose role it was to do
2 things like that. He had to go find some money to get the buses. I think he -- I think he
3 wound up effectively buying a small fleet of large buses, because I think they probably
4 weren't going to find their way back to the bus company or the source, wherever he got
5 them. You know, and that's how we moved a lot of -- you know, nearly -- I believe
6 nearly 3,000 of our local staff.

7 You know, we had to -- a typical -- a typical 24-hour period involved, you know, at
8 least a couple of shift-change meetings of talking to people and gathering their feedback.
9 It might have involved a trip by me out to one of the gates just to see what it was like out
10 there and what was happening.

11 It involved sitting in on the, you know, high-level interagency call that took place
12 so that we could -- so that Ambassador Bass could answer Washington's questions and
13 brief, and, you know, get some updated guidance.

14 It may have involved either Ambassador Bass or me attending one of the regular
15 NATO meetings, which were coordination meetings and sharing of information and doing
16 some planning among us.

17 It probably involved numerous trips over to Colonel Hardiman's cell to talk about
18 who was next in line to come in through South Gate and whether any changes should be
19 made to that and whether we needed to prioritize or deprioritize this or that movement.

20 It involved responding to a lot of emails from Washington, responding to a lot of
21 advocacy for individual Afghan cases. We handled -- we had an extremely large number
22 of emails -- phone calls, some, but especially emails -- that came in from U.S. officials or
23 former officials or colleagues at this or that Embassy, the vast majority of which were
24 well-intentioned because they had become aware of somebody who needed help and
25 wanted to get into the airport and that were inquiring as to whether we could help them.

1 And -- and I became sort of a clearinghouse. I think I -- I had responded to a lot
2 more of those than Ambassador Bass did, as he was more directly engaged with senior
3 leadership.

4 So -- yeah. So those were a few of the things.

5 Q That was really instructive. Thank you.

6 A couple of follow-up questions.

7 So you just testified that, in a 24-hour time period, you were sleeping 3 to 4 hours.
8 So it sounds like you were working, fair to say, around the clock?

9 A Yes.

10 Q Was that an experience shared by other State employees there?

11 A Generally, yes. I think it was a little bit different among some. Our
12 consular officers -- I felt I had a difficult job, but I felt our consular officers had a much
13 more difficult job than I did. Ambassador Bass and I were co-located in the Marines'
14 JOC, Joint Operations Center, and we were, I suppose, at least a few hundred meters
15 away from the nearest perimeter.

16 So we were -- we had some setback between us and the crowds whereas our
17 consular officers were together with the Marines or, you know, at best, right behind the
18 Marines as the Marines sort of were managing people and doing an initial check on who
19 could come in.

20 So it -- you know, very hot, very stressful for -- talking about for our consular
21 officers. Very, very hot out there, very stressful, no bathrooms, no shade, concrete,
22 concertina wire, mobs of people right on the other side, people coming in distraught, you
23 know, making rapid decisions about who could stay and who could go, highly stressful,
24 highly emotional.

25 So we didn't actually want them working 20 hours a day. So that -- I think that

1 would have -- that would have been too much under the circumstances that they were
2 dealing with. So -- so they were on -- they were on shifts.

3 But of course, you know, they would see needs, and they also worked beyond
4 those shifts if they saw a need and something -- the work had to continue.

5 Q Is it fair to say, however, that they were still working a large percentage of
6 the day?

7 A Yes.

8 Q And under really challenging circumstances?

9 A Under extraordinarily challenging, yes, circumstances.

10 Q I also wanted to ask. You had mentioned a colleague who procured a fleet
11 of vehicles.

12 A Uh-huh.

13 Q Was this sort of thinking-on-the-fly behavior representative of the
14 Department as a whole as -- on the ground?

15 A Yes, because I think one of -- one of the things that -- that struck me and that
16 I commented on many times was that sort of all the -- all the normal bureaucratic
17 constraints were just stripped away, and it was clear that Washington just expected us to
18 do this thing.

19 And, you know -- and so what -- the kinds of solutions people can come up
20 with -- you know, creative, smart people -- when the normal constraints are sort of lifted
21 and you're just given a mission to complete -- and, actually, I found that pretty inspiring
22 when I was there.

23 BY [REDACTED]:

24 Q To follow up on that, you testified that normal bureaucratic constraints were
25 stripped away. Was that unusual to have such constraints removed in your time at the

1 State Department?

2 A I mean, I think it's -- it was just -- I've never felt terribly constrained in my
3 career. I -- and I -- as a senior person, I've always felt that the leash on me was pretty
4 long. But this was just an extraordinary situation that -- where, you know, it was
5 just -- it was nonstop problem solving. And, you know, the only boundaries, I think,
6 were -- were we weren't going to do anything illegal. We weren't going to get, you
7 know, anybody hurt or killed.

8 But, aside from that, it was, you know, whatever -- whatever you can figure out to
9 solve this problem and to -- you know, and to complete the mission, you know, you could
10 do. And so people thought outside the box. And, yes, we're not normally allowed to
11 sort of procure buses in that manner.

12 Q And the fact that normal bureaucratic constraints were stripped away, is it
13 your belief that that contributed to better outcomes over the course of the evacuation?

14 A Yes, absolutely.

15 BY [REDACTED]:

16 Q Did you feel like those entrepreneurial actions were necessary in the
17 circumstances?

18 A Yes. They were highly necessary.

19 Q Could you explain why?

20 A Well, because we didn't -- we didn't have time to -- to follow a bureaucratic
21 process. We didn't have -- you know, we didn't -- through -- you know, because of the
22 crisis, we didn't have necessarily the resources.

23 For example, I mean, the -- most -- a lot of the vehicles at the airport were
24 disabled at the -- before the -- really, I think, at the start or before the start of the
25 evacuation, we found that many vehicles had been disabled. The keys had been stolen

1 or lost, or the -- or, you know, the wires had been pulled out so the vehicle wouldn't
2 work.

3 And -- you know, so we didn't -- we didn't have a normal avenue to get buses, I
4 guess, maybe in the normal procedure. And -- and, you know, people didn't necessarily
5 rely on whether this or that vehicle belonged to them. There was a lot of hot-wiring of
6 cars. There was a lot of borrowing of vehicles that -- you know, on the airport because
7 things needed to be done.

8 Q And just one more follow up on that. So this sort of innovativeness or
9 entrepreneurial spirit that you described, how was it received upon return back to
10 Washington, D.C.?

11 A Well, I think, you know, in my personal experience is that -- is that there was
12 great appreciation, and the Secretary personally expressed his appreciation to all of us --

13 Q Okay.

14 A -- in various ways.

15 BY [REDACTED]:

16 Q Thank you. I -- I want to pivot back to something you said in your earlier
17 testimony on a different topic.

18 You testified that there were discussions that you were in that reflected on the
19 tight timeline you were under, is that correct, that you considered?

20 A Yes.

21 Q And you testified that the discussions were not about changing the timeline,
22 but, rather, noting that it was very challenging, discussing whether you could
23 meet -- meet it, and discussing the downsides of changing it.

24 Is that a fair characterization of -- of your earlier testimony?

25 A Yes. I -- I guess I would add -- I mean, the question was constantly on our

1 minds, would -- would they stick to this timeline? Would we stick to this timeline, or
2 would it get changed?

3 So that was a -- that would just -- that was always a question that -- that hung over
4 everything we did, because we had to make decisions on how we were going to -- you
5 know, on what we were going to do to get people into the airport. A lot of those
6 decisions we made depended on how much time we had.

7 Q And, regarding your testimony that you discussed, the downsides of
8 changing the timeline, can you explain to us what you saw those downsides to be?

9 A I think that the main concern was that -- was that, if we had gone beyond
10 August 31st, the Taliban would -- would -- would not accept that, and there could be, you
11 know, at minimum, a breakdown of sort of basic cooperation by the Taliban, but -- but
12 also possibly outbreak of armed conflict with the Taliban if they thought that we were
13 delaying our departure.

14 Q Was your concern that the Taliban would overrun U.S. personnel or attack
15 them directly?

16 A I think it was -- there was certainly a concern that the Taliban might attack
17 U.S. personnel under those circumstances. But I think it -- there was a -- you know, I
18 heard the concern from military colleagues that, if -- if the -- if the relationship with the
19 Taliban went so downhill that it led to -- you know, to active fighting between us, that
20 there was an expectation that we would prevail, that we would not be overrun, but there
21 were thousands and thousands and thousands and thousands of civilians. And so there
22 would have -- it would have been a humanitarian disaster.

23 Q Okay.

24 A A lot of people would have been caught in the crossfire.

25 [REDACTED]. Did you have a follow-up?

1 [REDACTED]. Yeah.

2 BY [REDACTED]:

3 Q You talked about thinking that the Taliban -- you talked about the Taliban
4 may have attacked U.S. personnel.

5 What was that thinking based on? What would -- what influenced that thinking?

6 A Well, the possibility that we would -- that things would go off the rails and
7 we'd wind up in firefights with the Taliban, essentially because the Taliban -- our
8 perception was -- certainly mine was that they were cooperating and not making things
9 too difficult for us at the moment in the evacuation because they wanted to see us go.

10 And I think they made the calculation that they would be generally cooperative in
11 the steps we were taking on the evacuation because that would lead to our departure.

12 And, if -- and, if they didn't cooperate, then it might take us longer, and they
13 wanted -- they just wanted us out.

14 So I think there was a concern that, if we -- if we moved the goalpost and said,
15 "No, sorry, we're going to be here another week," then, you know, their cooperation
16 would then evaporate and possibly lead to something worse.

1 [12:09 p.m.]

2 BY [REDACTED]:

3 Q And that was based on the commitments made in the 2020 agreement with
4 the Taliban?

5 A I think it's related to that. But I think that what I'm describing -- trying to
6 describe, I think, is a more tactical environment because then -- yeah. There
7 were -- there was communication about our evacuation and our timeline of our
8 evacuation and so forth.

9 BY [REDACTED]:

10 Q What do you mean by "tactical environment"?

11 A Well, I guess that the -- the previous agreement undertaken with the
12 Taliban, I suppose -- I'd say that a more strategic level of that is our -- that is our
13 departure from Afghanistan. But when we get down to, you know, if it's going to be
14 August 31st or September 2nd or whatever, I see that as more tactical.

15 BY [REDACTED]:

16 Q So, Mr. DeHart, I want to quickly give you an opportunity, in our remaining
17 time, to give us a little bit more of the picture and the story around the bus movement
18 that you described.

19 You mentioned 3,000 individuals, approximately, were moved through that effort.
20 I just want to give you the opportunity to tell us the story, if there were any aspects of it
21 that we missed, given that you cited it as an example of innovation that was noteworthy.

22 A Well, when -- first -- so the bus movements I described were in connection
23 with our locally-engaged -- locally-employed staff, LES staff, of the embassy that came.
24 And those movements came after we were able to evacuate, I believe, pretty much every
25 American citizen who wanted to go and that we could -- you know, were able to locate

1 and were able to communicate with.

2 Then we turned our attention to our local staff. Our local staff were more
3 difficult in some ways to evacuate than the American citizens because we couldn't -- we
4 couldn't really send them, you know, through the Taliban or get the attention of the
5 Taliban. And so, we moved them through a different gate that we had identified with an
6 interagency partner that was not well known to the public and had not experienced the
7 kind of mobbing that Abbey Gate or North Gate had experienced.

8 And we did have an advantage with our local staff in that they largely knew one
9 another and they self-organized, which was an advantage over trying to do this with
10 American citizens who didn't -- didn't form an actual collective. But our embassy staff
11 did.

12 And so, they were in touch with each other. We were in touch with them.
13 We -- and by "we," I'm talking about the political officers who mainly implemented this
14 effort. They identified some captains among our local staff who would take the lead,
15 and they would be the captain on each bus, and they then worked among themselves and
16 organized themselves into groups that would be on the individual buses.

17 We had to prioritize first those who still had their embassy IDs and I think their
18 passports, too, to make sure that they could get through Taliban checkpoints. And that
19 meant, unfortunately, sending sort of to the end of the line those who didn't have their
20 embassy badges anymore, maybe because they destroyed them out of fear. But we
21 couldn't take the chance that they would sort of impede the flow of everybody else. So
22 we just put them to the back of the line, and we eventually got them out, too.

23 But we -- you know, our LES did a great job organizing themselves. And so when
24 it came time, we dispatched buses incrementally to different pick-up points, and they got
25 on the buses. They loaded -- the captains, you know, tried to make sure that nobody

1 else got on the bus.

2 We found that, in some cases, the bus drivers, because they were
3 contracted -- the drivers were contracted -- had evidently been in touch with some
4 others. And so there were at least -- at least on one occasion, somebody got on a bus
5 who was a stranger and shouldn't have been there, and that was -- you know, that kind of
6 thing was dangerous and problematic. We were worried about an ISIS bomber or
7 somebody getting on a bus.

8 But then we -- we basically then plotted out their arrival at this gate to do it in a
9 discreet manner so that we wouldn't draw attention to this effort. Because that was
10 always the concern. If we were too visible, too many people at once, too obvious, you
11 would have the crowds descend on the gate and then no longer be able to use the gate in
12 a safe way.

13 We had information that ISIS was seeking to attack. And so there was a very real
14 fear that if you drew attention to this kind of thing, you'd have a bomber, which, of
15 course, eventually we did at Abbey Gate.

16 So we were able to move -- basically, you know, we worked -- I don't know, a 24-,
17 48-hour period, something like that -- to just move these buses one at a time, but as fast
18 as we could. And we moved all of our employees who wanted to leave.

19 Q Thank you. That's a helpful narrative to hear.

20 I want to turn back to one other topic that came up previously in your testimony
21 regarding the work that consular officers were doing at or near the gates, which you
22 described as, in your opinion, a harder job than the job that you and Ambassador Bass
23 had. Is that correct?

24 A Yes.

25 Q And our committee has heard testimony that characterized that the State

1 Department at HKIA would completely shut down processing of Afghans and Americans
2 every evening and into the morning, leaving ground forces with a nightmare that they did
3 not work in reasonable rotations, and very much presented an unwillingness to work in
4 the situation.

5 Do you -- did this characterization comport with your understanding of the
6 consular officers' work at or near the gates?

7 A No. I don't understand that statement.

8 Q And the committee has heard a characterization that the Department of
9 State personnel -- they would come out to do their shift and randomly show up and leave.
10 They were slowing down the entire process.

11 And I couldn't understand what the thought process was behind this. Does that
12 characterization comport with your understanding of consular officers' work at or near
13 the gates?

14 A No. It doesn't comport with my understanding.

15 Q Thank you.

16 BY [REDACTED]:

17 Q And could you clarify just for the record why it doesn't comport with your
18 understanding?

19 A Because what I saw of our consular officers was that they were -- was that
20 they were eager to do this work, and they were present. Each time -- I visited -- I visited
21 different gates at different times. Every time I went personally to a gate, I encountered
22 consular officers there.

23 Q Did you ever receive any feedback or concerns from officers that would
24 comport with the characterization my colleague just read?

25 A No. Not -- not in the terms that you just read. There was unquestionably

1 friction from time to time among people because everybody was working in a highly
2 stressful environment. What the Marines were doing was incredible. What our
3 servicemembers were doing was absolutely incredible, the conditions that they were
4 working under. I don't think -- I don't think anybody is quite trained for what they were
5 being asked to do.

6 So, you know, it's no surprise to me that people would feel frustrated from
7 some -- some of the experience of what had to be done there. And it's not a
8 surprise -- excuse me. It's not a surprise that these frustrations would lead, in some
9 cases, to -- you know, to friction among people. It was just a very stressful, difficult set
10 of circumstances.

11 Q So just to hearken back to what you had testified prior, is it your testimony
12 today that these individuals performed in an extraordinary capacity given the cards that
13 they were dealt at the time?

14 A I -- I thought that the consular officers that were there were really doing
15 heroic work. There were -- there were some of our officers that, after being there,
16 realized it was too much for them, and they departed. I don't personally know who they
17 were. I was simply told that that was the case. And I don't know how many there
18 were. My impression is quite a small number. I also don't know if those were officers
19 who came for the evacuation or may have already been at the embassy when the
20 evacuation started.

21 But I'm also not surprised of that for some officers. What -- you know, what they
22 were being asked to do was maybe -- was maybe a little bit too much for some people.

23 Q Thank you.

24 [REDACTED]. So it is 12:21. We are off the record.

25 [Recess.]

1 ██████████. We are now back on time on the record.

2 BY ██████████:

3 Q So when did you depart for Afghanistan?

4 A I left Washington on -- for the evacuation on August 17 or 18, maybe. It
5 was around then.

6 Q And how did you get there?

7 A I flew commercial to Qatar, and then I -- and then I went on U.S. military
8 aircraft from there.

9 Q And when did you arrive in Afghanistan?

10 A I think it was the early morning hours of August 20. It might have been
11 August 19.

12 Q And who did you travel with?

13 A I traveled alone initially on the commercial flight, but then when I arrived in
14 Qatar, I encountered several officers -- other State Department officers -- who were en
15 route. And then we moved together to the military flight.

16 Q You spoke a little bit about this before.

17 But what was your initial reaction, you know, when you got off the plane and got
18 onto the ground at HKIA?

19 A Can you -- I'm sorry. What do you mean by "reaction"?

20 Q Your initial reaction, you know, when you got -- when you got -- when you
21 first landed, what was your initial reaction to the situation on the ground?

22 A Well, I mean, I was familiar. The military side of HKIA didn't come as any
23 big shock to me because I've spent a lot of time at those kinds of facilities in Afghanistan.
24 But once I saw the surrounding perimeter in that situation, you know, my reaction was as
25 I described it before.

1 [REDACTED]. Yeah.

2 [REDACTED], do you have the exhibit?

3 [REDACTED], you have the exhibit.

4 So we'll now mark exhibit 1. This is an article here that you authored for AFSA,
5 called "The Apocalyptic Airport Scene."

6 So [REDACTED] will bring you a copy.

7 [DeHart Exhibit No. 1

8 Was marked for identification.]

9 BY [REDACTED]:

10 Q So in this piece, you described the situation at Hamid Karzai International
11 Airport as "the apocalyptic airport scene."

12 Could you tell us a bit more about what you meant by that?

13 A Well, I think "apocalyptic" was the strongest possible word I could summon
14 to describe what was really just a shocking scene to me.

15 Q You wrote, "Our population was swelling uncontrollably, so we pushed hard
16 for every seat on every outbound flight to be filled. I didn't care who got on which
17 plane, where they flew, or how they landed. Those were other people's problems. Let
18 them sort it out elsewhere."

19 Can you, you know, elaborate on that situation?

20 A Yeah. Sure. I mean, I was solely focused on the task that we had to do on
21 the ground in Kabul, which was try to get the right people into the airport so that they
22 could be evacuated.

23 There was -- there were all sorts of discussions that I heard and that I was aware
24 of, including on those interagency calls, about all the -- all the related problems out there,
25 which was -- you know, the aircraft that took the evacuees had to have someplace to

1 land. It had to have someplace to take people.

2 And there was -- you know, particularly early in the evacuation, that was a real
3 challenge. And not all of the aircraft that departed -- there was a period of time early in
4 the evacuation where some of the planes were departing without being filled because the
5 space had not been created out there at the various lily pads to take these people.

6 And so, that was a big problem because we were prevented then from -- you
7 know, from clearing out the airport and moving people through. It was a throughput
8 problem. And that was -- you know, that was a major reason why the population within
9 the airport then began to grow and grow.

10 And so -- you know, so the -- we also then had the situation where some of our
11 European allies were also sending aircraft. And some private organizations were
12 sending aircraft to pick up, you know, their people that they wanted to pick up. But
13 when those aircraft arrived, they didn't -- they didn't necessarily want to fill every seat,
14 but we needed to fill every seat so that we could -- we needed to get people out of the
15 airport.

16 And so we had -- that was a major topic of discussion ongoing in the NATO
17 meetings that we had, you know, because people -- I mean, aircrafts sent for one purpose
18 were now being used, you know, for a slightly different purpose to get different people.
19 And different governments that were involved with the effort had their own interests in
20 ensuring that the right people are on their planes.

21 So that was a lot to work through. So that was really what I was trying to get at.

22 Q You mentioned that a big reason for the challenge was that the lily pads
23 were not available. Why was that the case that the lily pads were not available?

24 A Because -- you know, my impression was that -- was that Washington was in
25 intensive discussions with governments like Germany and Spain and Italy for permission.

1 We -- I don't think -- I don't think we wanted to just simply start sending large numbers of
2 people to their territories.

3 So they had to get those arrangements in place with the necessary permission so
4 that we could use our bases in those countries for that purpose.

5 Q And --

6 [REDACTED]. I just have a follow-up.

7 [REDACTED]. Yeah. Sure.

8 BY [REDACTED]:

9 Q Just so I'm understanding correctly, it was believed January 21 where the
10 President announced the intent to withdraw.

11 These negotiations with other countries hadn't been done in advance?

12 A I don't know because at that time leading up to the evacuation, I was
13 working on the Arctic.

14 Q Based on your experience while you were there, the negotiations were still
15 ongoing, at the very least?

16 A Actually, I don't know. I don't know when they -- I don't know when they
17 nailed down the permissions of these governments precisely for us to take those -- take
18 the people there.

19 There -- there was also -- related to that, there was also discussion that I -- that I
20 was aware of about some of the reactions that we were having from some of our allies
21 when aircraft landed, or were en route with more people than necessarily the ones that
22 they were sent to pick up. So I think that that was likely also an issue.

23 So it may -- because I don't know the timeline exactly -- it may have been a factor
24 of not having the necessary permissions in place yet. It may also have been a factor of,
25 when this was implemented, the host governments may not have been 100 percent

1 satisfied with how it was being implemented.

2 Q Which host governments did we have agreements with?

3 A Well, we wound up using Ramstein and Rhine Ordnance Barracks in
4 Germany, with permission of the German Government, to put people there as a lily pad,
5 as a -- basically as a transit stop en route to the United States, and also Rota Airbase in
6 Spain, and Sigonella in Italy.

7 And then, of course, there were the Gulf countries, which were the initial stop
8 coming out of Kabul. Qatar, which wound up to be our major platform to this day. But
9 initially -- I think that we initially also flew some planes to Kuwait and to -- and to others
10 as well. But yeah.

