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One Hundred Seventeenth Congress  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
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September 10, 2021

The Honorable Samantha Power  
Administrator  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
Ronald Regan Building  
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Administrator Power,

I write to better understand the United States Agency for International Development's operations in Afghanistan in the months leading up to the botched evacuation of U.S. citizens and partners last month, and Agency near-term and future plans in a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The rapid deterioration of security across the country and steady warning signals that precipitated the full withdrawal of the U.S. Embassy presence mandated that USAID take decisive action to ensure the safety and security of USAID staff, implementing partners, and beneficiaries of USAID-led programs. Unfortunately, the actions taken by the Agency are unclear, as is the role that USAID played in interagency deliberations leading up to the withdrawal. Despite repeated staff requests to be briefed on these actions and USAID operations moving forward, we have not had access to the requisite information to fulfill the House Foreign Affairs Committee's oversight responsibility.

The United States has a duty to protect partners that have worked alongside us for the last two decades in Afghanistan to advance U.S. policy objectives, including to promote the rights of women and children, advance democratic governance, combat corruption, foster economic growth, and support access to education and health services for the Afghan people – goals that are often in direct contradiction to Taliban interpretation and implementation of Sharia. Organizations took on inherent risk implementing these programs on behalf of the U.S.

government. Therefore, any failure to adequately address the safety and security of our partners in Afghanistan risks tarnishing the reputation of USAID around the world.

Since we can all agree that the humanitarian and refugee crisis in Afghanistan has grown in recent weeks, it is important to understand the degree to which the Agency has sought to mitigate the fallout of the Administration's actions to date – especially given previous public positions you personally have taken, coupled with the high likelihood of Taliban reprisals, and oppression and abuse of Afghan women and children increasing, soon. It is also important to understand how the Agency evaluates the successes or failures of USAID programs in Afghanistan over the last twenty years, when it is looking increasingly likely that progress made on a range of issues - including gender equality, democracy promotion, and education – could quickly be reversed.

I hope that, in the coming weeks, you will come to testify before the House Foreign Affairs Committee to answer some of these broader questions. As we have discussed recently, I recognize the critical role USAID has played in Afghanistan for many years, particularly in efforts to empower women, minorities, children, and other vulnerable populations. However, as we assess the fallout from the withdrawal, and look to future Agency plans in Afghanistan and in the region, it is critical that U.S. assistance does not, in any way, benefit the Taliban or legitimize a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. It is imperative that any assistance is implemented with every necessary precaution to prevent diversion, safeguard against waste, fraud, and abuse, and ensure effective oversight of U.S. taxpayer dollars.

Pursuant to Congress's oversight responsibility, and the House Foreign Affairs Committee's jurisdiction over USAID, I request answers to the questions below no later than September 20 so that we can better assess the agency's operations in Afghanistan.

1. When were stop work orders given to USAID contractors, grant recipients, and implementing partners in Afghanistan?
2. How many USAID contractors and grant recipients requested proof of employment during the months of April through September of 2021, and how many were granted such proof?
3. How many USAID contractors, grant recipients, and implementing partner staff have applied for the P2 refugee program to date, and how many have been accepted into that program? How many additional individuals do you assess are eligible for the program but have yet to apply?
4. For contractors who have applied for the P2 program, but whose applications are still being processed, please provide a geographic breakdown. How many of these contractors remain in Afghanistan, and how many are now waiting in other countries? Please indicate which countries these are.
5. How many USAID staff or implementing partner staff are still in Afghanistan awaiting evacuation? What efforts are being made to assist in evacuating these individuals?
6. Since the August 31 deadline has now passed, and our diplomatic and military presence has ended, to what extent have preexisting humanitarian assistance programs and food distributions restarted inside of Afghanistan?

7. What has changed since the stop work orders were provided, and what assurances has USAID received that indicate that implementing partners are now able to effectively and safely restart humanitarian assistance operations?
8. What conversations have occurred with the Taliban on humanitarian access and operational independence of our partners, what assurances if any have been provided, and are there certain areas/provinces that we are prioritizing?
9. Has the Taliban given assurances that NGOs can continue to employ female staff as frontline and operational humanitarian workers?
10. What is the staffing footprint of USAID's recently announced Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) and domestic Response Management Team (RMT)? What is their current role in providing assistance?
11. What is the staffing footprint of USAID staff in Doha focused on Afghanistan programs and management?
12. With USAID's OIG Kabul presence having been moved to Bangkok ahead of the withdrawal, how will USAID conduct effective oversight over assistance programs moving forward?
13. Who within USAID is responsible for communicating guidance and administration policy to implementing partners, both partners looking to stay and provide assistance and others working to evacuate staff members?
14. Please provide a full list of the benchmarks and conditions under which the Administration would consider the resumption of economic and development assistance in Afghanistan.
15. Please explain whether and how U.S foreign assistance programs will be executed in a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and what steps are being taken to mitigate diversion, security threats to partners, and waste, fraud, and abuse
16. How is USAID managing security, misuse, and diversion risks associated with global health assistance and vaccine campaigns, which we have previously seen take place in Taliban-controlled areas, when considering whether to resume these programs?
17. With the issuance of the OFAC specific licenses for Afghanistan, what is the expectation for continuation of humanitarian assistance, and how does USAID plan to work with partners to mitigate both the legal and security risks of continued operations? Is the Agency seeking any additional licenses or guidance from the Department of Treasury? Is there any internal discussion at this point about requesting issuance of a general license?
18. Has the State Department Office of Legal Adviser (L) provided you with any guidance as to the U.S. executive branch's official position on whether the Taliban's takeover qualifies as a coup d'état and what ramifications that determination has on foreign assistance?
19. Pursuant to the findings of the SIGAR "Lessons Learned Program" and report on U.S. assistance programs in Afghanistan post-2001, how does the Agency assess the successes and failures of USAID programs, and how is the Agency applying the recommendations to address program failures in other contexts moving forward?

I look forward to your responses.

Sincerely,



*Michael T. McCaul*

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Michael T. McCaul  
Ranking Member  
House Foreign Affairs Committee