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One Hundred Seventeenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
www.foreignaffairs.house.gov

August 20, 2021

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write to condemn in the strongest terms the Department's senior leadership team in its dereliction of duty regarding Afghanistan. Under your direction, contingency planning by the State Department has been woefully inadequate, and now we are seeing the tragic results: Thousands of Americans are fearing for their lives across the country; the Taliban's triumph is being broadcast across the world; a refugee crisis is growing; a new safe haven for terrorists is emerging; thousands of Afghans who helped our efforts over the course of 20 years are now in mortal danger; and the Taliban has taken possession of American weapons caches, vehicles, and air assets. The security and humanitarian disaster unfolding was avoidable, and it was caused in large part by the acts, omissions, and delays from the State Department which you lead.

Our adversaries have taken note of our every errant move, with PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi reportedly criticizing the "hurried withdrawal" of U.S. forces, and a spokesman for the PRC's Ministry of National Defense harping earlier this month that Washington "bears an unavoidable responsibility for the current situation in Afghanistan." Russia piled on, with its spokeswoman stating plainly, "With horror, the world is watching the result of another historic Washington experiment." Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi minced no words, calling out the United States' "military defeat." And Hamas echoed this statement, congratulating the Taliban on its victory over American "occupation."

Meanwhile, U.S. allies – claiming they were not fully consulted on Afghanistan decisions that put their own national security interests at risk – are doubting our nation’s credibility and partnership. They are skeptical that we will honor long-standing security commitments stretching from Europe to the Pacific and wonder about our ability to present a united defense against our strategic adversaries Russia and China. In the U.K., Defense Secretary Ben Wallace has said the rapid U.S. withdrawal “was not the right time or decision to make,” and members of Parliament described President Biden’s actions as “shameful.” One British cabinet minister lamented that the withdrawal proved the United States “is looking inward and is unwilling to do even a modest amount to maintain global order.” These comments were echoed elsewhere in Europe. The chairman of the German parliament’s foreign relations committee said the early withdrawal “was a serious and far-reaching miscalculation by the [Biden] administration” that will do “fundamental damage to the political and moral credibility of the West.” In short, twenty years after 9/11, many of the same allies who bravely stood by us at the time of greatest peril have expressed deep concern that this Administration’s unilateral decision to end NATO’s longest-running mission by means of a botched withdrawal has weakened, and even humiliated, the alliance.

Questionable decisions at the State Department have compounded the problems we now face. Earlier this year, you chose to dissolve the Bureau of Contingency and Crisis Response, which could have provided logistical support with Afghanistan evacuations of U.S. citizens and embassy personnel. Credible information we have obtained from inside the Department suggests that coordination of aviation support for Afghanistan evacuations has been an unmitigated disaster – with the Operational Medicine (OpMed) directorate waiting for weeks for any guidance from the 7th floor. When aircraft were finally requested on August 13th, the mission was turned off a day later at the 11th hour. That should have ended the story but didn’t: Inexplicably, staff for the acting Under Secretary for Management then *reversed its decision*. Unfortunately, by then the bureaucratic dithering meant that the mission could no longer be executed, as the 747s were no longer available from the relevant vendor. All the while, desperate U.S. personnel in Kabul were forced to wait as the security situation collapsed.

The Department has claimed that it set up an Afghanistan SIV “task force” following the White House announcement of the withdrawal, but it is unclear how often the task force met, what decisions if any it made, what funds if any were planned and allocated to carry our necessary evacuation and assistance needs, and how its efforts were synchronized with the Department of Defense and other agencies like USAID. Reportedly the link provided to State Department personnel to “sign up” for the task force was not even functional – a small but telling example of the Administration’s lackadaisical approach and the dearth of resources it devoted to what it should have known would be, at best, a difficult challenge. Further, reports have shown that officials working on the task force this summer asserted that they had 6-12 months at least before Kabul fell, leaving them in no rush to staff up to address the massive SIV backlog despite urgent pleas from Congress.