11 BY [REDACTED]:

12 Q And who in the United States Government was leading the effort to establish
13 those lily pads?

14 A I think that -- I was not involved directly in those discussions. But I think
15 that the European Bureau for those European lily pads were -- was, I believe, in the lead
16 talking to the governments through our embassies and probably the former deputy
17 assistant secretary, Molly --

18 Q Phee?

19 A No. Williamson. Williamson.

20 Q And would the --

21 A And I may be --

22 Q Sure.

23 A I'm forgetting her name, so --

24 Q Sure.

25 A Yeah.

1 Q Would the Middle Eastern countries have been in the Near East Bureau, or
2 Near Eastern Affairs Bureau?

3 A Certainly, they would be a part of that discussion. But I don't know -- I
4 don't know who led those talks directly with the governments.

5 Q And what were -- what were the main takeaways from the interagency
6 discussions?

7 A I'm sorry?

8 Q What were your main takeaways from -- you know, what was happening
9 with the interagency discussions?

10 A Just in general?

11 Q Yeah. You know, specific to this issue.

12 A That there was recognition of the urgent need to improve -- to open up
13 more space so that we wouldn't have these throughput issues, and to -- you know, to
14 create the conditions so that no aircraft would leave Kabul without being fully filled.

15 Q Were there any other major factors that led to the chaos at the airport?

16 A Do you mean the chaos around the perimeter, or -- can you --

17 Q Well, the chaos around the perimeter, the chaos at the airfield. You
18 described the chaotic, you know, situation.

19 A Well, so I think everybody has seen the images of Afghans trying to get on an
20 aircraft departing, falling off, getting killed. Obviously, really chaotic images. I was not
21 at work on this matter at that time. I was watching that on the news.

22 Q And approximately, you know, how many Afghans were at the airport, you
23 know, attempting to evacuate when you first arrived?

24 A Can you repeat that?

25 Q How many -- when you first arrived, you know, in country, how many

1 Afghans approximately were at the airport attempting to evacuate?

2 A Do you mean inside the airport or around the airport?

3 Q Both.

4 A I don't recall the exact number inside the airport at that point. It was, you
5 know, I think, you know, somewhere -- I think somewhere still well under 10,000 that
6 were inside the airport at that time. Maybe 5,000. But this is a very rough estimate.

7 Q Sure.

8 A But around the outside of the perimeter, I don't know, but I think -- I think
9 thousands of people.

10 Q And of the people inside the airport, how many of those had been granted
11 access and how many had entered the airport without authorization?

12 A That, I don't know.

13 Q Were there issues with radar and other equipment at the airport not
14 working?

15 A I've read in the news reports that there were. My knowledge of this is
16 basically from open sources, reading about it, you know, that it's been reported in the
17 media that when Afghans entered the airport initially before it got hit, they destroyed a
18 lot of things, wrecked a lot of things. But I didn't have any personal knowledge of it.

19 BY [REDACTED]:

20 Q So I'm just going to backtrack a little bit. And please feel free to correct me
21 if I'm mischaracterizing any of the statements. But you said from the outset, sort of, it
22 was a chaotic situation, but our response was not chaotic. I just want to run through a
23 couple things.

24 You noted previously that there were evolving plans, that you weren't aware if the
25 NEO had been issued, but that you were operating as though the NEO had been issued.

1 You had two ambassadors on ground, one who had been brought in the middle of
2 evacuation, the other who was the chief of mission, who was reporting to D.C., and not
3 really managing the embassy staff at that instance. Empty planes. There was no org
4 chart in place.

5 A Sorry. Can you clarify about the ambassador not overseeing the chief of
6 mission personnel?

7 Q We can come back. Let me backtrack. The chief of mission and
8 ambassador that came in the middle of evacuation -- we'll get to that point after.

9 I just want to understand, how is that not a chaotic response? If you could just
10 explain to us how that wasn't a chaotic reaction on behalf of sort of the State Department
11 to not have an org chart, to have empty planes, to have changing strategies, to have sort
12 of an unclear chain of command as though -- that's what it sounded like to me. But
13 please feel free to --

14 A I didn't find the chain of command to be unclear at any time. The empty
15 planes was a -- was a -- it was an occurrence of something that was outside of our control.
16 We were on the ground, and we had no control over where these aircraft could land, you
17 know, once they got to the Gulf or to Europe or whatever.

18 So I think -- I think what you're describing is a chaotic situation and some
19 extremely challenging circumstances that we were working to address as best we could.

20 Q In your opinion, do you think additional planning could have mitigated some
21 of those issues?

22 A It's certainly possible. I wasn't part of the planning leading up to the
23 events. So I don't know what took place in that respect.

24 Q Is it -- and you're an experienced diplomat. You've been in many other
25 conflict situations.

1 Is it normal, as a characterization, to have another ambassador flown in the
2 middle of an evacuation?

3 A I don't know enough about evacuations. I haven't participated in a
4 previous evacuation, so I don't -- I couldn't comment on whether that's normal or
5 abnormal.

6 It's -- you know, as far as -- I mean, we have -- it's not so uncommon to have a
7 chief of mission and an ambassador in a country, and then another person of, say,
8 ambassador rank who is a special envoy or representative to come in -- fly in and out of
9 the country to do business on some specific topic. But that's not exactly what we're
10 describing here either.

11 So, you know, I think this was a -- this was seen as an urgent requirement in
12 that -- you know, in that another senior leader on the ground who could focus solely on
13 the evacuation would be helpful.

14 BY ██████████:

15 Q Was there a division of responsibility between Ambassador Wilson and
16 Ambassador Bass, and if so, what?

17 A There was a division of responsibility. Excuse me. Ambassador Bass was
18 purely focused on conducting the evacuation together with military colleagues.

19 I don't -- I don't feel like I could adequately describe Ambassador Wilson's role at
20 that point because I just didn't -- I didn't have that much visibility on what they were
21 doing day to day.

22 Q What was your understanding of what they were doing to the extent that
23 you knew?

24 A My understanding was fairly limited to those areas where I came into
25 contact with them. And so one of those areas that I coordinated with Scott Weinholt,

1 his deputy, was on staffing. And they had -- they had essentially the accountability of
2 personnel on the ground. They were tracking where our personnel were, how many we
3 had, who we had, what they were essentially -- you know, what their role was. We
4 were just -- we were just laser-focused on our task, which was the evacuation.

5 Q Was the division responsibility -- how was that reached, and when, and who
6 decided it?

7 A I don't really know. I mean, they decided at some point before the
8 evacuation to ask John Bass to go out there, but I don't -- I wasn't part of those
9 conversations.

10 Q Were you told -- you know, I guess, how did you learn, you know, this was
11 going to be Bass' role, and this was going to be Wilson's role?

12 A Well, I learned that Ambassador Bass was going when he informed me. He
13 informed me and one or two others that he had been asked to go. And then I think -- I
14 think in the -- you know, in the course of being briefed by the task force before I went,
15 you know, at that time, I think I was informed that Ambassador Wilson was still there
16 and -- yeah. Sorry. Go ahead.

17 Q No, no, no. You.

18 A I think -- I don't think it was a major topic of discussion.

19 Q And do you know if the division of responsibilities was formal or informal?

20 A I think it was probably informal but well-understood.

21 Q Who was officially in charge on the ground during the evacuation?

22 A Ambassador Bass was in charge of the evacuation operations.

23 Q Under an NEO, wouldn't the chief of mission typically be in charge?

24 A Probably so. But this made sense.

25 Q Why did it make sense?

1 A Because I think the -- I think our leadership determined that it would be
2 good to have a senior leader there who knew Afghanistan well and had a history of
3 working very well with the military and could focus his efforts solely on -- solely on the
4 evacuation.

5 I think -- and, you know, in fairness to Ambassador Wilson, he was there and in
6 charge for the evacuation of the embassy out to the airport and for intensive events
7 leading up to the -- to the evacuation, you know. So I think he -- my impression was that
8 he welcomed the support -- the additional support for this huge task.

9 Q Was Ambassador -- was there a lack of confidence in Ambassador Wilson by
10 department leaders?

11 A I don't know.

12 Q Was Ambassador Bass sent in because of Ambassador Wilson's real or
13 perceived efficiencies?

14 A I don't know. I was not -- I haven't been a part of any of those senior
15 leadership discussions.

16 Q What was Ambassador Wilson's reputation?

17 A I think very good. I know him. I worked for him on my second
18 assignment. So personally, I had and continue to have a very high respect for him.

19 Q Did -- how present and engaged was he during your time on the ground?

20 A Mostly -- most of the time, we were not physically located in the same place.
21 He and Scott did come over at least a couple of times and -- for meetings all together with
22 Admiral Vasely and General Donahue. And so, they did make the trip over for
23 coordination purposes, I think.

24 Q Was Ambassador Wilson generally a participant in meetings and discussions
25 with State Department leaders?

1 A Yes. I believe that he was -- I believe that he was on the interagency calls,
2 the regular calls that we did. As I recall, there was also -- there was also another regular
3 call that took place that -- I don't know who all was on that call, but it was at a senior
4 level -- that Ambassador Wilson generally did, I think, to spare Ambassador Bass having to
5 participate as well in that call.

6 Q And did you and Ambassador Bass, you know, generally have a good
7 relationship and good flow of communication with Ambassador Wilson?

8 A Yes. When -- yes. Whenever I needed to, I felt that I could contact him or
9 Scott.

10 Q You mentioned earlier that you were based in the JOC. Could you explain
11 what that is?

12 A I don't know if I can explain it in Marine terms, but it was essentially the
13 hub -- the command center for the Marines who were there on the military side of the
14 airport. And we were fortunate enough to get a bit of office space right there, you
15 know, as part of the JOC.

16 Q And where was it located?

17 A On the military side of HKIA.

18 Q And what officials were based in the JOC?

19 A Ambassador Bass and myself. And we had a -- we had our own private
20 office space. And then we -- but we frequently had others who were there with us
21 depending on the need. We had a -- we did have a DOD aide there whose name I can't
22 remember now. He was there quite often. And then we had a few different officers
23 who passed through and sometimes worked there alongside us if we needed something
24 done.

25 Q And who were the --

1 A I'm sorry. That was just the -- that was just our office. But we had -- but
2 Colonel Hardiman was also -- he had a -- his team was located sort of either in the JOC or
3 just off the JOC. Admiral Vasely and General Donahue were actually in a separate -- in a
4 different building but very close by.

5 Q And were -- what was the facility like?

6 A Just a big -- mostly a big open room with a few private spaces. Large. A
7 large open room.

8 Q So where was Ambassador Wilson and his team based?

9 A They were based on one of the ramps on the civilian side of the airport. It
10 was -- as I understood it, that space had always been considered in the event that we had
11 to depart the embassy location and basically position the embassy at the airport for an
12 extended period of time.

13 Q Was that known as the KAC, or the Kabul Air Compound, I believe?

14 A I think so. I think that's right.

15 Q And what was that facility like?

16 A Well, I only visited it once when the mission was done and we were waiting
17 to board an aircraft out, and it was more pleasant.

18 Q And how much interaction was there between, you know, you and
19 Ambassador Bass' team and Ambassador Wilson's team, you know, below the principal
20 level?

21 A Sorry. Can you repeat?

22 Q How much interaction was there between the two teams, Ambassador Bass'
23 and Ambassador Wilson's?

24 A It's kind of hard for me to say because there was -- among the teams, there
25 was some overlap. And there were some officers who actually spent the night on the

1 KAC and would come over to do certain tasks on the military side as well. So there was
2 a little bit of fluidity between the two.

3 Q And who were the overlapping individuals?

4 A I never had a great handle on -- I never had a great handle on where people
5 were sleeping.

6 Q And so, once you got -- oh, where -- were there other sites where military
7 leaders were based, beyond the ones that you mentioned in the JOC?

8 A Well, predominantly on the military side of the airport, in a number of
9 different buildings there.

10 Q And --

11 A And so, Admiral Vasely had his own -- had a separate building with U.S.
12 forces there, and General Donahue, and -- but there were different places and
13 servicemembers, you know, who were bunking in all sorts of places.

14 Q What about General McKenzie? General McKenzie?

15 A Yeah. I don't know.

16 Q Okay. And what -- so once you got into the country, what were the first
17 things that you set out to do?

18 A I think the first thing was to get somebody to show me the way to the JOC
19 and to try to meet some people and figure out who was there and what they were doing.
20 Talk to Ambassador Bass and find out what he needed done.

21 Q And what was his initial, you know, kind of brief and direction to you?

22 A I don't think I remember. I mean, we -- I think we just talked -- we talked
23 about the situation, but I don't remember what specifically he told me.

24 Q But what kind of were your initial taskings or initiatives that you undertook
25 when -- you know, upon arriving and getting situated?

1 A I think early on, I wanted to ensure that I understood the guidance and that
2 everybody there who was working understood the guidance. And -- but I -- I described a
3 lot of the work that we were doing already, but I don't really remember the very first
4 steps.

5 Q And what was the guidance?

6 A Well, the guidance was -- we were focused on -- our highest priority was
7 American citizens and helping their family members in their legal permanent residency to
8 the U.S. And, you know -- and we wanted to -- we wanted to ensure that our consular
9 officers had guidance as they interviewed people and could decide who to let in.

10 But when I hit the ground, I don't remember -- since I mentioned earlier, the
11 guidance changed at different times depending on the circumstances. I don't remember
12 precisely where we had set the threshold at that time for interviewing people.

13 But I think it was probably -- I think it was probably, you know, let in American
14 citizens. Let in LPRs. Let in, you know, Afghans if they've got embassy badges, if they
15 clearly work for us. You know, qualified SIV visa holders. Yeah. People of that
16 nature.

17 Q So, you know, you described how you faced a very daunting and challenging
18 situation when you arrived in the country.

19 You know, how did you work to address those challenges and mitigate them to
20 the best of your ability to accomplish the mission?

21 A By staying very lashed-up with our military colleagues. By communicating a
22 lot with our officers who were there from the State Department. By soliciting their
23 feedback and understanding what they were dealing with, so we could make adjustments
24 if we needed to. And trying to, you know, have some situational awareness of what was
25 happening sort of all over the enterprise, and being in close contact with Washington as

1 well. Being responsive in providing Washington information so that they could -- they
2 would understand what we're dealing with and could be helpful.

3 Q And what do you think were kind of the most important data points that,
4 you know, Washington needed to know, you know, for their decision-making?

5 A I think what everybody needed to know, not just -- I mean, certainly
6 Washington and all U.S. officials needed to know, and everybody else from whatever
7 organization was contacting us.

8 What they needed to know was, we couldn't just point somebody to a gate. And
9 that was -- and that was, I think, difficult for people who weren't there to understand that
10 people were frustrated because -- you know, they would send me a message that said,
11 Hey, so-and-so is clearly qualified to be evacuated. Why won't -- why won't you people
12 just tell this person where to go and how to enter? Just give a clear instruction on
13 where they come in.

14 And I think that was the -- that was the big misunderstanding that people had out
15 there, was that we didn't have a place that we could send them.

16 Q And why was that?

17 A Because of the mobs around the gate -- the gates.

18 Q And why -- why was it -- I guess, why was it unable to, you know, restore
19 order promptly or disperse or gain control of the mobs?

20 A Can you repeat?

21 Q Yeah. I guess, why was -- you know, why was the situation -- you know,
22 why did the situation persist, you know, where the mobs weren't able to be controlled or
23 dispersed?

24 A The situation persisted because -- because there were many, many
25 desperate Afghans who were trying to get into an airport gate who had -- who went to

1 the airport, you know, thinking this would be their opportunity to get in. And so they
2 were there by the thousands.

3 And I think the situation persisted also because the Taliban were -- even though
4 they were -- some of them were being brutal in the crowds, and they were beating some
5 people, and they were causing some trouble, they weren't actually willing to completely
6 clear out the area because I think that they were starting to think about governing and
7 reactions to if they were too heavy-handed. And so, they were not fully -- they were
8 not -- they were not effectively controlling the crowds outside the perimeter.

9 Q Do you have any insight into why the U.S. did not accept the Taliban's offer
10 to allow the U.S. to maintain security control of Kabul during the evacuation?

11 A Do I have insight into that?

12 Q Yeah.

13 A I don't have any insight.

14 Q Was that ever revisited during your time there, about the U.S. taking a
15 greater role in security of the area around the airport?

16 A No. I never heard that seriously discussed.

17 Q Did you think it should have been discussed?

18 A It could have been discussed. But I think it would have been -- I think it
19 would have been extraordinarily difficult to do, and it would have required significantly
20 more troops.

21 Q Do you think that -- had that been established in advance of, you know, the
22 chaotic situation that you encountered to where security was provided by the U.S.
23 military instead of the Taliban -- that that would have led to a less chaotic situation?

24 A I don't know. I think -- I think DOD or U.S. forces would have to provide
25 that assessment.

1 Q What was security like at the airport?

2 A Inside or outside?

3 Q Both.

4 A Inside the airport, I think it was generally okay. I didn't -- I didn't personally
5 see any serious security problems inside the airport. I think security outside the gate
6 was terrible.

7 Q Could you elaborate on that?

8 A Well, it was -- it was extremely unsafe, from our perspective, to be outside
9 the perimeter of the airport and anywhere around those crowds because there were
10 Taliban there not always behaving well, there were a lot of armed people, a lot of -- a lot
11 of gunfire. Mainly -- mainly, we thought warning shots from Taliban in a sort of effort to
12 intimidate the crowds.

13 And I heard reports that there were thugs and people that were just there
14 robbing -- people that had taken all their possessions that were trying to get out. And
15 so there were people taking advantage of them. And we had strong indications that, at
16 some point, ISIS was going to exploit the fact that there were huge crowds of people and,
17 you know, try to kill large numbers of people.

18 So we were warning -- we were -- you know, most of the time, we were warning
19 Americans and our priority people away from those unsecured gates. And that is why
20 we were instead working to develop those -- those more managed operations where we
21 could get them in through a safer gate.

22 Q You mentioned several times that the Taliban was being brutal. Could you
23 elaborate on that?

24 A Our servicemembers and others reported -- and it was reported in the press,
25 I think, very credibly as well -- that they were beating people with sticks and, you know,

1 just physically assaulting some people. They were also -- they were also searching
2 people as they went to the -- some people as they went to the airport. I'm not sure
3 exactly what they were looking for, but maybe evidence that they were, you know,
4 closely tied to us.

5 Q Did you interact with the Taliban, or did Ambassador Bass?

6 A I did not interact with the Taliban. I don't think that Ambassador Bass
7 interacted directly, but I don't know for sure.

8 Q Did he interact indirectly with the Taliban?

9 A Can you explain what you mean by that?

10 Q Either through interlocutors or -- you used the word "directly." So that
11 made me wonder, was there any indirect?

12 A It was General Donahue who engaged -- he was generally the person to
13 engage the Taliban. And he did so in close coordination with the rest of leadership,
14 including Ambassador Bass.

15 Q What were the security understandings with the Taliban?

16 A So I was -- I was not a participant in any of those conversations that General
17 Donahue had with the Taliban. Generally speaking, I think it was -- it was an
18 understanding that, you know, as long as -- that if they would allow the evacuation to
19 proceed on the terms that we were trying to implement it, that would facilitate our
20 departure from the country. And so, the Taliban had an interest in allowing us to do
21 what we needed to do to get folks out.

22 And so, that was the general nature, I think, of those conversations, but there
23 were more specific conversations as well.

24 Q Can you speak to those?

25 A Yeah. There was -- I recall there was at least one meeting in which our

1 consular chief who was on the embassy side, Greg Floyd, participated to show the Taliban
2 what certain documents look like so that when they saw those documents, they would
3 allow those people to pass.

4 And I don't recollect at that time whether that was a discussion of American
5 passports or whether that was a discussion of special immigrant visas or some other
6 document. I just don't remember.

7 Q Do you recall when that took place?

8 A I don't recall exactly, no. Maybe midway through the -- through the
9 evacuation.

10 Q And do you know if there were any, you know, specific assurances that the
11 U.S. offered the Taliban, you know, in exchange for, you know, perceived cooperation?

12 A I don't know. I don't know of any specific assurances that General
13 Donahue would have offered, except -- except, I think, a general -- a general
14 understanding that this is how we, you know, avoid an escalation that neither side wants.

1 [1:50 p.m.]

2 BY [REDACTED]:

3 Q And, during the withdrawal, how vulnerable did the Department perceive
4 the airport to be, both to, you know, conventional assault or a terrorist attack?

5 A During the evacuation?

6 Q Yes.

7 A Yeah. And, for me, by the way, when I say "evacuation," with my own
8 experience, bias, my bias from my own experience, I'm thinking of -- really of those, you
9 know, roughly 10 days. It was a little bit more than that, but --

10 Q What range of dates? What range of dates, to the best of your knowledge?

11 A For me, it was between roughly August 19-20 and August 29 I think is when I
12 flew out.

13 Q And is the scoping, you know, to, you know, your experience, you know, in
14 the evacuation, or are you saying that before you arrived, there really was not an
15 evacuation taking place?

16 A Well, Ambassador Bass got there before me, at least 24 hours, I think. And
17 so the evacuation didn't start with me.

18 Q Did the evacuation start with Ambassador Bass' arrival, or was it already
19 underway?

20 A I don't know. I don't know precisely when you can put a marker on the
21 start of the evacuation. The Embassy was evacuated prior to the -- to the evacuation
22 from the airport.

23 Q And -- but, in terms of the evacuation of AMCITS and Afghans, do you know
24 how -- you know, when that began?

25 A I think DOD could speak better to the depart -- you know, the departure of

1 the first aircraft carrying evacuees.

2 Q And to return kind of to the issue about the airport's vulnerability --

3 A Yeah. We felt that the airport was very vulnerable. So I mentioned
4 earlier that South Gate would normally have been the preferred entry point for evacuees.
5 I was -- I was told by military colleagues there that South Gate was difficult to manage
6 from a security perspective.

7 And whether, you know -- with all the gates, including South Gate, there was
8 always the concern that if you made a mistake in how you were managing the flow of
9 people or vehicles through then -- and too many people gathered or the wrong people,
10 you could lose control of that gate. It could get overrun, and it would be hard to retake
11 control. And that -- those considerations guided us in -- really in everything that we did.

12 So South Gate was seen as -- you know, a lot of people came in through South
13 Gate. And it was, you know, always cause for concern, our military's ability to keep that
14 managed and under control.

15 Q Did -- would it be fair to say that Hamid Karzai International Airport was very
16 much a suboptimal site from a security perspective, a problematic site from a security
17 perspective to conduct an evacuation out of?

18 A I think there were probably many vulnerabilities, but I don't -- but there -- it
19 had -- it had runways. So I'm not -- I'm not sure I could provide a better site.

20 Q Did you use at all or look at using other sites throughout Afghanistan with
21 runways and aviation capabilities to evacuate?

22 A I was not involved in any conversations about that.

23 Q Do you know if others were, whether in the Department or military?

24 A I don't know. I mean, there's always been -- there's always been public
25 discussion of whether Bagram, you know, could have been used. I don't know. It was

1 much farther away, which has I suppose some upsides and as well as downsides.

2 Q Do you personally have an opinion as to whether it would have been easier
3 to conduct the NEO out of Bagram?

4 A I don't know.

5 Q And, during your time, it was never -- the idea of going back to Bagram or
6 anything like that was never -- that was already off the table?

7 A It was -- yeah. I didn't hear it discussed as any sort of realistic option.

8 Q The Department listed -- the Department's after-action review listed one of
9 Under Secretary Bass' key duties as coordination with the military. What did that
10 entail?

11 A I think "coordination" is almost too soft a word. I mean, everything we did,
12 essentially everything we did we did together with the military.

13 Q And what were the most important things that you did together with the
14 military?

15 A Well, when we -- I mean, when we designed the operations first to bring in
16 the Americans through a different gate, by the way, and then bring in our local staff, I
17 mean, all of those -- all of those plans and designs were done together with the military.

18 We talked about all of those things. And we had to coordinate all the -- the
19 actions, the related actions, you know, to make those plans work.

20 Q And when were those plans put together and how were they put together?

21 A For me, they were -- sorry. Can you repeat?

22 Q How and when were those plans put together?

23 A Well, we're talking now about, I mean, things that we did virtually from start
24 to finish during the period that I was there.

25 Q So -- and, you know, when you say "plans," do you mean -- you know, did

1 you produce written plans, written products, or was -- or was this, you know, more oral
2 discussions on what to do?

3 A Generally, generally oral discussions. I -- yeah. I was not -- I was not
4 drafting anything. I was -- I might have taken some notes here and there to help me
5 remember things. But, basically, for me it was verbally mostly. For the military, it may
6 have been otherwise. I don't know how they were reflecting the plans.

7 Q Were they, you know, aside from, you know, yours or other's individual
8 notes, were they memorialized or distributed in any manner? You know, was guidance
9 given?

10 A No, no. Mine -- I'm not sure mine would be comprehensible.

11 Q And, you know, what would you say -- can you give us an overview of the
12 plans?

13 A Which plans?

14 Q The plans that you were referring to.

15 A To get different groups of people in?

16 Q Yes.

17 A I can -- I can describe what we did to get American citizens in, for example,
18 which I -- which I haven't done yet.

19 With the Americans, different from our local staff, because, whereas our local
20 staff knew a lot of one another, you know, and could organize together, the Americans
21 obviously couldn't -- weren't in a situation where they could self-organize.

22 So it was in close coordination with Consular Affairs back in Washington. CA
23 would handle the communications from there, using a call center in Washington to notify
24 Americans of -- you know, first find out, establish that they are in Afghanistan, generally
25 their whereabouts and whether they wanted to be evacuated and whether they would be

1 available during certain periods of time.

2 And then we identified a gate that was protected and could not be reached by the
3 public because the only way you could access it was through the Ministry of Interior
4 facility, which the Taliban controlled.

5 The Taliban indicated that they -- that they were fine with our taking our citizens
6 out with us. And so we had -- we had an arrangement, an understanding with the
7 Taliban that the Americans would show up in groups during certain periods, and the
8 Taliban would confirm, based on the document check, that they were Americans, or LPRs,
9 and their family -- and that they had the right eligible family members with them.

10 And -- and, once they had done that, the Taliban would let them proceed down
11 this secure corridor down to the gate where we would be waiting for the Americans.
12 And then we would take them in, and we would process and double-check that they were
13 who they were supposed to be and bring them in.

14 And we ran a series -- we ran the series of operations like this over several days,
15 you know, with the notification going to them inviting them to be at the MOI facility at
16 such and such a time generally if they want to be evacuated.

17 And the -- and the Taliban cooperated very well with that understanding, and
18 they -- they did their part of what we asked them to do.

19 Q There's been extensive reporting on U.S. defense and law enforcement
20 articles left behind in Afghanistan. Do you have any knowledge or insight into that and
21 to what considerations were given as to their disposition?

22 A I don't know.

23 Q What was your understanding of the rules of engagement and operation
24 during the NEO?

25 A The rules of engagement of the military?

1 Q The military rules of engagement.

2 A I don't know precisely, but generally speaking, we were seeking to avoid
3 open conflict with the Taliban. We were seeking to avoid incidents.

4 Q Were more restrictive rules of engagement put in place, you know, as a
5 result?

6 A I'm not even sure what I -- what would be meant by more restrictive. I'm
7 not sure what the standard is in that situation.

8 Q Prior to what had been, you know, in place before the evacuation.

9 A I don't know, because I also don't know what was in place prior to the
10 evacuation.

11 Q And what would you say were the biggest challenges for State
12 Department-military coordination?

13 A I think, at the leadership level, I didn't -- I didn't see the challenges. We
14 had -- I really had a lot of admiration for Admiral Vasely and for General Donahue and
15 Colonel Hardiman. He did a fantastic job. We had -- it was very, very smooth at the
16 leadership level.

17 I think -- I think in the -- you know, out -- out on the perimeter with consular
18 officers and -- and the Marines and other servicemembers who are out there, you know,
19 you had people working in -- I think probably the biggest challenge was just people
20 working in an incredibly highly stressful situation.

21 And -- and, you know, the Marines may not have always understood that maybe
22 some of the decisions our consular officers made. There were a lot more Marines than
23 consular officers, and that's not their usual line of work.

24 So, you know -- so I think just the challenge of people working as a team in a
25 highly stressful environment where -- you know, where people are moving fast and things

1 are changing quickly and guidance is changing and all those -- all those things.

2 Q And you mentioned a little earlier when you were talking about evacuating
3 the American citizens a call center that was focused on that. Could you discuss that a
4 little more?

5 A I don't know much about it. I was aware that -- I was aware that Consular
6 Affairs had a call center that was equipped to make this rapid contact with American
7 citizens so that, when we needed to notify them, they could do so quickly. But I don't
8 know how it was organized or precisely who staffed it.

9 Q And how many consular officers were on the ground during the evacuation?

10 A I don't want to give a -- I don't want to guess and give a wrong number. I
11 think that -- that Scott Weinhold or somebody from the Embassy presence would be able
12 to provide that number.

13 Q Did -- were they under Scott Weinhold or under, you know, Mr. Floyd and
14 Jayne Howell?

15 A You know, as I -- as I mentioned before, there were -- there were
16 office -- there were officers, you know, who might sleep and eat over at the -- on the
17 Embassy side and then come over and work.

18 There was some -- there was some overlap among the two different groups. We
19 just weren't -- we just weren't concerned about, you know, who sat where in the org
20 chart.

21 Q Well, did that ever lead to confusion?

22 A Not in my -- not in my view. That was not a problem. As long as, you
23 know, we -- you know, the -- generally speaking, the consular officers wanted to do the
24 work. They were there because they wanted to do the work. And they took direction
25 to go where they needed to go and to do the jobs that they were doing.

1 And, whether they were part of the residual Embassy element or they had just
2 flown in the day before, it just didn't -- it didn't matter to me.

3 [REDACTED]. So our time is now expired. It is 2:06. So we are off the clock.
4 Off the record.

5 [Recess.]

6 [REDACTED]. So we're back on the record.

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q I'm [REDACTED] from the minority staff side. Thank you again for being
9 here and for testifying voluntarily.

10 I just want to reiterate something my colleague said, that we welcome your
11 firsthand knowledge and particularly that firsthand knowledge that we wouldn't be able
12 to get from anyone but you, recognizing that, in some cases, you may provide answers
13 that are validating what you know from open source but, to the extent that you have
14 firsthand knowledge, we welcome your elucidating that knowledge for us on record.

15 Let me -- let me go back to a topic that we raised in the earlier round, this issue of
16 the presence of two Ambassadors on the ground in Kabul over the course of the time that
17 you were there.

18 You testified earlier that the role and the division of labor between Ambassadors
19 Bass and Wilson was informal but well-understood. Is that correct?

20 A Yes.

21 Q And I want to clarify what that understanding was. Did you understand
22 Ambassador Wilson's role to be those pertaining to chief of mission duties and managing
23 the Embassy staff who had been assigned to Kabul?

24 A Yes.

25 Q Is that -- are there any other aspects of his role that I've not characterized?

1 A I think there was more to his role, but it wasn't something that I was paying
2 attention to. So I don't feel that I'm in a great position to describe what -- what all he
3 did as part of his continuing role in country.

4 Q But, generally, you understood that his activities all pertained to chief of
5 mission duties for the Embassy that had been moved and reconstituted at HKIA?

6 A Yes, I think that's accurate.

7 Q And you understood Ambassador Bass' role to be leading the evacuation
8 effort --

9 A Yes.

10 Q -- on the ground?

11 A Yes. For the State Department, yes.

12 Q And did the presence of Ambassador Bass on the ground in Kabul have a
13 positive or a negative impact on the overall evacuation operation?

14 A A very positive impact.

15 Q And did the presence of Ambassador Bass on the ground have a positive or
16 negative impact on the ability of the residual Embassy to carry out its duties from HKIA?

17 A Yes, I think it did, because it freed up the Embassy to focus elsewhere.

18 Q Okay. Do you agree with the characterization made earlier that the fact
19 that two Ambassadors were on the ground was evidence of, quote, "chaos"?

20 A No, I don't agree with that statement.

21 Q Okay. You testified previously that Ambassador Bass was better than most
22 at the State Department in his knowledge and experience with respect to Afghanistan.
23 Is that correct?

24 A I think I said "better" than most of the State Department in his knowledge of
25 how to work with the military.

1 Q Thank you for the clarification.

2 A Which translated to the situation in Afghanistan.

3 Q You did. I appreciate that clarification.

4 But I believe you also testified that Ambassador Bass was the deep expert in
5 Afghanistan.

6 A No, I would not say -- when he took up his position there, I wouldn't say that
7 he was -- when I first worked for him in Afghanistan, I would not say that, when he
8 started that assignment, that he was a deep expert in Afghanistan.

9 Q Let me clarify. By the time that you joined Ambassador Bass on the ground
10 in Kabul during the evacuation, did you consider him to have expertise in Afghanistan and
11 on Afghanistan policy and operations?

12 A Yes. I mean, by virtue of his having interacted with all of the key players in
13 his previous assignment, you know, he had -- he had that incredible experience, yes, from
14 his time as chief of mission.

15 Q Okay. And, as you reminded me previously, you testified earlier that he
16 was exceptional in his ability to coordinate well with the military, correct?

17 A Yes.

18 Q And the situation on the ground, as you saw it when you arrived in Kabul, did
19 you believe that it required a strong ability to coordinate with the military and other
20 U.S. --

21 A Yes.

22 Q -- stakeholders?

23 A Yes.

24 Q Did you believe that it required a background and understanding and
25 knowledge of Afghanistan?

1 A Yes.

2 Q And you testified that Ambassador Bass had both of those things?

3 A Yes.

4 Q So is it a fair characterization to say that the situation demanded those kinds
5 of qualities, and Ambassador Bass fulfilled that demand?

6 A Yes, definitely.

7 Q Okay.

8 BY [REDACTED]:

9 Q I have one more question.

10 So you testified the roles between Ambassador Bass and Wilson were informal but
11 well-understood. Can you provide any reasoning as to why the roles were informal?

12 A When -- when I say they were informal, what I mean is that we didn't have
13 time to go through the normal bureaucratic steps right down to the online system that
14 we -- that we use to do performance evaluations and to identify supervisors in the online
15 system. And all of those normal bureaucratic steps that are associated with a normal
16 assignment I assume were not taken for anybody who flew out rapidly to join the
17 evacuation.

18 And so that's -- that is what I mean when I say "informal." I mean, we were
19 in -- "we," the State Department was in an extreme hurry to address a crisis, an
20 emergency. And so -- and so we didn't have time for those normal bureaucratic steps.

21 Q So is it fair to say that the informality was by necessity, and that was because
22 the priority was evacuating people versus creating org charts?

23 A It is very accurate to say that, yes.

24 Q Thank you.

25 BY [REDACTED]:

1 Q And I'd like to revisit the topic of the security situation outside the gates of
2 HKIA, which I believe you described earlier as terrible.

3 I want to be clear for the record. Was it your understanding that the Taliban was
4 responsible for controlling security in Kabul outside the gates of the airport?

5 A Yes.

6 Q Was it your understanding that they were struggling to establish that control
7 outside the gates of the airport?

8 A I would say they weren't establishing it effectively. Whether that was
9 because they were having a hard time doing it or didn't necessarily want to do it, I don't
10 know.

11 Q Or didn't have the capability to do it?

12 A That's also possible, yes.

13 Q And was it your understanding that this dynamic situation was unfolding
14 quickly, so their effort to establish control was happening in rapid-fire --

15 A Yes. It was -- I -- yes, that's right.

16 Q And so it was your understanding that the U.S. military's security role
17 stopped at the perimeters of the airport?

18 A Yes.

19 Q Did you have any firsthand role in U.S. military force planning or deployment
20 decisions that were made in Kabul at the time?

21 A For the evacuation? No.

22 Q But you understood that the U.S. military controlling -- or seeking to control
23 territory beyond the gates of the airport would require a significant increase in troops?

24 A That's my belief, recognizing that that kind of assessment really should be
25 made by the military.

1 Q And did you understand or believe that it would also entail a significant
2 increase in risk to U.S. military personnel?

3 A Yes.

4 [REDACTED]: Thank you.

5 BY [REDACTED]:

6 Q I did have a quick question. So there's been some discussion that perhaps
7 the withdrawal only really started upon Ambassador Bass' arrival in Kabul.

8 I have a kind of broader question. In mid-July, the Biden administration began
9 evacuation flights. Are you familiar with this program?

10 A If you're referring to the program for SIV applicants specifically, then I'm
11 somewhat familiar, yes.

12 Q Does Operation Allies Refuge sound familiar to you?

13 A Yes.

14 Q Is that the operation that is related to SIV holders, as you just said?

15 A I can't remember the precise name, but probably.

16 Q Okay. And do you know whether there was a strong demand signal for
17 Afghans for these flights?

18 A I don't know because I wasn't involved in the time -- at the time.

19 Q Fair enough. Were you aware as to whether these flights were leaving with
20 every seat occupied?

21 A I have no idea.

22 Q Okay. Fair enough.

23 I'd like to pivot back to -- you said a few times in your testimony that your primary
24 focus was on getting the right people out. Is that a fair characterization?

25 A Yes.

1 Q Could you define for us who you mean by the right people?

2 A Those who we were seeking to prioritize for evacuation. So we weren't
3 trying to remove just any Afghan who turned up at the gate or economic migrants or
4 those who didn't have any association with us.

5 We were trying to -- we were trying to assist, first of all, American citizens, also
6 legal permanent residents, our own Embassy staff, the staff of affiliated Federal entities,
7 USAID and USAGM and others, and also SIV holders.

8 And -- and -- and we also -- and also certain at-risk Afghans who had -- who had
9 done important work on -- whether on women's rights or human rights or different
10 activities, received grants from the United States or other -- other support from us, whose
11 work would put them at risk to the Taliban. So some of these other at-risk cases as well.

12 Q That's super helpful.

13 Could you define American citizens for the purposes of those individuals entitled
14 to evacuation from Kabul and to the United States?

15 A I'm not sure I understand the question.

16 Q Could you provide some context on who is a part of the group entitled to
17 removal from Kabul to the United States who is an American citizen?

18 A American citizens were entitled to evacuation support, all American citizens.
19 We also were supporting their -- as I recall, their immediate family members, including
20 spouse and children.

21 There may -- there may have been a distinction for children at a certain age. I
22 don't recall whether we applied that in the evacuation. But, as I recall, we were unable
23 to take, for example, aging parents that a lot of the citizens wanted to take with them.

24 Most of the American citizens in Afghanistan, as I understood it, were dual -- were
25 from Afghanistan originally. And so they had lots of family ties there and quite often

1 wanted to take extended family members, but we couldn't accommodate those requests,
2 and -- and, in some cases, did not take us up on the offer of evacuation because maybe
3 they needed to care for that elderly family member, or they had property that they were
4 worried about leaving behind, or whatever other personal reason.

5 Q Okay. And what was the messaging that went out to AMCITS in the lead-up
6 to the withdrawal, AMCITS being American citizens?

7 A In the lead-up to the evacuation?

8 Q Uh-huh.

9 A Well, there were -- there were different messages. I don't think that I
10 could speak authoritatively to all the messages that were sent out. I think that question
11 would be better directed to Consular Affairs at State.

12 The messages that I was most concerned with were those that were inviting
13 Americans to come for evacuation, to show up at such and such a place for evacuation
14 at -- during a certain window of time. But there were other messages as well advising
15 them on the -- on the threat situation there and other purposes for those messages sent
16 by Consular Affairs.

17 Q Okay. And did you ever personally see any messages that were
18 disseminated to AMCITS regarding the evacuation?

19 A Yes.

20 Q If I was to provide you with one, might you be able to identify it?

21 A I might be able to.

22 Q Great.

23 [REDACTED]. I'd like to introduce into the record, I think this is exhibit No. 2.

24 [Dehart Exhibit No. 2

25 Was marked for identification.]

1 BY [REDACTED]:

2 Q This is exhibit No. 2. It is entitled "U.S. Embassy in Afghanistan, American
3 citizens only." There is no date on it, but there is a map at the bottom of the page and a
4 few paragraphs of text.

5 Can you take a minute to review it?

6 A Yes.

7 Q Have you personally seen this before?

8 A Yes, I think I have.

9 Q Could you identify for the record what it is?

10 A It's a notification to the remaining American citizens from our Consular
11 Affairs Bureau advising them that if they wish to be evacuated they need to -- they need
12 to proceed to the point and to evacuate.

13 Q Thank you. That's very helpful. And, in terms of what we see on this
14 document in particular, do you see the map at the bottom?

15 A Yes.

16 Q And a phone number for emergency assistance?

17 A Yes.

18 Q Do you also see directions about where to proceed at the airport if an
19 individual is looking to be evacuated?

20 A Yes.

21 Q And do you also see in the third paragraph where it identifies what the
22 AMCIT needs --

23 A Yes.

24 Q -- in order to leave? And what information is that?

25 A Each family must have one U.S. citizen family member with a U.S. passport.

1 Q In your professional experience, would you identify this notification as clear?

2 A Yes, I would.

3 Q Do you think that it would be helpful for an American citizen to receive this
4 and know what to do?

5 A Yes.

6 Q How many of these are you aware of that went out to American citizens?

7 A This particular notice I don't know exactly. I think that we -- I think that this
8 may have been sent to -- actually, I don't know because, at this point in time, we were
9 focused on those who had not already taken us up on the offer of evacuation. So I don't
10 know what -- what the remaining number of Americans was at this point.

11 Q Is it fair to say that numerous of these notifications went out to American
12 citizens?

13 A Yes.

14 Q Do you have a ballpark number of how many would have been sent out of
15 this sort?

16 A Well, I think this was probably sent to hundreds of Americans.

17 Q And, in terms of the quantity of notifications sent, would it have been a large
18 number?

19 A Thousands, yes.

20 Q Okay. And do you recall the first time a notification was sent to an
21 American citizen about potential issues in the region and, therefore, a need to potentially
22 depart?

23 A I don't know what notifications were sent prior to my arrival in Kabul with
24 the evacuation, but -- but we sent -- or, rather, the Department sent a number of these
25 notices during the evacuation, these kinds of notices.

1 Q The kinds of notifications.

2 BY [REDACTED]:

3 Q Did you have a sense of any warning messages that had gone out from the
4 Consular Section to Americans in Afghanistan about a level 4 travel warning?

5 A I have no doubt that those were sent. And I have no doubt that we -- the
6 Department sent multiple notifications and advisories to Americans prior to the
7 evacuation, but -- but I was not involved at that time.

8 Q But was it your general understanding that the notifications or warning
9 messages that had gone out to Americans had directed them or urged them, I should say,
10 to consider leaving the country immediately?

11 A Yes, I am very confident that that is the case, that American citizens were
12 advised not to travel to Afghanistan, and if they were in country, yes, I -- I do know that
13 they -- yes, that they were advised to depart.

14 BY [REDACTED]:

15 Q And speaking of those travel advisories, as a supplement to specific
16 messages that were disseminated to AMCITS, are you aware of those travel advisories?

17 A I'm sorry, which travel advisories?

18 Q Travel advisories that advised folks in the country or the region to perhaps
19 depart, given security concerns?

20 A I -- yes. I mean, I have been -- I've been informed that -- that all Americans
21 were strongly advised -- prior to the evacuation that they were strongly advised not to
22 travel to Afghanistan or, if they were already there, to depart Afghanistan.

23 Q Okay. And, just to be clear on my end, I'm referring to travel.state.gov
24 travel advisories that are regularly posted by embassies. Is that comports with your
25 understanding as well?

1 A Yes, that's -- yeah. Yes.

2 Q Do you have an idea of when the first of those advisories was posted?

3 A No, but -- but we -- I mean, for as long as I can remember, we've advised
4 Americans to avoid travel to Afghanistan, given the risks involved.

5 Q And so it's your understanding that these advisories predated the
6 evacuation?

7 A Yes, certainly.

8 [REDACTED]. I'd also like to introduce into the record this exhibit No. 3. This is
9 a packet of security alerts. The first is dated January 17, 2021, and the last is dated in
10 March 2022.

11 [DeHart Exhibit No. 3

12 Was marked for identification.]

13 BY [REDACTED]:

14 Q I'll give you a minute to review these.

15 Do these advisories look familiar to you, generally speaking?

16 A The first one was sent, the second one as well I think, during a time I was not
17 working on Afghanistan. So I doubt that I've seen them before, but these are pretty
18 generally consistent with our advice to Americans.

19 Q Do they look like alerts that are typically posted on travel.state.gov?

20 A I think so.

21 Q Okay. So I'd like to --

22 [REDACTED]. I'm sorry to interrupt. I don't have a problem with this, but his
23 reviewing this comment is not a verification or a confirmation that these are authentic,
24 came from the Department. They just -- you showed him what you showed him, and he
25 says what he says. But I don't want anything interpreted from this about their

1 authenticity.

2 [REDACTED]: Sure. That was certainly not the implication.

3 [REDACTED]: I understand.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q The question was whether or not they look similar to other travel advisories
6 you have seen in the past.

7 A It looks like a State Department, yes, advisory.

8 Q Okay. Fair enough. But I'd like to draw your attention to the first page for
9 the security alert dated January 17, 2021. In the first paragraph, I'd like to read into the
10 record. There is an advisory that states for individuals to not travel due to crime,
11 terrorism, civil unrest, kidnapping, armed conflict and COVID-19. U.S. citizens already in
12 Afghanistan should consider departing.

