

FIRST INTERIM REPORT

AFGHANISTAN WAR COMMISSION

August 22, 2024



AFGHANISTAN
WAR COMMISSION



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Shamila N. Chaudhary, left, and Colin Jackson, co-chairs of the Afghanistan War Commission, prepare to host the commission's first public hearing, July 2024.

PREFACE

Message from the Co-Chairs

As Afghanistan War Commission co-chairs, we are frequently asked how the commission plans to tackle the ambitious research task Congress has assigned us: to examine in depth the United States' key strategic, diplomatic, and operational decisions spanning the 20 years of war in Afghanistan and extract lessons for future leaders.

This First Interim Report provides our answer to this important question by offering an overview of our operational and research approach. We describe our research methodology and the inputs we are gathering, including data stemming from official government documents and subject interviews. In addition, we offer an overview of the commission's extensive outreach to date with the executive branch, Congress, veterans, Afghans, and the international community. Most importantly, we offer a window into our current research on wartime decisions in the sections on research team progress.

The numbers testify to the progress the commission has achieved in our first full year of operation. Commissioners have held more than 30 plenary meetings and research sessions. We have established critical liaisons with all relevant U.S. government agencies and issued each agency formal requests for information (RFIs). In response to these RFIs, we have already received dozens of briefings and thousands of pages of documentation. We held hundreds of formal and informal meetings with key experts and stakeholders, including veterans and Afghans. We have held numerous work plan briefings to seek feedback from Capitol Hill and to set expectations with executive branch and other stakeholders for what is to come. We created an on-line portal for gathering veteran testimonials, receiving more than 200 responses. We held our first public hearing, generating public awareness of our work. We made key domestic and international trips, including to U.S. Central Command, the United

Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) headquarters, and the National September 11 Memorial and Museum.

We also tapped into the deep expertise of the commissioners to establish clear values for the commission's work and to emphasize the importance of objectivity, empathy, and integrity of the commission's research. On governance, we established bylaws for the commission to address issues of consensus and voting among commissioners.

The commission's second year will build on this progress to prioritize rigorous inquiry into the decisions of the war. This will include conducting subject interviews, culling through thousands of government documents, and hosting public hearings. The goal will be to weave these inputs together into a rigorous and accessible narrative about the policy objectives of the U.S. war in Afghanistan, their implementation and impact, and what can be learned and applied to future scenarios. We hope you will continue to follow the progress of our work. The second interim report is due to Congress in August 2025, followed by the final report by August 2026.

As we continue this important work, we appreciate the support of stakeholders of the war for the unique and daunting task we have been assigned. We recognize that many people want answers and explanations, while others seek opportunities for dialogue and healing. With our plan in place, we are accelerating and intensifying our work, determined as we are to deliver the rigorous, independent, and objective assessment of the war that those who served and sacrificed, American policymakers, and the larger public expect and deserve.



The Afghanistan War Commission's co-chairs and senior staff visit the 9/11 Memorial and Museum in New York City in the fall of 2023, one of the commission's first public outreach initiatives.

Shamila N. Chaudhary

*Co-Chair
Afghanistan
War Commission*

Dr. Colin Jackson

*Co-Chair
Afghanistan
War Commission*



The Afghanistan War Commission opens its first public hearing at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Washington, D.C., Office in July 2024.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION

“The gravity of what we face over the next couple years is not lost on anybody on this Commission, and on me personally. One of the things that struck me the most was any time I got out of Kabul, out into the villages, and I saw the kids as a parent, as a grandfather. We have to get this right for those generations.”

— Commissioner Robert P. Ashley Jr.

LEGISLATIVE MANDATE

Congressional charter and commission bylaws set the goals, scope, and approach to study of the Afghanistan War

Congress established the Afghanistan War Commission in 2021 as an independent body to review U.S. decisions pertaining to the war in Afghanistan from June 2001 to August 2021.

The commission's charter is set out in The Afghanistan War Commission Act of 2021, Section 1094 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 (Pub. L. No. 117-81, 135 Stat. 1935 (2021)). The commission comprises 16 members, one each selected by the majority and minority leaders of the Senate, the speaker and minority leader of the House, and the chairmen and ranking members of the following congressional committees:

- The Senate Armed Services Committee
- The House Armed Services Committee
- The Senate Foreign Relations Committee
- The House Foreign Affairs Committee
- The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence
- The House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

Continuing in this bipartisan intent, the commission is led by two co-chairs. All 16 commissioners have significant national security expertise in government and academia.

The commission's mandate is to independently examine key strategic, diplomatic, and operational decisions the U.S. government made throughout the Afghanistan War. The scope of this study includes combat operations, reconstruction and development assistance, intelligence assessments, counterterrorism activities, political and diplomatic initiatives, and the most senior policy deliberations of the U.S. government. Through this

encompassing study, the commission will derive insights and actionable recommendations in an unclassified, public final report designed to inform effective strategic decision-making by Congress and policymakers throughout the U.S. government. The final report is due by August 22, 2026, with annual interim reports due each year.

Congress empowered the commission to conduct hearings and obtain information, including interviews and documents, from federal agencies “as the commission considers necessary” to execute its mandate upon written requests of the co-chairs. It correspondingly requires the heads of departments and agencies to furnish requested information to the commission expeditiously.

The commission is charged with examining multiple aspects of the 20-year war:

Policy objectives in three areas:

- **Diplomacy:** Reviewing diplomatic efforts and their impacts on the conflict and regional stability;
- **Military operations:** Assessing the goals, strategies, and effectiveness of military operations in Afghanistan; and,
- **Development assistance:** Evaluating the objectives and outcomes of development projects and humanitarian aid.

Strategic and operational decisions: Reviewing significant decisions, including options presented to policymakers and their subsequent impacts, and evaluating the efficacy of interagency coordination and execution processes.

Counterterrorism efforts: Assessing the success of counterterrorism operations against al-Qaeda, the Islamic State Khorasan Province, and other foreign terrorist

“I agreed to serve as a commissioner in the sincere hope that a critical examination of successes and failures in Afghanistan will lead to lessons being learned and not simply observed, and that future policies, implementations, and outcomes will be improved as a result.”

— Commissioner Andrew Wilder

organizations, and examining the efforts to degrade the capabilities of foreign terrorist organizations to mount attacks against the United States and its allies or threaten regional stability.

Intelligence efforts: Analyzing the application of the Intelligence Community’s analytic tradecraft standards in Afghanistan-related analytic production over time.

This includes incorporation of divergent analytic views in intelligence assessments and whether assessments concerning probable outcomes of the coalition forces’ withdrawal from Afghanistan provided sufficient warning to policymakers.

Metrics and effectiveness: Analyzing the metrics and milestones used to assess progress of military, diplomatic, and intelligence efforts.

Collapse of Afghan forces: Exploring the factors leading to the collapse in August 2021 of Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, including their training with and reliance on technology and support systems provided by the United States.

Counter corruption and counternarcotics efforts: Evaluating the effectiveness of efforts to combat endemic corruption and narcotics production and trade in Afghanistan.

Regional influences: Studying the role of neighboring countries in contributing to the situation in Afghanistan, including the disintegration of the U.S.-backed Afghan government.

The full Afghanistan War Commission Act of 2021 is in Appendix I.

From left to right, Commissioners Christopher Molino, Seth Jones, Luke Hartig, and Dan Fata participate in the Afghanistan War Commission’s first public hearing in July 2024.



Commissioners: Roles and Expertise

The 16 commissioners serve as the guiding intellectual force behind the commission's work. They provide insight, judgment, and guidance on the most foundational aspects of the project, from determining the scope and focus of the ambitious mandate to crafting the lessons learned and recommendations that will serve as the capstone to our analysis.

During the commission's pre-standup phase and into its first year of operation, commissioner expertise served as an important resource in all aspects of the commission's work. Commissioners recruited and recommended talented staff, identified key research questions, represented the commission in official travel

and briefings, and provided access to their professional networks. They also assumed prominent roles in public hearings, media engagements, and stakeholder outreach.

The 16 commissioners hold a wide range of practitioner and research expertise directly related to the Afghanistan War as well as on some of the biggest U.S. foreign policy challenges of our time. Their combined Afghanistan expertise, foreign policy wisdom, and real-world experience offer a solid foundation for the commission's work.

Full commissioner biographies are in Appendix II.



Shamila N. Chaudhary
CO-CHAIR



Colin Jackson
CO-CHAIR



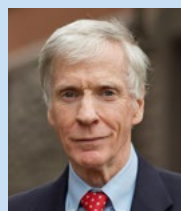
Michael Allen



Robert Ashley



Jeremy Bash



Ryan Crocker



Jeff Dressler



Dan Fata



Anand Gopal



Luke Hartig



Seth Jones



Laurel Miller



Chris Molino



Dipali
Mukhopadhyay



Bob Taft



Andrew Wilder

The commission is committed to a spirit of intellectual inquiry that will produce a rigorous, non-partisan, and independent report on the lessons learned in the U.S. war in Afghanistan.



Afghanistan War Commission staff provide support at the Commission's July 2024 public hearing. From left Jonathan Schroden, Pamela G. Faber Shearman, Jaime Cheshire, and Julie Martin.

COMMISSION STAFF

A priority for the Afghanistan War Commission during our first year has been finding and hiring a professional staff that brings a combination of Afghanistan expertise, policy experience, functional strengths in government management, and the objectivity necessary to conduct an unbiased review of the war. In the past year, the commission has hired a total of 35 staff to fulfill its mandate.

Staff expertise and experience reflect a balance across the government agencies involved in the war. The commission staff also includes individuals who have studied the war from both inside and outside government, reflecting the commission's emphasis on soliciting nongovernment and foreign perspectives. Finally, staffing supports the cross-functional and interdisciplinary needs of the entire project, which depend on the ability to work across the U.S. government's different institutional cultures.

The commission is led by an executive director and the following senior staff who form the commission's front office: a general counsel, a research director, a deputy research director, a senior advisor for Afghan outreach, a director of operations, a strategic communications advisor, and a chief of staff. Other staff serve across the

following thematic and functional teams, each of which is led by a senior practitioner with over two decades of work experience:

Thematic teams:

- Policy and Diplomacy
- Military Operations and Security Force Assistance
- Intelligence Assessments
- Development
- Counterterrorism

Functional teams:

- Interviews and Information Management
- Writing and Report Production

More detail on these teams can be found in the Research Section.

See Appendix III for staff biographies.

PRE-STANDUP PHASE

On September 30, 2021, Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.) introduced the Afghanistan War Commission Act of 2021. After receiving extensive bipartisan support in both chambers of Congress, the Commission Act was included in the Fiscal Year 2022 National Defense Authorization Act and became law in December 2021. During the first half of 2022, members of Congress from the relevant committees as well as ranking and minority leadership appointed 16 commissioners to serve on the commission. Upon their appointments, commissioners met weekly in informal, virtual sessions to discuss the commission's launch while awaiting funding and the designation of the two co-chairs, both necessary predicates to commencing operations.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2022 passed in March 2022 and provided funding for the commission under a line item for Congressionally Mandated Commissions in the Secretary of Defense's Operations and Maintenance account. In May 2022, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) appointed Commissioner Shamila N. Chaudhary to serve as a co-chair. Senator Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) appointed Commissioner Colin Jackson in September 2022. Once House and Senate Republican leadership selected him to serve as a co-chair, funding discussions among the commission, Department of Defense, and Congress began in earnest.

The congressional mandate assigned different operational responsibilities to Congress and the Department of Defense in supporting the commission. From 2022

to 2023, the co-chairs worked closely with the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Department of Defense to determine next steps on fundamental needs of the commission: staffing, office space, human resources support, information technology capabilities, security clearances, and an annual budget.

Two themes dominated the pre-standup phase of the commission. First, the commission emphasized the importance of its status as an independent organization within the legislative branch, notwithstanding the operational support it would receive from the Department of Defense and Congress. Second, the commission would not hold its first official business meeting and thereby start its clock without funding in place. While commissioners continued to pursue funding arrangements with the Department of Defense and Congress during this period, it could not take many of the fundamental steps necessary to commence operations, including hiring commission staff and securing office space.

The commission received access to appropriations in April 2023, upon which it immediately began a hiring search for an executive director, who, by statute, is responsible for hiring commission staff. The commission hired an executive director in July 2023 and convened its first business meeting on August 23, 2023.

“Over a 20-year period, thousands served in Afghanistan, tragically too many losing their lives or sustaining life-changing injuries. From that standpoint, all Americans deserve a credible, independent assessment of U.S. policy in Afghanistan. That’s what I believe this commission will be able to provide. Of course, our work and our recommendations will be even more important to protect the future of our national security. I really appreciate the honor to be able to serve.”

– Commissioner Bob Taft

OPERATIONAL READINESS

The Department of Defense and the U.S. Senate provide support to the commission consistent with its congressional mandate. In the past year, the commission has worked with the Department of Defense and the administrative offices of the Secretary of the Senate to address its most essential needs.

Once funding became available, the commission hired staff and worked with Washington Headquarters Service to lease the commission's main office space, which houses most of our full-time staff and is certified for operations at the SECRET level. As staff were hired and onboarded, the commission worked closely with the Office of Senate Security to initiate or transfer security clearances and establish processes to implement appropriate information security guidelines. The commission appreciates the prioritization placed by the Office of Senate Security on clearance processing for commissioners and staff.

Pending Operational Needs

The commission has identified the following outstanding requirements necessary to achieve full operational readiness.

