

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

August 25, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We write today to request a briefing from your Department on efforts underway to ensure adequate vetting of all Afghan nationals being evacuated from that country to the United States. Our country owes a moral obligation to those who put themselves at great personal risk to provide substantial assistance to coalition forces in Afghanistan. We therefore must work to ensure those individuals safe passage out of Afghanistan. And though we must expeditiously process and adjudicate any immigration benefits for which they may be eligible, we must also continue to guard against potential terrorist entry into the United States by those who would seek to covertly infiltrate this sympathetic population and take advantage of our good will.

It is no secret that terrorists and other bad actors will always seek to exploit any and all weaknesses in border security and vetting of foreign nationals seeking to enter the United States.¹ This is not unique to the situation in Afghanistan. For example, a program intended to resettle Iraqis who assisted the U.S. mission was discovered to be rife with fraud, with 4,000 Iraqis accused of having filed a fraudulent application, while over 100,000 other cases are suspect.² Over 500 Iraqis implicated in the fraud were even admitted to the United States; fortunately, none are known to have terrorist ties.³

In the chaotic situation left in the wake of the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, we are particularly concerned that terrorists and others who wish to harm the United States may seek to infiltrate the country disguised as those who provided assistance to coalition forces in Afghanistan. Indeed, the Taliban have taken control of prisons throughout the country and released inmates, including the Bagram prison which held Taliban and Islamic State fighters who

¹ *The 9/11 Commission Report: final report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States*, (July 22, 2004) at pg. 384, <https://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf>.

² Jonathan Landay & Ted Hesson, *EXCLUSIVE U.S. suspects 4,000 cases of fraud in Iraqi refugee program – documents*, REUTERS (June 18, 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/world/exclusive-us-suspects-4000-cases-fraud-iraqi-refugee-program-documents-2021-06-18/>.

³ *Id.*

are now mixing in with the general public.⁴ The integrity of our immigration system is paramount. Those who are eligible for immigration benefits should receive them, while those who are not – especially those who may be inadmissible for security and related grounds – should be screened out.⁵

To assist the Republicans on the Oversight Committee in conducting important oversight into the ongoing efforts to screen and vet potentially tens of thousands of Afghan nationals who may ultimately be resettled in the United States, please make arrangements to provide a staff-level briefing and all necessary information sufficient to answer the following questions no later than September 1, 2021:

1. What are the procedures used to screen Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) applicants for eligibility for that benefit, as well as to prevent the entry of any foreign national into the United States who may be inadmissible under the security and related grounds set forth in 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(3)?
2. What are the procedures used to screen foreign nationals applying under the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program Priority 1 (P-1) or Priority 2 (P-2) designation for eligibility for that benefit, as well as to prevent the entry of any foreign national who may be inadmissible under the security and related grounds set forth in 8 U.S.C. § 1182(a)(3)?
3. What information is the government cross-referencing to ensure that principal applicants for Special Immigrant Visas meet all requirements, particularly the requirement that they be employed for the required time period in Afghanistan by or on behalf of the U.S. government or by the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) or a successor mission?
4. How many total Afghan SIV applications have been approved?
5. What are the current average processing times for the various stages in the Afghan SIV application process and how have those processing times changed over the last six months?
6. How many Afghan SIV applications are being adjudicated per day, and how has that number changed over the last six months?

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. To make arrangements to schedule the briefing and deliver documents or ask any related follow-up questions, please contact Committee on Oversight and Reform Republican Staff at (202) 225-5074. The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

⁴ Ahmad Seir, et al, *Taliban sweep into Afghan capital after government collapses*, AP NEWS (Aug. 15, 2021), <https://apnews.com/article/afghanistan-taliban-kabul-bagram-e1ed33fe0c665ee67ba132c51b8e32a5>.

⁵ 8 U.S.C. 1182(a)(3).

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
August 25, 2021
Page 3

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "James" and last name "Comer" clearly legible.

James Comer
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform

cc: The Honorable Carolyn Maloney, Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform