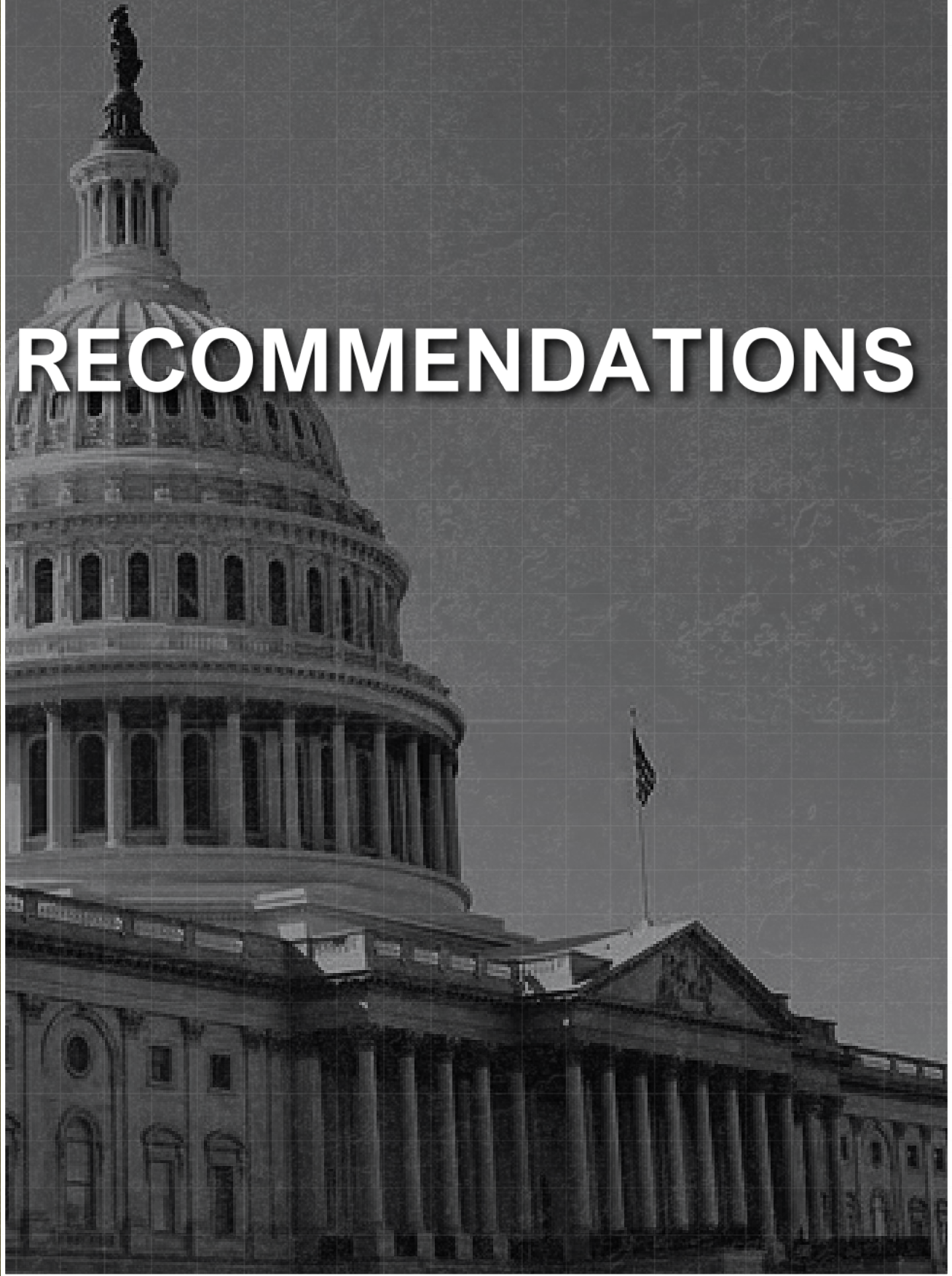


RECOMMENDATIONS



RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Congress should ensure accountability for key individuals responsible for decision making and execution failures throughout the withdrawal:

- Throughout Biden-Harris administration, key White House, National Security Council (NSC), State Department, and Department of Defense officials failed to execute their responsibilities on behalf of the American people and were not held accountable for the death and destruction their failures caused. Therefore, Congress should pass resolutions condemning:
 - **Joseph R. Biden**, President of the United States
 - **Kamala D. Harris**, Vice President of the United States
 - **Lloyd Austin**, Secretary, Department of Defense
 - **Antony Blinken**, Secretary, Department of State
 - **Jake Sullivan**, National Security Adviser of the United States
 - **Derek Chollet**, Former Counselor, Department of State; Current Chief of Staff, Department of Defense
 - **Ross Wilson**, Former Ambassador to Afghanistan, Department of State
 - **Brian McKeon**, Former Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources, Department of State
 - **Zalmay Khalilzad**, Former U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Department of State
 - **Colin Kahl**, Former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Department of Defense
 - **Jonathan Finer**, Deputy National Security Advisor of the United States
 - **Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall**, Homeland Security Advisor to the President of the United States
 - **Jen Psaki**, Former White House Press Secretary
 - **Ned Price**, Former State Department Spokesperson
 - **John Kirby**, Former Defense Department Spokesperson; Current White House National Security Communications Advisor

2. Congress should codify Noncombatant Evacuation Order (NEO) authorities and responsibilities:

- President Biden, Vice President Harris, the NSC, the State Department, and the Department of Defense political leadership prioritized politics and optics over operational needs leading directly to the failures of the disastrous Afghanistan withdrawal.

- Congress should take legislative action to establish specific authorities, and place responsibilities and requirements upon the Executive Branch to ensure future non-combatant evacuation operations (NEOs) are successful. The legislation should require the State Department, Department of Defense, other relevant departments and agencies to begin conducting all necessary exercises and preparations for a potential NEO when a country with a U.S. diplomatic mission is or has been designated a Level 4 Travel Advisory country, when an embassy is designated a High Threat Post pursuant to 22 U.S.C. § Section 4803, or when an embassy goes on Authorized Departure or Ordered Departure status. Congress should be briefed on such NEO coordination and planning when a country with a U.S. diplomatic mission is designated a Level 4 Travel Advisory country, when an embassy has been designated a High Threat Post, or when an embassy goes on Authorized Departure or Ordered Departure status.

3. Reestablish a crisis response bureau in the State Department to respond to situations similar to Afghanistan:

- The Trump administration's State Department had the foresight to create the Contingency and Crisis Response (CCR) Bureau. Among other responsibilities, CCR was tasked with developing and implementing policies and programs to safely evacuate U.S. government personnel, family members, and U.S. citizens. However, Secretary Blinken, upon recommendation from D-MR McKeon, closed this office in July 2021, just weeks before the fall of Kabul.
- Congress should take legislative action to authorize the creation of a crisis response bureau to ensure the safety and security of American personnel during emergency evacuations. The bureau leader should have extensive crisis management experience, with consideration given to experience as a Chief of Mission at a High Threat Post, former military flag officers, or other experience in crisis situations. The bureau, in coordination with the Bureau of Consular Affairs and other offices, should maintain and regularly update a roster of experienced personnel to deploy as part of crisis response, including but not limited to select members of the State Department Reserve Corps. Priority should be given to those and other individuals with experience at High Threat Posts, including certain retired foreign service officers, those who have served in the U.S. military, undergone medical training, or possess other crisis management experience.

4. DoD should declassify the U.S. Central Command Abbey Gate Investigation and the Army Central Supplemental Review:

- The Department of Defense should declassify the U.S. Central Command Abbey Gate Investigation and the Army Central Supplemental Review, in accordance with all statutory and regulatory procedures protecting sources, methods, and national security interests.

