

Prepared Statement for the Record

Congressional Hearing

Chairmen, Ranking Members, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity and thank you all for your service to this country. I come here as witness to provide my experiences with Afghan and American citizen evacuation.

I submit this testimony as an American born abroad to a foreign mother, a son of a retired soldier and as a soldier myself who has spent a lifetime at the point where policy and consequence meet.

We lost National Guard Specialist Sarah Beckstrom. May God rest her soul. Specialist Andrew Wolfe remains in our prayers as he fights to recover. These soldiers wore our nation's uniform. They raised their right hand. They answered the call. Their sacrifice deserves remembrance, and it deserves justice, full justice against the perpetrator and anyone who came to this country with the intent to do harm.

There must be no ambiguity on this point. Violence against American service members is an attack on the nation itself, and it must be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

It is critical I speak clearly and honestly. The person who perpetrated these crimes does not represent the Afghan people I fought beside, advocated for, and continue to support. Conflating lawful allies with violent criminals dishonors both our fallen soldiers and the Afghans who kept faith with us.

I served proudly in the United States Army, retiring with many combat deployments in multiple combat theaters. I was among the first soldiers into Iraq and Afghanistan. Some might judge a career by rank alone. But none of the men I led would call my service unsuccessful. I measure success by lives preserved and promises kept. As part of the first units in Afghanistan, we were met by a local warlord and U.S. government personnel who welcomed our presence and immediately warned us: the enemy was everywhere. Nobody was coming to rescue us if things went wrong. This was a Special Forces mission at its core, and it should never have become anything else.

People came from all over the world to kill Americans. Some were not even Afghan. Even Americans came to kill us. And yet, our Afghan partners stood firm. They fought beside us. They translated not just language, but culture. They helped us understand tribal dynamics, honor, and consequence. They bled. They died. They lived.

They became like us.

They cursed, dipped Copenhagen, tried their best at American jokes, and believed deeply that America meant something. We secured polling places so Afghans could vote. The world

remembers the images of women in burkas holding up ink-stained fingers, girls going to school, men working without fear of reprisal. That progress was not abstract. It was earned, block by block, village by village, together.

That is why what happened in July 2021 shook me to my core.

When we prematurely brought our U.S. commander home, leaving a vacuum in the command structure, I knew something was wrong. I watched closely for indicators. They came fast. The world watched Afghans cling to aircraft, fall to their deaths, and flee in terror from the Taliban. Cramming themselves and standing in filth at the abbey gate, I felt physically sick, it was a morale injury. These were people who believed us because we told them to. We made a promise.

We taught our youngest privates to model American values to the Afghan people. We promised loyalty, accountability, and honor. And then we left.

I could not stand by.

I put my personal phone number on social media and told the world: *If you need help, contact me.* People from across the globe responded, veterans and civilians. We formed ad-hoc mesh networks overnight to save lives. It quickly became clear this effort would require resources, so I established a non-profit AFGfree and 18 Series coffee company. Not one cent has ever been provided by the U.S. government to my organization. Every dollar came from me and private American citizens.

We began to advocate for legal immigration into a country that would accept them.

We established strict criteria. First, we worked to rescue American citizens. I am proud to say we helped bring 2,118 Americans home. One of them was a woman named Sarah, who was imprisoned by the Taliban.

Second, we advocated for people who worked with U.S. personnel and could prove it.

Third, for us to advocate for your immigration to the United States you had to meet the U.S. State Department Special Immigration requirements.

Even with those standards, the system nearly collapsed. Too many mistakes were made by far too many of our country's leaders, but I am proud of the work we did to protect many people including U.S. citizens.

To this day, I believe we failed as American leaders both military and civilian.

Thirteen of our finest were killed at Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA). Nowhere in our doctrine do we allow the enemy inside our defensive perimeter. And yet that is exactly what happened. That failure enabled an IED attack that killed Americans and civilians alike. That moment marked the end of any orderly evacuation but not the end of legally processing our

Afghan partners and American citizens. Everyone we advocated for including American citizens were screened, vetted and processed. The people we had touch points with went to either Humanitarian city in Abu Dhabi or Qatar for further scrutiny.

Today, we continue to help the people who fought beside us, who believed in us, who risked everything because they trusted America to be America.
Which brings me to the present tragedy.