Classified information technology support: The commission's most pressing unresolved operational need is classified IT support, the requirements for which we conveyed to the Department of Defense in February 2024. In particular, the commission has an acute need for the timely provision of computers that can store and process information up to the S//NF level, on which much of the commission's work will be drafted. Relatedly, the commission requires computers that can store and process information up to the TS//SCI level to complete its research and analysis of more sensitive material. The commission appreciates the Department of Defense's extensive efforts to identify a workable solution. While

Commissioner Bob Ashley listens to testimony during the Afghanistan War Commission's first public hearing in July 2024.





Commissioner Ryan Crocker, former U.S. ambassador to Afghanistan, prepares for the Afghanistan War Commission's first public hearing in July 2024.

the commission is encouraged by the Department of Defense's efforts to date, any further delay in reaching a solution will adversely impact our ability to deliver the thorough accounting of the Afghanistan War that the American people deserve. The timely resolution of this issue is vital to the successful execution of the commission's mandate. The commission's staff simply cannot write until the classified technology is operational.

SCIF workspace: Commission staff continue to work with the Department of Defense for an anticipated September 2024 delivery of a leased Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility (SCIF) from which the commission will pursue the more sensitive aspects of its mandate. The demand for SCIF space across the Department of Defense exceeds ready supply, and the commission appreciates the department's efforts to locate a suitable space on the commission's expedited timeline. In the meantime, the commission has been able to work on an interim but limited basis at the Office of Senate Security.

Appropriations: The commission is currently supported via a Department of Defense Commissions funding account that covers all congressionally chartered commissions. The commission notes that the department must make decisions on apportionment of funds to each of its mandated commissions, and the commission would prefer an appropriation mark under Department of Defense Commissions specifically for the Afghanistan War Commission.

“I want to thank Congress for setting this commission up, and I think it is very important for Americans to understand that it was done in a bipartisan fashion. I think the bipartisan and even the nonpartisan component of this makes our work very important, and my hope—and I think the hope of all the commissioners involved and the members that appointed them—is that what results from this is a trustworthy document.”

— Commissioner Seth G. Jones



Afghanistan War Commission Co-Chairs Shamila N. Chaudhary and Colin Jackson with senior staff visit the 9/11 Memorial and Museum in New York City in Fall 2023.

RESEARCH

“Many Americans don’t question why we went to Afghanistan, but many don’t understand why we stayed so long. Our charge here is to help our fellow citizens process the war and to help bring some closure to those and to this nation. We cannot remain the beacon to the world if we cannot honestly get to the core of what went right and wrong in the Afghanistan War.”

– Commissioner Daniel Fata

SCOPE AND DESIGN

Commission builds its study around key decisions made over the course of the Afghanistan War

During our first year of operation, the commission hired staff, developed and executed a consultative process to solicit commissioner and external expertise, and finalized a research plan to respond to the requirements of our congressional mandate. The result is a clinical and rigorous research approach that will objectively review key decisions made by the United States and its allies, adversaries, and other entities throughout the war in Afghanistan (from June 2001 to August 2021).

With an ambitious congressional mandate, the research plan has established a set of overarching research questions, areas of study, and methodologies that enable the commission to complete its work in the allotted time frame and deliver high-quality research products. This research will culminate in August 2026 with the commission's publication of a comprehensive study of the 20-year war, presented in a report accessible to both expert and general audiences.

The congressional mandate directs the commission to study strategic, diplomatic, and operational decisions across 29 specific aspects of the war. Given the length of the war, the numerous government and nongovernment entities involved, and the volumes of research and literature already available on the subjects of study, the commission determined that scoping our research to specific topics was essential to the success of this project. As a result, we have grouped our research into seven topical areas, which also correspond with our research teams: **policy, diplomacy, counterterrorism, conventional military operations, building the Afghan security forces (security force assistance), reconstruction (development), and intelligence assessments.** Aspects of the war that overlap two or more of these topical areas will entail cross-topical analysis. Other activities, such as counternarcotics and countering corruption, are being considered within these seven primary topics as “special projects.”

Key Research Questions

Across the seven topical areas, analysis will delve into dozens of key decisions made throughout the course of the war. Simultaneously, we will pursue in-depth analysis of cross-topical themes, key assumptions made by decision-makers throughout the war, and the human experiences and toll of the conflict. Throughout, we will use the following overarching questions as our analytical guide:

1. What were the key strategic, policy, diplomatic, and operational decisions associated with the U.S. war in Afghanistan?
2. How and why were these decisions made?
3. What were the direct, indirect, intended, and unintended impacts of those decisions on the course and outcome of the war?
4. What insights can we derive from the Afghanistan case, and how far can the United States go in applying those insights to decisions about future interventions and conflicts?
5. In what ways should the U.S. government change its structure, capabilities, processes, or customs and practices to improve decision-making in the future?

Levels of Decision-Making

The commission recognizes that a decisions-centered analysis requires an appreciation of the complex nature of policymaking in its formulation, implementation, and impact. The commission will frame key decisions across the following levels of decision-making:

U.S. National: Decisions made by the executive branch and Congress influenced outcomes both in Washington, D.C., and in the field. Relevant issues for consideration include the interaction of the various departments and

Research Team Organization

The research staff is organized into the following seven teams:

1. **Policy & Diplomacy:** This team focuses on policymaking by U.S. government and international agencies and will include a review of diplomatic efforts, such as Taliban reconciliation negotiations and U.S. government interagency processes, that led to major decisions and created inflection points in the course of the war.
2. **Development:** This team focuses on U.S. economic development and reconstruction activities in Afghanistan, including support for developing Afghan governance institutions.
3. **Intelligence Assessments:** This team focuses on analysis of intelligence as well as the production of intelligence assessments and intelligence support to policymaking and operations.
4. **Military Operations and Security Force Assistance:** This team focuses on the conventional military operations of U.S. and NATO forces as well as the partnered, advised, or independent operations of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF). ANDSF activities include building, training, and equipping all elements of the Afghan security forces, as well as efforts to create and support non-statutory security forces such as the Afghan local police.
5. **Counterterrorism:** This team focuses on U.S. and Afghan counterterrorism efforts, both intelligence and operational.
6. **Interviews and Information Management:** In collaboration with the topic-specific teams, this team will conduct interviews to generate and consistently analyze primary-source information. This team will also manage the commission's document repository and support the other teams' research efforts via management of government document requests.
7. **Writing and Production:** In collaboration with the other teams, this team will lead the writing, editing, and graphic design of formal commission products, including reports and briefings provided to Congress.

agencies of the executive branch, the involvement of members of Congress in Afghanistan policy, and constituent interests in the war.

NATO, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other states:

This will include decisions such as those made by the United Nations Security Council, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other states. It will also allow for inquiry into interactions between U.S. plans and local actors, such as the Afghan government and people, the Taliban, and third parties.

Field Operational: At this level, decisions made by entities such as U.S. Central Command, the International Security Assistance Force, and U.S. embassies in Kabul and Islamabad will factor into the commission's review. The research will be sensitive to identifying instances of tensions between perspectives in the field and in Washington. It will also examine situations in which ambiguous or abstract policies at international or national levels may have left leaders in the field to make consequential decisions on the conduct of the war.

Methodologies

Research methods include a review of existing literature, subject interviews, and analysis of data and documents gathered from all pertinent agencies, organizations, and individuals. These approaches will be developed and refined continuously. Exploring nuanced, varied, and personal experiences of the impacts of the war will ensure the commission produces content that is accessible and relevant to the broadest audience possible.

The Paths Not Taken

The commission will examine prevailing questions and hypotheses of the war as well as alternative policy options, and how different decisions might have impacted the trajectory of the war. We are mindful that readers of the commission's final report may approach the material with previously held hypotheses about the war. The research will address leading theories and established explanations and address the extent to which the evidence supports or undermines those theories. This effort will adhere

Research Timeline

Q1 2024	Q2 2024 - Q3 2025	Q3 2025 - Q2 2026	Q4 2025 - Q3 2026
Foundational Research Build Research Plan Review Literature Identify Goals & Assessment Frameworks	Execute Data Collection Plan Characterize Key Decisions	Identify Findings Identify Recommendations	Write Overarching Narrative Complete Final Report

The steps outlined above will not be strictly sequential; the research teams will likely move through them at varying paces, and the writing steps will often be conducted in parallel with research steps. This figure represents a broad outline of timing and will be continuously revised as work progresses. Once specific work plans for the research teams are established, this timeline will also reflect targets for staff reports, papers, and quarterly content products.

to the highest standards of research by extensively citing sources and cross-referencing disputed information. The study will acknowledge instances in which definitive conclusions cannot be drawn.

Findings and Recommendations

Findings will be clearly traceable through logic built on analysis and sourcing to confirmable information, and the commission's recommendations to Congress will be clearly tied to those findings. The final report's recommendations will reflect the commission's focus on their utility to future U.S. decision-makers in different settings. Some lessons the commission identifies will be quite specific to the Afghanistan War. Other lessons, particularly those with close parallels in Vietnam and Iraq, may apply well beyond the confines of the

Afghanistan War and to future U.S. conflicts in general. The commission will consider how to improve decision-making by identifying changes in government structure, capabilities, processes, and practices that will help the nation consider choices surrounding future interventions.



Nader Nadery, senior fellow at the Wilson Center and former senior advisor to the president of Afghanistan, addresses the Afghanistan War Commission via videoconference during its July 2024 public hearing.

COMMISSIONER RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

In both plenary sessions and small groups, commissioners have met frequently to gather outside expert and stakeholder inputs into the commission's work. These sessions inform commissioner views as the project's research unfolds. Simultaneously, they have created a rich culture of dialogue and debate among commissioners and the wider community of experts interested in studying the impacts of the war. The following is a list of key meetings of the commission.

- On August 23, 2023, Co-Chairs Shamila N. Chaudhary and Colin Jackson convened the first official business meeting of the commission to approve bylaws for the governance and conduct of the commission and the timeline for research, stakeholder engagement, and publication of findings. This session also triggered the statutory three-year clock for completion of the commission's research work.
- In November 2023, Co-Chairs Chaudhary and Jackson moderated a commission plenary session with experts from the 9/11 Commission and an Army historian for a discussion titled "When Government Writes History."
- In December 2023, Commissioner Ryan Crocker led a commission plenary session with a fellow former ambassador titled "The Role of U.S. Ambassadors During Wartime."
- In January 2024, Commissioner Bob Ashley led a commission plenary session with a fellow former senior Intelligence Community official for a discussion titled "Intelligence Assessments During Wartime" with commissioners and senior staff.
- In February 2024, several commissioners participated in a veterans' roundtable for a candid discussion about the veterans' personal experiences of the Afghanistan War, the withdrawal, and the consequences.
- That same month, Commissioner Andrew Wilder moderated a conversation with Afghanistan experts Dr. Tom Barfield, Dr. Dipali Mukhopadhyay, and Scott Worden about state legitimacy in Afghanistan. The discussion offered valuable insights into the challenges of imposing Western frameworks on Afghanistan's multiethnic landscape and the assumption that elections automatically confer legitimacy.

- In April 2024, commissioners discussed U.S. efforts for state-legitimizing and democracy-promotion in Afghanistan with two prominent Afghan scholars, Dr. Omar Sharifi, President's postdoc fellow and lecturer at the Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, and Dr. Omar Sadr, Senior Research Scholar at the University of Pittsburgh's Center for Governance and Markets. Topics included the impact of fostering democracy through electoral mechanisms and the long-term consequences to state legitimacy and stability of partnering with warlords.
- In June 2024, the commission hosted a virtual roundtable with several members of the Afghan-American diaspora. Co-Chairs Chaudhary and Jackson, along with Commissioners Bob Ashley, Bob Taft, and Dipali Mukhopadhyay, listened to participants as they discussed the impacts of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on their communities and the subsequent U.S. war in Afghanistan. Topics included the role of the Afghan diaspora in Afghan politics and the importance of capturing the voices of Afghans directly affected by the war.
- On July 19, 2024, the commission conducted its first public hearing at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Washington, D.C., Office. Commissioners questioned expert witnesses on lessons learned from the early years of the 20-year U.S. war in Afghanistan, as well as from past forensic reviews, such as the Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (the 9/11 Commission). Witnesses included Ambassador Ronald Neumann, President of the American Academy of Diplomacy; Dr. Alexis Albion; Dr. Halima Kazem, Oral Historian and Manager of the Afghanistan Research Team at Stanford University's Hoover Institution; Mr. Nader Nadery, Senior Fellow with the Wilson Center; Dr. Michael G. Vickers, former Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence; and Dr. Noah Coburn, Provost and Vice President for Academics at the Evergreen State College.

Commissioners also have met 18 times in discussion sessions to delve into the research elements of the commission's work.

The Honorable Michael G. Vickers, former Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, answers questions from commissioners during the Afghanistan War Commission's first public hearing in July 2024.