5. The Department of Defense's policies regarding personal effects must be stringently adhered to:

- The Department of Defense failed to maintain and return all the personal effects of the brave 13 servicemembers killed and 45 wounded at Abbey Gate. While personal effects may be important for Department of Defense investigators after an attack or incident, they must also eventually be returned to the servicemembers or their next of kin.
- Congress should ensure adherence to current law, to include 10 U.S.C. § 7712, 8392, and 9712, which states that Department of Defense maintain all personal effects for servicemembers injured, missing, or killed in action or while training. Department of Defense leadership should ensure that, if for any reason they believe the personal effects are dangerous, they must get the servicemember or the next of kin's written approval to destroy the items.

6. Eyewitness testimony portals should be established to capture testimony from witnesses who are not interviewed:

- While investigators across the State Department and the Department of Defense were able to speak with many witnesses of the Abbey Gate terrorist attack, important witnesses were not included in their investigations and did not have their testimony heard.
- The State Department and the Department of Defense should, respectively, create portals or other means of communication for eyewitnesses to submit their information relevant to after-action reviews. This information would allow for investigators to maximize their scope and for important inputs to reach those investigators.

7. Congress should require the State Department and the Department of Defense to maintain standard operating procedures for NEOs:

- The State Department did not adhere to or maintain standard operating procedures that align with the Department of Defense's standard operating procedures, which created confusion and left both departments unprepared for the Afghanistan NEO.
- Congress should take legislative action to require the State Department, and the Department of Defense to maintain a joint-NEO plan, which should delineate clear lines of command, roles, and responsibilities in requesting and executing a NEO.

8. The State Department should designate a single official as lead during a NEO or other crisis situations:

- The State Department's leadership failed in both mission and clarity during the Afghanistan withdrawal. The majority's investigation uncovered confusion at every level, across multiple bureaus and offices, regarding who at the State Department was in charge of the NEO, which delayed or prevented decisive action.
- The State Department should designate a single official, who is responsible for organizing and executing the State Department's crisis response efforts, and should be responsible for coordinating with the NSC, Department of Defense, other departments and agencies, non-governmental organizations, and others during a crisis.

9. Congress should consider making the Bureau of Diplomatic Security a direct report to the Secretary of State:

- Diplomatic Security was one of the few entities within the State Department that appropriately assessed the security risks in Afghanistan, including regarding the maintenance of a diplomatic mission. However, the majority's investigation uncovered that Diplomatic Security's memoranda were often watered down or ignored.
- Congress should consider making Diplomatic Security a direct report to the Secretary of State to ensure security and safety assessments are unfiltered and are afforded appropriate consideration.

10. Congress should consider reforming the NSC to ensure Congress's ability to conduct its constitutional oversight over national security decision making:

- Overwhelming witness testimony and documentary evidence has pointed to the NSC as the nerve center for critical decision making regarding the withdrawal from Afghanistan, going well beyond the NSC's statutory role of advising the President on national security policy integration (50 U.S.C. 3021) into operational control, including decision making regarding roles and responsibilities delegated in statute to the State Department in Title 22 of the U.S. Code.
- Congress should review the operation of the NSC to assess whether it comports with its statutory mission and limitations, to ensure that operational decisions that would otherwise be made by agencies subject to committee jurisdiction are not obscured from congressional view and oversight.

11. Certain Dissent Channel cables should be shared with the interagency and committees of jurisdiction:

- The Dissent Channel cable sent by Embassy Kabul personnel in July 2021 raised all the concerns that came to fruition in the withdrawal. When cables regarding the safety and security of U.S. personnel in country are transmitted, access cannot be limited to the State Department's senior leadership. In Afghanistan, on-the-ground information and assessments found in the cable would have been beneficial for situational awareness and contingency planning by the Department of Defense, NSC, intelligence community, and other relevant federal entities.
- Congress should take legislative action to require that the Secretary of State, while protecting the privacy and identity of those individuals transmitting the Dissent Channel cable, share all Dissent Channel cables pertaining to the safety and security of U.S. Embassy personnel and American citizens with the Secretary of Defense, heads of appropriate elements of the intelligence community, and heads of any other relevant federal entities. The Secretary, while protecting the privacy and identity of those individuals transmitting the Dissent Channel cable, shall further share any such cables with the Chairs and Ranking Members of the committees of jurisdiction in an appropriate setting.

