

May 10, 2021

Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin,

We are a group of former diplomats, military officers, and civil servants. Many of us have helped manage and support U.S. engagement with Afghanistan over the past twenty years. We are writing to you today to add our voices to the many Americans who have already expressed concern, both publicly and privately, about the fate of the many thousands of Afghans who devoted their lives to working with U.S. personnel in support of America's policy objectives and the values we espoused in Afghanistan.

While we come from different backgrounds and hold diverse perspectives on the President's decision to withdraw U.S. forces from Afghanistan, we are united in the belief that the U.S. must act urgently in the face of the upcoming withdrawal to be able to protect those who did so much to protect us.

Our concerns are well-founded. According to No One Left Behind and Brown University's Costs of War Project research, for example, there have been over 300 incidents documented since 2014 of former Afghan interpreters who were targeted and killed by the Taliban for their collaboration with U.S. forces. We are also all well aware of the waves of assassinations that have targeted many who worked closely with the U.S. in recent months.

We fully support continued American diplomacy to encourage a negotiated path to peace and continued U.S. funding for development and security assistance to Afghanistan. However, we should not assume that an empowered Taliban leadership will view those Afghans who worked with us any kindlier in the future than they have in the past. We need to be prepared to act as needed to care for those who supported and trusted us. In that regard, we welcome Secretary Blinken's public pledge recently to ensure that the administration has the resources in place to implement the program quickly.

To follow up on that commitment, we ask that you direct your staffs to coordinate on taking immediate action to address this impending crisis. We urge that the teams at State and Defense work with the White House and the Congress to ensure that the United States government is putting in place appropriate measures to move forward rapidly and effectively. In particular, we recommend:

- 1) Expediting processing and decision-making related to existing SIV applications, utilizing the approximately 4,000 visas available under the cap of 22,620 visas Congress made available in the 2021 NDAA as well as the nearly 11,000 visas that were previously authorized and remain available. Note that over 18,000 Afghans, including former interpreters and others, are awaiting visa adjudication. Working with other agency partners, expedited processing should include rapid adjudication of security clearances. Our goal should be to clear the backlog before our forces depart.
- 2) Raising existing quotas on admittance on an emergency basis when the U.S. withdraws. Utilize the President's 90-day review of the SIV process to address the potential surge in demand.
- 3) Asking Congress to take emergency steps to create an admissions pathway for additional Afghans who will be especially vulnerable in the post-withdrawal period. We are encouraged by the bipartisan Congressional letter to the President of April 21 that committed those members to work with the Administration "to address challenges facing the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) and the U.S. Refugee Admissions Programs in providing the response necessary to address this issue over the next few months."
- 4) Conducting a rapid assessment by the State Department in cooperation with the Department of Defense, and coordinated with international partners including NATO, of the potential humanitarian implications of a withdrawal and plan responses to act immediately as the situation warrants.

Regrettably, U.S. history is replete with instances where we failed to understand or prepare to mitigate the terrible consequences that might confront those of our national partners who stood beside us and believed in us when the going was tough. We have the ability now to avoid a similar fate for our Afghan partners and their families. We have a moral obligation to do better this time. We urge that you lead in taking the necessary measures to meet that obligation.

Sincerely,

- Rear Admiral Sandy Adams, USN (ret)
- Brigadier General Ricardo Aponte, USAF (ret)
- Honorable Bernard Aronson, former Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs
- Ms. Hilda Arrelano, former Coordinating Director for Development and Economic Affairs, USAID Kabul
- Major General Donna Barbisch, USA (ret)
- Rear Admiral Jamie Barnett, USN (ret)
- Lieutenant General Ronald Blanck, USA (ret)
- Honorable Peter Bodde, former Ambassador, former Ambassador, Malawi, Nepal, and Libya
- Honorable Barbara Bodine, former Acting Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Department of State and former Ambassador, Yemen
- Honorable Richard Boucher, former Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia and former Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs
- Honorable Kenneth Brown, former Ambassador, Congo-Brazzaville, Cote d'Ivoire, and Ghana
- Honorable Steven Browning, former Ambassador to Uganda and to Malawi
- Honorable Peter Burleigh, former Ambassador to India, and Sri Lanka and the Maldives, former Acting Ambassador to the United Nations, and former Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Department of State
- Honorable John Campbell, former Ambassador to Nigeria
- Honorable Hank Cohen, former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and former Ambassador to the Gambia
- Honorable Frances Cook, former Ambassador to Cameroon, Burundi, and Oman
- Honorable Thomas Countryman, former Assistant Secretary of State for International Security and Nonproliferation
- Honorable Ryan Crocker, former Ambassador to Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Kuwait, and Lebanon
- Major General Andrew B. Davis, USMC (ret)
- Major General Rick Devereaux, USAF (ret)
- Honorable Shaun Donnelly, former Ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives
- Brigadier General John W. Douglass, USAF (ret)
- Major General Paul Eaton, USA (ret)
- Honorable Eric Edelman, former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