RESEARCH TEAMS PROGRESS

The commission's research teams developed detailed overall research plans within their respective topic areas

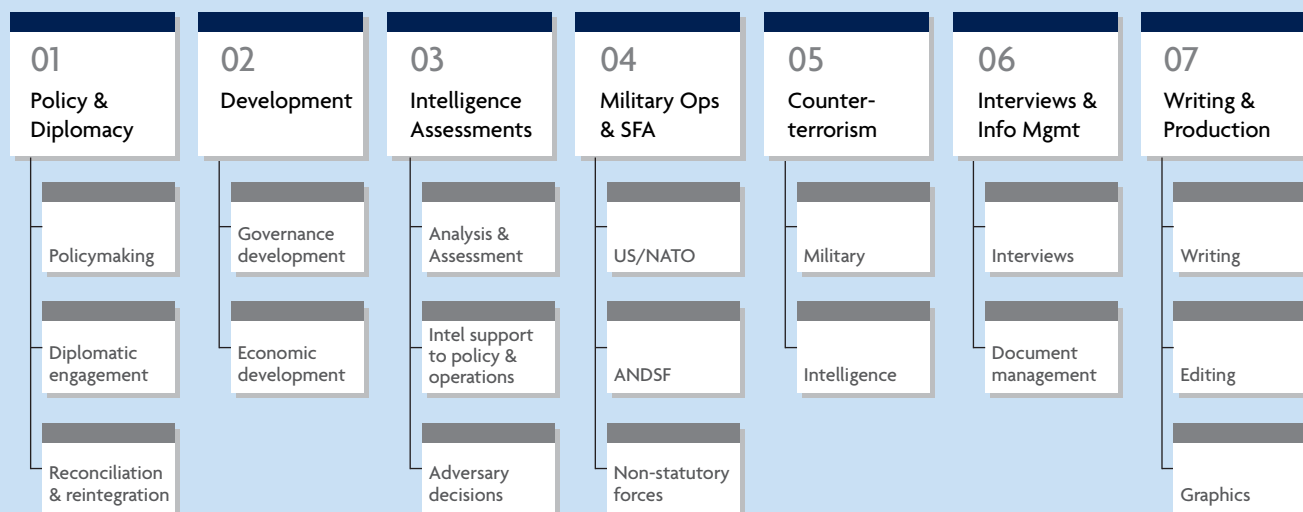
Through extensive consultations with commissioners, across teams, and with external experts, each team has refined—and will continue to define—its scope, research priorities, and questions. Research team progress to date will enable the commission to make specific requests for information and conduct interviews in the coming year.

All teams will review documents, participate in subject interviews, and be deeply involved in research, analysis, and writing. In the past year, they have worked closely with the commission's general counsel, who is dual-hatted as the commission's director for interagency affairs and prepares and oversees all requests for information.

The teams have also initiated contact with current and former officials at U.S. government agencies, coalition members, international actors, and independent stakeholders relevant to their research, many of whom will eventually participate in subject interviews. As part of this process, all teams continue to work closely with the general counsel and the Interviews and Information Management Team to begin strategizing the commission's approach to subject interviews and data management.

Following is an overview of each team's research scope and priorities.

RESEARCH AND FUNCTIONAL STAFF TEAMS



Policy & Diplomacy

SCOPE

From the moment the United States determined that the terrorist attacks of 9/11 were planned and initiated by al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, U.S. policy focused on defeating al-Qaeda and ensuring that Afghanistan could never again be used for attacks on the American homeland. For nearly two decades, in seeking to accomplish those two goals, the United States engaged in a global diplomatic effort to support a stable Afghanistan that was at peace with itself and its neighbors and acted as a responsible member of the international community. The commission's Policy & Diplomacy Team is examining these efforts along with key national security policy decisions made by four presidential administrations during the Afghanistan War. On policy, the team aims to uncover the reasons behind, and processes involved in, making and implementing those critical decisions, as well as to evaluate their ultimate impact on the overall course of the war. On diplomacy, the team will engage in rigorous research of diplomatic efforts across U.S. government agencies to determine how these efforts supported the pursuit of U.S. objectives in Afghanistan, including the efforts to reach a political settlement of the war. The team is particularly focused on evaluating the mission, structures, and resources of the Department of State in building and promoting regional and international coalitions in support of overall U.S. objectives in Afghanistan.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES: POLICY

- U.S. government policy objectives, the authorities used to pursue them, and efficacy of efforts made to achieve them
- Efficacy of U.S. government interagency planning and implementation processes

RESEARCH PRIORITIES: DIPLOMACY

- U.S. government diplomatic objectives and efficacy of efforts made to achieve them
- Key decisions made by the U.S. government and the varying diplomatic approaches by different presidential administrations
- Role of Afghanistan's neighboring countries, most notably Pakistan, in contributing to stability or instability

“I believe this commission owes the American people and the Afghan people an honest, detailed, and legible account of a war that shaped our two nations. I have taught many brilliant Afghan students, American veterans, journalists, aid workers, diplomats, and all of them gave and gained and lost much over the last two decades. So, I take it as a sacred obligation to remember and reflect on the lessons they have taught me.”

— Commissioner Dipali Mukhopadhyay

Development

SCOPE

The congressional mandate directs the Development Team to analyze key U.S. government decisions related to governance, economic development, and humanitarian assistance made during the war. As the U.S. footprint in Afghanistan grew, so did the U.S. effort to build or rebuild strong, functioning Afghan state institutions. Efforts to do so were directly connected to protecting U.S. national security interests in Afghanistan and led to the United States spending more than \$100 billion on development programs between 2002 and 2021.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES:

- Whether development activities advanced U.S. national security interests in Afghanistan
- The U.S. government's overarching development objectives
- The efficacy of efforts made in achieving stated development objectives
- The efficacy of interagency planning, execution, and oversight processes in pursuing development work in Afghanistan

Intelligence Assessments

SCOPE

Intelligence assessments supported the U.S. government's key decisions pertaining to the Afghanistan War. The president, the National Security Council, the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and other U.S. government agencies relied on information provided by the Intelligence Community before and during the war. In light of the commission's legislative mandate, the Intelligence Assessments Team is examining the role of intelligence analysis in U.S. decision-making, policy formulation, and strategic assessments throughout the Afghanistan War.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES:

- Address efficacy of intelligence efforts in supporting key decisions and helping achieve policy objectives
- Address efficacy of intelligence assessments pertaining to potential post-U.S. withdrawal scenarios in Afghanistan, including the collapse of the Afghan government
- Examine the classification of intelligence and whether overcompartmentation unduly restricted access for any U.S. government agencies involved in Afghanistan
- Examine how implementation of the 9/11 Commission's recommendations and other post-9/11 reforms affected intelligence structures, practices, and assessments over the course of the war in Afghanistan



Kabul, Afghanistan.

Military Operations & Security Force Assistance

SCOPE

The commission's Military Operations & Security Force Assistance Team is examining the key military decisions pertaining to the longest overseas war the United States has ever fought. While inquiries will be particularly focused on U.S. military decisions and operations, the team will also examine the role of coalition and NATO forces throughout the Afghanistan War. The team's research concentration is on the strategic to operational levels of the war. It will also delve into relevant aspects of tactical implementation and how they did or did not align with policy and operational decisions.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES:

- Identify overarching military objectives, key options and decisions, and their effects on combat operations in Afghanistan
- Evaluate the efficacy of military operations in achieving U.S. government policy objectives in Afghanistan
- Examine the manning, training, and equipping of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces and the circumstances leading to their disintegration in 2021

“I’m grateful to contribute to the solemn goal of learning from our 20-year war and ensuring that we do not repeat our past mistakes. Three consecutive generations of Molinos have served in uniform, totaling more than 159 months of combat service, two Purple Hearts. My brother is still on active duty today, continuing 118 years of active military service in my family. The consequences of this commission’s endeavor are deeply personal for me, not only as a Molino, but as an American.”

— Commissioner Chris Molino

“It is our contention that we cannot understand the shocking conclusion of the war without first understanding its very beginning. We seek to recall the origins of the terror threat that culminated in the attacks on September 11th, 2001, and to connect the story told by the 9/11 Commission to the early decisions and episodes of the U.S. war in Afghanistan.”

— Commission Co-Chair Colin F. Jackson

Counterterrorism

SCOPE

The primary reason the United States went to war in Afghanistan in 2001 was to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaida, the terror organization behind the September 11, 2001, attacks, and its associated forces. The mission continued for nearly 20 years, targeting these terrorist organizations, including the Islamic State Khorasan Province (IS-K). The commission is mandated to examine the efficacy of the U.S. government’s counterterrorism efforts against al-Qaida, IS-K, and other terrorist organizations active in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES:

- Evaluate activities of U.S. and Afghan military and intelligence entities aimed at disrupting, degrading, and defeating terrorist groups during the Afghanistan War
- Analyze counterterrorism policies, authorities, decisions, and activities, including the relationship between counterterrorism activities in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the Global War on Terror, terrorist sanctuaries, counterterrorism activities against foreign terrorist organizations and insurgent groups, U.S. response to hostage-taking, and harm to civilians resulting from counterterrorism efforts
- Examine how considerations of the terrorism threat, the hardening of U.S. homeland defenses, the building of counterterrorism partners’ capabilities and commitments, the refining of U.S. capabilities, and considerations of human rights influenced discussions and efforts to reduce or end the U.S. military footprint in Afghanistan and transition to an over-the-horizon approach

Special Projects

The congressional mandate asked the commission to look into two additional issues, counternarcotics and counter corruption, which have been classified as special projects and will leverage expertise and inputs from across all relevant research teams. Through extensive consultations in the past year with commissioners, across teams, and with external experts, research staff refined the scope and key questions for these projects.

COUNTERNARCOTICS

The congressional mandate requires the commission to review why U.S. and allied efforts to combat the narcotics problem in Afghanistan did not achieve expected results.

Illicit poppy cultivation boomed during the Afghanistan War. For nearly two decades, despite U.S. and international efforts to curtail it, Afghanistan remained the world's top opium producer. The narcotics economy funded the Taliban insurgency, fueled organized crime, and contributed to endemic corruption in Afghanistan. From destroying drug processing labs to providing alternative livelihood opportunities for poppy farmers, different U.S. government agencies executed counternarcotics projects and programs throughout the war. Given the relationship between the illicit drug economy and the war, the commission will examine how the failure to effectively address the drug economy impacted the United States' counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and stabilization efforts.

COUNTER CORRUPTION

The congressional mandate requires the commission to review corruption and counter corruption across the entire spectrum of U.S. government assistance and warfighting efforts in Afghanistan. U.S. efforts to build and strengthen state institutions in Afghanistan ran headfirst into endemic corruption in the Afghan government that eroded U.S. public confidence and support. The United States also fueled corruption by flooding Afghanistan with more development assistance than the nation could absorb. Of the nearly \$134 billion Congress appropriated for various Afghanistan reconstruction activities from 2002 to 2022, billions were lost to fraud, waste, and abuse. Corruption and counter corruption cut across the entire spectrum of U.S. government assistance and warfighting efforts in Afghanistan, most notably development, building the Afghan security forces, counternarcotics, and policymaking.

“I visited Afghanistan many times, and I was part of the leadership team of CIA that oversaw operations against Osama bin Laden. I sat at the right elbow of a CIA Director and Secretary of Defense as he signed deployment orders sending our men and women into harm’s way to Afghanistan, and I stood with him at Dover and Arlington Cemetery to welcome home our fallen heroes. I want to pay particular tribute to the civilians, including the seven CIA officers who died on December 30, 2009, in Khost, Afghanistan, at Chapman Base. We can never repay the debt of gratitude we owe them.”

– Commissioner Jeremy Bash

Functional Teams

INTERVIEWS & INFORMATION MANAGEMENT TEAM

The Interviews & Information Management Team serves as the centralized hub of organizing and supporting the data collection and interview processes within the commission. It works across all research teams to ensure the staff has access to the tools it needs. The team comprises senior professionals who have conducted and managed extensive interview processes and investigations across the U.S. government.

In its first year of operation, the team developed interview protocols applicable to all the different types of information the commission must gather. It also created a comprehensive data management plan that already has been implemented across all research teams. The plan provides an organizational structure that governs version control, document sharing, and production for both classified and unclassified materials. The plan is also designed to aid the commission's records retention efforts.

As the commission's work progresses, the team will lead the management of interviews with key decision-makers

who shaped major policies during the Afghanistan War, working in close collaboration with commissioners and the research team leads. It will attend interviews and offer comprehensive preparation and training for those individuals in information-gathering roles, giving research teams specific protocols to follow for a consistent and thorough approach to executing interviews.

WRITING & PRODUCTION TEAM

The commission's Writing & Production Team stood up early this summer and includes editors, writers—including an Afghan journalist—and a graphic designer. The team's primary responsibilities are to lead the production, editing, and publication processes of all commission products, including interim reports, staff reports, monographs, and the final report. It will work in close tandem with commissioners, senior staff, and research teams as they dive into the circumstances and consequences of the key decisions that shaped and reshaped the 20-year Afghanistan War.

A U.S. servicemember plays Taps during a 9/11 10th Anniversary Ceremony at the U.S. embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan.





Historian Dr. Alexis Albion and Dr. Janna Mantua, senior analyst and interviewer with the Afghanistan War Commission, talk at a reception before the commission's public hearing in July 2024.

OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENTS

“This was a conflict that was often referred to as the Forever War. With that comes a lot of associations, both for what it meant on the ground, but also what it meant for our democracy. It’s important that we get this work right to understand what happened in Afghanistan, but also to rationalize it within our broader society.”

– Commissioner Luke Hartig

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Commission engages with government agencies, international organizations, veterans, Afghans, and academics

Over the past year, the commission has engaged in hundreds of informal meetings with individuals from a wide variety of organizations and backgrounds.

These have included current and former U.S. government officials from the Intelligence Community, Department of Defense, Department of State, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. This effort has also included historians, authors, archivists, and other subject matter experts from academia, think tanks, federally funded research and development centers, and non-profit research organizations.

The commission's research plan is supported by an equally rigorous approach to documenting the first-hand experiences of war, which will be incorporated into the final report. We intend this to bring awareness to the human toll of the war, which includes experiences of trauma, death, and moral injury by studying American veterans' and Afghan experiences.

