

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 4, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

Our Afghan friends and allies are at greater risk than ever before. We formed the bipartisan Honoring Our Promises Working Group to prevent the Afghans who served by our side from being killed in the wake of our withdrawal by groups like the Taliban, ISIS, and Al Qaeda. We would like to follow up on our letter of April 21, 2021, in which we sought your commitment to ensure that we honor our promises to them in the final days of this conflict.

In the past month, we have been closely following your developing withdrawal plans. We appreciate the complexity of ending the War in Afghanistan, but we are increasingly concerned that you have not yet directed the Department of Defense be mobilized as part of a concrete and workable whole of government plan to protect our Afghan partners. At the request of your Administration, members of the working group introduced legislation to streamline and accelerate the process by raising the visa cap for the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program and waiving the medical exam requirement. But even with those legislative fixes, the SIV application backlog is likely to keep growing and our Afghan partners are certain to face an even greater threat.

The current SIV process will not work. It takes an average of 800+ days, and we plan to withdraw in less than 100 days. While our working group is investigating various process efficiencies and options for expanding the number of SIVs available, it is clear that the process will not be rectified in time to help the 18,000+ applicants who need visas before our withdrawal.

After examining this situation through multiple hearings, briefings, and our own offices' research and outreach, our bipartisan working group has concluded that we must evacuate our Afghan friends and allies immediately. No U.S. entity—to include the Department of Defense, Department of State, USAID, et al.—has the ability or authority to protect them in Afghanistan after our withdrawal. It would be a moral failure to transfer the responsibility to protect our Afghan partners onto the shoulders of the Afghan Government. The time is now to honor our promise and evacuate Afghan SIV applicants.

The United States has conducted evacuations at a far greater scale before. In 1975, we evacuated ~130,000 Vietnamese refugees after the Fall of Saigon, holding most of those refugees temporarily in Guam before transporting them to the continental United States to finish visa processing. In 1996, we evacuated thousands of Kurds at the end of the Iraqi Kurdish Civil War, also holding them in Guam temporarily before they reached their final destination in the United States. We have experience with this type of evacuation in times of crisis, and the current environment in Afghanistan clearly merits such action.

Previous evacuations have benefited from a coordinating body to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are engaged and held accountable. For that reason, we call on your administration to establish a President's Interagency Task Force responsible for the visa management and evacuation of our Afghan allies before our withdrawal from the country. We also recommend that the President's Interagency Task Force specifically consider the option of using Guam as a temporary evacuation site before moving our friends and allies to more permanent locations within the continental United States. In consultation with our colleague from Guam, if Guam is selected as a temporary evacuation site we recommend that the Task Force to develop a robust vaccination and housing plan that defends against COVID-19 and its potential impacts on the local community. The Task Force should ensure that evacuation plans do not interfere with continued support of Afghan forces and officials in country and put in place expedited procedures for Afghans who may choose to be evacuated later as well.

If we fail to protect our allies in Afghanistan, it will have a lasting impact on our future partnerships and global reputation, which will then be a great detriment to our troops and the future of our national security. Veterans in Congress understand this firsthand: when we recruited our Afghan friends, we promised to have their backs. The Honoring Our Promises Working Group stands ready to provide support and oversight for this critical mission.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this urgent matter of our national security.

Sincerely,



SETH MOULTON
Member of Congress
Honoring Our Promises Working Group Co-lead



JASON CROW
Member of Congress
Honoring Our Promises Working Group Co-lead

/s/

MICHAEL SAN NICOLAS
Member of Congress

/s/

EARL BLUMENAUER
Member of Congress

/s/

NEAL DUNN
Member of Congress

/s/

RUBEN GALLEGO
Member of Congress

/s/

ANDREW KIM
Member of Congress

/s/

SARA JACOBS
Member of Congress

/s/

PETER MEIJER
Member of Congress

/s/

STEPHANIE MURPHY
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MICHAEL WALTZ
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BRAD WENSTRUP
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DON BACON
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JOE COURTNEY
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BILL FOSTER
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PETER WELCH
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