12. High Threat Post leadership selection should be more rigorous:

- The majority's investigation revealed that Ambassador Wilson's poor decision making and performance leading up to and during the NEO led to or exacerbated the failures on the ground.
- The State Department should ensure it selects Chiefs of Mission and Deputy Chiefs of Mission to serve at High Threat Posts who have significant experience, capabilities, and training to perform their duties in high risk, high threat environments and crisis situations.

13. Reports tracking the weapons left behind in Afghanistan should be mandated:

- The Biden-Harris administration left \$7.1 billion of U.S.-funded weapons and equipment in Afghanistan when the U.S. military withdrew. These weapons and equipment are now in the hands of the Taliban and other adversaries.
- Congress should ensure the Department of Defense, Department of State, and other relevant agencies' inspectors general and the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconciliation produce a joint report on the weapons and equipment left behind, our efforts to track such weapons and equipment, how the Taliban and other terrorists are employing or attempting to deploy such weapons and equipment, and what efforts the U.S. government is making to ensure these weapons and equipment are compromised, destroyed, or otherwise prevented from being used against American citizens, Afghan civilians, or by other adversaries of the United States. While this report is being drafted, the leaders of the relevant departments and agencies should brief Congress on their initial findings, to include detailing what weapons left behind are in the hands of terrorists.

14. The U.S. government should uphold our commitment to those brave Afghans who risked their lives fighting for freedom from the Taliban:

- Congress should ensure there are sufficient Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs) to relocate all Afghans who risked their lives to fight alongside the U.S. military and who the Biden-Harris administration left behind in Afghanistan. Additionally, the processes for vetting and relocating vulnerable Afghan allies should be modernized, including by employing existing technology systems to increase efficiency.
- Congress needs to work in a bipartisan, bicameral manner to find a humane solution for all Afghans, including those already in the United States, who have a legitimate fear of persecution from the Taliban. It is imperative that the solution includes robust vetting to protect U.S. national security.

15. Congress should take legislative action to designate the Taliban as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO):

- Congress should take legislative action to designate the Taliban as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, including for purposes of 8 U.S.C. 1189(a).

16. Congress should continue to strongly and publicly condemn the Taliban:

- Congress should pass a resolution:
 - Condemning the Taliban for its brutal treatment of women and girls
 - Stating the United States shall not normalize relations with the Taliban.
 - Stating the United States shall halt funding to the United Nations Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan, should the UN recognize the Taliban as the government of Afghanistan.

17. U.S. veterans should be recruited to staff the Office of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE):

- The State Department's CARE office should, in partnership with veteran service organizations, work to recruit veterans, particularly those who served in Afghanistan, to assist efforts to support in Afghan allies who were left behind by the Biden-Harris administration.

18. The State Department should improve efforts to account for all U.S. citizens traveling to Level 4 Travel Advisory countries:

- The State Department has struggled to accurately account for U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents (LPRs) overseas. In the event of an emergency evacuation, the Department is often guessing how many U.S. citizens and LPRs must be evacuated, leaving it without key information.

The State Department identifies Level 4 Travel Advisory countries are dangerous and recommends U.S. citizens and LPRs not travel to those countries. However, that is not a prohibition of travel, and many U.S. citizens and LPRs do travel to those countries for various reasons.

