

New Duckworth Bill Would Create Nonpartisan, Independent Afghanistan War Commission To Help Ensure Our Nation Never Makes The Same Mistakes Again

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), member of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) who served in the Reserve Forces for 23 years and is Chair of the SASC Airland Subcommittee, along with U.S. Senators Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Angus King (I-ME), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) Michael Bennet (D-CO) and

Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), today introduced the *Afghanistan War Study Commission Act* to establish a nonpartisan, independent commission to examine every aspect of the war in Afghanistan, including the political and strategic decisions that transformed a focused military mission into vast, nation-building campaign that became the longest war in our nation's history. The goal of this commission will be to produce actionable recommendations designed to guide the development of real reforms in order to ensure that our nation not only learns the right lessons from our 20 years in Afghanistan but ensures the same mistakes are never made again.

“The War in Afghanistan was shaped by four different administrations and 11 different Congresses—no party should be looking to score cheap, partisan political points off a decades-long nation-building failure that was bipartisan in the making,” said Duckworth. “Congress owes the thousands of American service members who sacrificed in Afghanistan a serious, honest and long-term effort devoted to bringing accountability and transparency, which is why I’m introducing legislation to create an independent, nonpartisan commission aimed at ensuring we learn from mistakes made and implement reforms to ensure those mistakes are not repeated.”

“After an endless war in Afghanistan, we need an independent commission to investigate the decisions made during the beginning, middle, and end of this war. This commission could help identify what mistakes were made in a war spanning four administrations and twenty years, and ways we could prevent those mistakes in the future. This bill is a necessary first step in that process,” said Hirono.

“After 20 years, thousands of servicemembers lost, and more than a trillion taxpayer dollars, America’s longest war has ended – but many questions about Afghanistan remain,” said King. “The current situation in Afghanistan is the product of four presidential administrations and Congresses controlled by both Republicans and Democrats. The responsibility for any failures is truly shared over those two decades – and we must pursue accountability and answers for all of them. Oversight hearings are a part of this process, but we must do more to get answers for the American people – especially the brave women and men who served in Afghanistan and their loved ones who sacrificed so much. As Churchill said, ‘those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it’ – so let’s study what went wrong, on a nonpartisan basis, and learn our lessons for the future.”

“The mistakes and missteps of America’s two-decade-long conflict in Afghanistan should lead to lessons learned. There are tough questions and Americans deserve answers. 2,400 killed, 20,000 wounded, and \$2 trillion spent. The Afghan War Commission is essential to finding out what went wrong, why it went wrong, and how our country can do better in the future,” said Blumenthal.

“The decision to withdraw our troops from America’s longest war was a difficult yet necessary decision. Now it is time for Congress to do its job and demand a full accounting of the decisions over the last 20 years that resulted in thousands of fallen and wounded American and allied service members, trillions of dollars spent, and the devastating loss of Afghan life. We owe it to those who served in Afghanistan to perform a comprehensive, independent, and objective examination of U.S. policy so that our government can do better for our service members, diplomats, intelligence officers, and their families as we think about the future of our national security,” said Gillibrand.

“The end of this war demands our responsibility to learn from it. We must undertake a sober and thorough examination of the serial misjudgments across multiple administrations that brought us to this point. After two decades of war and two trillion dollars, that is the least we owe every American — and especially the men and women who served bravely on its front lines,” said Bennet.

“The war in Afghanistan was our nation’s longest war, spanning multiple generations. The difficulties of the final days of the U.S. withdrawal were not the result of overnight policy, but rather the culmination of two decades of inconsistent strategies. We owe all Americans, and particularly those who served the U.S. mission and those who made the ultimate sacrifice, a fully transparent and clear accounting of the last twenty years of war. We cannot afford to repeat those mistakes. That is why I’m glad to join Senator Duckworth on this bill to direct a nonpartisan, comprehensive review of the last twenty years of U.S. engagement in Afghanistan. I will continue to work with my colleagues to examine the events that unfolded in Afghanistan and guide U.S. policy going forward,” said Shaheen.

Specifically, the *Afghanistan War Study Commission Act* would establish an independent commission to:

- Examine all U.S. combat operations, irregular warfare operations, intelligence actions, diplomatic activities, and the interagency decision-making and coordinating processes used in the War in Afghanistan. The commission would span the entirety of the War—from September 11, 2001, attacks until the conclusion of the military evacuation on August 30, 2021;
- Study the use of authorities for conducting the Afghanistan War, the effectiveness of Congressional oversight efforts, and the strategic decisions made throughout the course of the war;
- Investigate actions by all U.S. government agencies, including the Department of Defense, Department of State, and the Intelligence Community. It would also examine the U.S. efforts with our allies and partners;
- Ensure its members are nonpartisan and chosen in equal numbers by the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the House and Senate committees of jurisdiction for

Armed Services, Intelligence, and Foreign Affairs, with one additional member from the Administration. The Commissioners would be experienced policy professionals from all corners of the federal government with no direct history of involvement in operational or strategic decision-making in the Afghanistan War to ensure objectivity;

- Provide lessons learned and actionable recommendations in a public and unclassified report, with a classified annex for Intelligence Community matters. The report would allow the United States to learn from our experience in Afghanistan and ensure those mistakes are never repeated.

Together, the original cosponsors sit on key committees of jurisdiction that have conducted oversight of the war, including the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. Bill text can be found [here](#).

This week, during the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) hearing with U. S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley, and US. Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander Kenneth McKenzie, Duckworth advocated for her commission that would examine the lessons learned from our nation's 20 years of involvement in Afghanistan in an honest, independent, and nonpartisan manner. Video of the Senator's remarks can be found [here](#).

Duckworth was one of the first handful of Army women to fly combat missions during Operation Iraqi Freedom. She served in the Reserve Forces for 23 years before retiring from military service in 2014 at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. She served on the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) during her four years serving in the U.S. House of Representatives.