13 Do you see that on page 1?

14 A Yes.

15 Q In the following paragraph, it goes on to say: Please help us to increase
16 enrollment in the Safe Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). If you know of U.S. citizens
17 who are not enrolled, please encourage them to visit step.state.gov and enroll today.

18 Does that sound right to you?

19 A It sounds right.

20 Q Great. So does this all comport with your understanding that, indeed,
21 there was notification, whether it be through a specific channel to alert American citizens
22 or through a travel advisory, that there were efforts made to notify American citizens
23 about the situation in Kabul?

24 A Yes, I -- there were certainly consistent efforts made to notify American
25 citizens about the situation throughout Afghanistan.

1 Q Do you think the efforts were adequate?

2 A Yes.

3 Q Do you think that there were multiple means of communication to reach
4 American citizens about the situation?

5 A Yes.

6 Q Can you describe the means in which the communications were
7 disseminated -- or the mode might be a better way to ask it?

8 A I think the -- I think the question is better directed to Consular Affairs.

9 Q Okay. Fair enough. Are you aware of emails being sent, for example?

10 A Well, during the evacuation, I'm aware of emails being sent to notify
11 Americans and to encourage them to -- to evacuate.

12 Q And would those have been facilitated by the STEP program?

13 A Presumably so.

14 Q Okay.

15 A I was -- I was not concerned with the mechanics of it as it was done in
16 Washington. More concerned by the substance of what we were saying to American
17 citizens.

18 Q Understood. But you were aware of multiple methods of communication
19 designed to reach American citizens related to the situation in Kabul?

20 A Yes. I would go further. We -- the Department undertook extraordinary
21 efforts to -- to reach American citizens. Even after they declined the opportunity to be
22 evacuated, the Department reached out to them again and again.

23 And this was the subject of a lot of interagency discussion, all of the efforts that
24 needed to be made to evacuate every single American who would like to be evacuated.

25 There were efforts undertaken elsewhere in the government to try to use other

1 means to figure out where these Americans were, their whereabouts, and do everything
2 possible beyond the normal notification and advisory system to figure out their
3 whereabouts and make sure that we were reaching every one of them.

4 So I think there was an intense focus on this.

5 Q Okay. So that's very helpful. You mentioned the STEP program and then
6 also efforts that were conducted outside of it to reach American citizens.

7 Can you detail any of those methods outside of the STEP program?

8 [REDACTED]: So I'm going to -- we have no objection to answering that question,
9 but the answer to that question could implicate classified information and would need to
10 be made in a different setting.

11 [REDACTED]: Understood. We can move on, if appropriate.

12 [REDACTED]: I'm just saying I -- he can answer, but I am not confident without
13 knowing what he's going to say that it wouldn't raise classified.

14 A Yeah. I think actually there's -- there are some unclassified aspects that I
15 could respond to --

16 BY [REDACTED]:

17 Q That would be great. We'd love to hear about that.

18 A -- which are there was -- there was -- there was data analysis being done -- I
19 can't describe how that was done -- but to try to pinpoint locations and numbers using
20 whatever data was available to the analyst to try to -- to try to pinpoint precisely how
21 many Americans there still were.

22 There was discussion of trying to locate via, you know, mobile phones the
23 whereabouts of people, to figure out how many were in Kabul or may have been in other
24 locations.

25 I don't know how people went about doing these things, but I know that

1 those -- those different approaches were either examined very seriously or they were
2 implemented to try to identify specific Americans, individual Americans.

3 Q Okay. And, once the contact point was made with the AMCIT -- and
4 unclassified, whatever you can disclose -- what were sort of the next steps?

5 A There was contact directly with Americans, I think, so that they could -- so
6 that someone in Washington could actually have a conversation to guide them toward
7 evacuation. And then there was also simply these email communications, notifications
8 encouraging them to show up at a certain timeframe to be evacuated.

9 The reality was that, when we -- when we did that, we never knew how many
10 Americans would actually show up in that timeframe. We were in a hurry, so we didn't
11 want to invite them to show up the following day, but, by the same token, if we gave
12 them an hour to show up, we didn't know how far they'd have to travel and whether they
13 could get there.

14 So we were trying to figure out what the right timeframe was and to do this over
15 and over again, and to each time after each notification and then we would see the
16 results of the notification. Then we would recalibrate to figure out whether we should
17 expand the notification to a higher number next time, whether we needed to allow more
18 time, or whatever adjustment needed to be made.

19 Q So, again, is it a fair characterization that the situation was dynamic and
20 evolving, and changes were being made in order to respond to the crisis in real time?

21 A Yes, that's exactly what was happening. We had to make -- we were
22 constantly learning and gathering and adjusting.

23 Q And who was making the decisions regarding these notifications to AMCITS
24 or the contours that underpinned the notifications?

25 A We were -- we were advising Washington from Kabul, and following coming

1 out of discussion with John Bass and Admiral Vasely and General Donahue. We were all
2 in these discussions together -- Jayne Howell, our consular leader -- on what was -- on
3 what would work best. And then we would advise Washington on when to release the
4 messages and what precisely they should say.

5 Q And so, from the initial messaging, do you feel that, as you continued to
6 refine, the situation got better and less chaotic?

7 A Well, the --

8 Q For AMCITS in particular.

9 A I'm not sure what you mean by "the situation."

10 Q So you testified that the contours that underpinned these notifications were
11 changing in real time. Was the outcome of that a more organized and methodical
12 means of getting AMCITS out of the country?

13 A Yeah. I think we were -- we were tweaking the system, learning along the
14 way, and -- and -- and probably being a little more effective as we -- as we went along.

15 The other variable was the -- was the Taliban's cooperation because, as the
16 American citizens arrived at the Ministry of Interior site, what we had hoped was the
17 Taliban would verify their citizenship and so forth, and then they would send them down
18 to the gate, where we could immediately begin processing them.

19 But that didn't happen. The Taliban held them all until essentially the end of the
20 time window. And so we didn't get an immediate feedback from how it was working,
21 not until the Taliban released them to all basically proceed to the gate at roughly the
22 same time.

23 Q How did you respond to that sort of holdup of AMCITS by the Taliban?

24 A There was -- I think that there was continuous engagement with the Taliban,
25 I think mainly by General Donahue. But, essentially, it worked. And the Americans, by

1 and large, who did show up with the right family members and the right documents
2 probably had to wait longer than we had hoped that they would have to wait but did get
3 through safely. And nobody, to my knowledge, suffered serious injury or -- or anything
4 like that. And so, essentially, the system worked.

5 BY [REDACTED]:

6 Q And, just to clarify, you said just now this effort essentially worked for
7 Americans who showed up with the right family members.

8 Is your understanding that the right family members were those relatives who
9 met the standard --

10 A Yes.

11 Q -- under U.S. immigration law --

12 A Yes.

13 Q -- to travel with them?

14 A Yes.

15 Q The AMCIT.

16 A That's right. The Taliban did turn away people who did not meet the
17 criteria.

18 BY [REDACTED]:

19 Q I also wanted to clarify. You made a point that you felt the evacuation was
20 successful for AMCITS who wanted to leave the country and also that a lot of that went
21 through the STEP program.

22 Is it true that Americans can't be required to register with STEP?

23 A An American cannot -- no, an American cannot be required to register with
24 the U.S. Government, and we don't normally track Americans.

25 Q So, for the individuals that did register for STEP, is it your opinion that there

1 was the successful evacuation of AMCITS?

2 A Yes. There was -- there was certainly a successful evacuation of AMCITS.
3 And I was understanding of those who, for whatever reason, may not have wanted to
4 take part in the evacuation.

5 But I do believe we gave every opportunity and took really extraordinary steps to
6 make sure that they had the opportunity to be evacuated if they at all wanted to.

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q You testified that the State Department did more than it usually does to
9 reach Americans, including these phone calls. You would characterize -- would it be true
10 to characterize that effort as unprecedented?

11 A I don't know if I have the knowledge of --

12 Q In your experience.

13 A -- of other evacuations, but it seemed unprecedented to me, yes.

14 Q And were there instances where you would reach an American and that
15 American would say, "I don't want to leave yet"?

16 A Yes, I believe that happened, or -- or they simply didn't show up when
17 invited.

18 BY [REDACTED]:

19 Q Great. So I'd like to pivot to SIV processing. What was your
20 understanding of the pipeline for eligible SIV applicants at the time you arrived in Kabul?

21 A What do you mean by that? Do you mean the numbers in the pipeline or --

22 Q Yes.

23 A I -- I don't know what the numbers were at that time.

24 Q Okay.

25 A Sorry. I think the number -- I think the number, the total number in the

1 pipeline who had just -- Afghans who had put in just that initial application for an SIV was
2 somewhere around 17,000, I think, but I may be mistaken about that.

3 Q That's a -- so I understand that there was a backlog of at least 18,000
4 applicants --

5 A Okay.

6 Q -- in June of 2022, and that the Trump administration did not make
7 addressing the backlog or surging additional resources a priority. June of 2020, sorry
8 about that.

9 Does that comport with your understanding?

10 A Can you give me the dates again?

11 Q In June of 2020, the backlog was 18,000 applicants. And so I believe that
12 you just testified it's your understanding there were about 17,000 applicants at the time
13 of the evacuation.

14 A What I can -- what I can report is that, from 2018 to 2019, when I was the
15 assistant chief of mission, I was also the -- the chief of mission approval of SIV applicants
16 was delegated to me as my responsibility. So I did those approvals. And I did not feel
17 that we were under-resourcing or lagging in our -- in our work to process SIVs.

1 [2:59 p.m.]

2 BY [REDACTED]:

3 Q Do you think that the large number of applicants in June 2020 had an impact
4 on your work on the ground?

5 A Probably not. I -- can you -- can you rephrase -- can you be more specific in
6 what you -- your question?

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q I think maybe we can back up. I think you --

9 A Uh-huh.

10 Q -- just testified that, from your experience in D.C. in 2018 and 2019 --

11 A Uh-huh.

12 Q -- and your concurrent role at that time as approver at the chief of mission
13 level of SIV applications to move ahead in the process, that you felt sufficiently resourced
14 and that you were moving at an appropriate pace. Is that correct?

15 A Yes. That's correct.

16 Q And are you aware of any slowing of that pace in SIV processing subsequent
17 to the time you're speaking of in 2018 and 2019?

18 A I'm not -- I'm not aware of a slowing of that pace after I departed Kabul.

19 Q Were you aware of a slowdown in -- I'm sorry -- a shutdown in in-person
20 processing of SIVs and other visa applicants at Embassy Kabul when the COVID
21 pandemic --

22 A Yes. There was a shutdown of many, if not most activities that was -- I
23 mean, the activities of the embassy, I know through personal contacts, colleagues who
24 were there at the time, those activities were extremely restricted. I don't know
25 what -- the details, but I'm sure that there was a big impact on the ability to process it.

1 Q And, going back to the time that you were in Kabul as the CM in 2018 and
2 2019, you testified earlier that the resources and the pace at which you were processing
3 these from the embassy was sufficient and appropriate. But is it true that you did have
4 a backlog to work through at -- in 2018 and 2019?

5 A Yes. There was a -- when I was assistant Chief of Mission in Kabul, 2018 to
6 2019, there was a backlog. There had been a backlog as far as I -- as far as I knew -- I
7 believe through most of the life of the program, there has been a backlog.

8 And I don't recall that I ever took sort of a holistic look to see whether our pace
9 was sufficient to meet that backlog at the time. What I was focused on, because it was
10 my responsibility, was I undertook an effort to try to reprioritize within the SIV program
11 who we were processing first.

12 And so, I worked with Washington to -- to reset the criteria, to adjust the criteria
13 that -- to ensure that we moved those who were most at risk to the top of the queue so
14 that we would get to them more quickly, because my main concern -- my main concern
15 was not so much the overall backlog, it was that I was seeing too many cases that seemed
16 to me people that met the legal requirement, but were not in any risk, the nature of their
17 work.

18 Q And just a couple more quick questions on this topic.

19 You testified earlier that, during your time as Assistant Chief of Mission in Kabul,
20 you managed and implemented, or assisted to implement some reduction in the staffing
21 footprint at Embassy Kabul. Is that correct?

22 A Yes.

23 Q And did those staffing reductions impact the SIV processing at post?

24 A I don't believe -- I don't believe that they did. We -- part of our discussion
25 was to ensure that there would not be an impact on SIV processing. I had also

1 recommended to Washington that we -- that we start working to offshore some of that
2 work, specifically to Pakistan, so that in the event, you know, that we, in the future, were
3 no longer able to process in Kabul, we might have some other offshore location where we
4 could keep going.

5 Q Of the staff positions that were proposed to be cut or were, in fact, cut to
6 your knowledge from Embassy Kabul, did they include consular positions?

7 A I believe that there were some consular positions cut, but I don't remember
8 how many.

9 Q Okay. And fast-forwarding into when you came to Kabul in 2021, what was
10 your understanding or how would you characterize the pace of SIV processing by the
11 Department at that time?

12 A I'm sorry. Can you repeat the timeframe?

13 Q When you came back to Kabul in 2021 for the evacuation --

14 A Oh.

15 Q -- what was your understanding of the pace of the Department's SIV
16 processing at that time?

17 A It was -- in the evacuation period, this was not something I was
18 looking -- following. I wasn't -- I wasn't tracking the overall SIV processing effort, so I
19 don't know.

20 Q Thanks.

21 A I was -- I was aware of -- I was aware of the additional program that had
22 been put into place to -- to bring, you know, those SIV cases who had reached the end of
23 the process directly to the U.S., right, to a military base in Virginia and to -- and to get
24 them out of Afghanistan, to get them there and finish the process. I was aware of that
25 effort.

1 Q And was your general sense that the Department was processing SIVs as fast
2 as it could at the time of the evacuation beginning?

3 A I just wasn't following it. I just didn't know at the time.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q Could I just ask -- I want to go back to your time in 2018 and 2019. I recall
6 in great detail that effort to cut staff at Embassy Kabul. And you mentioned that there
7 were consular -- members of the consular section that the staffing that was reduced
8 there.

9 A Yes.

10 Q Okay. And, if you had --

11 A I believe -- I believe so. I don't -- I don't recall what our final decisions were
12 with respect to consular staffing, but, yes, I believe they probably took some cuts.

13 Q Okay. And objectively and just --

14 A Yeah.

15 Q -- based on how visa processing happens, if you had more staff in Kabul, you
16 could make a greater dent in addressing the SIV backlog?

17 A It depends where the backlog is. I mean, there are -- there are multiple
18 stages in the overall SIV process, so it really -- so where you put your resources depends
19 where the bottleneck is in the process.

20 Q Okay. And --

21 A So fewer -- fewer staff at one phase of the process does not necessarily help
22 if the bottleneck is someplace else.

23 Q Okay. Thanks.

24 BY [REDACTED]:

25 Q Pivoting to a different topic, are you aware of any AMCITS who had indicated

1 they wanted to leave Afghanistan but remained in the country after the last flight
2 departed?

3 A I was not in personal communication with the AMCITS that we were offering
4 evacuation. That was done from -- from colleagues in Washington. I'm -- I'm certain
5 that there were some AMCITS who declined the offer of evacuation.

6 Q So I guess I'm referring to a population of individuals who wanted to leave
7 but remained in the country after the --

8 A Oh.

9 Q -- last flight went out.

10 A I'm not aware of any specific cases.

11 Q And do you think you would have been privy to that information if such
12 individuals existed?

13 A Yes. I mean, I think, if there were -- if we were aware of a group of
14 American citizens who were trying to get out but -- but couldn't get out, then -- then we
15 would have kept working to get them out. And in fact, we did. Following the
16 evacuation, when I took on the task force role, those efforts continued for those
17 Americans who perhaps didn't get out at the time or might have changed their minds.

18 Q So can you talk to us a little bit about that specifically since you continued to
19 be a part of the task force after your departure physically from Kabul?

20 A Sure. What can I -- what can I talk about?

21 Q So what was the process like to continue conversations with AMCITS and
22 remove such individuals from the country?

23 A Yeah. I would say that, at that point, the scale was much smaller, because
24 the main evacuation was complete. So, in the task force phase, which for me was
25 roughly September 8 or 9 until October 8 or 9, something like that, we were -- you know,

1 instead of talking about notifying hundreds or a thousand AMCITS at once, we were now
2 in the business of assisting one or two, maybe a family or something, in getting out.

3 So there was -- there were efforts working, for example, with our embassy in
4 Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, to try to assist those who felt that they could do a border crossing
5 by land.

6 But unquestionably, if an American citizen came to our attention, raised their
7 hand and said, We -- you know, we want to leave, then -- then the task force was going to
8 try to find a way to support that.

9 Q So, just so I understand clearly, you testified that, at the time of the
10 evacuation, there were thousands of individuals. Upon your departure, there were one
11 or two individual cases that you were trying to assist?

12 A I -- my sense -- at the end of the evacuation, my sense was that we had done
13 everything possible and reached everybody that was reachable to give them an offer of
14 evacuation. So I didn't leave -- I didn't leave with any knowledge of, Oh, there's still two
15 Americans here or two Americans there. I felt that -- I felt that we had completed what
16 we could possibly complete.

17 But, of course, then, on the task force, more cases came to our attention, I think
18 not surprisingly. My impression is there may well have been Americans who had still
19 decided to travel to Afghanistan possibly after the evacuation. So -- but if they appealed
20 to us for help, we tried to help them.

21 Q I see. So, just so it's clear for the record, is my understanding correct that,
22 upon your departure from Kabul, you were not aware of any AMCITS who remained in
23 the country that wanted to depart?

24 A That's correct. I was not aware of any.

25 Q However, upon you working with the task force in D.C., you became aware

1 of one to two, or a minimal amount of folks who remained in the country who wanted to
2 leave. Is that correct?

3 A Yes. Not all at once, but yes. Yeah.

4 Q And you were able to assist those AMCITS in departure from Kabul?

5 A Yes. I think in most, or perhaps in all cases, I think we were.

6 BY [REDACTED]:

7 Q I want to go back to just one earlier topic in this round. We had asked you
8 to help us understand what constitutes the, quote/unquote, "right people that you were
9 seeking to assist," and you clarified that the goal was not just to put any Afghan who
10 showed up at the gate onto a plane, but that you wanted to specifically assist American
11 citizens, LPRs, those with SIV -- those with SIVs and other at-risk Afghans.

12 A And our former employees.

13 Q And our former employees.

14 A Or our current employees, too, yes.

15 Q Thank you.

16 A Yes.

17 Q From your perch on the ground in Kabul during the evacuation, did you
18 believe there was a perception among the crowds that anyone who showed up and made
19 it to the gate could come through and -- and leave the -- leave the country?

20 A I don't know what the people in the crowds were thinking, but -- I can't
21 possibly know, but I would be surprised if -- if they hadn't been talking to others and
22 didn't know -- didn't understand it was a long shot, particularly if they had no
23 qualifications.

24 Q But was it your sense that individuals were coming to the gates and seeking
25 to be evacuated even if they did perceive it to be a long shot?

1 A Yes.

2 Q Okay.

3 A Yes, absolutely.

4 Q And did you have the sense of a perception among -- let me back up. Let
5 me rephrase.

6 You testified earlier that current and former high-level U.S. officials were often
7 reaching out to you with special cases that they wanted to seek --

8 A Yes.

9 Q -- the team's assistance on evacuating.

10 Did you sense a perception among advocates like those current, former officials or
11 other outside groups who were advocating for specific groups of people to be
12 evacuated -- did you sense that there was a perception that, if they made it through the
13 gates, you would unquestionably evacuate them?

14 A No. I think -- because I don't think they -- I don't think they
15 understood -- most -- most who were advocating didn't understand the situation that
16 well --

17 Q Okay.

18 A -- as you just described it. I think that -- that the assumption of many that I
19 heard from was that we had the ability to direct them to a gate where they could
20 routinely enter. And -- and many of them seemed to feel that, as long as a -- a seat on
21 the plane had been promised to them, then that was the challenge.

22 So -- so I had received many communications that said, you know, Everything's in
23 order, We have permission from X government to allow them into the country, We have
24 an aircraft that -- a charter aircraft that's come in, you know, organized by this group, the
25 person's guaranteed a seat on the plane, so we've solved everything, so please just direct

1 the person to the right gate, and then the rest is all set.

2 And -- and there were a lot of messages along those lines, and what they didn't
3 realize was that a seat on a plane wasn't really the issue. It was -- it was just
4 getting -- getting through the gate. We had far too many people that we wanted to get
5 in through one gate or another, and far less space to be able to do that safely.

6 Generally speaking, if you could get through a gate and you were in the airport,
7 generally you were going to be on a flight out.

8 [REDACTED]: Okay. Thank you. I'm at time. We'll continue.

9 [REDACTED]: Okay. We're off the clock.

10 [Recess.]

11 [REDACTED]: Okay. So let's go back on the record.

12 BY [REDACTED]:

13 Q So, in the last round, you discussed that you believed that any American
14 citizen who wanted to get out was able to get out by the end of the withdrawal, correct?

15 A I think what I said was I felt that -- that we had done everything we possibly
16 could to give every American the opportunity to evacuate with our support, and that I
17 wasn't aware of any lingering cases that wanted to leave that hadn't been able to leave.

18 Q Oh. So the House Foreign Affairs Committee found in its August 2022
19 report that more than 800 American citizens were left behind in Afghanistan, that, you
20 know, there has been extensive public reporting.

21 I'd like to now mark -- introduce exhibit 4.

22 [DeHart Exhibit No. 4

23 Was marked for identification.]

24 BY [REDACTED]:

25 Q So, here, we have an article from Reuters titled, "Over 1,000 Await Flight

1 Clearance to Leave Afghan City of Mazar-i-Sharif," which included a number of Americans.

2 How do you reconcile these stories and the -- you know, the committee's finding
3 of over 100 Americans left behind with your previous statement?

4 A Can I read the --

5 Q Yes. 100 percent.

6 A Okay. From the time -- from my period on the task force, I do have
7 experience with the various charter flights, the privately organized charter flights, many
8 of which did receive authorization to land, I think primarily in Qatar, with U.S. support,
9 but not -- I think not all of which did.

10 Q This demonstrates, doesn't it, that there were significant amounts of
11 Americans who wanted to leave Afghanistan before the U.S. fully withdrew and were not
12 able to by that deadline?