Given the planning failures we have seen thus far and the situation that is evolving each hour, and pursuant to our constitutional responsibility to conduct oversight of our nation’s foreign policy apparatus, we urgently request answers to the questions below no later than September 3rd.

1. How many American citizens and LPRs does the State Department estimate currently remain in Afghanistan, separate and apart from diplomatic personnel?
 - a. How many have been evacuated since August 13?

- b. How many of those came from outside Kabul?
 - c. How many Repatriation Assistance Requests has the State Department received over the last two weeks from U.S. citizens living in Afghanistan?
 - d. Will the Administration commit to continuing evacuations of U.S. citizens, personnel, and Afghan partners until 2022, if necessary?
 2. How many diplomatic personnel are working and residing at Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA)? What are their functions? Please provide a breakdown that includes government employees and contractors.
 - a. How long does the Administration intend to keep the additional roughly 6,000 U.S. troops at HKIA?
 - b. What is the status of Turkey's presence and role in securing HKIA?
 - c. Please provide details regarding this new embassy space and how it will be secured. Please further provide details regarding the division of security responsibilities at the new space between DoD and the Bureau of Diplomatic Security (DS).
 - d. Please provide the number of staff members of State Department and USAID implementing partners (that are parties to grants, contracts and cooperative agreements) who are estimated to currently be in Afghanistan.
 - i. How many have you identified that want to leave and are considered at risk?
 - ii. Within this population, what is the breakdown between U.S. citizens, LPRs, SIV eligible individuals, those eligible for P1/P2 consideration, or humanitarian parole? What is the geographic breakdown of these individuals across Afghanistan?
 3. In light of the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, what is the status of ongoing U.S. assistance programs throughout Afghanistan, including programs previously conducted in coordination with the Afghan government as well as broader humanitarian and development assistance projects conducted through implementing partners? What are the Administration's intentions for rescinding and/or reprogramming foreign assistance in Afghanistan? More specifically:
 - a. Please provide a full breakdown of all U.S. funded foreign assistance programs and activities in Afghanistan, specifying by amount, account, geographic focus and implementing partner.
 - b. Please explain the status of funding outlined in recent Congressional Notifications issued on May 25, July 28, August 14, and August 16.
 - c. How does the Department plan to utilize the up to \$500 million Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance funds that President Biden authorized on August 16? How will these funds be deconflicted with other government funding (e.g., DoD)? What other humanitarian assistance resources are being considered to respond to increasing needs within Afghanistan?
 - d. Please explain the status of security assistance programs that were underway with the Afghanistan security forces, and what the Department is doing to account for U.S.-origin defense equipment provided to these security forces.
 - e. Please explain the status of Russian helicopters purchased beginning in 2013 with U.S. taxpayer dollars for use by the Afghan Air Force.
 - f. Please explain whether and how U.S. foreign assistance programs will be executed in a Taliban-controlled environment.
 4. Please provide an accounting of all consultations with NATO allies and partners on the timing and tactics of the withdrawal, given that some allies have said publicly that

Washington presented them with a *fait accompli* rather than any true opportunity to weigh in.

