



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

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Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Republican Afghanistan Hearing

April 18, 2023

I am pleased the Subcommittee is holding today's hearing to examine how President Biden was able to withdraw our troops from Afghanistan after 20 years of war. After the deaths of more than 2,400 American soldiers, tens of thousands wounded, and over \$2 TRILLION spent - ending the war in Afghanistan was the right decision. The American people wanted the war to end - and leaders on both sides of the aisle advocated for ending it.

My Republican colleagues praised the Trump-Taliban Deal – even absent the Afghan government's involvement in the negotiations. They praised the Trump-Taliban Deal even though many had questions about the terms, including the agreement to release 5,000 Taliban prisoners. They praised the Trump-Taliban Deal even given the uncertainty of whether the Taliban could be trusted. Now, Republicans in Congress are singing a different tune because it was President Biden and not President Trump who extracted the United States from an otherwise endless war.

Under President Biden, our military undertook an extremely difficult operation, facilitating the evacuation of more than 124,000 people in 17 days. Let me be clear. The scenes of thousands of vulnerable Afghans trying to board U.S. aircraft to seek refuge in this country was distressing. And the loss of 13 service members during the evacuation was tragic. Because of them and other service members on the ground, that day alone, 7,500 people were airlifted out of Afghanistan. And because of the sacrifices made by all those who served in the war over two decades, as well as our Afghan partners, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, was the last complex, foreign terrorist attack on U.S. soil.

We made significant progress in degrading groups like al Qaeda and ISIS – and have even destroyed parts of their networks. That's what today's hearing should be about: Now that we are out of the war, and the Taliban have control of Afghanistan thanks to the Trump-Taliban Deal – what are the homeland security implications? And how do we keep the pressure on terrorist groups? We are here to ensure the security of our homeland – not to score political points.

With that, I am looking forward to hearing from today's witnesses about lessons learned from 20 years of war in Afghanistan, the homeland security threats that may emerge from that country, given the U.S.' departure, and what those of us in Congress who take our duties seriously can do to help protect the country from people who seek to do us harm.

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