

On April 14th 2021, President Biden announced the United States would unilaterally withdraw its military forces from Afghanistan.

For months before that announcement, his senior military advisors – including both gentlemen testifying here today –as well as the intelligence community issued dire warnings about the withdrawal’s disastrous consequences.

And after the announcement, I, along with other Republican and Democrat Members of Congress, urged President Biden to prepare for the withdrawal’s inevitable fallout. These warnings were ignored.

As the withdrawal date neared, the situation on the ground in Afghanistan deteriorated. The Taliban was gaining significant ground across the country. Yet the Biden administration was still not planning – threatening the safety and security of U.S. personnel still in the country.

As a result, in July of 2021, 23 State Department employees in Kabul sent a Dissent Channel Cable warning Secretary Blinken of their grave concerns for Afghanistan’s stability and their own safety.

Still nothing was done to course correct.

Instead, our investigation has uncovered repeated instances of this administration refusing to listen to its military and intelligence advisors warning of the situation on the ground in the country.

We have even uncovered that State Department leadership prohibited its employees from uttering the word “NEO” – shorthand for an emergency evacuation – until as late as August 2021.

Additionally, the committee has learned the State Department’s request for an emergency evacuation was not transmitted to the DOD until August 16th – the day after the Taliban surrounded Kabul and the embassy was evacuated.

As a result, it took two full days for the airport to be secured so U.S. personnel and equipment could get on the ground to begin an evacuation.

As Benjamin Franklin once said, “If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail.”

And fail they did. The next 15 days created international outrage and humiliation for the United States. People all over the world watched as babies were flung over barbed wire by mothers without hope, desperate Afghans fell to their deaths from planes, and hordes of people surrounded the airport as they tried to flee for their lives. The damage to our reputation and U.S. credibility around the world will last for generations.

Our servicemembers were forced to watch as American citizens and Afghan allies were beaten and murdered outside the gates of the airport. These brave Americans were told to stand by as terrorists brutalized innocent civilians.

And then, on the morning of August 26th, we watched in horror as reports of a terrorist attack at Abbey Gate flooded the news. Thirteen U.S. servicemembers were killed, with dozens more injured. Some of their family members are here today.

I will not rest until I get to the bottom of this tragedy. You deserve answers. The American people deserve answers. And I intend to uncover them.

When the last U.S. military plane left on August 30th, 2021, more than 1,000 American citizens remained trapped in Afghanistan, along with tens of thousands of Afghan allies who risked their lives serving beside our troops and diplomats.

Many if not most of those allies are still trapped in Afghanistan, constantly afraid for their lives.

I want to thank both of our witnesses for joining us today. Despite current DOD officials actively trying to limit their testimony, they agreed to appear here voluntarily, and I am grateful for their service to this country and this investigation.

I also want to thank the families of the U.S. servicemembers who were killed at Abbey Gate for joining us today us today.

The president has never said the names of your children out loud. [PAUSE]

But I will. Their names are:

Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Darin T. Hoover;
Marine Corps Sgt. Johanny Rosario;
Marine Corps Sgt. Nicole L. Gee;
Marine Corps Cpl. Hunter Lopez;
Marine Corps Cpl. Daegan W. Page;
Marine Corps Cpl. Humberto A. Sanchez;
Marine Corps Lance Cpl. David L. Espinoza;
Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Jared M. Schmitz;
Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Rylee J. McCollum;
Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Dylan R. Merola;
Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Kareem M. Nikoui;
Navy Petty Officer Third Class Maxton W. Soviak; and
Army Staff Sgt. Ryan C. Knauss.
They will not be forgotten.