We grieve Specialist Sarah Beckstrom. We pray for Specialist Wolfe. We honor the thirteen Americans who gave their lives during the evacuation. Justice must be pursued fully against the perpetrator and anyone who came to this country intending harm. There can be no compromise on that.

But let me be equally clear. I'll say this again because it bears repeating: This attacker does not represent the Afghan people I advocated for, fought beside, and continue to support. Conflating lawful allies with violent criminals dishonors both our fallen soldiers and the Afghans who kept faith with us.

One of our advocates was there during the fall of Kabul. He and his men cleared the HKIA runway and stood over "Murder Alley", a stretch of dirt road they could see and will never forget. He also witnessed his interpreter step in front of gunfire to protect him and his unit.

I want to share a few stories of people who followed the legal process. Some have made it through. Others are still waiting.

I mentioned Sarah earlier, who is an American citizen. When the evacuation began, she was working in Afghanistan. She went to HKIA with her U.S. passport but was turned away and could not enter the airport.

Sometime during 2022, she made her way to Mazar-e-Sharif with two teenage Afghan girls she rescued from being sold. She was captured by the Taliban and held in the bottom of a house. She reached out to everyone she knew, and eventually she reached me.

At first, I did not believe her. Then she sent me a proof-of-life video showing her American passport and the conditions she was living in. With the help of our Afghan Commando partners still in Afghanistan, we were able to extract her and move her and the girls through a rat line into Pakistan.

Once in Pakistan, I offered to pay for her flight home. She refused. She said, "No. I want to stay and help you. There are so many girls here who need help." A year and a half later, AFGfree paid for her ticket home; the two girls remain in Pakistan.

Another Afghan we worked with was a mechanic named Hotak. He kept our equipment running for years.

During the evacuation, he was separated from his wife and two daughters because they did not

have the proper paperwork for his youngest daughter. Believing they would be reunited shortly at Humanitarian City in Abu Dhabi, he boarded the plane with his two sons.

When he arrived in the United States, he immediately went to work. For the first time in his life, he became a single parent raising two elementary school aged boys in an unfamiliar country, navigating confusing rules, systems, and unfamiliar laws.

For three years, he worked, waited, and hoped.

Finally in 2024 he was reunited with his family in America.

We stay in contact to this day and he continues to work and strive for citizenship.

Two brothers who served as interpreters were SIV approved in early August of 2021. They did everything right. They did not make it to the United States until September and October of 2023.

We also advocated for a translator who speaks impeccable English. He worked for GardaWorld, American University, and Safi Engineering. He served both as a translator and in security roles. During the evacuation at HKIA, he was offered a seat on a plane three different times, but he refused to leave without his wife and children.

His Special Immigrant Visa was later denied because of a contract number error. His employer listed the wrong prime contract number on his verification letter, a mistake we have seen repeatedly.

The American citizen president of American University wrote a recommendation on his behalf, but it made no difference.

This man has handled hundreds of dangerous situations in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He helped provide food and safety for Americans during the evacuation. He continues to help others today and he is still waiting for a decision on his appeal.

These are but a few stories that illustrate the length of processing while many advocates supported our Afghan partners both financially and emotionally.

That is the fate of those we leave behind. These are the real life and death consequences of turning our backs on those who risked their lives for our country. I understand this hearing is about the Afghan Parolee and SIV Program. Programs like this exist because our credibility matters. Because when America makes a promise in war, people stake their lives on it.

American generosity is not weakness. But generosity without standards is not compassion. It is negligence.

If we are serious about honoring our allies, protecting our service members, and restoring trust in our institutions, then oversight must extend beyond entry. We should not punish our Afghan partners who are here or are still waiting on a decision on their cases but work on solutions to support them and keep our promises. Those solutions should include post-entry accountability.

These are both critical to responsible governance.

Effective, humane solutions protect communities, support lawful immigrants and identify problems before they become tragedies. Those who entered legally, who are contributing, and who are living in accordance with American law welcome that engagement. Transparency builds trust. Absence of oversight and engagement breeds failure.

If we are serious about integration, safety, and fairness, then post-entry accountability must be part of the system, not just an afterthought.

Our soldiers deserve justice.

Our allies deserve honor.

And our nation deserves the truth.

Perry B