The commission has also engaged the general public in a dialogue about our work, from building an active presence on social media platforms to sharing updates regularly through our electronic mailing list. We built relationships with the media, civil society organizations, and universities

interested in featuring the commission in their journalism and thought leadership, efforts that will come to fruition in the coming year.

Congress and Executive Branch Engagements

Engaging Congress and the executive branch are vital for the commission to ensure accountability for and appropriate transparency in its work, in addition to providing high quality research and analysis.

Since its establishment in 2023, the commission has maintained regular engagements with its appointing congressional committees and leadership offices to keep them informed of progress. These included work plan briefings and courtesy calls. In January, Commission Co-Chairs Chaudhary and Jackson met with members of the bipartisan For Country Caucus, where they discussed the commission's progress and planning with Representatives Jason Crow, Jake Ellzey, Jimmy Panetta, and Michael Waltz.

Similarly, the co-chairs, commissioners, and senior staff have engaged executive branch officials to provide foundational briefings on the commission's work plan and requirements.

These engagements included the following:

- Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines
- Department of State Under Secretary for Management John Bass and Coordinator for the Afghanistan War Commission Jennifer Davis
- Alternate Special Representative of the United States for Special Political Affairs in the United Nations and Alternate Representative of the United States for Special Political Affairs in the Sessions of the General Assembly of the United Nations Ambassador Robert Wood
- Director, National Counterterrorism Center Christy Abizaid and incoming Acting Director Brett Holmgren
- Director of the Joint Staff Lieutenant General Douglas A. Sims II

- U.S. Central Command Deputy Commander Vice Admiral Brad Cooper
- U.S. Special Operations Command Deputy Commander Lieutenant General Sean M. Farrell
- Department of State Special Representative for Afghanistan Tom West and Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights Rina Amiri
- Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction John Sopko
- Deputy Assistant to the President, Deputy Counsel to the President, and Legal Advisor to the National Security Council Joshua Geltzer
- U.S. Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Deputy Chief of Mission Rick Holtzapple and Defense Advisor Rachel Ellehuus
- Department of Defense Special Coordinator for Afghanistan Lisa Sawyer and Deputy Special Coordinator for Afghanistan Pete Velz
- Department of State Acting Under Secretary for Management Alaina Teplitz
- Defense Intelligence Agency Director for Analysis Kim Kinney
- Office of the Director of National Intelligence Acting General Counsel Tricia Wellman and National Intelligence Officer for South Asia
- U.S. Agency for International Development Deputy Assistant Administrator Michael McCord and Deputy Director Asia Bureau Kristin Titus
- Department of State Coordinator for the Afghanistan War Commission Andrew Hay
- Central Intelligence Agency Director of the Office of Congressional Affairs (OCA), Elizabeth Burdick, and OCA's Senior Advisor for Strategy, Engagement, and Training
- U.S. Agency for International Development Senior Afghanistan Desk Officer and Commission Point of Contact Julie Fossler

A room filled with members of the public, former ambassadors, veterans, Afghans, academia, and media attend the Afghanistan War Commission's first public hearing at the Veterans of Foreign Wars Washington, D.C., Office in July 2024.



Requests for Information

The Afghanistan War Commission Act authorizes the commission to secure information it considers necessary to carry out its statutory mandate. The act further instructs the heads of executive branch departments and agencies to provide such requested information to the commission. To date, Co-Chairs Chaudhary and Jackson have issued eight formal requests for executive branch materials and briefings to support the commission's research. More requests will be issued as the research advances.

The commission has requested, and departments and agencies have established, senior points of contact to act as commission liaisons and assume primary responsibility for ensuring the commission's requests are appropriately actioned.

The commission has requested a broad range of materials spanning the full substantive and temporal range of its mandate. With a time-constrained review, the commission appreciates the effort to produce materials during our intense research phase of spring 2024 to spring 2025. The commission is currently encouraged with the progress to date and is working with executive branch points of contact to commemorate standard operating procedures to expedite future requests. The commission anticipates the need for similar cooperation as it begins to conduct interviews of U.S. government officials.

The following is a list of offices that have provided briefings to the commission at its requests.

Department of Defense:

- Comptroller
- Defense Intelligence Agency
- Historian Offices across the Department of Defense
- Joint Chiefs of Staff
- Office of the Special Coordinator for Afghanistan in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

Department of State:

- Bureau of Consular Affairs
- Bureau of Counterterrorism
- Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
- Bureau of Diplomatic Security
- Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs
- Bureau of Global Talent Management
- Bureau of Intelligence and Research
- Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement
- Bureau of Political-Military Affairs
- Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration
- Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs
- Coordinator for Afghanistan Relocation Efforts

- Foreign Service Institute
- Office of Foreign Assistance
- Office of Global Women's Issues
- Office of the Historian
- Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights
- Special Representative for Afghanistan

Office of the Director of National Intelligence/Central Intelligence Agency:

- National Intelligence Council-Led Brief

Central Intelligence Agency:

- Afghanistan Department
- Center for the Study of Intelligence
- South and Central Asia Mission Center

U.S. Agency for International Development:

- Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance
- Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance
- Office of Acquisition and Assistance
- Office of Civilian-Military Cooperation
- Office of Transition Initiatives

International Engagement

The commission conducted two notable engagements with international organizations that were intended to familiarize those organizations with our mandate and establish lines of communication.

In February, commission co-chairs and senior staff traveled to the United Nations headquarters in New York City to meet with officials from the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA). Co-Chair Chaudhary held a follow-on engagement in March to further discuss the commission's areas of focus and UNAMA's role in Afghanistan over time. Given UNAMA's historical and ongoing presence inside Afghanistan, the commission values its continued conversations with UNAMA.

In June, commission senior staff traveled to Brussels, Belgium, for a series of introductory meetings with NATO senior officials. They presented the commission's work plan to the NATO Archives Committee, discussed future commission access to NATO information, and laid the groundwork for a future visit by co-chairs and commissioners with NATO leadership.

Additional international engagements are planned for the upcoming year to begin preparations for overseas travel and interviews with foreign interlocutors.

Media Coverage

During its first full year of operations, the commission's work has been covered in several major media outlets.

- *The Hill*, "How the Afghanistan War Commission aims to learn from our longest conflict" (August 30, 2023)
- *Politico*, "'Never Been Done Before': A True Investigation of a Failed American War" (May 26, 2024)
- *Military Times*, "Afghanistan War Commission wants veteran stories and questions" (July 16, 2024)
- *The Washington Post*, "Afghanistan War Commission opens inquiry of America's longest conflict" (July 19, 2024)
- Reuters, "Panel studying US war in Afghanistan holds first public hearing" (July 19, 2024)
- Fox News Channel, "Afghanistan Withdrawal: Commission holds first public hearing" (July 19, 2024)
- Military.com, "'Today We Make History': Commission Probing Afghanistan War Starts Work with Veterans Top of Mind" (July 19, 2024)
- C-SPAN, "Afghanistan War Commission Public Hearing on Origins of Afghanistan War (Panels 1 and 2)" (July 19, 2024)

The commission also frequently updated the general public on its progress through its website, e-mail newsletters, and social media, including on LinkedIn, X, and YouTube.

In fulfilling its mandate to inform policymakers and the American public of its work in an accessible and transparent manner, the commission plans to continue regular, robust engagements with journalists and through social media postings.



Jeremy Butler, Afghanistan War Commission's director of operations and veterans outreach, meets with staff of Combined Arms, May 10, 2024, in Houston, Texas. From left are Mia Garcia, Bryan Escobedo, Mr. Butler, and Khalil Arab.

Veterans

When Congress proposed the idea of the commission, veterans serving in Congress and across the United States staunchly advocated for its establishment. The American Legion adopted Resolution No. 12 in May 2023, which stated that it “fully endorses the creation and implementation of the Afghanistan War Commission.” The commission feels a duty to its earliest supporters and to the roughly 800,000 U.S. military personnel who served in Afghanistan to rigorously analyze veterans’ experiences in the context of our review of policy decisions.

The commission hired Jeremy Butler, a Navy Reservist and former CEO of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, to serve as director of operations and as senior advisor on veteran engagement. Mr. Butler has been instrumental in building the commission’s outreach strategy and linking it to our research, communications, and Afghan outreach priorities. In the past year, we established dialogue and collaborations with key engagements.

- Co-Chair and Army veteran Colin Jackson was hosted by Stanford University’s Hoover Institution in March for a discussion on the commission’s work at an event in Massachusetts with other veterans and community members, including Afghans who served alongside Americans in the war.

- The commission hosted a virtual roundtable in April with Afghanistan War veterans to solicit their views on the commission’s mandate and to understand veterans community’s expectations for the commission. We worked with Blue Star Families and the White Oak Collaborative to organize this event. We intend to engage with Gold Star Families, too.
- Executive Director Jaime Cheshire appeared as a featured guest on the American Legion’s “Tango Alpha Lima” podcast in April to discuss the commission’s mandate.
- In May, Mr. Butler met with Combined Arms, a veterans empowerment network based in Houston, Texas, to discuss veterans’ personal experiences in Afghanistan and their views on the commission’s mandate.
- In July, the commission was honored to partner with the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) for the commission’s first public hearing at VFW’s Washington, D.C., Office.

Building on this outreach, the commission established a dedicated online portal on its website inviting Afghanistan War veterans to share their perspectives and experiences and to pose questions for the commission to consider in its research. The portal has received more than 200 responses to date and has been highlighted in leading military community media outlets.

Afghans

The commission's final report would be incomplete without understanding the role of Afghans in the formation and implementation of U.S. decisions. We must hear directly from Afghans about how U.S. wartime decisions impacted them over time. Commissioners have emphasized that our work must examine how and where U.S. plans and intentions throughout the war collided with the political realities and autonomy of the Afghan people. To achieve this goal, the commission has focused on building collaborative partnerships and open dialogue with Afghans relevant to the commission's work.

We hired Mariam Jalalzada to serve as Senior Advisor for Afghan Outreach. Ms. Jalalzada is an experienced U.S. government civil servant who has conducted extensive fieldwork in Afghanistan and has key relationships in the global Afghan community. Under her leadership, the commission has hosted a series of virtual and in-person meetings and interviews to learn from Afghans who can provide insights into the human, social, and political dimensions of the conflict. In the coming year, we will continue to engage the many Afghans who served and

sacrificed, from former Afghan government and military officials to civil society members and Afghan Americans, to those eligible for special immigrant visas.

“I think it’s quite significant that we started our outreach last fall with a poignant visit to the 9/11 Memorial in New York. It was a very painful experience, a reminder of the tragedy that has guided us for the past two decades, but it was a necessary one.”

– Commissioner Co-Chair Shamila N. Chaudhary

Dr. Halima Kazem, Oral Historian and Manager of the Hoover Afghanistan Research and Relief Team Oral History Project at Stanford University, addresses the Afghanistan War Commission at the commission's July 2024 hearing.





Afghanistan War Commission leadership at the 9/11 Memorial in New York City. From left are Jaime Cheshire, Matt Gobush, Shamila N. Chaudhary, Colin Jackson, Julie Martin, and Jonathan Schroden.

“The writ of this commission extends for 20 years. That is an entire generation. We had servicemembers who fought in Afghanistan who had no living memory of 9/11. As vast as that time is, history didn’t begin in 2001, and it didn’t end in 2021. An appreciation of history, I think, is very important.”

— Commissioner Ryan Crocker

NEXT STEPS

Year Two Goals

In its second year, the Afghanistan War Commission will rigorously review the key decisions identified in each of its major lines of research.

Building on the first public hearing in July 2024, the commission will continue to hold full plenary sessions. Commissioners and senior staff will remain heavily engaged in outreach with relevant stakeholders.

Year two activities will include the following:

- Substantial reviews of incoming U.S. government documents (e.g., policy, operational, intelligence) formally requested from executive branch agencies at various levels of classification and materials obtained from other governments and organizations (e.g., NATO);
- Formal interviews of current and former government officials (e.g., from the United States, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and allied/partner governments) and subject matter experts;
- Public hearings and private roundtable discussions oriented on specific lines of research;
- Compilation and analysis of datasets focused on specific key decisions of interest;
- The production of staff papers documenting the results of the analysis;

By the end of year two, August 2025, the Afghanistan War Commission will be writing products that build toward the 2026 narrative report and initiating the process to identify findings and recommendations in each of its major lines of research.

APPENDIX I

AFGHANISTAN WAR COMMISSION ACT

SEC. 1094. AFGHANISTAN WAR COMMISSION ACT OF 2021.

National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 (Pub. L. No. 117-81, 135 Stat. 1935 (2021)).

(a) SHORT TITLE.—This section may be cited as the “Afghanistan War Commission Act of 2021”.

(b) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(1) The term “applicable period” means the period beginning June 1, 2001, and ending August 30, 2021.

(2) The term “appropriate congressional committees” means—

- (A) the Committee on Armed Services of the Senate;
- (B) the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate;
- (C) the Select Committee on Intelligence of the Senate;
- (D) the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate;
- (E) the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives;
- (F) the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives;
- (G) the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence of the House of Representatives; and
- (H) the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives.

(3) The term “intelligence community” has the meaning given that term in section 3(4) of the National Security Act of 1947 (50 U.S.C. 3003(4)).

(c) ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMISSION.—

(1) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established in the legislative branch an independent commission to be known as the Afghanistan War Commission (in this section referred to as the “Commission”).