13 A I don't necessarily see it that way. The report indicates a thousand,
14 including Americans. It doesn't give a number of Americans. It -- and it's -- in the case
15 of these charter flights, one of the challenges that we had in my task force period
16 was -- was having some assurance of who was going to be on these flights when they
17 departed, and who was going to show up in the Gulf and come off of these planes,
18 because we had no way of verifying who was being manifested.

19 And, in fact, when some of these charter flights landed in the Gulf and the people
20 got off the planes, we found that a very, very small proportion of them were people that
21 we were trying to support to evacuate. A very small handful would be people -- were
22 people that we wanted to evacuate. The rest, in many cases, were people that
23 shouldn't have been on those flights. And we heard reports that they had paid to be on
24 those flights.

25 So, when I was on the task force, I felt very strongly about this in that support for

1 these flights where we could not verify who was going to get on them, where we did not
2 have trusted agents on the ground who could confirm that they were the people that we
3 wanted to help, that was a big problem.

4 And while we were -- and if we supported such flights without knowing if they had
5 integrity, the manifest, we were potentially inserting large numbers of people into our
6 pipeline who had no business coming to the United States, and who would likely get stuck
7 wherever they landed. But they would be our problem if we supported their travel
8 there.

9 Q What was the process for creating manifests for flights out of HKIA?

10 A During our evacuation?

11 Q Yes.

12 A I -- well, I don't think I could describe the process exactly. I think it was -- it
13 was handled by -- by our U.S. Forces as they -- as they filled up the planes.

14 BY [REDACTED]:

15 Q Once they got through the gates -- my understanding -- please correct me if
16 I'm mistaken -- is that the Marines were at the gates, and, once they got through, there
17 should have been consular agents -- consular officers --

18 A Yes.

19 Q -- checking their paperwork.

20 Did this happen in every instance, because, if so, I would imagine they would have
21 provided the necessary documentation?

22 A I would say that it very likely did not happen in every instance, because there
23 were also -- another dynamic at the airport was that -- that our servicemembers also
24 were being contacted with pleas for help. Our servicemembers had -- were in contact
25 with other servicemembers who were not in Kabul, who knew Afghans who may have

1 been interpreters for them at some point, or working for this organization or a family
2 member of somebody.

3 And -- and our servicemembers were also put in the position of being asked to
4 help a specific Afghan who showed up at a specific location. And -- and I would -- I
5 would be confident that there were many, many Afghans who came in by virtue of being
6 put in touch with somebody who could help them get through a gate, not necessarily a
7 consular officer.

8 Q I completely understand. I'm first generation. My parents are from
9 Afghanistan originally, so I guess I understood the situation on the ground.

10 I guess my inquiry was not necessarily what happened with Marines; it's what
11 happened thereafter. So once they got through the Marines, were there consular
12 officers, because my understanding is that was sort of their role on the ground? Were
13 the consular officers checking their paperwork? And if not, do we have assurances as to
14 knowing exactly who got onto the planes out of HKIA?

15 A Well, that -- that is why I point this out, is because, in this very fluid
16 situation, I'm confident that not everybody was seen by a consular officer. That was
17 how it was supposed to work, to have a trained consular officer who can examine the
18 documents, make a judgment in accordance with the guidance.

19 But -- but there was improvisation by other people -- other U.S. personnel who
20 were at HKIA who were taking it upon themselves, I think, with the best of intentions to
21 assist Afghans who, you know, they felt were at risk and who should be let inside. So I
22 think that happened a lot.

23 And so, you know, as a result, not everybody who then proceeded to the terminal,
24 which could be a multiple-day journey, and then got to the terminal and got manifested
25 on the flight -- I would say that probably not every one of those people saw a consular

1 officer before that happened.

2 Q And would you be able to speak to the lily pads? It's okay if not, but, sir, to
3 be best of your knowledge, were manifests for flights out of the lily pads created? So,
4 once they got through the lily pads, were they able to check their documentation there
5 and sort of ensure that we have all the necessary materials and know who these
6 individuals are, whether they come to the United States or not?

7 A Yeah. I mean, I -- I didn't go to any of the lily pads during that time, so I
8 didn't have any firsthand knowledge of how they handled those initial arrivals. But yes,
9 that was an opportunity to take a closer look at who was coming off the aircraft and to do
10 some vetting there of these people and examine before they got on a -- they got on the
11 next flight. And, in fact, some of those people did not get on the next flight to the
12 United States. But -- so were held back.

13 BY [REDACTED]:

14 Q Do you know the percentage?

15 A I -- I don't know the percentage, but, at one time -- at one time, the
16 population of Camp Bondsteel was, you know, in several hundreds. I don't -- I don't
17 know what it was in its max.

18 BY [REDACTED]:

19 Q Was the Department responsible for tracking these evacuees, or was that
20 the military?

21 My understanding was that there was some sort of tracking mechanism that was
22 put into place, but please feel free to correct me if I'm mistaken.

23 A Sure.

24 Q But I wasn't -- was the Department responsible for that, or was that
25 the -- sort of the military that took over that responsibility?

1 A The Department tracked it. The task force tracked the numbers that we
2 were moving. I don't know whether DOD was doing the same, but State was -- has been
3 doing that.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q And who at the Department was responsible for that effort?

6 A Well, it was -- it was the responsibility of the task force.

7 Q But was there a specific official on the task force that -- who had
8 management authority over that?

9 A I can't think of where precisely that was located.

10 Q Also, what percentage of the Afghans who got on the planes through the
11 evacuation would you estimate did not get screened by a consulate officer?

12 A I have no way of knowing or estimating that.

13 Q Can you -- can you give us kind of any sense of how large a population this
14 was, like dozens, hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands?

15 A I -- I have no way of calculating that.

16 Q Well, so, many people have suggested that the Afghans who were airlifted
17 out of Kabul were the, quote, "wrong Afghans," and that individuals without ties to the
18 U.S. were evacuated while Afghan allies who were seeking to evacuate were left behind.

19 Do you believe that's correct, or incorrect?

20 A I -- I'm sure that -- I'm sure that there were some people on flights
21 that -- that shouldn't have been on flights, but I think that's a -- a vast overstatement,
22 what you've just read.

23 Q How small the population do you think it was?

24 A I have no way of calculating.

25 Q And where did the direction come from on who should be evacuated and

1 what the procedure should be?

2 A Well, the -- the threshold for who should come into the airport and then get
3 on -- manifested on an aircraft was decided at a very senior level, and it was
4 communicated especially through the interagency discussions that we had, but also
5 reiterated, reaffirmed through a variety of channels from our senior leaders at State.

6 Q And, when you say a very senior level, who specifically would that be?

7 A Well, I -- I talked before about interagency meetings that resemble the
8 National Security Council.

9 Q Would that have come from the President, the National Security Advisor?

10 [REDACTED]: So, once again, the potential answer to that question, which I don't
11 actually know what Mr. DeHart would say, implicates content and composition of internal
12 matters that are potentially subject to executive confidentiality branch interests, and
13 really cannot be answered at this time without the executive branch reviewing whether
14 or not such an answer would involve those types of matters.

15 [REDACTED]: And, you know, we reiterate our earlier statement that, you know,
16 the witness has a right to answer if the witness chooses, and that this is a voluntary
17 appearance, but there is, you know, the possibility, if the committee determines it needs
18 information, that it cannot voluntarily obtain it, it may have to compel that testimony.

19 [REDACTED]: It may have to attempt to compel that testimony.

20 [REDACTED]: I have one follow-up --

21 Mr. DeHart. Could I --

22 [REDACTED]: Oh, please, go ahead.

23 Mr. DeHart. I understand, and I'm trying to be helpful in the response --

24 [REDACTED]: I understand that.

25 Mr. DeHart. -- that I've given you.

1 [REDACTED]: I understand. Can you --

2 [REDACTED]: I just have one follow-up question.

3 [REDACTED]: One quick --

4 [REDACTED]: You go ahead.

5 [REDACTED]:

6 Q Was there any guidance from the Presidential level on this matter?

7 [REDACTED]: Again, I would just restate what I had said previously. I just don't
8 want to run it all out again for the record.

9 BY [REDACTED]:

10 Q I just want to backtrack a little bit as to sort of the right versus the wrong
11 Afghans, quote -- put in this quote. But, given these moving goalposts, based on my
12 understanding, our earlier conversation, you know, there were different directions
13 coming at different times as to who should be let in, who should not be let in.

14 Do you think these, you know, moving goalposts likely by necessity, given the
15 changing situation, caused some confusion at the gate as to who could be let in, who
16 can't be let in?

17 A I -- I'm starting to regret my use of the term the right Afghans, because these
18 are all people.

19 Q Again, I completely -- yes.

20 A You understand the spirit that I'm --

21 Q I put it in quotes based on what was previously stated.

22 A Yeah. I -- I think that, yes, so the guidance changed as the conditions
23 changed and -- and people felt there was a need to change the guidance. And, when
24 you change guidance, you know, quickly, yes, there's room for misunderstanding. We
25 worked very hard to try to avoid that, to try to explain why we were changing the

1 guidance now, raising the bar, lowering the bar, the intent and the reasoning behind that.

2 You know, we -- we did our best to get the word out to our officers in a way that
3 they would understand it and be able to pass it along through the chain. You know, in
4 a -- in a situation like this, does everybody get the memo every time? No. So -- so, you
5 know, I have no doubt there was some misunderstandings along the way, but we did the
6 best we could to -- to keep everybody informed.

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q Do you believe that there were enough consular officers at HKIA throughout
9 the evacuation to execute the processing mission?

10 A Yes. Yes. We did not request -- we could have requested additional
11 officers. We did not request them. We felt that we had sufficient numbers.

12 Q Well, why did you feel that the numbers were sufficient and determine not
13 to request additional ones?

14 A Because we had to balance the work requirements on the ground with the
15 safety of -- the fact that anybody we brought in was being -- would be put at significant
16 risk in undertaking those jobs. So we tried to find the right number to accomplish the
17 mission.

18 Q Can you outline the chain of command from a consular officer on the ground
19 up ultimately through leadership at Washington to the ultimate level?

20 A Yes. So Jayne Howell was the consular -- she was the consular chief
21 colocated with us in the JOC, and she -- her deputy, Jean Akers, they both did a great job.
22 They reported directly to me and to John Bass. They were in charge of the cadre of
23 consular officers who were there on the ground. So generally, the instructions that
24 went to the consular officers generally went via Jayne or Jean or the two of them.

25 Q And were they receiving their instructions from you and Ambassador Bass,

1 or from the State Department in Washington, or from elsewhere?

2 A They were receiving instructions from us, Ambassador Bass and myself.
3 They were also in contact with Consular Affairs back in Washington.

4 Q And who from Consular Affairs back in Washington were they reporting to?

5 A I don't know the -- I don't know the precise chain that they were following,
6 but I -- I'm confident that they felt that if they needed to, they could pick up the phone
7 and call Assistant Secretary Rena Bitter, because she was directly involved virtually
8 around the clock, I think, on this effort back in Washington.

9 Q And what were the shifts and hours like for the consular officers?

10 A I think -- I think Jayne or Jean would probably -- or one of the
11 officers -- consular officers would probably have to address that. My perception was
12 that they work in shifts of roughly 10 hours.

13 Q And what were the consular officers' core responsibilities and duties?

14 A Essentially simply to work alongside the Marines, to be the adjudicators and
15 to make a decision on whether this person or that person could enter the airport and be
16 evacuated.

17 Q And how were those responsibilities and duties of the consular officers
18 aligned with those of the Marines, and who was responsible for screening
19 documentation?

20 A Right. The Marines were the first point of contact in general, and some
21 other servicemembers, too -- first point of contact to -- to make a judgment about
22 whether this or that person at the gate or in the crowd merited a closer look. And, if
23 they thought they did, they would pull them in, and then a consular officer would take a
24 closer look and really examine the documents. But I think the Marines and
25 servicemembers were probably also looking at some documents.

1 Q And did the Marines receive training or guidance from consular officers or
2 otherwise from the State Department?

3 A I -- no formal training, but I'm sure there were many interactions between
4 Marines and consular officers that were learning opportunities.

5 Q How did they -- I mean, did they receive any kind of documents or briefing?
6 How did they know, you know, for that first round of screening, what to screen for?

7 A General Sullivan was the Marine commander. He was also frequently in
8 our discussions and conversations. These were his Marines. So I have no doubt that
9 they were receiving guidance and direction from General Sullivan and his command team
10 as well.

11 Q So it was -- it was done principally through the Marine chain of command,
12 not through the State Department or Consular Affairs?

13 A Marines were receiving orders from -- yes, from their command. Our
14 consular officers were working with the Marines as a team.

15 Q But they did not receive, you know, any kind of organized guidance from
16 Consular Affairs?

17 A I don't know. There -- there may have been -- there may have been
18 additional steps taken by the consular officers or by Jayne or by Jean or others to -- to
19 support the work that the Marines were doing, but I -- but I don't know.

20 Q How often did you and Ambassador Bass meet with the consular officers on
21 the ground?

22 A We -- we were at the shift changes that took place roughly -- roughly in the
23 early morning and evening, and that's where we engaged, you know, as a group. But we
24 had constant interactions sort of throughout the day and -- and also when we visited the
25 gates.

1 Q And you mentioned the changes in acceptable documentation throughout
2 the evacuation. How frequently did the rules on what was acceptable documentation to
3 evacuate change?

4 A I'm not sure I would characterize it as the rules on acceptable
5 documentation, because a consular officer can -- can make a judgment, including based
6 on incomplete documentation if they -- if they think the person is qualified. But I think
7 the -- I would say, you know, probably a few times that we sort of reset the threshold.
8 Maybe two or three.

9 Q Okay. So you don't -- you would say that they were not changing on a daily
10 or hourly basis?

11 A Certainly not hourly.

12 Q And, when changes were made, how were they communicated to consular
13 officers?

14 A We would talk to -- to Jayne Howell or -- and to Jean so that they could
15 convey through that -- through that consular chain, and we talked about guidance as well
16 at the shift changes that I explained.

17 Q And who communicated the changes to the Marines?

18 A I think the -- I'm sure that our consular officers did in their interactions as a
19 team, and -- and I am confident that they received those instructions, too, from their
20 command. It was at one point actually that -- General Sullivan was a very active
21 participant in these discussions about threshold of people that we should be allowing on,
22 because he had responsibility for the security at the airport and around the airport, and
23 he was concerned about the numbers that were growing.

24 Q Was the decision as to who could evacuate being made on the ground, or
25 was it being made in Washington?

1 A It was fundamentally guidance from Washington. In some cases, though, it
2 was guidance in response to what we were telling Washington.

3 BY ██████████:

4 Q I had a follow-up question.

5 We've all seen sort of the harrowing images of, you know, babies being flung over
6 the gates, people who had been trying to get to the gates. Just to clarify, a lot of these
7 questions are operating on the reality that people were even able to get to the gates to
8 show their documents, correct?

9 A I'm sorry. The question --

10 Q So, at the gates -- at the gates --

11 A Uh-huh.

12 Q -- my understanding was that one of the greatest difficulties for even those
13 eligible individuals was to even get to the Marines, to even be able to --

14 A Yes.

15 Q -- show them the materials?

16 A Absolutely, yes.

17 Q Okay.

18 A Yes.

19 Q And my follow-up question was: Do you think, you know, being on the
20 ground is a very different experience than being at HQ? Do you think there was, at
21 some point, a disconnect between these changing orders coming from D.C. and what you
22 were seeing on the ground, whether it be at the gate, outside the gate, or within HKIA
23 itself?

24 A I don't think so. I mean, Washington was very responsive to the advice that
25 they -- that we were giving, because they understood that they weren't on the ground;

1 we were. They were -- they -- and one of the things that I appreciated when I was in
2 Kabul is that they were -- the willingness in Washington to defer to our judgment if we
3 recommended an adjustment of some kind, and ultimately -- I think it was -- you know, I
4 got the message again and again from Washington that we -- we understand you're on
5 the ground, we trust you, we trust your judgment, what you think, you know, the best call
6 here is.

7 BY [REDACTED]:

8 Q What were the considerations for the recommendations that you made?

9 A Can you be more specific?

10 Q As you -- as you were making recommendations on what populations should
11 and shouldn't be allowed --

12 A Uh-huh.

13 Q -- you know, at any given moment, what were the --

14 A Yeah.

15 Q -- considerations on that?

16 A The considerations included how many -- how many people we had already
17 in the airport -- in the airport, and whether -- whether we felt that population was getting
18 out of control and posing risks if we added more to those numbers. That was a major
19 consideration at one point to the evacuation.

20 Another consideration was the throughput and whether -- whether we, you know,
21 could -- could get people out on planes and knew that they would have someplace to land
22 so we could keep putting people on planes and have confidence that we would be able to
23 keep doing that.

24 So it was largely about, you know, population control so that -- right, so that we
25 didn't create a crisis in the airport.

1 Q Yeah. And can you give us a picture of how the eligibility evolved
2 throughout the time that you were there and what populations were and, you know,
3 weren't as you changed kind of the dials, so to speak?

4 A Yeah. I think -- and I think I described this before this morning, but initially,
5 in the early part of the evacuation, in the early hours, days that I was there, I know that
6 we were very generous in taking women and children who had made it to the gates, and
7 that there was not a desire back among our leadership to turn away women and children
8 who had been able to make it that far.

9 And -- and then we -- and then we tightened as we came to the conclusion that
10 we had to be more discriminating about who we bring in.

11 And then, over the days, the numbers on the airport just kept growing and
12 growing and growing and growing every day until we reached a point that General
13 Sullivan seemed very, very worried about where this was leading.

14 We also had, as another factor to consider, if you reach a certain number that are
15 sitting in the airport and the end of the evacuation is August 31st, at what point do we
16 have so many that we're not going to get everybody out of the airport? And we did not
17 want to leave anybody at the airport.

18 BY [REDACTED]:

19 Q Did the Department at any point defer to the NSC to define scope of eligible
20 evacuees to the extent you can in unclassified? If it's classified, we understand.

21 [REDACTED]: No, no, no. That question directly implicates information, calls
22 for an answer for guidance provided from the executive office of the President, which
23 may or may not be subject to an executive branch of confidentiality claim. And,
24 therefore, I'm not in a position to authorize, because we haven't consulted whether or
25 not what he would answer, which I don't know, would fall within a potentially protected

1 area.

2 BY [REDACTED]:

3 Q Was the ultimate decision authority within the State Department?

4 A In our country, the ultimate decisionmaking authority is not -- was not at the
5 State Department.

6 Q Right. Was the decision -- but was the decision on this coming from -- you
7 know, the final decision on the -- what populations were being allowed in at any given
8 point, was that being made at the State Department, or outside the State Department?

9 A I think -- I would say that the same authority did not necessarily make each
10 decision.

11 Q Uh-huh.

12 A At different -- at different -- there were different decisions at different times.
13 Not all of them are made at the same level.

14 Q Can you speak to which ones were made at the level of the State
15 Department, and which ones were made outside of the State Department?

16 A That's beyond my ability to recall.

17 Q You also spoke about kind of -- was it more of an issue of eligible
18 populations, or the specific documentation that was acceptable that changed over time,
19 or both?

20 A It's less about the documentation than about the person. There could be
21 an American citizen who turns up at the gate who has lost their passport or had it stolen
22 by a Taliban on their way to the gate. If their consular officer can establish with
23 confidence that that person is an American citizen, it doesn't matter if they have a single
24 document with them.

25 Q How would the consular officer establish that they're an American citizen

1 without documentation?

2 A Through -- through questioning based on their training and experience.

3 Q And was --

4 A And I'm -- I'm just stating this not as -- I'm not thinking of a specific incident,
5 but just as a general -- just as a general fact.

6 Q And were there changes in the guidance as to what documentation
7 specifically was acceptable throughout the evacuation?

8 A Again, Washington wasn't telling us, Only take people, you know, who have
9 this or this or this document, really. As a general rule, they were giving us categories of
10 people, right? We -- now, you know, focus on American citizens, right? That was the
11 initial guidance. That's your priority, put American citizens, also legal permanent
12 residents.

13 We -- I believe that we had a conversation with Washington about family
14 members and -- and who, you know, would qualify as appropriate family member to
15 include with the American citizen.

16 These were interactive discussions, less about documents, because documents are
17 tactical and can be delegated to the consular officer to figure out with their training, more
18 about -- more about the purpose of what we were trying to do.

19 Q How did eligible Afghans get inside the gates, especially if they had no
20 connections?

21 A If they had no connections?

22 Q You spoke about, you know, people being contacted through, you know,
23 various officials, various branches of government, VIPs, so forth. How did just, you
24 know, an average eligible Afghan get inside if, you know, they didn't have a connection
25 to, say, one of the Marines or consular officers working the gate?

1 A Well, those who had worked for us at the embassy were connected, of
2 course, to us, and we brought them in proactively. Some -- it -- you know, at-risk
3 Afghans who had done human rights work or justice work or whatever work in
4 cooperation with us, I think, you know, if they made it to the gate and could -- could raise
5 the attention of a marine and be seen by a consular officer, they didn't necessarily require
6 that they knew somebody first, but there were those targets of opportunity as well.

7 Q How were messages from the U.S. Government conveyed both to American
8 citizens, but also Afghan allies, you know, and eligible Afghans on the ground?

9 A Well, we had a couple of political officers who were in contact with our
10 locally engaged staff when it came time to -- to get them organized and move them by
11 bus into the -- into the airport. I think they did that probably -- they probably used
12 email, phone, maybe WhatsApp.

13 Q What happened when evacuees entered HKIA and consular officers who
14 screened them determined that they either were not eligible or, you know, were not, you
15 know, able to sufficiently authenticate themselves as eligible, you know, with
16 documentation or otherwise?

17 A If they -- if it was determined that they should not be evacuated, our
18 Marines escorted them out.

19 Q Can you explain what the hall pass was?

20 A No. I don't think I can.

21 Q Okay. You're not familiar with a document that was widely printed and
22 disseminated without specific identifying information? It was referred to as the hall
23 pass?

24 A Oh, I'm not sure I've heard it referred to as a hall pass --

25 Q Are you familiar with what --

1 A If you -- are you referring to the -- if you're referring to the -- to the
2 document that was sent out that resembles a U.S. visa to --

3 Q A document that was sent to a wide population and duplicated significantly?

4 A Yes. I think I know what you're referring to.

5 Q Yeah. So can you explain what that was and how that came about?

6 A I don't think I can explain much about it. It took place before I landed in
7 Kabul.

8 Q What kind of challenges did its circulation create on the ground for you?

9 A The document in question, since I think that we're referring to the same
10 document, was passed from Afghan to Afghan, and then many Afghans tried to use it to
11 gain entry. And so it became -- it became useless for the people that -- that were
12 supposed to receive it, and then problematic, since it resulted in -- in a larger number
13 trying to gain access.