- To ensure the State Department has a more accurate accounting of U.S. citizens and LPRs in those countries, it should review and expand its ability to communicate and share information on the security situation in the country and encourage registration in Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). In doing so, the State Department should work with private air, land, and maritime transportation carriers and other entities to devise ways in which to better gauge the numbers of U.S. citizens and LPRs traveling to and residing in Level 4 Travel Advisory countries at a given time.

19. Congress should enact H.R. 4517 Ensuring Voluntary Actions are Compensated (EVAC) Act:

- When Afghanistan fell, private citizens jumped into action to save American citizens, lawful permanent residents, and Afghan allies, often at great expense and risk to themselves.
- This bill would require the Secretary of State to submit a plan for the reimbursement of personal funds expended to evacuate American citizens, lawful permanent residents, and Afghan allies from Afghanistan.

20. Congress should enact H.R. 8371, the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act:

- Veterans who served in Afghanistan have expressed their frustration and sense of betrayal at the manner in which the Biden-Harris administration left Afghanistan. They, like all our nations' veterans, deserve better care, benefits and support.
- This bill would improve the delivery of healthcare, benefits, and services at the Department of Veterans Affairs for veterans, their families, and their survivors.

Despite significant obstruction and stonewalling by Secretary Blinken and the State Department, the findings of this report reflect a wide-ranging and thorough investigative effort into multiple facets of the Biden-Harris administration's withdrawal. The findings also illuminate areas where further oversight and investigation are needed. Congress has a responsibility to ensure those at fault during the Afghanistan withdraw are finally held accountable.

21. Congress should request testimony from Department of Defense officials:

- This investigation uncovered inexcusable errors made by the Department of Defense that warrant further investigation, including, but not limited to, their failure to have video footage of Abbey Gate leading up to and at the time of the attack after heightened and consistent threat streams of imminent attack; the demilitarization – i.e., destruction – of physical hard drives and servers at HKIA that may have contained evidence; and the failure to close Abbey Gate in spite of heightened and consistent threat streams of imminent attack. There is also unresolved debate over several issues, including, but not limited to, whether Abbey Gate was a complex attack or a lone suicide bomber. For both reasons, Congress should request testimony from Department of Defense officials, including, but not limited to:
 - **Lloyd Austin**, Secretary of Defense
 - **Colin Kahl**, Former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
 - **Chris Donahue**, Lieutenant General, U.S. Army*
 - **Peter Vasely**, Rear Admiral (Retired), U.S. Navy*
 - **Farrell Sullivan**, Brigadier General, U.S. Marine Corps*
 - **John Kirby**, Former Defense Department Spokesperson

22. Congress should request testimony from NSC officials:

- As this investigation lays out, the National Security Council usurped the congressionally mandated roles and responsibilities of the State Department, including by controlling the planning and execution of the NEO. For that reason, Congress should request testimony from National Security Council officials, including, but not limited to:
 - **Jake Sullivan**, National Security Advisor of the United States
 - **Jonathan Finer**, Deputy National Security Advisor of the United States
 - **Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall**, Homeland Security Advisor to the President of the United States

23. Congress should request testimony from White House officials:

- The White House has led a campaign of obstruction against this investigation, delaying and hindering witness testimony and document discovery. Because the White House has claimed to wield control over the appearances of witnesses and production of documents by the U.S. Department of State and U.S. Department of Defense, Congress should request testimony from White House officials, including, but not limited to:
 - **Ron Klain**, Former White House Chief of Staff
 - **Steve Ricchetti**, Counselor to the President
 - **Ed Siskel**, White House Counsel
 - **Rachel F. Cotton**, Deputy Counsel to the President
 - **Dana Remus**, Former White House Counsel
 - **Richard Sauber**, Former Special Counsel to the President
 - **Anita Dunn**, Former Senior Advisor to the President of the United States

**House Armed Services Committee majority requested written responses to questions from these witnesses on behalf of the House Foreign Affairs Committee majority. On September 6, 2024, these individuals provided their answers in writing which, while informative, raised critical new questions Congress should continue to pursue.*