(2) MEMBERSHIP.—

(A) COMPOSITION.—The Commission shall be composed of 16 members of whom—

- (i) 1 shall be appointed by the Chairman of the Committee on Armed Services of the Senate;
- (ii) 1 shall be appointed by the ranking member of the Committee on Armed Services of the Senate;
- (iii) 1 shall be appointed by the Chairman of the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives;
- (iv) 1 shall be appointed by the ranking member of the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives;
- (v) 1 shall be appointed by the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate;
- (vi) 1 shall be appointed by the ranking member of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate;

- (vii) 1 shall be appointed by the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives;
- (viii) 1 shall be appointed by the ranking member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives;
- (ix) 1 shall be appointed by the Chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence of the Senate;
- (x) 1 shall be appointed by the Vice Chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence of the Senate;
- (xi) 1 shall be appointed by the Chairman of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence of the House of Representatives;
- (xii) 1 shall be appointed by the ranking member of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence of the House of Representatives;
- (xiii) 1 shall be appointed by the Majority leader of the Senate;
- (xiv) 1 shall be appointed by the Minority leader of the Senate;
- (xv) 1 shall be appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives; and
- (xvi) 1 shall be appointed by the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives.

(B) QUALIFICATIONS.—It is the sense of Congress that each member of the Commission appointed under subparagraph (A) should—

- (i) have significant professional experience in national security, such as a position in—
 - (I) the Department of Defense;
 - (II) the Department of State;
 - (III) the intelligence community;
 - (IV) the United States Agency for International Development; or
 - (V) an academic or scholarly institution; and
- (ii) be eligible to receive the appropriate security clearance to effectively execute their duties.

(C) PROHIBITIONS.—A member of the Commission appointed under subparagraph (A) may not—

- (i) be a current member of Congress;
- (ii) be a former member of Congress who served in Congress after January 3, 2001;
- (iii) be a current or former registrant under the Foreign Agents Registration Act of 1938 (22 U.S.C. 611 et seq.);
- (iv) have previously investigated Afghanistan policy or the war in Afghanistan through employment in the office of a relevant inspector general;
- (v) have been the sole owner or had a majority stake in a company that held any United States or coalition defense contract providing goods or services to activities by the United States Government or coalition in Afghanistan during the applicable period; or
- (vi) have served, with direct involvement in actions by the United States Government in Afghanistan during the time the relevant official served, as—
 - (I) a cabinet secretary or national security adviser to the President; or
 - (II) a four-star flag officer, Under Secretary, or more senior official in the Department of Defense or the Department of State.

(D) DATE.—

- (i) IN GENERAL.—The appointments of the members of the Commission shall be made not later than 60 days after the date of enactment of this Act.

(ii) FAILURE TO MAKE APPOINTMENT.—If an appointment under subparagraph (A) is not made by the appointment date specified in clause (i)—

(I) the authority to make such appointment shall expire; and

(II) the number of members of the Commission shall be reduced by the number equal to the number of appointments not made.

(3) PERIOD OF APPOINTMENT; VACANCIES.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—A member of the Commission shall be appointed for the life of the Commission.

(B) VACANCIES.—A vacancy in the Commission—

(i) shall not affect the powers of the Commission; and

(ii) shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment.

(4) MEETINGS.—

(A) INITIAL MEETING.—Not later than 30 days after the date on which all members of the Commission have been appointed, the Commission shall hold the first meeting of the Commission.

(B) FREQUENCY.—The Commission shall meet at the call of the Co-Chairpersons.

(C) QUORUM.—A majority of the members of the Commission shall constitute a quorum, but a lesser number of members may hold hearings.

(5) CO-CHAIRPERSONS.—Co-Chairpersons of the Commission shall be selected by the Leadership of the Senate and the House of Representatives as follows:

(A) 1 Co-Chairperson selected by the Majority Leader of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives from the members of the Commission appointed by chairpersons of the appropriate congressional committees, the Majority Leader of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives; and

(B) 1 Co-Chairperson selected by the Minority Leader of the Senate and the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives from the members of the Commission appointed by the ranking members of the appropriate congressional committees, the Minority Leader of the Senate, and the Minority Leader of the House of Representatives.

(d) PURPOSE OF COMMISSION.— The purpose of the Commission is—

(1) to examine the key strategic, diplomatic, and operational decisions that pertain to the war in Afghanistan during the relevant period, including decisions, assessments, and events that preceded the war in Afghanistan; and

(2) to develop a series of lessons learned and recommendations for the way forward that will inform future decisions by Congress and policymakers throughout the United States Government.

(e) DUTIES OF COMMISSION.—

(1) STUDY.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Commission shall conduct a thorough study of all matters relating to combat operations, reconstruction and security force assistance activities, intelligence activities, and diplomatic activities of the United States pertaining to Afghanistan during the period beginning June 1, 2001, and ending August 30, 2021.

(B) MATTERS STUDIED.—The matters studied by the Commission shall include—

(i) for the time period specified under subparagraph (A)—

(I) the policy objectives of the United States Government, including—

(aa) military objectives;

(bb) diplomatic objectives; and

(cc) development objectives;

- (II) significant decisions made by the United States, including the development of options presented to policymakers;
- (III) the efficacy of efforts by the United States Government in meeting the objectives described in clause (i), including an analysis of—
 - (aa) military efforts;
 - (bb) diplomatic efforts;
 - (cc) development efforts; and
 - (dd) intelligence efforts; and
- (IV) the efficacy of counterterrorism efforts against al-Qaeda, the Islamic State Khorasan Province, and other foreign terrorist organizations in degrading the will and capabilities of such organizations—
 - (aa) to mount external attacks against the United States or its allies and partners; or
 - (bb) to threaten stability in Afghanistan, neighboring countries, and the region;
- (ii) the efficacy of metrics, measures of effectiveness, and milestones used to assess progress of diplomatic, military, and intelligence efforts;
- (iii) the efficacy of interagency planning and execution process by the United States Government;
- (iv) factors that led to the collapse of the Afghan National Defense Security Forces in 2021, including—
 - (I) training and mentoring from the institutional to the tactical levels within the Afghan National Defense Security Forces;
 - (II) assessment methodologies, including any transition from different methodologies and the consistency of implementation and reporting;
 - (III) the determination of how to establish and develop the Afghan National Defense Security Forces, including the Afghan Air Force, and what determined the security cooperation model used to build such force;
 - (IV) reliance on technology and logistics support;
 - (V) corruption; and
 - (VI) reliance on warfighting enablers provided by the United States;
- (v) the challenges of corruption across the entire spectrum of the Afghan Government and efficacy of counter corruption efforts to include linkages to diplomatic lines of effort, linkages to foreign and security assistance, and assessment methodologies;
- (vi) the efficacy of counternarcotic efforts to include alternative livelihoods, eradication, interdiction, and education efforts;
- (vii) the role of countries neighboring Afghanistan in contributing to the stability or instability of Afghanistan;
- (viii) varying diplomatic approaches between Presidential administrations;
- (ix) the extent to which the intelligence community did or did not fail to provide sufficient warning about the probable outcomes of a withdrawal of coalition military personnel from Afghanistan, including as it relates to—
 - (I) the capability and sustainability of the Afghanistan National Defense Security Forces;
 - (II) the sustainability of the Afghan central government, absent coalition support;
 - (III) the extent of Taliban control over Afghanistan over time with respect to geographic territory,

population centers, governance, and influence; and

(IV) the likelihood of the Taliban regaining control of Afghanistan at various levels of United States and coalition support, including the withdrawal of most or all United States or coalition support;

(x) the extent to which intelligence products related to the state of the conflict in Afghanistan and the effectiveness of the Afghanistan National Defense Security Forces complied with intelligence community-wide analytic tradecraft standards and fully reflected the divergence of analytic views across the intelligence community;

(xi) an evaluation of whether any element of the United States Government inappropriately restricted access to data from elements of the intelligence community, Congress, or the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) or any other oversight body such as other inspectors general or the Government Accountability Office, including through the use of overclassification; and

(xii) the extent to which public representations of the situation in Afghanistan before Congress by United States Government officials differed from the most recent formal assessment of the intelligence community at the time those representations were made.

(2) REPORT REQUIRED.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—

(i) ANNUAL REPORT.—

(I) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 1 year after the date of the initial meeting of the Commission, and annually thereafter, the Commission shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees a report describing the progress of the activities of the Commission as of the date of such report, including any findings, recommendations, or lessons learned endorsed by the Commission.

(II) ADDENDA.—Any member of the Commission may submit an addendum to a report required under subclause (I) setting forth the separate views of such member with respect to any matter considered by the Commission.

(III) BRIEFING.—On the date of the submission of each report, the Commission shall brief Congress.

(ii) FINAL REPORT.—

(I) SUBMISSION.—Not later than 3 years after the date of the initial meeting of the Commission, the Commission shall submit to Congress a report that contains a detailed statement of the findings, recommendations, and lessons learned endorsed by the Commission.

(II) ADDENDA.—Any member of the Commission may submit an addendum to the report required under subclause (I) setting forth the separate views of such member with respect to any matter considered by the Commission.

(III) EXTENSION.—The Commission may submit the report required under subclause (I) at a date that is not more than 1 year later than the date specified in such clause if agreed to by the chairperson and ranking member of each of the appropriate congressional committees.

(B) FORM.—The report required by paragraph (1)(B) shall be submitted and publicly released on a Government website in unclassified form but may contain a classified annex.

(C) SUBSEQUENT REPORTS ON DECLASSIFICATION.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 4 years after the date that the report required by subparagraph (A)(ii) is submitted, each relevant agency of jurisdiction shall submit to the committee of jurisdiction a report on the efforts of such agency to declassify such annex.

(ii) CONTENTS.—Each report required by clause (i) shall include—

(I) a list of the items in the classified annex that the agency is working to declassify at the time of the

report and an estimate of the timeline for declassification of such items;

(II) a broad description of items in the annex that the agency is declining to declassify at the time of the report; and

(III) any justification for withholding declassification of certain items in the annex and an estimate of the timeline for declassification of such items.

(f) POWERS OF COMMISSION.—

(1) HEARINGS.—The Commission may hold such hearings, take such testimony, and receive such evidence as the Commission considers necessary to carry out its purpose and functions under this section.

(2) ASSISTANCE FROM FEDERAL AGENCIES.—

(A) INFORMATION.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—The Commission may secure directly from a Federal department or agency such information as the Commission considers necessary to carry out this section.

(ii) FURNISHING INFORMATION.—Upon receipt of a written request by the Co-Chairpersons of the Commission, the head of the department or agency shall expeditiously furnish the information to the Commission.

(B) SPACE FOR COMMISSION.—

(i) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 30 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Architect of the Capitol, in consultation with the Commission, shall identify suitable space to house the operations of the Commission, which shall include—

(I) a dedicated sensitive compartmented information facility or access to a sensitive compartmented information facility; and

(II) the ability to store classified documents.

(ii) AUTHORITY TO LEASE.—If the Architect of the Capitol is not able to identify space in accordance with clause (i) within the 30-day period specified in clause (i), the Commission may lease space to the extent that funds are available for such purpose.

(C) COMPLIANCE BY INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY.—Elements of the intelligence community shall respond to requests submitted pursuant to paragraph (2) in a manner consistent with the protection of intelligence sources and methods.

(3) POSTAL SERVICES.—The Commission may use the United States mails in the same manner and under the same conditions as other departments and agencies of the Federal Government.

(4) GIFTS.—The Commission may accept, use, and dispose of gifts or donations of services, goods, and property from non-Federal entities for the purposes of aiding and facilitating the work of the Commission. The authority in this subsection does not extend to gifts of money. Gifts accepted under this authority shall be documented, and conflicts of interest or the appearance of conflicts of interest shall be avoided. Subject to the authority in this section, commissioners shall otherwise comply with rules set forth by the Select Committee on Ethics of the Senate.

(5) ETHICS.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The members and employees of the Commission shall be subject to the ethical rules and guidelines of the Senate.

(B) REPORTING.—For purposes of title I of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.), each member and employee of the Commission—

(i) shall be deemed to be an officer or employee of the Congress (as defined in section 109(13) of such title); and

(ii) shall file any report required to be filed by such member or such employee (including by virtue of the

application of subsection (g)(1)) under title I of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.) with the Secretary of the Senate.

(g) COMMISSION PERSONNEL MATTERS.—

(1) COMPENSATION OF MEMBERS.—A member of the Commission who is not an officer or employee of the Federal Government shall be compensated at a rate equal to the daily equivalent of the annual rate of basic pay prescribed for level IV of the Executive Schedule under section 5315 of title 5, United States Code, for each day (including travel time) during which the member is engaged in the performance of the duties of the Commission.

(2) TRAVEL EXPENSES.—A member of the Commission shall be allowed travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of subsistence, at rates authorized for employees of agencies under subchapter I of chapter 57 of title 5, United States Code, while away from their homes or regular places of business in the performance of services for the Commission.

(3) STAFF.—

(A) STATUS AS FEDERAL EMPLOYEES.—Notwithstanding the requirements of section 2105 of title 5, United States Code, including the required supervision under subsection (a)(3) of such section, the members of the commission shall be deemed to be Federal employees.

(B) EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR.—The Co-Chairpersons of the Commission shall appoint and fix the rate of basic pay for an Executive Director in accordance with section 3161(d) of title 5, United States Code.

(C) PAY.—The Executive Director, with the approval of the Co-Chairpersons of the Commission, may appoint and fix the rate of basic pay for additional personnel as staff of the Commission in accordance with section 3161(d) of title 5, United States Code.