14 Q Do you think that the consular personnel on the ground had the right
15 experience for such a high stakes and intense situation?

16 A I think that the -- the fantastic way that they worked and really heroic efforts
17 and -- you know, and what they accomplished demonstrated that they did.

1 [4:08 p.m.]

2 BY ██████████:

3 Q Can you speak as to how those who were deployed for the evacuation were
4 selected for that role?

5 A I don't know. I believe that most of them probably volunteered, but I -- I
6 don't know.

7 Q Was experience with, you know, similar high-stakes, intense situations such
8 as NEOs taken into consideration for that?

9 A I don't know.

10 Q Is it correct that a number of consular officials who had served at the
11 Embassy were sent home partway through the evacuation?

12 A I know that some were. I don't know how many were. I'm not sure
13 that -- but I'm not sure about the characterization of sent home. My impression is that
14 some may have indicated that they didn't feel that that was the right place for them and
15 should leave.

16 Q Okay. Were you aware of consular officials who had served at the Embassy
17 and, you know, had had no issues with performing the mission and wished to remain
18 being returned home partway through the evacuation?

19 A I'm not aware of that.

20 Q So it has been publicly reported that the CIA was more successful than other
21 government entities in evacuating its Afghan partners. Can you speak to that and
22 explain why that was the case?

23 ██████████: Again, I trust -- you know what you're doing. I trust you.

24 But I really have no idea what part of this could be crossed over into classified
25 information.

1 BY [REDACTED]:

2 Q Are you able to answer the question or address it at an unclassified level?

3 A I'm trying to think about that. I don't think I can, though.

4 Q Okay. And the -- can you speak to the F77 documents and the sufficiency
5 or insufficiency of those documents in enabling, you know, the officials leading the
6 evacuation to do their job and identify Americans?

7 A I don't recall ever seeing the F77. I was -- since I was not working on those
8 matters before I went.

9 Q Okay. I want to move on to the terrorist attack at Abbey Gate.
10 Can you please take us through the sequence of events leading up to the terrorist
11 attack?

12 A We -- we had indications that -- we had enough indications of a -- of a
13 terrorist attack in the near future, that we pulled back State Department personnel from
14 the gates not long -- not too long before the attack took place.

15 Q Do you recall at what point -- you know, how long before the attack the
16 State Department personnel were pulled back?

17 A My guess -- my best recollection is maybe a half day before. Somewhere
18 between -- somewhere between 4 and 12 hours. I'm not sure. And then there were
19 quite a number of us in the JOC when the attack took place.

20 So the duck-and-cover alarm came on, and then everybody suited up, and then
21 there was some information about follow-on attacks and things that turned out not to be
22 accurate.

23 And then we were -- then we were just waiting for a period of time, and then, as
24 soon as it was -- became clear that the attack was over, everybody just went back to
25 work.

1 Q And just -- can you clarify, what did you mean by "suited up"?

2 A In PPE and protective gear.

3 Q And how long before the attack had there been threat reporting suggesting,
4 you know, the risk of an immediate attack? And, you know, how did that threat picture
5 evolve?

6 A There had been -- there had been threat information essentially throughout
7 the evacuation. But it rose to -- it rose to a level serious enough that we felt that we
8 needed to pull the consular officers back in.

9 Q Do you have any knowledge of why the gate was not fully shut down when
10 the consular officers were pulled back?

11 A I don't. I think the Marines would need to answer it. But it was
12 not -- Abbey Gate was not much of a gate. It couldn't just be pulled shut.

13 Q What does -- what do you mean by Abbey Gate was not much of a gate?

14 A It meant that the Marines were separated and our consular officers were
15 separated from -- I don't know -- maybe a couple thousand Afghans by a metal fence with
16 a hole cut through it, a little bit of concertina wire, and a canal that becomes sort of a
17 sewage canal. So there really wasn't -- it really wasn't a gate, per se. The gate was off
18 to the side, but you could enter the area via the canal.

19 BY [REDACTED]:

20 Q Do you think better planning could have prevented this sort of scenario with
21 Abbey Gate not being a real gate? And I'm not even going to get into the facts of the
22 bombing but just sort of the security measures around the gate itself.

23 A I think -- I think this is beyond my ability to answer because I think the
24 Marines, the U.S. Forces, would have to make a judgment about whether that area could
25 be improved from a security perspective and how they would do that.

1 BY [REDACTED]:

2 Q Is it fair -- would it be fair to say from your assessment that -- you said it
3 wasn't a real gate -- that essentially, the Marines could not have vacated the post, you
4 know, while maintaining it as secure?

5 A Personally, that's my belief, was they probably did not have the luxury of
6 pulling back.

7 Q It has been indicated that Abbey Gate was kept open mainly to facilitate the
8 evacuation of U.K. forces and their Afghan partners so as not to leave the U.K. isolated at
9 the Baron Hotel.

10 To the best of your knowledge, is that correct?

11 A I don't know. I don't know. That was not my understanding at the time.

12 Q Were you ever made aware that one of the sniper teams believed that they
13 had made a positive identification of a suspected terrorist?

14 A I've read about that in the newspaper.

15 Q But not at the time that you were on the ground?

16 A No.

17 Q So, after the attack took place and you went back to work, what was the
18 decisionmaking response like, and what were the considerations on whether to end the
19 NEO at that point or not or make any significant adjustments?

20 A I don't recall any discussion of ending the NEO. I don't recall anybody
21 suggesting that.

22 But our consular officers -- I think to their great credit -- basically approached us
23 and said: We want to get back to work and go back out with the Marines and keep
24 working.

25 And so we took those -- we didn't -- we kind of moved in stages. They went back

1 to work in places like the terminal where they could -- where there was work to do as
2 well -- but didn't send them immediately back out to the gates.

3 But Abbey Gate did not reopen, to my recollection. At that point, a lot of our
4 energies were already shifting to the -- to the movements that we had -- the controlled
5 manage movements that we had going elsewhere. I think at that time, we were moving
6 large numbers of our local staff. So we really -- you know, and those were going well,
7 and we were moving lots of people that way. So, as I recall, we really focused on that.

8 And South Gate, as well, became a major focus for me together with the military
9 that were operating South Gate.

10 Q Can you take us through the sequence of events from the Abbey Gate
11 bombing and the timeline from, you know, your operations for the Abbey Gate bombing
12 through your departure?

13 A The sequence of events?

14 Q Yeah.

15 A I think the Abbey Gate bombing obviously put a -- put a chill on what we
16 could do at these -- in terms of targets of opportunity that I described before -- these
17 other gates, although I don't think that those efforts completely stopped at the other
18 gates. I believe -- although it wasn't really any longer my focus, I believe that some
19 Afghans still entered with -- you know, with the support of our servicemembers who were
20 in those locations.

21 But we then -- we continued and intensified what we were doing
22 through -- through that lesser known gate where we were moving our local staff. We
23 were starting to plan and take steps to figure out how we could move in the SIV cases
24 that had visas, hoping that we would have enough time to get to them. We didn't
25 have -- we knew that we wouldn't be able to do too many, but we were focused on about

1 800 people that we were hoping we could get to.

2 And then, as I mentioned, the South Gate became a real focus of our attention
3 because lots of people were coming in through South Gate, but it had become -- it had
4 swollen into this huge bottleneck, and people -- the vehicles, you know, previously might
5 have been waiting an hour or two at the gate. Now, they were waiting 12 hours in a
6 huge line, which was a security problem in itself.

7 I was in contact with people that wanted to get into those convoys and come in
8 through the gate. And so we were trying to regulate that together with the military as
9 best we could.

10 Q You know, I thought your comments on Abbey Gate were quite informative.

11 You talked a little bit about the different gates earlier in the morning, but could
12 you maybe run through the different gates in a little more detail and talk about kind of
13 their purpose but also kind of the physical setup and the various characteristics and the
14 role that they played in the evacuation?

15 A I visited either -- well, there was Abbey Gate, which was a particular kind of
16 mess because of the -- this vulnerability at the canal that came in where Afghans could
17 just come in, and then they were all -- they were kind of right there in front of the
18 Marines.

19 I also visited either North Gate or East Gate. I don't remember now which was
20 which. And that was a more -- I think I visited -- no, I visited both of them. And those
21 were a bit easier to manage, I think. And those were actual gates. Large, very heavy
22 doors that could, you know -- or turnstiles, possibly -- that could be some advantage.

23 Q And what role did each of those serve in terms of the populations and the
24 throughput?

25 A So, if I'm remembering the place names correctly, North Gate and East Gate,

1 they were -- they were gates where Afghans were -- large numbers of Afghans were right
2 outside the gate, and it was very chaotic outside the gate and all the awful conditions that
3 I described earlier. And then those were, you know, targets of opportunity if the
4 Marines could spot somebody who had made it to the front of the crowd who looked
5 legit.

6 Q And then you mentioned South Gate.

7 A South Gate was the main airport --- civilian airport gate, which should have
8 been the routine gate for people to enter the airport. It's the entry, I think, that Afghans
9 are most familiar with. And many, many people came in through South Gate. But it
10 was also a big security vulnerability and difficult to manage and --

11 Q Why was that a difficult security vulnerability and difficult to manage?

12 A I heard from the military that it was just difficult to manage from a security
13 perspective. I don't know -- I don't know precisely why that was. But the way it was
14 configured. And so there was always fear that -- you know, that it could be overrun, and
15 we'd lose control of the South Gate.

16 Q And what other gates were there besides those?

17 A To my recollection, the three -- the three gates that I have in mind where we
18 plucked targets of opportunity were Abbey Gate and North Gate and East Gate. There
19 was the lesser known gate operated by a different U.S. Government agency that
20 we -- that we brought in so many of our local staff. There was the -- the gate that was
21 accessible from the outside only through Ministry of the Interior where we brought the
22 Americans.

23 Q How was that -- what was that, the Ministry of the Interior gate?

24 A I think we usually referred to it as the Camp Alvarado gate. But -- yeah.
25 And then I think -- I think there were some -- there may have been some other small

1 gates as well. I don't know if they were functional or just sealed shut.

2 Q And then, for, you know, high-profile Afghans such as, you know, senior
3 military officers, you know, cabinet ministers, judges, how would you get them out?

4 A We weren't focused on evacuating senior government officials.

5 Q Yeah. People -- highly at-risk Afghans without ties to the U.S. Government
6 were not a focus of the effort?

7 A No. We weren't -- I mean, there were -- there were probably some who
8 came into the airport. But, generally speaking, we were not actively -- we were not
9 trying to -- actively trying to evacuate the Ashraf Ghani government.

10 Q And, in the evacuations, did you give any special consideration, you know, or
11 prioritization to women, given the threats that they faced from the Taliban?

12 A Yes. Yeah. So, as I said initially -- initially, the guidance that we had was
13 not to turn away women and children who had made it to the gates. And then I think
14 throughout the evacuation, women and girls got special consideration, even when we
15 raised the bar. And particularly activists who had done human rights work and gender
16 work got special consideration.

17 Q Were there other populations that were prioritized or got special
18 consideration, you know, throughout the process, whether American citizens, Afghan
19 allies, or just regular Afghans?

20 A Well, I think I described -- I described the priorities.

21 Q You have already given -- yeah. Okay --

22 A Hazara women also, because the Hazaras are discriminated against in
23 Afghanistan, and there is a greater proportion of Hazaras that are involved in human
24 rights work and advocacy and reform.

25 [REDACTED]. Okay. We're nearly at the end of this round. So we'll go off the

1 record and stop the clock.

2 [Recess.]

3 [REDACTED]: We're back on the record.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q [REDACTED] with HFAC minority staff. I just wanted to start with a few
6 clarification questions. Sorry. They're not all necessarily related.

7 Was the State Department responsible for any security decisions made at the
8 airport?

9 A That's very broad.

10 Q Related to the perimeter of the airport. Not including, you know,
11 diplomatic security that may be within the grounds.

12 A Well, we were involved in the sense that -- very much a part of the
13 discussions that we had together with military colleagues was with, you know, this
14 operation and this effort to bring a bus through such-and-such point, you know, how do
15 we do this without creating or exacerbating a security vulnerability? How do we do this
16 safely? So security is very much a part of every discussion that we had and everything
17 that we were trying to do.

18 Q Okay.

19 A But, fundamentally, of course, securing the perimeter of the airport was not
20 State's responsibility. It was the military's responsibility.

21 Q So then would the State Department have had any part in any
22 decisionmaking about when to close a particular gate or open it back up? And, again,
23 recognizing what you said earlier, that it's not as simple as closing and opening it up.

24 A Generally speaking, I believe that was the -- that was the call of U.S. Forces
25 or the Marines.

1 Q And, if it were to be in response to -- let's say after a period of time when,
2 broadly speaking, the mission at HKIA was aware of increased threat reporting that
3 suggested something was more imminent. So, after that time, would the State
4 Department -- would the State Department have to have an active role in deciding how to
5 reinforce the gate or how to increase security on any particular perimeter or plan better
6 for a potential attack?

7 A There's a lot there.

8 Q Sorry.

9 A But I think if the question is about physical security --

10 Q Yes.

11 A Again, that was a -- that's for U.S. military.

12 Q Okay. Was the State Department at any point, sort of in any way, inserted
13 into the military chain of command, just given, like you said, the cooperative relationship
14 there?

15 A Not the chain of command, but just the very close work that we did with
16 them.

17 Q Did the State Department contribute to the veracity -- to determining the
18 veracity of threat reporting?

19 A I don't -- I don't know. I think that we -- we talked about -- I think we
20 discussed the threat reporting that we saw with military colleagues and may have voiced
21 our interpretation or our judgment about its credibility based on our experience and
22 seeing such reporting in the past.

23 Q Meaning you might contribute your regional expertise or regional knowledge
24 to determine how to interpret a particular piece of intel reporting?

25 A We may have done that. Generally, though -- generally, I recall that the -- I

1 mean, that the threat reporting that we saw didn't require a whole lot of discussion or
2 analysis. It could be taken sort of -- sort of at face value. Well -- yeah. There were
3 other -- there were other pieces that did require, I think, our consideration about the
4 credibility of it.

5 Q And, in your understanding, that helped distinguish it from the previous
6 threat reporting that had been coming in at, as you described it, I think a fairly steady
7 stream across the -- across the time that you were there?

8 A I'm not quite sure what we're referring to now. Are we referring to a
9 specific threat?

10 Q Yeah. It sounded like you were referring to -- and correct me if I'm
11 wrong -- the threat reporting that ultimately preceded the bombing at Abbey Gate.

12 A Okay.

13 Q It sounded like you were describing that as being not really open to as much
14 interpretation or discussion.

15 A I wasn't referencing that specifically.

16 Q Okay.

17 A There was other threat reporting. I thought we were addressing threat
18 reporting in general. But, again, the threat reporting that we saw -- that specific threat
19 reporting was sufficient for us to pull back our people.

20 Q Okay. And just -- sorry. One other point.

21 Are you aware of any American civilians -- not including the servicemembers that
22 we know of who were killed in the bombing -- that were killed in the bombing at Abbey
23 Gate?

24 A Am I aware of --

25 Q Of any American civilians who were killed in the bombing at Abbey Gate, not

1 including the servicemembers that we know that were killed.

2 A Beyond the servicemembers, no, I'm not.

3 Q Okay.

4 BY [REDACTED]:

5 Q I have a few other items for followup, and then we'll, I guess, hopefully in a
6 speedy fashion, move through a few last topics for you.

7 I wanted to circle back to the issue of American citizens who may have wanted to
8 leave Afghanistan after the withdrawal deadline.

9 I should say, for the record, I think our majority colleagues referred to a figure of
10 800-some-odd American citizens, and they described that as the Foreign Affairs
11 Committee findings. I just needed to clarify that -- I'll let them confirm if they were
12 referring to a different source, but we understand that to be a figure that was part of a
13 report published by then Ranking Member McCaul on August 17th, 2022, entitled "A
14 Strategic Failure Assessing the Administration's Afghanistan Withdrawal."

15 And I just need to state for the record that the Democratic side of the committee
16 staff and then Chairman Meeks were not involved in the preparation of that report.

17 But I want to just confirm that we have a clear understanding of your previous
18 testimony. I believe you already testified that you became aware of American citizens,
19 after the withdrawal deadline, who after that same deadline, indicated at that point their
20 desire to leave the country, correct?

21 A Yes.

22 Q And that these numbers were onesies and twosies, so to speak? A few
23 cases here and there?

24 A Yes.

25 Q Okay. So, conceivably -- or presumably, there could have been Americans

1 inside Afghanistan prior to the withdrawal that were unknown to you. Is that correct?

2 A Of course. I would expect that there were American citizens who were
3 unknown to me.

4 Q And that there could have been American citizens, prior to the withdrawal,
5 who were known to you but who didn't want to leave at that time. Is that correct?

6 A Yes. Not known to me personally, but known to the U.S. Government, who
7 did not want to leave, yes.

8 Q Correct. And then, after the withdrawal deadline, any of those American
9 citizens could have then indicated to the U.S. Government an interest in leaving the
10 country?

11 A Yes. That's true.

12 Q Okay. Let me also go back to something you said -- I'm paraphrasing your
13 testimony -- with respect to individuals that were coming through for State Department
14 processing in HKIA.

15 You said not everyone was seen by a consular officer, and I believe you referred to
16 improvisation that occurred. So I want to unpack that a little bit.

17 Can you describe who was improvising, and what did that improvisation look like?

18 A Yeah. And bearing in mind that what we're talking about here are things
19 that happened that we didn't see. We're talking -- we're talking about things that I
20 believe happened --

21 Q Fair enough.

22 A -- but by their definition are outside of my knowledge.

23 Q Point taken.

24 A Yeah. But, for example, a -- I wound up in a conversation with a uniformed
25 member of Afghan descent who was either an LPR or an American citizen serving in

1 uniform there.

2 Q To clarify, in the U.S. military?

3 A In the U.S. military, who was there at the airport, who told me that a
4 commander had helped bring in his family members. And that -- that was a reminder to
5 me that things were -- obviously, there was a lot of -- there was a lot of things happening
6 beyond our viewpoint out of our visibility. And that was not surprising because there's a
7 lot of relationships that exist with a lot of different Afghans after 20 years of involvement
8 in the conflict there, and I think mostly are very well-intentioned to help people that are
9 at risk. So I knew that was happening, but I couldn't possibly -- I can't possibly know the
10 scope of that.

11 Q Were you aware of any instances when State Department officers on the
12 ground were asked by other U.S. officials on the ground not to process individuals or to
13 skip the State Department's part of the process and to let people through to planes?

14 A No. I mean, the original -- the original guidance not to turn away women
15 and children is, of course, broad guidance because that suggests that, you know,
16 documents or certain qualifications are not needed. We're just not going to turn away a
17 category of people.

18 But, actually, my personal guidance to the consular officers who were adjudicating
19 these cases was to use their best judgment and whatever decision they took. I would
20 support that, and they were, by definition, correct because they were -- they were
21 dealing with a fair number of gray areas.

22 For example, if a qualified family came in -- maybe a U.S. passport holder and a
23 couple small children, and then one sister and, in some cases, maybe a disabled extended
24 family member who technically did not meet the criteria. But if you -- if you evicted that
25 person from the base, the rest of the family either has to abandon that extended family

1 member who may not be able to fend for themselves or, you know, take them.

2 And so there were a lot -- I think plenty of instances where the consular officer
3 had to make a judgment call about situations where the guidance was not clear, or really
4 a strict reading of the guidance would say this person is not qualified and should not be
5 let in, but doing that would be wrong and counterproductive in that situation.

6 So I would say quite the opposite of your question. We empowered the consular
7 officers to use their best judgment, be humane, and, if they needed to bend the guidance
8 to do the right thing, they could do that.

9 Q Thank you. That's helpful clarification.

10 And just one other followup from a prior line of questioning. You mentioned
11 individuals who got to Camp Bondsteel, I believe, who weren't able to then travel further
12 because of ineligibility to enter the United States.

13 Can you explain a little bit more about those instances and the process for those
14 individuals stopped at that point?

15 A Right. Because the question was, what number or percentage of Afghans
16 didn't get to continue their journey off the lily pads all the way to the United States?
17 And although I don't -- I can't give a figure, I could point to Camp Bondsteel as probably
18 representative of that number.

19 If somebody -- if somebody at a lily pad in Germany or Italy or Spain -- once they
20 encountered a U.S. official and they determined that this person may not be qualified to
21 proceed to the United States, they need a closer look -- they're not necessarily
22 inadmissible, but they need further processing -- that that place for further processing
23 was Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo. And so hundreds were sent there for that further
24 processing. You know, I think many, if not most, have now departed Camp Bondsteel.

25 Q Okay. So, to the best of your knowledge, in instances where an Afghan

1 would have hit a pause in their ability to move onward at Camp Bondsteel, it was
2 generally because of the need to further investigate and clarify their admissibility or their
3 eligibility under U.S. law? Is that a fair characterization?

4 A Yes.

5 Q Let's pick up a thread that I think you started to allude to earlier when you
6 were describing, I think, the three lines of effort that occupied a lot of your time. You
7 described some of these special cases or priority cases -- priority groups that had been
8 flagged for you by outside groups or contacts not on the ground in Kabul that you were
9 tracking and trying to help facilitate the movement of. Is that a fair characterization?

10 A Yes.

11 Q Okay. So I want to get more specificity on that for the record.

12 Did you receive requests from Members of Congress flagging individuals inside
13 Afghanistan and requesting State's assistance for evacuating those individuals?

14 A I don't recall if I received those directly. But, yes, I think, indirectly, we
15 received some of those via the State Department.

16 Q And do you have a sense of the ballpark figure and the number of such
17 requests from Members of Congress?

18 A I don't.

19 Q Did you receive requests from outside groups, non-U.S. Government groups,
20 flagging individuals inside Afghanistan and requesting the Department's help with
21 evacuating them?

22 A Yes.

23 Q Can you describe or ballpark figure the number of such requests?

24 A Nongovernmental organizations? Private organizations?

25 Q Uh-huh.

1 A At least in the hundreds.

2 Q Hundreds of requests?

3 A I believe so.

4 Q And do you have a ballpark figure of the number of people that were on the
5 docket, so to speak, who outside groups had flagged that you were trying to track and
6 assist?

7 A It would -- it's very hard to assign a number.

8 Q Okay. Generally speaking, though, what percentage of your time on the
9 ground in Kabul was spent tracking and working on these special cases that had been
10 flagged by others?

11 A A very significant amount of my time because these were pouring in from
12 people that normally I want to be responsive to and also because we wanted to be
13 helpful if that person really does merit inclusion in the evacuation.