5. Will the State Department reconsider its upcoming Congressional Notification dissolving the Bureau of Contingency and Crisis Response, given the logistical challenges we now face and are likely to continue to face?
 - a. In the absence of a senior bureau official for the Bureau of Contingency and Crisis Response, which Assistant Secretary (or equivalent) official is currently responsible for providing aviation, logistics, and medical support to crisis response operations and remains responsive to relevant congressional committees for briefings on those capabilities?
 - b. What bureau and senior bureau officials at the State Department were responsible for developing plans for evacuating U.S. citizens, employees, and contractors from Afghanistan? Who was the senior Department official responsible for contingency planning regarding Kabul? If Deputy Secretary McKeon and Acting Undersecretary for Management Carol Perez shared authority, how was responsibility divided?
6. What is the Administration's intention regarding formal recognition of a Taliban government, and how will it ensure that U.S. assistance does not go to, and is not used by, a non-inclusive Taliban government?
7. Please provide all documents relating to the establishment of the State Department's SIV and Afghanistan Task Force(s), as well as any documents suggesting the degree, if any, to which the Task Force(s) synchronized their efforts with the Department of Defense and other agencies.
8. Now that the Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul has been moved to the airport, what is the plan for continuing SIV, P1, and P2 application processing? Will we maintain a diplomatic presence in Afghanistan, consular or otherwise, beyond August 31st?
 - a. How does the State Department intend to fulfil its promise to provide SIVs to eligible Afghans if we cannot provide interviews to applicants in country?
 - b. Do P1 and P2 eligible Afghans need to depart on their own from Afghanistan, or will they be considered for evacuation via HKIA and then paroled? What are the criteria for such parole, and which Afghans is the Administration considering eligible, or prioritizing, for parole?
 - c. How many SIV, P1, and P2 applicants have been evacuated to date?
9. What considerations are being made to protect Afghan women and their families who worked in coordination with the U.S. government to promote women's empowerment and human rights? How does the State Department intend to fulfill its promise to provide resources and support for this vulnerable group in light of the degraded U.S. presence and increased risks to these individuals?
10. Which third countries have we received firm agreements from to host Afghan refugees and/or SIV applicants while they finish processing?
 - a. What resources is State providing to countries in the region surrounding Afghanistan to prepare for increased refugee outflows as a result of the premature U.S. withdrawal?
 - b. What efforts are being made to engage with regional countries surrounding Afghanistan regarding forced repatriation of Afghan refugees, and how does the principle of *non-refoulement* impact those efforts?

11. What diplomatic agreements are in place as of August 13, 2021 to grant the U.S. counterterrorism strike and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities?
 - a. What is the status of negotiations with regional countries to secure basing and airspace access for U.S. forces to conduct ISR operations in support of our counter-terrorism mission?
 - b. As of September 1, what is the Administration's plan to ensure the U.S. has the necessary intelligence collection capabilities, including intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, to help prevent terrorism threats in Afghanistan from reaching the homeland? Does that plan include any U.S. presence on the ground in Afghanistan?
 - c. What is your assessment of the amount of time post-withdrawal that it could take al Qaeda and ISIS to regain enough capability to conduct an attack on the homelands of the U.S. and our allies?
12. What are the Administration's intentions for continuing negotiations with the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, Kabul, or elsewhere in Afghanistan? What conditions has the Taliban requested regarding keeping HKIA open past August 31st, and what promises has the U.S. government made in return?
13. Please provide copies of all internal Department dissent cables from 2020 and 2021 regarding the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, the potential effects of President Biden's rapid withdrawal, and recommendations to mitigate the threat to U.S. embassy personnel in Kabul.

CC

Amb. Linda Thomas Greenfield
USAID Administrator Samantha Power

Sincerely,



Michael T. McCaul
Member of Congress
Ranking Member, Committee
on Foreign Affairs



Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress



Steve Chabot
Member of Congress



Joe Wilson
Member of Congress



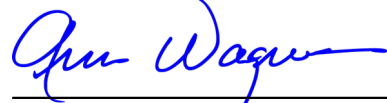
Darrell Issa
Member of Congress



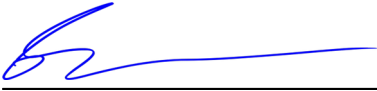
Adam Kinzinger
Member of Congress



Lee Zeldin
Member of Congress



Ann Wagner
Member of Congress



Brian J. Mast
Member of Congress



Brian Fitzpatrick
Member of Congress



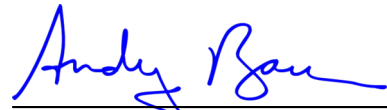
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Member of Congress



Tim Burchett
Member of Congress



Mark E. Green, MD
Member of Congress



Andy Barr
Member of Congress



W. Gregory Steube
Member of Congress



Daniel Meuser
Member of Congress



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