(D) SECURITY CLEARANCES.—All staff must have or be eligible to receive the appropriate security clearance to conduct their duties.

(4) DETAIL OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES.—A Federal Government employee, with the appropriate security clearance to conduct their duties, may be detailed to the Commission without reimbursement, and such detail shall be without interruption or loss of civil service status or privilege.

(5) PROCUREMENT OF TEMPORARY AND INTERMITTENT SERVICES.—The Co-Chairpersons of the Commission may procure temporary and intermittent services under section 3109(b) of title 5, United States Code, at rates for individuals that do not exceed the daily equivalent of the annual rate of basic pay prescribed for level V of the Executive Schedule under section 5316 of that title.

(6) PAY.—The pay of each employee of the Commission and any member of the Commission who receives pay in accordance with paragraph (1) shall be disbursed by the Secretary of the Senate.

(h) TERMINATION OF COMMISSION.—The Commission shall terminate 90 days after the date on which the Commission submits the report required under subsection (e)(2)(A)(ii).

APPENDIX II

COMMISSIONER BIOGRAPHIES



Shamila N. Chaudhary

**CO-CHAIR OF THE
AFGHANISTAN WAR
COMMISSION**

from 2009 to 2010. Since leaving public service in 2011, Ms. Chaudhary has assumed a variety of leadership roles in higher education, think tank, non-profit, and private sector, including at the political risk consultancy Eurasia Group, the American Pakistan Foundation, and the Atlantic Council. At Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, she served as senior advisor to Dean Vali Nasr from 2013 to 2019. Ms. Chaudhary earned an MA in International Affairs from the American University's School of International Service and a BA in English Literature and Women's Studies from the University of Toledo.

Shamila N. Chaudhary served in senior roles in the U.S. government for more than a decade, including as Director for Pakistan and Afghanistan on the National Security Council from 2010 to 2011. She also served in the U.S. Department of State's policy planning staff as South Asia Advisor to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the late Ambassador Richard Holbrooke



Dr. Colin Jackson

**CO-CHAIR OF THE
AFGHANISTAN WAR
COMMISSION**

2017, he served at the Naval War College as a professor in the Strategy Department and later Director of the Advanced Strategist Program. Dr. Jackson also taught strategy and counterinsurgency at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and at Columbia University. His career serving in the U.S. Army and U.S. Army Reserve included a deployment to Afghanistan in 2011 as Executive Officer for Policy Planning for the Deputy Chief of Staff, Operations U.S. Forces-Afghanistan and as a senior civilian advisor to Task Force Mountain Warrior. Before entering academia, he worked in private sector financial trading and power development. He holds degrees from MIT, University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, and Princeton University. He is a recipient of both the Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service and the Bronze Star Medal.

Colin F. Jackson serves as the Chair of the Strategic and Operational Research Department at the U.S. Naval War College. Previously he served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia from 2017 to 2019. He also served as the senior Department of Defense representative to the U.S.-Taliban peace talks. From 2006 to

Michael Allen

Michael Allen served in the George W. Bush White House in a variety of national security policy and legislative roles, including Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Counter-proliferation Strategy on the National Security Council from June 2007 to January 2009. From 2011 to 2013, Mr. Allen served as the Majority Staff Director of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. Prior to joining the select committee, Mr. Allen was Director for the Bipartisan Policy Center's successor to the 9/11 Commission, the National Security Preparedness Group, which was co-chaired by former Congressman Lee Hamilton and former Governor Tom Kean. Mr. Allen is managing director of Beacon Global Strategies, which advises clients on the intersection of business and national security. He received his LLM with distinction in International Law from the Georgetown University Law Center; his JD from the University of Alabama, cum laude; and his BA from Vanderbilt University.



Lieutenant General Robert P. Ashley Jr., U.S. Army (retired)

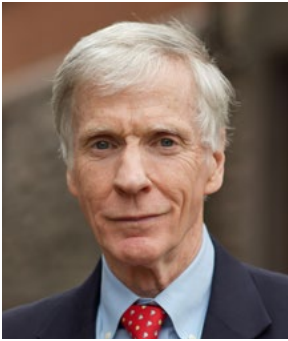
LTG Robert P. Ashley Jr. served in the U.S. Army for over 36 years and was the 21st Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency from 2017 to 2020. Previously, he served as the Army Deputy Chief of Staff, G-2, where he was a senior advisor to the Secretary of the Army and Army Chief of Staff for all aspects of intelligence, counterintelligence, and security. A career military intelligence officer, he commanded at the company, battalion, squadron, and brigade levels with six tours in Iraq and Afghanistan: as a squadron commander, brigade commander, and Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence (J-2). Other key assignments include Director of Intelligence, U.S. Joint Special Operations Command; Director of Intelligence, U.S. Central Command; Deputy Chief of Staff, Intelligence, International Security Assistance Force and Director of Intelligence, U.S. Forces-Afghanistan; and Commanding General, U.S. Army Intelligence Center of Excellence at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. He has a BA in Political Science from Appalachian State University, a master's in Strategic Intelligence from the National Intelligence University, and a master's in Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College.



Jeremy Bash

Jeremy Bash served as Chief of Staff to the Director of the CIA (2009–2011) and Chief of Staff to the Secretary of Defense (2011–2013). From 2004 to 2009, he served on Capitol Hill, including as Chief Counsel of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. From August 2010 to May 2011, he was a member of the CIA's senior management team overseeing the operation that killed Osama Bin Laden. Currently, Mr. Bash is a managing director at Beacon Global Strategies, serves as a member of the President's Intelligence Advisory Board, and as a board member to the Truman Center for National Policy and the International Spy Museum. Mr. Bash is a recipient of the Department of Defense Distinguished Public Service Medal, the CIA Director's Award, the Distinguished Intelligence Medal, and the Donovan Award from the National Clandestine Service. He graduated from Georgetown University, magna cum laude, and earned his law degree from Harvard Law School, where he was an editor of the *Harvard Law Review*.





Ryan Crocker

Former Ambassador Ryan Crocker was a career foreign service officer who served as a U.S. Ambassador to six countries: Afghanistan (2011–2012), Iraq (2007–2009), Pakistan (2004–2007), Syria (1998–2001), Kuwait (1994–1997), and Lebanon (1990–1993). He received the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award, in 2009. He currently is a nonresident senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and was previously a diplomat in residence at Princeton University. Other recent awards include the inaugural Bancroft Award presented by the Naval Academy in 2016; the annual James Joyce Award bestowed by the University College, Dublin; and the West Point's Thayer Award in 2020. He is an Honorary Marine.



Jeffrey Dressler

Jeffrey Dressler is a partner in SoftBank's global government affairs office in Washington, D.C. Previously, he served as the National Security Advisor to Speakers of the House Paul Ryan and Kevin McCarthy. Prior to working with leadership in the U.S. House of Representatives, Mr. Dressler was a professional staff member on the House Foreign Affairs Committee responsible for terrorism, trade, and non-proliferation. Mr. Dressler began his career as an expert on Afghanistan and Pakistan at the Institute for the Study of War, in which capacity he served as a terrorism and counterinsurgency advisor to senior commanders in Afghanistan. Mr. Dressler has appeared on Fox News, CNN, MSNBC, and in leading publications as a subject matter expert on foreign policy and national security issues.



Daniel Fata

Daniel Fata, president of Fata Advisory, LLC, is a public policy expert, national security consultant, and strategic advisor focused on helping companies and organizations enhance their product and program offerings through the development of comprehensive government affairs strategies, risk assessments, strategic planning, and advocacy initiatives. For seven years, Mr. Fata served in various capacities at Lockheed Martin. Prior to joining Lockheed Martin, he spent six years as the vice president of The Cohen Group, a global strategic advisory firm. From 2005 to 2008, he served as the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for European and NATO Policy. Mr. Fata graduated with honors from the University of Connecticut with a BA in Political Science. He earned his MA in International Relations from Boston University.

Dr. Anand Gopal

Dr. Anand Gopal is the author of *No Good Men Among the Living: America, the Taliban, and the War Through Afghan Eyes* (Metropolitan Books, 2014), a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award and winner of the Ridenhour Prize for Journalism. As an award-winning journalist, he has been published in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Atlantic*, and *Harper's Magazine*. He has extensively covered conflict in Afghanistan and Syria, including embedding with the Taliban, which led to his writing *No Good Men Among the Living*. He received his PhD from Columbia University and is an assistant research professor at the Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict.



Luke Hartig

Luke Hartig is a fellow at New America's International Security program and the President of Gravity Research. Previously, he served as Senior Director for Counterterrorism at the National Security Council. Mr. Hartig has also served in various national security positions within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, State Department, Office of Management and Budget, Government Accountability Office, and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan. He is an Executive Editor at Just Security and a member of the Advisory Boards of Hostage US and the James W. Foley Legacy Foundation. He began his career as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Guatemala. Mr. Hartig holds an MPP from the Harvard Kennedy School and a BA in International Relations from Boston University.



Dr. Seth G. Jones

Dr. Seth G. Jones is Senior Vice President, Harold Brown Chair, and director of the International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. He also teaches at Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies and the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School's Center for Homeland Defense and Security. He previously was director of the International Security and Defense Policy Center at RAND Corporation and served in several positions in U.S. Special Operations Command and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, including plans officer and advisor to the commanding general, U.S. Special Operations Forces, in Afghanistan. He served on a 2014 congressional panel that reviewed the FBI's implementation of the 9/11 Commission's counterterrorism recommendations. Among the books he's authored is *In the Graveyard of Empires: America's War in Afghanistan* (W.W. Norton, 2010). A graduate of Bowdoin College, Dr. Jones received his MA and PhD from the University of Chicago.





Laurel E. Miller

Laurel E. Miller is President and CEO of the Asia Foundation. Her previous nonprofit work includes Director of the Asia Program for the International Crisis Group and senior foreign policy expert for RAND Corporation on an array of topics including peace processes, institution building, economic and security assistance, and governance. At the State Department, Ms. Miller was Deputy and Acting Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan and also served as Senior Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Senior Advisor to the U.S. Special Envoy for the Balkans, and Deputy to the Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues. She was directly involved in peace negotiations in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia. In addition, Ms. Miller served as Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs at the National Security Council. She is a graduate of Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs and the University of Chicago Law School.



Lieutenant Colonel Chris Molino, U.S. Army (retired)

LTC Chris Molino served in the U.S. Army for 20 years. His career included operational and senior staff assignments focused on counterterrorism and U.S. policymaking, including roles in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Special Operations Command, and Army Special Operations Command. He also served as the Director for Counterterrorism on the National Security Council from 2017 to 2019. In addition to conventional assignments in the Infantry, LTC Molino served in Army and Joint Special Operations commands at every rank from second lieutenant to lieutenant colonel with combat experience in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan. He is the Chief Operating Officer of consulting firm Gossamer Insights and Director of Defense Programs for Foundation Stack AI. He also is an adjunct professor at Georgetown University and Missouri State University. LTC Molino received BAs in Government and History from William & Mary and an MPM from Georgetown University.



Dr. Dipali Mukhopadhyay

Dr. Dipali Mukhopadhyay, author of *Warlords, Strongman Governors and the State in Afghanistan* (Cambridge University Press, 2014), is a senior expert on the Afghanistan peace process for the U.S. Institute of Peace. She also is an associate professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies and has had similar positions at the University of Minnesota and Columbia University. Her research focus is the relationships among political violence, state building, and governance during and after war with a geographical focus on Afghanistan and Syria. Dr. Mukhopadhyay is vice president of the American Institute of Afghan Studies and was a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations. In 2016, she was a visiting scholar at New York University's Center on International Cooperation. She earned her doctorate from The Fletcher School at Tufts University and her bachelor's in political science from Yale University. She held a post-doctoral fellowship at Princeton University.

Governor Robert “Bob” Taft

Governor Robert “Bob” Taft served as governor of Ohio for two terms from 1999 to 2007. During his time in office, Governor Taft championed the state’s high-technology sector and worked to improve Ohio’s education system. Programs he implemented continue to produce rewards for the Buckeye State long after he left office, such as his 12-year \$10 billion school construction and renovation agenda and his Ohio Reads initiative that has delivered more than 45,000 volunteers to help elementary school children achieve grade level reading standards by the end of the fourth grade. Before his election as governor, he served as a member of Ohio’s House of Representatives, as Commissioner of Hamilton County, and as Secretary of State of Ohio. Governor Taft served as Assistant Program Officer with the USAID Mission in South Vietnam (1967–1969) and as a Peace Corps volunteer in Tanzania (1963–1965). Currently, he is a Distinguished Research Associate at the University of Dayton. Governor Taft’s father and grandfather both served in the U.S. Senate, and his great-grandfather, William Howard Taft, was the 27th U.S. President and served as Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.



Dr. Andrew Wilder

Dr. Andrew Wilder is Vice President of Asia Programs at the U.S. Institute for Peace (USIP). He has worked there since 2010, including from 2010 to 2013 as director of Afghanistan and Pakistan programs. Prior to his USIP service, Dr. Wilder was research director for politics and policy at the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University. Previously, he founded and directed Afghanistan’s first independent research institution, the Kabul-based Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, following more than 10 years managing humanitarian and development programs in Pakistan and Afghanistan. He served as country director of Save the Children’s Afghanistan and Pakistan programs from 1996 to 2001. Dr. Wilder has conducted research on topics related to state-building, electoral politics, and development and stabilization efforts in Pakistan and Afghanistan. He holds a BS in foreign service from Georgetown University, and a master’s degree and PhD from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.