- Major General Mari K. Eder, USA (ret)
- Honorable Gerald M. Feierstein, former Ambassador to Yemen
- Vice Admiral Mike Franken, USN (ret)
- Colonel Robert Gaylord, USAF (ret)
- Honorable Harold Geisel, former Ambassador to Mauritius
- Rear Admiral Steven Glass, USN (ret)
- Honorable Gordon Gray, former Ambassador, Tunisia
- Vice Admiral Kevin P. Green
- Major General Richard S. “Beef” Haddad, USAF (ret)
- Rear Admiral Charles Harr, USN (ret)
- Honorable Patricia Haslach, former Ambassador to Ethiopia and to Laos and former Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs
- Rear Admiral L.R. Hering, USN (ret)
- Honorable Cameron Hume, former Ambassador to Algeria, South Africa, and Indonesia
- Honorable Vicki J. Huddleston, former Ambassador to Mali and to Madagascar
- Brigadier General David R. Irvine, USA (ret)
- Honorable Dennis Jett, former Ambassador to Mozambique and to Peru
- Honorable David Johnson, former Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, former Ambassador to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and former Coordinator for Afghanistan, Department of State
- Ms. Susan Johnson, former Career Foreign Service Officer
- Honorable James Keith, former Ambassador to Malaysia
- Lieutenant General Claudia Kennedy, USA (ret)
- Honorable Laura Kennedy, former Ambassador, Turkmenistan and former Permanent Representative, Conference on Disarmament
- Honorable Dan Kurtzer, former Ambassador, Egypt and Israel
- Mr. Bruce Lemken, SES (ret)
- Major General Steven Lepper, USAF (ret)
- Honorable Hugo Llorens, former U.S. Ambassador to Honduras, Assistant Chief of Mission, Kabul, and Special Charge d’Affaires, Afghanistan
- Honorable Steven R. Mann, former Ambassador to Turkmenistan
- Major General Rick Martin, USAF (ret)
- Brigadier General Carlos Martinez, USAF (ret)
- Mr. Robert McBrien, SES (ret)

- Honorable Steven McGann, former Ambassador to Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga, and Tuvalu
- Honorable P. Michael McKinley, former Ambassador to Peru, Colombia, Afghanistan, and Brazil
- Brigadier General Joseph V. Medina, USMC (ret)
- Honorable William B. Milam, former Ambassador, Pakistan and Bangladesh
- Honorable Tom Miller, former Ambassador to Greece and to Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Major General David Morris, USA (ret)
- Honorable Joe Mussomeli, former Ambassador to Slovenia and Cambodia
- Honorable Allan P. Mustard, former Ambassador to Turkmenistan
- Honorable Ron Neumann, former Ambassador, Algeria, Bahrain, and Afghanistan
- Rear Admiral David Oliver, USN (ret)
- Honorable Richard Olson, former Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates and to Pakistan and former Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan
- Brigadier General Scott O'Meara, USMC (ret)
- Honorable David D. Pearce, former Ambassador to Greece and to Algeria, former Assistant Chief of Mission to Afghanistan, and former Acting Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan
- Honorable Robert Pearson, former Ambassador to Turkey
- Ms. Annie Pforzheimer, former Senior Foreign Service Officer and Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Afghanistan
- Major General Jeffrey E. Phillips, USA (ret)
- Honorable Nicholas Platt, former Ambassador, Pakistan, Philippines, and Zambia
- Major General Gale S. Pollock, USA (ret)
- Honorable Michael Polt, former Ambassador to Estonia, Serbia and Montenegro, and to Serbia
- Honorable Robin Raphel, former Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Affairs and former Ambassador, Tunisia
- Honorable Charles Ray, former Ambassador, Zimbabwe
- Rear Admiral Harold Robinson, USN (ret)
- Honorable Peter Romero, former Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs and former Ambassador to Ecuador and to El Salvador
- Honorable Teresita Schaffer, former Ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives
- Honorable Douglas Silliman, former Ambassador to Kuwait and to Iraq
- Dr. Carol Sisco, Ph.D

- Honorable Francis X. Taylor, former Assistant Secretary of State for Diplomatic Security, former Coordinator for Counterterrorism, Department of State, former Under Secretary of Homeland Security for Intelligence and Analysis, and Brigadier General, USAF (ret)
- Honorable James H. Thessin, former Ambassador to Paraguay and former Deputy Legal Adviser, Department of State
- Honorable Harry Thomas, former Ambassador to Bangladesh, Zimbabwe, and the Philippines and as former Director General of the Foreign Service
- Honorable Kurt Tong, former Ambassador, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation and Consul General, Hong Kong
- Major General F. Andrew Turley, USAF (ret)
- General Joseph Votel, USA (ret)
- Honorable James Warlick, former Ambassador to Bulgaria
- Honorable E. Anthony Wayne, former Ambassador to Mexico and to Argentina, former Deputy Ambassador to Afghanistan, and former Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs
- Honorable William Webster, former Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and former Director of Central Intelligence
- Honorable Bruce Wharton, former Acting Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and former Ambassador, Zimbabwe
- Honorable Pamela White, former Ambassador to Haiti and the Gambia
- Major General Michael N. Wilson, USAF (ret)
- Honorable Frank Wisner, former Ambassador to India, the Philippines, Zambia, and Egypt, former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, and former Under Secretary of State for International Security Affairs
- Honorable William Wood, former Ambassador to Afghanistan and to Colombia
- Major General David T. Zabecki, USA (ret)

Cc:

Honorable Jason Crow
Member of Congress

Honorable Adam Schiff
Member of Congress

Honorable Don Bacon
Member of Congress

Honorable Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress

Honorable Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Honorable Neal P. Dunn, M.D.
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Honorable Andy Kim
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Honorable Adam Kinzinger
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Honorable Sara Jacobs
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Honorable Tom Malinowski
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Honorable Peter Meijer
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Honorable Stephanie Murphy
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Honorable Brad R. Wenstrup, D.P.M.
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