

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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<https://oversight.house.gov>

December 6, 2022

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301

General Mark Milley  
Chairman  
Joint Chiefs of Staff  
9999 Joint Staff Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20318

Dear Secretary Austin and Chairman Milley:

House Oversight Committee Republicans are continuing to conduct oversight of the United States' botched withdrawal from Afghanistan. In July 2021, prior to withdrawal, President Biden claimed "[t]here's going to be no circumstance where you see people being lifted off the roof of an embassy."<sup>1</sup> By August 2021, however, Americans watched in horror as the Taliban quickly gained control of Afghanistan, fleeing Afghans clung to and fell from planes departing Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA), and a suicide bomber murdered 13 U.S. servicemen and women and hundreds of innocent Afghans.<sup>2</sup> In light of the mass casualties, taxpayer dollars spent, and ongoing national security concerns, Committee Republicans are seeking information about the planning, logistics, and steps the Biden Administration took to plan for the rushed exit from Afghanistan. Looking forward to the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress, this investigation will continue to be a priority for the Committee. Therefore, we are reiterating our previous requests to the Department of Defense (DOD) for documents and information.

Following the collapse of Afghanistan, we requested documents and information from DOD and many others regarding the Biden Administration's disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan. Unfortunately, DOD's response to our request was insufficient and did not detail

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<sup>1</sup> Press Briefing, The White House, Remarks by President Biden on the Drawdown of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan (July 8, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Luke Harding & Ben Doherty, *Kabul airport: footage appears to show Afghans falling from plane after takeoff*, THE GUARDIAN (Aug. 16, 2021).

when documents would be delivered.<sup>3</sup> We requested documents and information regarding the Taliban's access to U.S. funded military equipment,<sup>4</sup> which we now know that approximately \$7.2 billion in military equipment transferred to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) is now in the hands of the Taliban,<sup>5</sup> and the Taliban are using that equipment for their own military training.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, we asked for all documents relating to the withdrawal from Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup>

Despite years of warnings raised by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) regarding the capabilities of the ANDSF, Secretary Austin still claimed that the collapse of the ANDSF "took us all by surprise."<sup>8</sup> It is clear the Biden Administration did not plan accordingly for the withdrawal, as evidenced by the released August 14, 2021 Meeting Summary detailing relocations out of Afghanistan.<sup>9</sup> After the release of this document in February 2022, we requested documents relating to the withdrawal again<sup>10</sup> but received no substantive response. It has been over a year since the United States withdrew its forces, diplomats, and contractors from Afghanistan. American taxpayers, the women and girls who continue to be repressed under Taliban control, and the families of the thirteen service members who lost their lives evacuating Afghans all deserve answers.

Next Congress the Oversight Committee will continue to investigate the Biden Administration's failure to conduct a safe withdrawal from Afghanistan and all national security concerns that reverberated from it. DOD and the Joint Chiefs of Staff possess critical information needed to inform Congress and the American people of the decisions and planning regarding the withdrawal from Afghanistan. Please provide the documents and communications listed in prior correspondence. Additionally, please prioritize the following requests for information covering the time period from January 20, 2021 to present, as soon as possible but no later than December 20, 2022:

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<sup>3</sup> Letter from Hon. Colin Kahl, Under Sec'y of Defense for Policy, U.S. Dep't of Defense, to Hon. James Comer, Ranking Member, H. Comm on Oversight & Reform (Apr. 26, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Hon. James Comer, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight & Reform, et. al., to Hon. Lloyd Austin, Sec'y of Defense, U.S. Dep't of Defense (Aug. 23, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> News Release, Office of Inspector Gen, U.S. Dep't of Defense, Lead Inspector Gen. for Operation Enduring Sentinel and Operation Freedom's Sentinel Quarterly Report to the United States Congress (Aug. 16, 2022).

<sup>6</sup> Mohammad Yunus Yawar, *Black Hawk helicopter crashes during Taliban training exercise, killing three*, REUTERS, (Sept. 10, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> Letter from Hon. James Comer, et. al., Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight & Reform, to President Joseph Biden, et. al. (Dec. 1, 2021).

<sup>8</sup> SPECIAL INSPECTOR GEN. FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION, RECONSTRUCTING THE AFGHAN NATIONAL DEFENSE AND SECURITY FORCES: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE U.S. EXPERIENCE IN AFGHANISTAN, SIGAR-17-62-LL (Sept. 21, 2017); SPECIAL INSPECTOR GEN. FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION, 2021 HIGH RISK LIST, 12-21 (Mar. 10, 2021); Quint Forgey, *Pentagon leaders: Kabul withdrawal was a 'strategic failure'*, POLITICO (Sept. 28, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum, Summary of Conclusions for DSG Meeting on Relocations out of Afghanistan, Nat'l Sec. Council, The White House (Aug. 14, 2021).

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Hon. James Comer, et. al., Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight & Reform, to Jake Sullivan, et. al., Assistant to the President for Nat'l Sec'y Affairs (Feb. 15, 2022).

1. All documents and communications related to contingency plans in the Afghanistan withdrawal and evacuation that were presented to the White House. Please include any rationale or discussion that includes the decision to remove air support prior to the evacuation of U.S. citizens;
2. All documents and communications between DOD and other agencies implementing the plan to withdraw from Kabul, Afghanistan in August 2021;
3. All documents, meeting records, and communications discussing or requesting a surge or drawing down of troops in Afghanistan or in support of the mission in Afghanistan from January 20, 2021, to September 30, 2021;
4. All documents and communications with NATO leaders regarding Afghanistan troop withdrawal and evacuation planning;
5. All intelligence assessments, reports, communications, and documents provided to the White House referring or relating to al-Qaeda's posture in Afghanistan;
6. All documents and communications between or among the former Afghan Air Force (AAF), ANDSF, the Afghan Ministry of Defense, Afghan Ministry of Interior, or the Afghan Government referring or relating to the closure of Bagram Airfield;
7. All documents and communications including inventory logs of military and civilian equipment left behind in Afghanistan including but not limited to equipment handed over to the ANDSF and equipment utilized by U.S. forces;
8. All documents and communications referring or relating to the planning and implementation of Operation Allies Welcome (OAW) and Operation Allies Refuge (OAR);
9. All documents, assessments, plans, and communications regarding the ability to conduct over-the-horizon operations in Afghanistan following the withdrawal; and
10. All draft or final after-action assessments completed by DOD evaluating the Afghanistan withdrawal and evacuation that identified any areas of improvement or weakness.

To coordinate delivery of documents or ask any follow-up questions, please contact the 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.

The Honorable Lloyd Austin  
General Mark Milley  
Page 4

Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

James Comer  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Oversight and Reform

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