APPENDIX III

STAFF BIOGRAPHIES

Jaime Cheshire

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Jaime Cheshire is a national security professional with 25 years of service on Capitol Hill and as a senior intelligence service officer in the Intelligence Community. Prior to serving as Executive Director of the commission, Jaime served as Executive Secretary of the Central Intelligence Agency, where she oversaw the Operations Center, providing 24-7 support to agency leadership and the White House. As director of the Office of Congressional Affairs, she advised the agency's senior leadership on all legislative strategy and served as the agency's liaison to the U.S. Congress. For her service, she received the Presidential Rank Award and the Director's Award three times. From 2009 to 2017, Jaime served as senior advisor to the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. She helped enact seven consecutive National Defense Authorization Acts while navigating committee and floor debates on critical national security issues. In this role, she conducted six oversight trips into Afghanistan. Earlier in her career, Jaime served as legislative director to Rep. Buck McKeon (California) and her home district representative, Rep. Nancy Johnson (Connecticut), a senior member of the Ways and Means Committee. Jaime served as a member of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Dean's Advisory Board at the University of Connecticut, her alma mater. She completed her lifelong goal of a 2,200-mile thru-hike of the Appalachian Trail in 2021.

Julie Martin

GENERAL COUNSEL

Julie Martin has served for nearly two decades as a trusted legal advisor to senior national security and foreign policy officials on a broad range of novel and complex issues. Immediately prior to joining the Commission, Julie served as a Deputy General Counsel in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), where she oversaw practice groups providing primary legal support to the Chief Operating Officer, Directorate of Policy and Capabilities, and the National Counterterrorism and National Counterproliferation and Biosecurity Centers. She served as an interim senior policy advisor for privacy and civil liberties and has considerable experience in the fields of counterterrorism, IC support to screening and vetting, and protections for U.S. persons in the conduct of intelligence collection and analysis. Prior to her tenure with the ODNI, Julie enjoyed a varied career with the Department of State Office of the Legal Adviser, which included practice in the areas of congressional oversight; human rights law; the law of armed conflict; intelligence; transnational extradition; and counternarcotics programs. She also served as U.S. Embassy Baghdad legal adviser from 2009 to 2010. She clerked for Chief Judge Andrew S. Effron of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces.

Iain Robertson**CHIEF OF STAFF**

Iain joined the Commission from the Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) at the Atlantic Council, where he served for more than five years as Deputy Managing Editor. In that role, he helped manage a large, global team of researchers and oversaw the production of many of the DFRLab's short- and long-form reports. Prior to his time at the DFRLab, Iain served six years at the White House, where he started with the Office of Presidential Correspondence before transitioning to the Executive Secretariat of the National Security Council. He draws on the latter experience extensively for his role as Chief of Staff with the commission, overseeing its strategic calendar as well as taskings and paper flow to the co-chairs and commissioners. Iain holds a Master of Business Administration from Georgetown University, including a Certificate in Nonmarket Strategy, and a Bachelor of the Arts in Media Studies from Carleton College.

Jeremy Butler**DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS**

Jeremy joined the Commission from We the Veterans, a non-profit, non-partisan democracy organization where he served as Chief Growth Officer and advocated for civic participation of veterans. He previously served as the Chief Executive Officer of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America after joining the staff in 2015 working in various capacities with the fundraising team. In 2018 he transitioned to Chief Operating Officer and in 2019 took over as CEO. Jeremy served on active duty in the Navy from 1999 to 2005 as a Surface Warfare Officer. He transitioned to the Reserves and has remained there since, being currently assigned to the staff of Commander, Naval Surface Forces, U.S. Pacific Fleet. Coming off active duty, Mr. Butler began working for a DC-based government contractor and served in a variety of roles, including work for the Department of Homeland Security, the Joint Staff, and the Department of the Navy. Throughout, he spent several years back on active duty both overseas and in the United States. He attended Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, and graduated with an International Relations major. Jeremy received his MA in National Security and Strategic Studies from the U.S. Naval War College.

Jonathan Schroden, PhD**RESEARCH DIRECTOR**

Jonathan served as strategic advisor to U.S. Central Command, the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, and deployed or traveled to the country 13 times since 2008. Most recently, he worked as the Director of the Countering Threats and Challenges Program and the Special Operations Program at the Center for Naval Analyses, where his work supported U.S. government efforts to better understand and counter state and non-state threats and challenges. His portfolio includes work on counterterrorism, security cooperation, irregular, proxy, and information warfare, as well as the challenges facing special operations forces today and in the future. Jonathan previously served as an adjunct professor at George Washington University, where he lectured on U.S. Special Operations, as a senior advisor to the U.S. Institute of Peace's Afghanistan Study Group, and as an adjunct scholar with the U.S. Military Academy's Modern War Institute. He holds PhD and MS degrees from Cornell University.

Matthew Gobush

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS ADVISOR

Matt served as Director of Communications for the National Security Council and as Foreign Policy Spokesman and Speechwriter in the Office of the Vice President. Prior to working at The White House, he served as a staff specialist for international and commercial programs in the Office of the Secretary of Defense at the Pentagon. During the Afghanistan War's initial phases, Matt was Press Secretary for the U.S. House of Representatives International Relations Committee minority staff, and later Director of Communications for Senate Armed Services Committee member Joe Lieberman. Most recently, he was Communications Manager at Exxon Mobil Corporation. During his career, he has been privileged to directly support a sitting President, Vice President, Senator, Congressman, and two Chief Executive Officers, as well as two future U.S. Secretaries of State of different political parties. He has written extensively on foreign policy, military ethics, and veterans affairs, and led the Military Chaplains Just War Education Project for the Episcopal Church. A graduate of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, Matt and his wife, Gari Lister, have six internationally adopted daughters.

Mariam Jalalzada

SENIOR ADVISOR FOR AFGHAN OUTREACH

In her role as Senior Advisor for Afghan Outreach on the Afghanistan War Commission, Mariam employs her extensive research and field expertise to ensure a comprehensive assessment, taking into account various perspectives, including those of Afghan stakeholders. She has more than 16 years of experience in Afghanistan's reconstruction landscape, specializing in private sector development, civil society promotion, and citizen empowerment. In her most recent role as Senior Research Analyst at the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, a U.S. government oversight agency, Mariam contributed to the planning, coordination, and development of lessons learned reports, offering invaluable insights into the complex dynamics of post-conflict development. After graduation from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, where she earned her Master's in international development, Mariam traveled to Kabul, her hometown, and worked with numerous international organizations on projects such as community peacebuilding and business entrepreneurship. She has conducted in-depth research covering a wide range of topics, including the effectiveness of programs supporting economic and political participation of communities in the midst of violent conflict. She has observed how communities struggle to sustain livelihoods and repair relationships when shattered by war.

Pamela G. Faber Shearman

DEPUTY RESEARCH DIRECTOR

Pamela most recently worked for the Center for Naval Analyses (CNA), a Federally Funded Research and Development Center, where she served as a Senior Research Scientist and coordinator of CNA's Africa Security portfolio. As an experienced research leader, policy analyst, and national security advisor, she has conducted research projects on issues including counterterrorism, security force assistance, women, peace and security, and civilian harm in conflict mitigation. Pamela has designed, directed, and authored numerous research reports for senior government officials within the Department of Defense, State Department, and Intelligence Community. She has also conducted extensive fieldwork on a range of security issues in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Kenya, Guinea, Benin, Ghana, Cameroon, Senegal, and Chad, among other countries. She holds an M.Phil. in International Development from St. Catherine's College, University of Oxford, an MSc in International Relations from The London School of Economics, a BA in Political Science from Columbia University, and a BA in History from List College, The Jewish Theological Seminary.

Neha Ansari, PhD**SENIOR ANALYST**

- Neha has worked as a journalist and editor in Pakistan for almost a decade, focusing on political violence, war on terror, counterterrorism, and U.S.–Pakistan relations.
- She wrote her PhD dissertation on increasing effectiveness and acceptance of U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan’s Federally Administered Tribal Area, conducting fieldwork spanning 116 qualitative interviews in northwestern Pakistan. Her findings had implications for the war in Afghanistan and U.S. counterterrorism efforts.
- Through research fellowships, Neha has conducted research for the State Department, National Defense University, and Sandia National Laboratories. She holds a BA (Honors) and MA from the University of Karachi, Pakistan, and an MA in Law and Diplomacy and a PhD in International Relations from The Fletcher School, Tufts University.

Catherine “Kate” Bateman**SENIOR ADVISOR**

- Kate brings more than 17 years of experience as a researcher and policy practitioner, spanning the Department of State, the Department of Defense, Congress, an oversight agency, and think tanks. For more than 10 years, she has worked in and on Afghanistan, including a tour at U.S. Embassy Kabul from 2010 to 2012.
- Kate was previously a senior expert on Afghanistan at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), a project lead in the Lessons Learned Program at the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, and a Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow. She has led major research initiatives on the Afghan conflict, including on U.S. negotiations with the Taliban, anticorruption, women’s rights, and reintegration of ex-combatants.
- Kate’s published work has appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, *Lawfare*, *The Hill*, *Proceedings*, and *The National Interest*, in addition to her work at USIP and a chapter in *The Great Power Competition, Volume 4—Lessons Learned in Afghanistan: America’s Longest War* (Springer Press, 2023).

Destini Berry**OPERATIONS ASSOCIATE**

- Destini served as an Operations Analyst for two years with the National Commission on Military Aviation and Safety.
- She brings knowledge of the administrative challenges of running a legislative commission and the experience of overcoming those obstacles.
- In addition to her time in government service, Destini has a long background in managing the administrative and financial aspects of a private sector medical practice.

Brian Callsen**CHIEF, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS TEAM**

- Brian has more than 30 years of intelligence experience as a Central Intelligence Agency manager and analyst as well as an Air Force intelligence officer.
- His most recent posting within the CIA was with its China Mission Center. Prior to that, he served as an instructor at National Defense University, a branch chief, President’s Daily Brief briefer, mission center editor, deployed instructor, and course director.
- Brian brings an incredible depth of knowledge on the tradecraft of intelligence analysis that aligns well with the commission’s mandate to examine the way in which intelligence assessments were prepared, coordinated, and used to support decision-making.

Raphael Carland

CHIEF, POLICY AND DIPLOMACY TEAM

- A career member of the Senior Executive Service with 20 years of experience at the U.S. Department of State, Raphael most recently served as Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of Legislative Affairs.
- He held senior executive and leadership roles at Department of State in the Bureau of Narcotics and Law Enforcement, the Office of Foreign Assistance, and the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations. Raphael also worked for two Deputy Secretaries of State as a special assistant focused on Afghanistan. He worked on NATO/ISAF coalition coordination issues and was detailed to the Office of the Secretary of Defense to work on counterinsurgency policy. Prior to that he served as a political officer in Afghanistan on Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Uruzgan and Farah.
- Raphael served as an officer in the U.S. Army and received degrees from Tufts' Fletcher School and Georgetown's School of Foreign Service.

Elizabeth Nathan Conrad

CHIEF, INTERVIEWS AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT TEAM

- A detailee from the Institute for Defense Analyses, Elizabeth has experience at the House Armed Services Committee, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, and The Cohen Group.
- Her congressional oversight experience included investigations into the transfer of Afghan detainees from GTMO, the Department of Defense response to the attack in Benghazi, and the security transition to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces.
- Elizabeth has extensive experience carrying out sensitive, senior-level interviews and consultations in permissive and non-permissive environments. She has an MA from Georgetown University and a BA from the University of Georgia.

Akmal Dawi

SENIOR WRITER

- Akmal joined the commission from Voice of America, where he served as an editor and journalist since 2012, prior to which he worked for the United Nations and the BBC in Afghanistan.
- Akmal served as a linguist during the 2019–2020 U.S.-Taliban negotiations in Doha, Qatar. Among other duties, he simultaneously translated the phone call between President Trump and Mullah Baradar in March 2020.
- Akmal is the author of a Pashto novel about the First Anglo-Afghan War (1838–1842).

Edmund J. "EJ" Degen

CHIEF, MILITARY OPERATIONS AND SECURITY FORCES ASSISTANCE TEAM

- EJ is a retired career U.S. Army field artillery officer who rose to the rank of colonel and most recently served as the director of the Chief of Staff, Army's Operation Enduring Freedom Study Group.
- He commanded artillery units at all levels through the brigade and served as the V Corps (U.S.) chief of plans for the Iraq invasion at the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, chief of future operations for U.S. Forces Korea, and chief of staff for Combined Joint Interagency Task Force 435 in Afghanistan. He had multiple combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan.
- He was a fellow on the Chief of Staff, Army, inaugural Strategic Studies Group and served as the Senior Fellow the following year. He earned an MMAS from the Army's School of Advanced Military Studies and an MS in Strategic and Operational Planning from the Joint Advanced Warfighting School. He has coauthored two official U.S. Army histories: *On Point: The U.S. Army in Operation Iraqi Freedom* and *Modern War in an Ancient Land: The U.S. Army in Afghanistan, 2001-2014*.

Dan Elinoff**SENIOR ANALYST**

- Dan is a seasoned defense analyst with deep research expertise in U.S. national security policy and infrastructure, security cooperation, security force assistance, and force readiness.
- He joined the commission from RAND, where he most recently conducted interviews with former high-level security forces assistance practitioners and planners in Afghanistan, as well as an extensive review of government, academic, and nongovernment organization documents regarding international security assistance to the Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces.
- Dan is a U.S. Army veteran who deployed to Iraq as a route clearance medic and to Afghanistan as a combat advisor to the Afghan National Army. He holds a BA in International Affairs from George Washington University and a MA in War Studies from King's College London.

