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COMMITTEES
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March 16, 2022

Honorable Jack Reed
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
228 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510-6050

Dear Chairman Reed,

I write to urge you to promptly convene open hearings on the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan following the report of U.S. Central Command.

It is no secret that the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan was poorly planned and executed. Only now, however, is the full extent of this tragedy coming to light as a result of U.S. Central Command's investigation into the events surrounding the Abbey Gate bombing on August 26, 2021. Drawing on interviews with 139 individuals, including U.S. military commanders on the ground, the investigation reveals in new detail just how badly the Biden administration failed to prepare for and then respond to the rapid collapse of the Afghan government.

The investigative report's findings and underlying testimony reaffirm, for instance, that the Administration had ample warning that such a rapid collapse was possible if not likely. The report shows further how key parts of the Administration refused to prepare for that eventuality, despite mounting warnings and at the cost of American forces' ability to begin preparing the battlespace for a non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO), including by establishing security at the Kabul airport. And the report provides new information about how the Administration bungled the NEO itself, including failure to vet the tens of thousands of individuals the Administration asked U.S. servicemembers to evacuate, endangering servicemembers' safety and ultimately the safety of the American people.

The American public wants and deserves accountability for what transpired in Afghanistan last year, and this report is an important step in that direction. Yet the Armed Services Committee has ignored it since its release. Members of this Committee appear to be either unfamiliar or misinformed about its contents. Just yesterday morning, for instance, one Senator said it was "categorically untrue" that the Biden administration had months of warning that the Afghan government might collapse rapidly. This is wrong. As the Central Command report and other sources show, multiple commanders of U.S. forces in Afghanistan advised the Administration in the spring and summer of 2021 to prepare for the rapid collapse of the Afghan government. But the Administration ignored them.

A rigorous and public review of the Central Command investigative report is the necessary and appropriate next step to ensure accountability for the disaster in Afghanistan and prevent another like it. I am aware that Congress has directed an outside commission to study our decades-long engagement in Afghanistan. But that look-back, which may take years to complete and will not focus on the events detailed in the Central Command report, is no substitute for actual congressional oversight. I therefore call upon you to promptly convene open hearings. These hearings should allow us to hear from the leaders responsible for the disaster, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who has thus far only testified before this Committee in a closed setting. They should also – and critically – allow us to hear directly from those who were on the ground during those fateful weeks, including the U.S. military commanders cited by the Central Command investigation.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Josh Hawley".

Josh Hawley
United States Senator