14 Q Okay. And can you give us a better sense of the work that you did to track
15 and assist these special cases?

16 A Unfortunately, in most cases, we were very limited in our ability to help
17 because we were -- as most of these came in, we were very much focused on American
18 citizens and then our local staff. And some of these people were the targets of
19 opportunity that we were able to get in at these various gates, but it was very
20 difficult -- and this was one of the most difficult parts of the evacuation. It was very,
21 very difficult to drop everything else and focus on one or two people and to -- and to
22 spend the time making the logistical arrangements to direct one or two people to some
23 spot where we might possibly be able to meet them and to get them in.

24 We were more focused on -- I was personally more focused on efforts to move
25 hundreds if not thousands of people, rather than one or two people at a time. And that

1 was very difficult because we knew that these were important people, but we just had to
2 focus on where we could help the most people.

3 Q So, to understand, you testified earlier that these sorts of requests were,
4 quote, pouring in. So there was presumably a large number of them. But the amount
5 of staff, energy, and time required to deal with any one of them was significantly higher
6 than other activities you were engaged in?

7 A Yes. Yes. It was more time-consuming, labor-intensive, to focus on one
8 or two people as -- you know, as much as they may have deserved the help. Which isn't
9 to say that we didn't do it. You know, members of the team did take that time
10 sometimes and were able to help people by the ones and twos and threes and to get
11 them in at various places, including at the lesser known gate that we were using for
12 our -- for our local staff.

13 Q So it sounds like what you're describing here is, I believe, that quality you
14 referred to earlier that consular officers were being enterprising, entrepreneurial --

15 A Yes.

16 Q -- creative in finding solutions?

17 A Yes. That's right. And they were trying to -- if they could -- if they could
18 help somebody, they wanted to find a way to do it. And, if they had a minute free that
19 they could work on that, they wanted to do that.

20 Towards the end, we -- I tried to come up with a more systematic way of gathering
21 and sort of prioritizing all of those cases and to inform consular officers and other
22 officers, you know, of who they were so that we could try to -- try to do more with these
23 targets of opportunity and recognize them if we had a chance, if we encountered them.

24 But that was -- that was challenging. We didn't want to make lists of these
25 people, which could inadvertently create a security problem for them. So it was -- it

1 was -- I found it very challenging to develop a systematic approach where we
2 could -- yeah -- turn them into a group rather than onesies and twosies.

3 Q Okay. And can you also speak to the way -- the mode and the frequency
4 with which you communicated with individuals who were advocating for you to assist
5 these groups? Were you staying in touch with them, exchanging information, giving
6 updates? Can you describe your communications with those advocates?

7 A Yeah. For the most part, I was -- I thought that the -- I thought the best
8 thing that I could do -- I think we all communicated a little bit differently. And all the
9 officers were getting these kinds of requests.

10 For me, I thought it was important just to give them the truth about it, and if their
11 expectations needed to be lowered, I thought that was the best thing I could do for them
12 so that they can -- so that they wouldn't have a false hope that, if they wait around, we'll
13 be able to help them later because, if they knew -- you know, if they knew that that was
14 unlikely, they could take other measures to protect themselves. So I just tried to be
15 painfully honest with them on what the chances were of our being able to assist.

16 Q Okay. And were you aware of any situations where outside groups or
17 Members of Congress or others pushed for people to be evacuated who were otherwise
18 not -- who would otherwise not have been eligible or prioritized for evacuation?

19 A Yes. I think there were many -- many people who -- I mean, there were
20 many people who contacted us, I think, with the best of intentions because they had
21 been contacted, and they didn't want to -- I think they felt an obligation. They probably,
22 in some cases, were worried that if they didn't contact us -- they didn't want to be
23 responsible for somebody getting hurt or something happening. So they wanted to
24 make that information known to us.

25 There were also cases -- I had heard from our consular officers that our consular

1 officers were contacted by important, powerful people who pressured them hard to help
2 certain people and gave them a very hard time. And that was -- and we -- we raised that
3 with Washington and addressed it and said: This can't be happening because, you
4 know, we -- it's not fair to our consular officers, and we need them focused on the
5 right -- the right work.

6 Q And did you get a response?

7 A Yeah. We certainly got a response. And I think this was addressed -- this
8 was addressed not by me directly but by -- probably by Ambassador Bass. And so I
9 don't -- I'm not sure I saw the specific exchanges. But yes.

10 Q Okay.

11 A Washington understood that this was a problem and knew that they were
12 trying to -- trying to tamp that down.

13 Q Okay. And, just to be crystal clear for the record, the reason that you
14 understand -- let me rephrase that. It's the end of the day.

15 It was your belief that the impact of these special requests, including some where
16 there was a lot of pressure placed on consular officers, was -- was that consular officers
17 had less bandwidth to attend to other pressing tasks?

18 A Yes. That's right. But, also, if somebody is throwing their weight around
19 and just putting pressure on somebody in an already incredibly stressful situation, that
20 was -- that was not fair or helpful.

21 Q Thank you. That's helpful.

22 A And so they needed -- our officers needed the support.

23 Q Thank you.

24 BY [REDACTED]:

25 Q I wanted to briefly draw your attention back to exhibit 4. It's the news

1 article introduced by my majority colleagues.

2 Do you recall having been questioned about this document? Do you recall
3 having been questioned about this document?

4 A Yes, I do.

5 Q And is it my understanding that you disagreed with the characterizations in
6 this document related to the number of individuals identified as Americans in Afghanistan
7 after the evacuation?

8 A I find the report ambiguous -- the first sentence -- about 1,000 people,
9 including Americans, have been stuck in Afghanistan. So it tells me very little about the
10 number of Americans that are purported to be stuck in Afghanistan.

11 Q Understandable. And I also -- if you could just read the second-to-last
12 paragraph out loud for the record. Sorry. The second-to-last paragraph on the first
13 page.

14 A "Reuters could not independently verify the details of the account."

15 Q Thank you. And, to be clear, you were on the ground during the
16 evacuation, correct?

17 A Yes.

18 Q And so it was your testimony that, while you were on the ground during the
19 evacuation, you were assisting with the evacuation of American citizens. Is that correct?

20 A Yes.

21 Q And then, upon your departure, you were not personally aware of any
22 American citizens remaining in Afghanistan who wanted to, in fact, depart?

23 A I was not -- I was not personally aware of any specific American citizens still
24 in Afghanistan who wanted to depart.

25 Q Okay. Thank you. I also wanted to go back to -- you had mentioned

1 previously there were evacuations conducted by private groups. Is that correct?

2 A Yes.

3 Q And when did you become aware of this?

4 A Most of -- most of my experience and recollection of that is during the time
5 on the task force. I believe I was -- I think those efforts were starting during the actual
6 evacuation, but it was less of an issue at that -- at that time. It was really much more of
7 an issue by the time I began on the task force.

8 Q And so, when you're talking about your time on the task force, are you
9 referring to the time period after you left Kabul?

10 A Yes.

11 Q Okay. And were any of these efforts represented as United States
12 Government efforts related to the private groups?

13 A Well, no. They were -- they were private efforts. I don't -- I don't recall
14 any of the private groups mischaracterizing them as U.S. Government efforts. However,
15 some of them were authorized in a sense by the U.S. Government. In some cases, the
16 U.S. Government vouched for a specific flight with a government so that it would receive
17 authorization to land there.

18 Q Could you unpack that a little bit just so we understand? Under what
19 circumstances would the U.S. Government have authorized these private groups?

20 A So, with Qatar -- the government of Qatar -- if it received a request from a
21 private group to fly an evacuation flight by charter out of Afghanistan, the government
22 was unlikely to approve that flight landing there unless they received a thumbs up from
23 the U.S. Government.

24 And so, in those cases, if we spoke to the Qatar Government or a different
25 government and said, "Yes, we -- we support this flight," even though it wasn't a U.S.

1 Government flight, we, in effect, were taking ownership of that effort. And it was
2 something -- it was something of a guarantee to the government that, if that flight landed
3 in Qatar or wherever, that those passengers would become our responsibility and not be
4 left to the responsibility of the government where they had landed.

5 Q Understood. So, just to be clear, these private groups were organized
6 independent of the State Department?

7 A Yes. But -- yes, they were -- they -- sometimes with -- sometimes with
8 significant, though, conversations and discussions. Generally, these groups would reach
9 out to the State Department or to the U.S. Government in some fashion to explain what
10 they were doing and to try to gain our understanding and support for what they were
11 doing.

12 Q So is my understanding correct that the efforts were independent; however,
13 in some circumstances, there was consultation with the United States Government?

14 A Yes.

15 Q Were there instances in which private groups were independent and not in
16 consultation with the State Department or government?

17 A Yes. I'm sure that there were.

18 Q Are you personally aware of any such group?

19 A I'm not sure if I can be aware of things I'm not aware of. My assumption is
20 that there were some private efforts where they did not try to reach out to State, but I
21 can't be certain of that.

22 Q Okay.

23 BY [REDACTED]

24 Q Of those that may have operated independently from the State Department,
25 are you aware of any such efforts where the private group represented it as a

1 USG-sanctioned effort?

2 A I'm -- yes. I'm aware there's multiple times where -- where I saw
3 indications that a group had told a potential host government that their flight had the
4 backing of the State Department in trying to -- I think in trying to persuade that
5 government that they should approve their flight.

6 Q But, in such instances, that was incorrect, and the State Department had not
7 offered its support to these flights?

8 A Yeah. I think that's -- that's right. There was some cases where the
9 private entity was -- was misrepresenting the situation in order to gain support for the
10 flight.

11 Q And, in such instances, is it safe to assume that the State Department would
12 not have known who was on the flights?

13 A That's probably the case, yes.

14 Q And would not have known how the flights were funded?

15 A Right. That's correct.

16 Q And would not have known any plans for the individuals on the flights for
17 onward travel to the U.S.?

18 A Any plans --

19 Q For onward travel to the U.S.?

20 A I think we would assume that their intent was to continue to travel to the
21 United States, but we wouldn't have -- we wouldn't know about their qualifications to do
22 so.

23 Q Or their potential eligibility or admissibility?

24 A Right. Yes.

25 BY [REDACTED]:

1 Q Just backing up a little bit, in terms of these private groups writ large, in your
2 opinion, what do these private efforts -- what impacts do these private efforts have on
3 the U.S. Government effort to evacuate AMCITS, those in the SIV pipeline, and other
4 Afghans at risk?

5 A I don't want to overgeneralize because I think that there was a range of
6 different groups involved in these efforts. Many -- many of our veterans were
7 supporting these efforts. I know that many of our veterans contributed financially to
8 these efforts. Some contributed a lot when they probably didn't have a lot to
9 contribute.

10 And so there's -- I think, you know, there's -- there's a very sad element to this
11 because I think people were doing -- wanted to contribute, you know, with the absolute
12 best of intentions to help Afghan allies, but their contributions did not always produce
13 what they were hoping it would produce.

14 I think some groups did better than others. I don't -- I don't have a good
15 understanding of the differences of these different groups, and there's some overlap
16 among them, too. So I couldn't possibly try to make value judgments about any specific
17 groups.

18 But I was very concerned during my time on the task force that too many of these
19 groups did not have proper control over who got on the aircraft. And so there was not
20 the integrity to the manifests. And that was true not only for groups that were outside
21 our radar or that we chose not to support, but it was also true for some groups where we
22 did go to bat for them with a host government like Qatar. And then, when those flights
23 arrived, we saw that what they had told us about the -- you know, the passengers on
24 them was not accurate, and that was a significant problem for us.

25 Q Understood. So is it fair to say that these private efforts -- some were

1 successes, some were not successes, but by comparison to the State Department's plan of
2 evacuating individuals, that was a well-organized, for the most part, methodically run,
3 and effective evacuation?

4 A By comparison? I thought -- I thought that our efforts were effective and,
5 by comparison, certainly more effective than most of these groups. And I thought
6 that -- although there were probably some successes among the private charter groups, I
7 thought that there were fewer successes than there were failures.

1 [5:07 p.m.]

2 BY [REDACTED]:

3 Q Fair enough. How would you respond to the assessment we've heard from
4 some folks that the NEO was essentially an evacuation of the well-connected?

5 A I think -- I don't know. I think the term "well-connected" can be defined in
6 so many different ways.

7 Q Do you have any thoughts related to the assessment that the evacuation
8 worked for specific groups of people who had status or privilege as compared to others?

9 A I think to be an American citizen is one of the best status and privilege that a
10 person can have, so -- so I can't really argue with that.

11 To be an Afghan working for the U.S. Embassy in Kabul is a status and privilege
12 that most Afghans could only dream of. So, in that sense, those people -- people
13 are -- do have status in their country.

14 Q So would you say that the assessment done to evacuate individuals was fair?

15 A I'm sorry. Can you repeat that?

16 Q Is your -- from your experience, do you feel that the criteria provided to
17 Consular Affairs in order to determine eligibility for the evacuation was fair?

18 A Yes. I feel that we were -- we were focused. We were prioritizing the
19 groups we needed to prioritize, yes.

20 Q Okay. And do you believe that the evacuation of any special request or
21 individual priority cases came at the expense of evacuating other AMCITS, those in the SIV
22 pipeline or at-risk Afghans who were seeking to leave?

23 A Clearly, American citizens were at the top of the list, and so they were
24 not -- there was no other group that crowded out our focus on American citizens or legal
25 permanent residents. And -- and our locally employed staff as well were very high

1 priority.

2 But the fact is that there were tradeoffs, and we did prioritize different people and
3 different groups. We didn't want to deprioritize anybody, but we did prioritize certain
4 groups.

5 And so, American citizens, for example, came before SIV holders. And those
6 are -- those were tradeoffs. And we had -- we didn't have enough -- we didn't have
7 enough time or bandwidth to do everybody we would have liked to do.

8 Q Understood. And pivoting to a different topic, were you involved in the
9 drafting of the State Department's after-action report?

10 A I was not involved in the drafting. I was interviewed for it, though, as part
11 of the AAR.

12 Q Okay. And in terms of the interview, did you have any other researching
13 responsibilities or hand in the AAR?

14 A No, I did not.

15 Q And did you sit for one interview or multiple?

16 A I sat for one interview, and then I had a follow-up conversation with
17 Ambassador Dan Smith.

18 Q Okay.

19 A Just with him. I don't -- I'm -- I'm trying to remember whether I -- whether
20 he asked me to submit anything in writing after the interview, but I don't think so.

21 Q Okay. Have you reviewed the AAR?

22 A No.

23 Q Do you have any reason to dispute the credibility of its findings, to the
24 extent you know them?

25 A I have respect and trust in Dan Smith, so I assume that he did a good job.

1 But I have -- I have not seen it, so I don't know.

2 Q What information informs that trust of Dan Smith?

3 A What I know of his reputation and my meetings with him in the past.

4 Q Have you had individualized interactions with him?

5 A Yes.

6 Q Where you've seen him perform to the best of his abilities?

7 A Yes, when I was the Arctic coordinator and he was -- he was covering the
8 Deputy Secretary position for a period of time. I think that was -- that was the job.

9 Q Did you see him display critical thinking and judgment?

10 A Yes.

11 Q And objectivity?

12 A Yes.

13 Q Okay.

14 [REDACTED]. That's all from us.

15 [Discussion held off the record.]

16 [REDACTED]. We are back on the record. It's 5:12 p.m.

17 BY [REDACTED]:

18 Q Sir, my name is [REDACTED]. I'm [REDACTED] for Chairman
19 McCaul.

20 I'd first like to state for the record we appreciate your patience in taking your day
21 to answer our questions and answering them to the best of your ability. We all
22 appreciate that.

23 I'd like to follow up on just a line of questioning that my colleague asked, which
24 was about whether or not you and Ambassador Bass had been sort of integrated into or
25 operating above the military chain of command.

1 It is my recollection that you answered that no, you were not formally integrated
2 into that chain of command. Is that correct?

3 A That is correct. Working together as a team.

4 Q Right. Would you perhaps elaborate on that? I think there is some
5 question, and you had said earlier in this interview that you were operating as if it were a
6 NEO, though you were unsure whether a NEO had been officially called. Would you be
7 able to clarify that statement?

8 A Yeah. I think I'm just a little unsure about the line of questioning, because
9 there may be some technical aspects of -- of what makes something officially, formally a
10 NEO. And I don't know what those are, so I don't feel comfortable stating for the record
11 if -- you know, mechanisms that I'm not familiar with.

12 It -- it wasn't relevant to me. We were -- we were conducting an evacuation.

13 Q Okay.

14 A We can call it a NEO. We can call it an evacuation. We can call it any
15 number of things, but I knew what we were doing there.

16 Q Okay. So in the absence of, you know, sort of understanding whether a
17 NEO was officially initiated or operational or not, your understanding of your task was to
18 work very closely with Ambassador Bass and the military. And it does seem to be that
19 he was brought in for that particular task. Is that correct?

20 A Yes, that's right.

21 Q Would you be able to elaborate on where you and Ambassador Bass sort of
22 entered the conversation with the military and where your feedback was provided to
23 them and they provided information to you to help you carry out your mission?

24 A Sure. And since he arrived before me, he had already established that
25 relationship with -- with the military leadership before I entered the picture. But it was

1 just collaborative.

2 So, you know, I think we're -- we're comfortable -- we're comfortable at State with
3 fluid arrangements without -- you know, without worrying perhaps so much about org
4 charts or chain of command, but simply to accomplish the task.

5 And so we just -- I think for every important development or decision or
6 recommendation, we had those conversations as a group all the time. If we -- if
7 Ambassador Bass wanted to talk about something serious, then we -- you know, we tried
8 to get Admiral Vasely into the room and General Donahue and Colonel Hardiman and
9 Jayne Howell, consular leader, and try to -- try to do it together, because everybody
10 has -- everybody had input. Everybody had really important input.

11 Q Would it be fair then to characterize that your involvement with the military
12 leadership was a partnership, but that ultimate decision-making authority remained at
13 the military level when we were discussing things, such as maybe base security, gate
14 access, on-base security, after we've gotten past the gates, military flight coordination,
15 sort of all of those fundamental operations happening on base, the chain of command or
16 those in charge were still military leadership, and you played more of an -- I do not
17 downplay it, but adviser or sort of collaborator/partner role?

18 A I would say that the State Department had its responsibilities. The military
19 had its responsibilities. And the reason it worked well was because we respected each
20 other's authorities and responsibilities. So somebody like John Bass, who's worked a
21 long time with the military --

22 Q Right.

23 A -- knows instinctively what is in their responsibility and is not going to
24 challenge them on if they want to make this security decision, force protection decision
25 or whatever.

1 But at the same time, they clearly looked to the State Department and to our
2 consular officers to make the determination about who could have entered the airport,
3 for example.

4 Q Right.

5 A And that was where civilian lead came in. So it wasn't for a Marine to
6 overrule a consular officer and say, No, we're in charge here. So, you know, I mean, the
7 Civ-Mil works -- cooperation works best when you just know instinctively what each party
8 is responsible for and respect that, and then just work together to achieve the goal.

9 Q To that end, your colocation in the JOC seems to have been a value-add for
10 that relationship. Is that correct?

11 A Definitely, yes.

12 Q Was there any value lost in Chief of Mission Wilson and other colleagues
13 being located on the other side of the airport? Did physical distance play a role in any
14 level of communication difficulties or breakdown?

15 A I think it would have been easier if we were all located together.

16 Q Okay. Was there -- would you be able to provide some light, though -- that
17 decision was probably made before you got there -- as to how --

18 A Yes.

19 Q -- the base was broken up?

20 A Yes.

21 Q Or was that -- that had been baked when you arrived, you just had to deal
22 with it?

23 A That's right. It was already set up that way when we arrived. And I
24 understood why it was. It was because that where the embassy had located to had -- I
25 knew had involved some previous planning, because some of that planning even took

1 place when I was there from 2018 to 2019, knowing that there might come a time that
2 we need to relocate a residual presence to the airport.

3 And so -- so my understanding is that's what they executed and that's why they
4 wound up over there. But -- but for the evacuation, apparently it was decided before I
5 got involved that they would be colocated with the military. And I was thankful for that.

6 Q Can you point to any specific examples of where the logistical implications of
7 sort of the distance between decision-makers and different roles and responsibilities may
8 have impacted the mission?

9 A Well, you know, if you have to get from one place to another, you can't walk.
10 So there is just the inefficiency of the time to travel from one place to the other, which
11 ultimately is probably why I never went over to the embassy side was I was too busy and I
12 didn't think that it was a good use of my time to make the trip over there. And mobile
13 phone communications were a little rough, so --

14 Q For context, can you give us a rough estimation of how long it would take
15 you? You are traversing an active runway and dealing with safe operations on the
16 ground, so I understand it might take longer than just driving.

17 A Well, the drive itself was probably, I don't know, 5 minutes. But -- but, you
18 know, I was -- there was a need for a driver, rally some security. I don't really know,
19 because I didn't do it until the end, and then the circumstances, I think, were a little
20 different.

21 Q Turning to the entry point for American citizens through the Ministry of the
22 Interior gate, this gate that was on there, I believe you had testified earlier that the
23 Ministry of the Interior was controlled by the Taliban. Is that correct?

24 A Yes.

25 Q How was the establishment of that relationship maintained throughout the

1 operation, in that the Taliban did not adjust or change who they were letting through the
2 Ministry of the Interior?

3 A Can you rephrase that?

4 Q You had testified earlier I believe to Ambassador Bass and yourself not
5 having engaged with or spoken to the Taliban, but it does seem that a relationship would
6 have needed to be maintained to make sure that they were continuing to allow for
7 American citizens to pass through the Ministry of Interior.

8 So how did you maintain that relationship without engaging with them directly?

9 A Well, we, as the leadership team, did engage with them directly, but it was
10 General Donahue --

11 Q Okay.

12 A -- generally who did it. I think that for a variety of reasons, it was him.
13 And so, we would discuss before he -- before he would engage the Taliban, and then he
14 would tell us afterwards what came out of that.

15 So -- so Ambassador Bass, you know, was very much involved in -- in all of those
16 conversations indirectly that General Donahue did. And as I said before, I'm not aware
17 that Ambassador Bass participated directly, although it's possible I missed that at some
18 point and there may have -- I mentioned Greg Floyd as being part of at least one
19 discussion, and there may have been other USG officials at some point as well, but I'm not
20 aware of those contacts.

21 Q At any point in the evacuation while you were on the ground, did the
22 Ministry of Interior gate pose any extra hurdles or barriers or problems that required
23 extra attention? Were they not allowing American citizens through at any point
24 because of a breakdown in communication or was that fairly smooth, in your opinion?