Leah Fiddler**SENIOR ANALYST**

- Leah brings years of executive branch experience: at the Pentagon, the White House, and then the National Security Council across Presidential administrations. She wrote on the President's behalf to everyday Americans; served in the NSC's Development, Democracy, and Humanitarian Assistance Directorate; was Chief of Staff of the Transnational Threats Directorate; and supported two Homeland Security Advisors.
- Prompted by the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, she helped coordinate the Truman Center for National Policy's Afghanistan Operations Center, which stood up its own airline and, in 2021, evacuated hundreds of at-risk Afghans, many at the U.S. government's request.
- Previously, she conducted research for the Comparative Constitutions Project on Afghanistan's governance challenges. At the Digital Forensic Research Lab, she worked at the intersection of technology and democracy. Her degrees are from the University of Southern California and the University of Chicago.

Rory Gates**ANALYST**

- Rory is currently a PhD candidate at the Institute for World Politics, where he is finishing up a dissertation that analyzes the efficacy of psychological warfare and brainwashing with a focus on Right Wing Extremism in America since the Civil War.
- Previously, Rory was a policy fellow at the Asia Society Policy Institute, where he focused on Chinese influence operations in the West Pacific. Before that he worked as an analyst at the Defense Intelligence Agency, as an open-source analyst for Advance Democracy, and a research assistant on criminology/political science.
- Rory earned his BA in creative writing/political science with honors and his Master's in International Relations (magna cum laude) from the University of Chicago, where he completed his thesis on international relations theory under the supervision of John Mearsheimer.

Avery Parsons Grayson**ANALYST**

- Avery brings expertise on governance in Islamic contexts, including from her nongovernmental organization work in Indonesia, on the Syria Desk at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' Middle East headquarters, and in the media/think tank space where she worked as a Senior Analyst for International Security at *Foreign Policy* magazine.
- At the Overseas Development Institute in London, she implemented the "Lessons for Peace: Afghanistan" program which analyzed lessons learned through the lens of governance and international cooperation. Furthermore, in 2021, she managed *The New Arab's* opinion and analysis coverage of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- Avery has an MSc in Middle East Politics from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS University of London) and a BA in Global Affairs–International Security from Yale University.

Natalie Hall

SPECIAL ASSISTANT AND ANALYST

- Natalie is a researcher with experience as a fellow at the Oxus Society for Central Asian Affairs and a research assistant to Dr. Alexander Cooley (Harriman Institute, Columbia University). Prior to the commission, she contracted for the U.S. government as a senior supply chain risk management analyst at Exiger, specializing on Russia and China. She previously worked as a program coordinator at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Russia and Eurasia Program).
- Natalie's publication credits include the Uyghur Human Rights Project, the journal *Globalizations*, *The Diplomat*, *The Hill*, and *Newsweek*. She has briefed her research and analysis to a number of U.S. government bodies, including the National Security Council, FBI, and Department of Homeland Security. Natalie regularly attends international conferences on Central Asia, Russia, and Ukraine.
- Natalie lived in Kazakhstan for six months, where she learned about Central Asia's culture, history, politics, economics, and international relations. She has an MA in Russian and Eurasian Studies from Columbia University with a focus on Central Asia and wrote her thesis on Kazakhstan's national identity, political mobilization, and state violence. She has a BA in International Affairs with a concentration in Security Policy and minors in History and Slavic Studies from George Washington University.

Jennifer M. Hazen, PhD

SENIOR ANALYST

- Jennifer is a senior research analyst with more than 20 years of extensive on-the-ground experience in conflict and post-conflict countries, specializing in conflict dynamics, armed groups, and security sector governance.
- Previously, she served as a civil-military advisor with the U.S. Agency for International Development; a civil-military advisor embedded in the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy for Special Operations/Low-Intensity Conflict; the director of the Africa Regional Studies program at the Foreign Service Institute of the U.S. State Department; a senior advisor and analyst at U.S. Africa Command; a senior researcher at the Small Arms Survey; a political affairs officer at the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Sierra Leone; and an analyst at International Crisis Group.
- She holds a PhD in International Relations from Georgetown University with research experience in more than a dozen countries in Africa, Asia, and Europe.

Sam Howell

ANALYST

- Sam joined the commission from the Center for New American Security (CNAS), where she focused on quantum information science, semiconductors, and technology workforce issues. Her work has appeared in *The Economist*, *Lawfare*, and *The Diplomat*, among other publications.
- She previously worked as an intelligence analyst at TD International, a terrorism analyst at the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), and as a staff assistant in the U.S. House of Representatives.
- She received an MA in Security Policy Studies from George Washington University in 2021 and a BA in Bioethics and Political Science from Baylor University in 2019.

Nakissa Jahanbani, PhD**SENIOR ANALYST**

- Nakissa is a former Researcher at the Combating Terrorism Center and Assistant Professor in the Department of Sciences at the United States Military Academy at West Point, where she taught classes on terrorism and conducted policy-oriented, mixed-methods research on the Iran Threat Network and terrorist groups, including the Islamic State Khorasan Province. Her work has appeared in various policy outlets, including *Lawfare* and *War on the Rocks*, and academic journals, including *Terrorism and Political Violence*.
- She obtained her PhD in Political Science from the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy at the University of Albany, New York. Her thesis focused on examining the drivers and modalities of state-sponsored support for rebel groups.
- She brings a detailed understanding of jihadist groups and will expertly lead the commission's substantive work on adversary decision making.

Nathan Lowry**ANALYST**

- Nathan served as a U.S. Marine Corps ground intelligence officer in Afghanistan, East and West Africa, and Europe between 2014 and 2019.
- He deployed to Helmand Province throughout 2018 in support of Operation Freedom's Sentinel and Resolute Support. He developed and deconflicted targets for U.S. and Afghan special operations raid forces operating in Helmand while simultaneously supporting conventional train, advise, and assist efforts.
- He remains active in the veteran's community, most recently serving as the Co-Director for Service to School's JD program (2020–2024) and Harvard Law School's Armed Forces Association Co-President (2023–2024).

Janna Mantua, PhD**SENIOR ANALYST AND INTERVIEWER**

- Janna is a defense scientist with deep expertise in Special Operations Forces (SOF), irregular warfare, and the “human dimension” of war. Janna most recently served as an embedded senior research analyst in the Office of the Secretary of Defense–Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation.
- Janna previously served at the Institute for Defense Analyses, where she was a subject matter expert on several national security studies and led a study team that analyzed materials retrieved from Bin Laden's Abbottabad compound. Prior to that, she served as a research psychologist at Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, where she led a team that focused on SOF performance enhancement. In that role, she deployed to Afghanistan with the 75th Ranger Regiment to assist with Afghan Partner Unit selection.
- She has a PhD in Behavioral Neuroscience and a Master's in Military Studies. She currently serves as a non-resident fellow at Joint Special Operations University and Chief Operating Officer at the Irregular Warfare Initiative.

Colin McKeague**ANALYST**

- Colin worked at the Archdiocese for the Military Services for almost eight years, where he transformed administrative processing into a highly efficient system and effectively managed proprietary and nonproprietary databases for the Archdiocese.
- He has extensive experience proofreading and editing document drafts, ensuring accuracy and clarity of the final copy.
- Colin earned his Master's in International Security from George Mason University's Schar School of Policy and Government.

Eric Minton

CHIEF, WRITING AND PRODUCTION TEAM

- Eric has served as the editor, writer, and production manager for three prior commissions: on Military Aviation Safety; on the Future of the Army; and on the Structure of the Air Force. With the Department of Defense's Vietnam War Commemoration, Eric organized and operated Camp Legacy, a 100-exhibitor display on the National Mall, part of the Commemoration's May 2023 "Welcome Home" program for Vietnam Veterans.
- Eric was editor-in-chief of the Reserve Officers Association's magazine *The Officer*, a copy editor for the Association of the U.S. Army, and a project manager for the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities.
- With a BJ from the University of Missouri School of Journalism, Eric has 50 years of professional experience in newspapers, magazines, and online. The spouse of a now-retired Air Force officer, he has continually worked as a freelance writer the past 40 years. He also manages Shakespeareances.com, a website dedicated to Shakespeare in performance and pop culture.

Nainika Ashok Paul

ANALYST

- Prior to the commission, Nainika worked in the Library of Congress—Federal Research Division as a Researcher in the Law and Criminal Justice Section. While there, she worked on literature reviews, reports, and summaries meant for the executive branch, including the State Department, Minority Business Development Administration, and the Library's internal offices.
- In 2019, she served as a Harold Rosenthal fellow at the Department of Defense Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, Pakistan Desk.
- She is also a PhD candidate at Rutgers University specializing in Women and Politics and an adjunct lecturer at the University of Maryland Global campus, teaching undergraduate students introductory principles of counterterrorism policy and international relations theory. Nainika earned an MA in Conflict Management and Middle East Studies at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C., where she undertook research efforts in evaluating gender parity in Iraq and examining the possibilities for consociationalism in Afghanistan.

Carmella Saia

ANALYST

- Carmella joined the commission from the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Intelligence and Analysis. Prior to that, she worked on foreign affairs and national security matters at the U.S. Senate.
- She has an MA in Security Policy Studies from George Washington University and BAs in Political Science and Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution from George Washington University. Her research has focused on rebel governance and recruitment and illicit cyber activity of state and non-state actors.
- Carmella has also been recognized by several organizations for being a young leader in public service, including the Presidential Management Fellows Program, the National Military Intelligence Foundation, the Security Industry Association's Women in Security Forum, the Wolcott Foundation, and the International Women of Elliott at the Elliott School of International Affairs.

Harris Samad

SPECIAL ASSISTANT AND ANALYST

- Harris came to the commission from the Atlantic Council's South Asia Center (SAC) where, as Associate Director, he managed the SAC programmatically and analytically. He led the Center's Afghanistan research portfolio and was cofounder and lead editor of SouthAsiaSource, SAC's blog on South Asian affairs that received millions of views per year.
- His research and interests focus on U.S.-Pakistan relations before and after the fall of Kabul; the tension for U.S. policymakers between country and regional policy in South Asia; and illicit smuggling and financial networks in Afghanistan. Crosscutting these areas is a deep-seated interest in exploring power dynamics that influence international relations from the U.S. policy perspective.
- Prior, Harris worked at Legacy International, the Embassy of Iraq in Washington, and as a Conflict Resolution Research Assistant at Georgetown University. He has an MA in Conflict Resolution from Georgetown University and a BA in Political Science from the University of Pittsburgh.

Neilesh Shelat**CHIEF, DEVELOPMENT TEAM**

- Neilesh held several senior executive roles at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), including as the Executive Secretary across two Presidential administrations, and within the Bureau of Conflict Prevention and Stabilization and the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance.
- He served as a Director on the National Security Council, with portfolios that included security sector assistance and stability programming in failed and fragile states. He deployed to Iraq and northeast Syria to advise U.S. and coalition forces on stabilization activities in support of Operation Inherent Resolve.
- From 2007 to 2011, he deployed to Helmand, Kandahar, Ghazni, Wardak, and Kabul working alongside U.S., Polish, Turkish, and other NATO, and Afghan military forces as part of the Provincial Reconstruction and District Support Teams. He also served as Development Advisor to the Combined Forces Special Operations Component Command.

Luis Vertiz**SENIOR ANALYST**

- Luis joined the commission from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) where he served as a senior policy analyst.
- His performance audits with SIGAR reviewed topics that included the Afghan military's management of infrastructure, the use of conditionality in Afghan National Defense and Security Forces development, and the Afghan government's anticorruption initiatives. He deployed to SIGAR's office at the U.S. embassy in Kabul for a six-month detail in 2017.
- Luis has a BA in Political Science with honors in International Security Studies from Stanford University.

Adam Wunische, PhD**SENIOR ANALYST**

- Adam previously served as a military analyst and analytic methodologist with the Central Intelligence Agency covering the Taliban and Afghan Security Forces from 2020 to 2023. He also served with the U.S. Army from 2005 to 2010, completing two deployments to Afghanistan.
- He completed his PhD from Boston College in 2021 with a dissertation focusing on armed state-building operations with case studies on Afghanistan, Iraq, Vietnam, and others. He has been an adjunct instructor at George Washington University since 2019 teaching Military Power and Effectiveness, Political Violence and Terrorism, and Geospatial Conflict Analysis.
- His research and analysis have appeared in the *Armed Conflict Survey*, *The New Republic*, *The National Interest*, *The Washington Quarterly*, *The Diplomat*, and the *Journal of Political Science Education*.

Katherine Zimmerman**SENIOR ANALYST**

- Katherine, a recognized expert on Salafi-jihadi groups, is a former fellow at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI). While at AEI, she also advised the Critical Threats Project, an open-source intelligence research team that she helped develop.
- She has testified multiple times before Congress about threats to U.S. national security interests emanating from al-Qaeda and its network and briefed members of the U.S. military, diplomatic, and intelligence community at multiple echelons. She has been published extensively on Salafi-jihadi groups and U.S. counterterrorism efforts—including for CNN, *CTC Sentinel*, *Foreign Policy*, *Journal of National Security Law and Policy*, *Military Times*, *PRISM*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*.
- She has a MA in Terrorism, Security, and Society from King's College London and a BA in Political Science and Modern Middle Eastern Studies from Yale University. She is a term member with the Council on Foreign Relations, a member of the RESOLVE Network Research Advisory Council, and serves as a 2024 non-resident fellow at the Irregular Warfare Initiative.



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