25 A It was remarkably smooth. We did get some -- we got some complaints

1 from American citizens that -- that the Taliban had turned them away. And when we
2 looked into them further, it looked to us that those Americans had brought ineligible
3 family members with them.

4 And so, it seemed that in many of these cases, the Taliban had actually
5 asked -- had done what we had asked them to do, which is let through this category of
6 people.

7 Standing around a facility with a bunch of Taliban was, I think, probably scary for a
8 lot of the American citizens who went, and so they -- you know, there were some -- there
9 was some nervousness also from the feedback that we got from Americans. But -- but it
10 was remarkably smooth. Overall, the Taliban did what we requested, and that's how we
11 moved a whole lot of Americans out.

12 [REDACTED]. Thank you.

13 BY [REDACTED]:

14 Q Were you aware of any parallel effort or separate efforts engaging with the
15 Taliban taking place in Doha?

16 A Generally, yes. I knew that -- I knew that there were some discussions
17 there, but I was not paying very close attention to those.

18 Q And what was your overall impression or takeaway of what had come out of
19 that?

20 A It didn't -- it didn't seem -- I could be wrong, but my impression was that it
21 didn't seem very meaningful, because the Taliban, who were in Doha at that point,
22 were -- weren't really in the action. And I think the -- you know, those who really
23 mattered were on the ground in Kabul, including the military command.

24 I do also want to note that -- that I am aware I think of one or two others involved
25 in conversations with the Taliban. Tom West, who was in Kabul during the evacuation

1 as well, who I believe had contact with the Taliban in Kabul. Mustafa Popal may also
2 have had contact, as they were -- they were engaged in a different effort over the -- over
3 the status of the airport, which required engagement with the Taliban.

4 Here again, I wasn't interested. That was not my role and I was really
5 uninterested, and so I didn't try to learn more about what they were trying to do.

6 Q And when you say the status of the airport with the Taliban, what do you
7 mean?

8 A Meaning -- meaning what would happen to the airport and how would it be
9 run following the evacuation.

10 Q And what was Tom West's role at that time?

11 A I'm not exactly sure, because Zal Khalilzad I think was still on the job at the
12 time.

13 Q And was -- do you know what generally, beyond the specific effort with the
14 Taliban in the airport, what he was doing in Kabul?

15 A Sorry, repeat.

16 Q Do you know what his role in Kabul was, you know, what his activities in
17 Kabul were during the evacuation beyond the, you know, engagement with the Taliban
18 on the airport issue?

19 A I think that was primarily it, but -- but, again, I wasn't -- I wasn't following his
20 efforts that closely.

21 Q And you mentioned another individual, Mustafa Gopal. Is that --

22 A Popal.

23 Q Popal. Sorry, Popal.

24 A Yes, yes.

25 Q And what was his role?

1 A I believe that he was sent to Kabul -- I mean, because he's an extremely
2 capable officer, one who speaks fluent Dari, very trusted by the seventh floor, at the time
3 was working for the Deputy Secretary. And so, he was there to support and to assist.
4 And I think that -- I believe he spent -- he wound up spending most of his time, I think
5 together with Tom West, in support of those efforts.

6 Q And what was his role working for the Deputy Secretary?

7 A Today, he's the chief of staff.

8 Q Was he in that role at the time before he -- was he deployed temporarily?

9 A He was deployed temporarily, yes.

10 Q And he was working for her. Was he her chief of staff at that time?

11 A I think he was.

12 Q And -- and were you aware of any others who had significant engagement
13 with the Taliban aside from those two and those you previously mentioned?

14 A Those are all the names that come to mind.

15 Q So returning to your departure, when did you depart Afghanistan and with
16 whom?

17 A I think I departed on August 29.

18 Q And what was the situation on the ground on August 29 at the time of your
19 departure, and how much of the U.S. presence had departed at that point?

20 A I was on the main flight out. We -- we made the decision to -- to fly out
21 most of the evacuation team on the 29th, and then to leave behind a residual evacuation
22 element to try to do a little bit more.

23 And I flew out with -- with the main team. And Ambassador Bass, Ross Wilson,
24 Scott Weinhold stayed behind with just a -- with a handful of officers.

25 Q And what -- what were they doing in the additional day?

1 A Yeah. So by that point, by the time I flew out, the military was -- was
2 involved in -- you know, still involved in evacuation, but also involved in retrograde at that
3 point.

4 So the -- so the pace of the operations and what we were doing were significantly
5 slowing down. There was a sprint still to get as many people through south gate as
6 possible. That was a main effort. But I think they were -- the military was pulling back
7 from the perimeter in a -- in a safe and secure way.

8 So we were winding down, but the -- but the residual element that we left behind
9 was still trying to do as many operations/movements as possible, as they could under the
10 circumstances in the little bit of time that was left.

11 Q What was your role with the Afghanistan task force?

12 A I was the head of the task force, which was -- which was actually a number
13 of small task forces all under one director. It was -- it was -- because it was so large, the
14 structure was a little unusual.

15 Q And how did you come to be assigned to that role?

16 A A few days after I got back, I was asked. I was voluntold.

17 Q No rest for the wicked.

18 And how long -- when were you -- when were you put into that role? Do you
19 remember the date?

20 A It was -- I was probably asked around September 5th or 6th, and then I kind
21 of -- yeah, I spent a little time and I think I moved into the chair for real on, like, the 9th or
22 10th or something, but I had some overlap with Dean Thompson first.

23 Q And how long did you serve in it?

24 A For about one month.

25 Q And what -- who reported to you -- or sorry. Who reported to you? Who

1 were your direct reports?

2 A Here again, not a -- not so much of a formal supervisory structure, but -- but
3 I did have a deputy and then a number of people who worked right there colocated in the
4 task force space who I could -- who I could direct and interact with directly. And
5 then -- and then we had some outlying task forces that were part of -- part of the whole
6 effort that had different functions.

7 Q And where was the task force principally located?

8 A In the ops center area, State Department, which is now moved to a different
9 location, but --

10 Q And who did you report to as director of the task force?

11 A I reported to a number of principals and to the executive secretary of the
12 Department. But, again, not -- not as a -- not in a formal supervisory change.

13 Q And which -- which principals did you report to?

14 A Well, regularly reporting to Brian McKeon, to Wendy Sherman, to Under
15 Secretary Nuland, to -- you know, as part of my communication, regularly to Suzy George,
16 to Uzra Zeya, Under Secretary for J, the executive secretary.

17 Q Were any of them more involved than others?

18 A Sure, depending on the issue.

19 Q Is there anything I guess, you know, any indication you could give us as to
20 who was -- you know, who among the principals were the most involved on these issues?

21 A I would say the Deputy Secretary for Management Resources, Brian McKeon,
22 was quite involved. I mean, the work of the task force had the attention of all the
23 principals. It depended, in part, also on who would be in the chair for the next deputies
24 meeting. There were frequent deputies meetings during my time on the task force.

25 Q How frequent?

1 A At least -- at least once a week with the deputies meeting on policy issues,
2 which I was not involved in, and a separate one on relocation issues.

3 Q And what were the task force's main responsibilities?

4 A The task force was a coordinating body to ensure that -- that all the
5 elements of the Department that are involved in this effort were -- were addressing all
6 the major problems.

7 By the time that -- that I started at the task force, the Kabul evacuation was over,
8 but we had -- there were tens of thousands of Afghans who had been evacuated who
9 were at the lily pads hosted by DOD, but also with involvement of State Department
10 officers who were also at these lily pads.

11 And -- and then there was the -- there were the reception centers when they
12 moved from the lily pads to -- to the United States would first wind up at the Dulles
13 Center, or the one in Philadelphia, I think it was. And then they would -- you know,
14 and -- and so, there was a big effort at those reception centers to look after these people.

15 And then -- and then they were farmed out to, I think, 11 military bases around
16 the U.S., again, hosted by DOD and a lot of participation by DHS but, again, by State
17 Department officers who were at these locations.

18 And so the task force was involved in the entire effort from the -- all of the issues
19 involved in the movement of these people from the lily pads, and all the requirements,
20 the health vaccination requirements, the screenings, the getting past the measles issues
21 that -- that developed, the vetting, the management of cases that -- that were not
22 immediately deemed admissible to the United States, and to the -- and then to the United
23 States into the safe havens. And we had to be a coordinating body for everything that
24 needed to be done across the entire enterprise.

25 And we also had to address -- in addition to those who were in our pipeline at one

1 of the lily pads or in the U.S., there were also a lot of Afghans who had flown out in
2 various private charters. And here, I'm not really talking about the charters that flew
3 out of Mazar, but other flights that took place and landed in numerous countries around
4 the world, from Mexico to Uganda to Rwanda to Albania to Macedonia, all over the place,
5 where we were in touch with our embassies there to figure out how to manage all those
6 people, who -- most of whom had gotten out on their own without the help of the U.S.
7 Government.

8 Q There were several numbered task force teams, such as TF 1, TF 2, correct?

9 A Yes.

10 Q Can you take us through each of them and their missions and identify the
11 leader of each during your time there?

12 A I can't, no. I could tell you some of them.

13 Q To the best of your ability.

14 A Task Force 1 was basically the task force that looked like the most typical
15 State Department task force, 24/7 staffing, which was sort of the first point of entry for
16 people calling into the Department to talk to the task force. And so they were -- Task
17 Force 1 was sort of the coordinating body that would then connect to whichever other
18 task force, or other Department element could help.

19 The other ones I can't -- I can't tell you by number. I don't remember. But we
20 had a logistics task force purely focused on all the logistics of these movements of
21 everybody.

22 We had a -- we had a task force that was really devoted to the -- the at-risk
23 Afghans, including all those who had landed in countries all over the place, and how
24 would we deal with them possibly as refugees.

25 We had a -- we had an SIV-focused effort. It was not -- it was not actually a real

1 task force, but it was a -- it was -- it had one or two people focused strictly on the SIV
2 challenge.

3 We had a -- we had a task force, or a group that was devoted to the continental
4 United States and what was happening in the U.S. at military safe havens, and also, the
5 efforts of our Refugee Bureau to move them into the resettlement system in the U.S.

6 We had a -- we had a -- yeah. I'm not sure I can remember the others.

7 Q Was there a Consular Affairs-focused one?

8 A Yeah, I don't recall. I don't think there was a consular task force per se, but
9 I could be mistaken.

10 Q Was -- did the kind of, you know, TF 1, TF2, you know, subtask forces have
11 designated leaders?

12 A Yes.

13 Q Do you remember who any of those were?

14 A Laura Dogu, Ambassador Laura Dogu ran the -- ran the continental United
15 States. I don't even know if it was a task force. It was a group. She ran that effort.

16 Ambassador Kathleen Hill ran the logistics effort. Christine Elder, Ambassador
17 Christine Elder ran the -- the group devoted to at-risk Afghans I mentioned. Elizabeth
18 Rood was in charge of the SIV effort.

19 Ambassador Tracey Jacobson ran a group that I have not mentioned yet, which
20 was State Department interface with the DHS-led group that I cannot remember the
21 name of, but it was the -- it was an interagency effort led by DHS to address all of their
22 tasks.

23 Q So you mentioned the lily pads being a significant area of focus for the task
24 force. Can you outline its activities in a little more detail and also talk about some of
25 kind of the major challenges that you faced with the lily pads?

1 A Well, we were just trying to -- I mean, the task force was the coordinating
2 body to basically address all the issues needed to keep people moving, to get them out of
3 U.S. military facilities in these countries, the lily pads, and on their way to the United
4 States and to solve all the problems that arose.

5 But issues like, you know, when -- when there were some measles cases identified
6 in Germany, there were intensive interagency discussions, including with CDC, on what
7 that meant, because measles requires a certain period of treatment. And then it
8 stopped the movement of those people for quite a long time, for weeks, in Germany.

9 And then -- and then there had to be coordination of the diplomacy with the
10 Germans over that situation, who were expecting these people to move through much
11 more quickly.

12 We had to then, in the interagency, revisit what was required in terms of
13 vaccinations as these people moved on. We were involved in staffing, making sure that
14 we were -- we were constantly working with bureaus to recruit more State Department
15 officers so that we could send them either to lily pads or to U.S. military bases
16 somewhere in the U.S., so the State Department could keep helping, even though one
17 might suggest that that's -- that that's not -- you know, it goes beyond, I think, the role of
18 the State Department, but we saw issues that we thought we could help address.

19 You know, there were issues of unaccompanied minors who wound up at lily pads
20 separated from -- separated from parents, and efforts among, you know, some in the task
21 force to locate the parents and figure out how to reunite families.

22 There were people that got stuck for ineligibilities, national security ineligibilities
23 or for being bad people that weren't going to make it to the United States, and we had to
24 figure out what to do with them.

25 We had one individual I remember who wound up on a no-fly list, and we had to

1 figure out how to deal with that case.

2 We were in constant contact with our embassies overseas. That, for example, in
3 the United Arab Emirates, where there were a significant number of Afghans that we had
4 evacuated there, but there were also a significant number of Afghans who had
5 simply -- had gotten there on private charters that we did not vouch for, but nevertheless
6 had arrived there and were now all intermingled in a large --

7 Q Is this Emirates Humanitarian City?

8 A Yes. And so all colocated together and intermingled, and we had to figure
9 out how to -- how to deal with that population.

10 And -- and we had to figure out how to support our embassies that were suddenly
11 dealing with these difficult issues. And some of them needed additional resources.
12 Our embassies all needed additional guidance to understand -- to understand which
13 of -- who among these people and these populations might be admissible to the United
14 States and in what -- what capacity, because they weren't necessarily familiar with the
15 Afghan SIV program or how you get to refugee status.

16 So there was a lot of guidance and support to posts, and there was a lot of
17 reporting up our chain to keep leadership informed. And we did situation reports,
18 which I cleared on, as the task force director.

19 And we did front-channel guidance to posts, as -- including an effort to try to
20 delineate the different Afghans who had wound up in different countries and -- and how
21 to address, you know, the criteria that we would use to address all these populations.
22 You know, and we regularly connected people to each other. When everybody had
23 questions, we would get them to the right people that could provide the answer.

24 We fielded an incredible number of inquiries from the outside, from Congress,
25 from Afghans, from family members, from advocates, everybody asking and advocating

1 for individual cases. So we had a lot to do.

2 Q So a number of the outside groups that were conducting evacuations have
3 been critical of the State Department. Can you speak as to the reasons, you know, that
4 it was so challenging to coordinate with them?

5 A I don't think the problem -- I don't think the challenge was -- was one of
6 coordination. I mean, I laid out some of my concerns about the reason why I had
7 concerns about the activities of some of the groups.

8 Q Do you think the State Department was responsive to the outside groups?

9 A I think at times, we were overly responsive.

10 Q What does that mean?

11 A Because I think that some of the groups, some of the groups were -- as I
12 already described, were not contributing effectively to solutions.

13 Q And what -- how did you come to depart your position from the task force?

14 A Well, so I was really -- they asked me to lead the task force and then
15 transition it into something more sustainable. And so that was really the task, the
16 overarching task I had was to run the task force and then transition it to an operation that
17 would no longer be a task force, but a more sustainable operation, because we knew that
18 we would be in this business for a very long time and you can't run a task force with shift
19 work and those conditions sort of permanently.

20 And so, I worked up until the time, essentially, that Ambassador Beth Jones came
21 in as the head of CARE, which is now the lead coordinating body for this effort. And so,
22 when CARE started, that was my -- my time to go back to the Arctic.

23 Q And you returned to being the Arctic coordinator?

24 A Yeah.

25 Q And when did you transition from that to your current role?

1 A Last -- last June, June of last year. June, I departed the Arctic role, and I
2 started this role at the end of July.

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

5 A I learned from AFSA, the American Foreign Service Association. They
6 contacted me by -- the president of AFSA contacted me, and said that AFSA would
7 support me in this. And that caused me to Google with some keywords, and then I
8 found a CNN report online that informed me. And then I --

9 Q So you heard from AFSA before you heard from the Department?

10 A That's true.

11 Q And what engagement did you have in AFSA related to the interview
12 following that?

13 A I spoke to [REDACTED], who is the general counsel for AFSA.

14 Q And she gave you guidance and that sort of thing?

15 A She gave me advice.

16 Q And what other preparations did you engage in for this interview?

17 A I also spoke -- on the advice of [REDACTED], I spoke to [REDACTED], who is
18 at Federal Benefits, my professional liability insurance, and for his advice.

19 Q Did you have preparations with State Department officials?

20 A Yes. And then my counsel, and two other State Department officials
21 from --

22 Q Can you identify the other State Department officials?

23 A [REDACTED]. I don't know if I'm pronouncing it --

24 [REDACTED] - [REDACTED].

25 Mr. DeHart. Thank you. And [REDACTED]

1 BY [REDACTED]:

2 Q [REDACTED].

3 A Thank you.

4 Q And were any U.S. Government officials from outside of the State
5 Department involved in your preparations?

6 A No.

7 Q So some closing questions. What were you most proud of about the
8 evacuation and what were your biggest regrets?

9 A I thought -- I was really -- I was proud that I went. I was proud of my
10 colleagues. I was pretty inspired by the work that I saw my colleagues do. And I would
11 say especially the consular officers who I saw working at the gates, but -- but really
12 virtually everybody that I worked with there I just -- I thought that it was -- yeah.

13 I was -- I was very impressed by what I saw. I was proud of what I saw from our
14 military servicemembers, the Marines and other servicemembers. I thought -- I was
15 extremely impressed with the military leadership that we worked with there.

16 I thought we -- I thought we did very well under the circumstances, and I thought
17 we helped a lot of people and we moved a lot of people. I have a hard time thinking
18 about how we could have done that better, although maybe we could have. I don't
19 know. But I thought we -- I thought we did it well.

20 I -- I regret that -- I regret that I was personally so mistaken about what would
21 happen with the departure of the U.S. from Afghanistan, because I did -- I feel that I know
22 Afghanistan probably better than most in the State Department, yet the way that Kabul
23 fell and the way that the Taliban took over the entire country so cohesively and so quickly
24 really surprised me.

25 And it disturbed me that -- that I would be so wrong about that, because I

1 thought -- not that I necessarily thought the government would hold, but I thought -- I
2 thought it would be more of a fragmentation across Afghanistan and that there would be
3 a lot more pockets of resistance and more of an implosion than a smooth takeover by the
4 Taliban.

5 Q How long did you foresee the government holding out?

6 A I -- I mean, by the time this was all happening, I wasn't -- I was -- I was no
7 longer, you know -- I didn't have any inside information any longer, but I certainly thought
8 the government would hold out -- I think I bought into the conventional wisdom that they
9 would hold out for many months.

10 But really, I thought -- really where I think I got it wrong was that -- that I thought
11 the whole country would just sort of melt down and there would be a much greater
12 fragmentation. So I didn't think the -- I didn't think the Taliban could pull it off so -- so
13 coherently, every part of the country. I didn't think the different factions around the
14 country would fold so easily.

15 Q Do you I guess have -- do you think that there was something that was
16 missed that, you know, that people got wrong?

17 A Well, I think it's -- well, you know, I think yes. I think -- although, again,
18 since I was working on the Arctic, I don't know what -- I don't know if some of my
19 colleagues got it better than me. They may well have.

20 So I didn't feel I did very well in my predictions, but, of course, on the other hand,
21 my predictions were from a sideline, so --

22 Q In terms of the evacuation, was there anything that you think should have
23 been done differently in retrospect, you know, whether the evacuation itself or the
24 planning that led up to the evacuation, that could have put the United States in a stronger
25 position?

1 A I have wondered whether -- whether it would have been wiser to hold onto
2 Bagram, but -- and I thought about that a lot. And -- and I think that may have been
3 better, but -- but I -- I don't feel very confident about my judgment on that one.

4 And since I wasn't involved in any of those discussions leading up to it then I
5 especially don't feel confident in making that kind of judgment.

6 Q And is there any recommendation you would make, you know, a
7 forward-looking aspect, to try to prevent another such event from happening again in the
8 future?

9 A Don't get ourselves into that situation in the first place.

10 [REDACTED]. I think that concludes our questioning. So we are off the record.

11 [Discussion held off the record.]

12 [REDACTED]. Go back on the record.

13 BY [REDACTED]:

14 Q A couple of follow-up questions, the first being you said that you were in
15 consultation with a number of entities regarding your testimony today. Is that correct?

16 A Yes.

17 Q Despite that consultation, is it fair to say that your testimony here today is
18 based on your own mental impressions and lived experiences?

19 A Yes.

20 Q In addition, could you clarify for the record about what you meant when you
21 just testified don't get ourselves into the situation we were in?

22 A Well, I mean, I think that, you know, we -- we, after 20 years of involvement
23 in Afghanistan, we've -- it was never going to end well. And so, I did actually feel that
24 we needed to -- to depart Afghanistan. We needed to leave. We needed to get out.

25 But the nature of our involvement for the previous two decades, you know, set us

1 up for a situation where it was -- it was not -- there was not going to be a good ending for
2 it. So I think the problem -- in my opinion, the problem is -- the problem was the nature
3 of our involvement for the previous 20 years.

4 Q So is it fair to say that the evacuation was impacted not just by the
5 withdrawal itself, but the 20 years leading up to it?

6 A Absolutely.

7 Q Is it fair to say that it was impacted by numerous administrations, not just
8 the current administration?

9 A Absolutely. Yes.

10 [REDACTED]. With that, I think, you know, that concludes our questioning.
11 We're reaching about 8 hours.

12 And we want to thank you very much for your service, including your service in
13 testifying here today voluntarily, on behalf of the minority and the ranking member.

14 And I think that's all from the minority. Thank you very much.

15 Mr. DeHart. Thank you.

16 [REDACTED]. We have nothing further.

17 [Whereupon, at 6:03 p.m., the interview was concluded.]

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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.

James P. DeHART

Witness Name



2/21/2024

Date

**Errata Sheet for the Transcribed Interview of
James DeHart dated 06/16/2023**

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

Page	Line	Change	Reason
Universal		Change “Hardiman” to “Hardman”	
2		Add “████████████████████” in the HFAC majority appearances section	
2		Add “████████████████████ ████████████████████” in the HFAC majority appearances section	
6	24-25	Revise speaker from “Mr. DeHart” to State Department counsel “██████████.”	
116	3	Change “100 Americans” to “800 Americans”	
130	4	Change “decisionmaking” to “decision-making”	
137	18	Change “decisionmaking” to “decision-making”	
138	22	Change “lesser known” to “lesser-known”	
142	22	Change “decisionmaking” to “decision-making”	
148	10	Change “followup” to “follow-up”	