

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

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March 26, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2202 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is conducting oversight of a series of embassy closures and partial evacuations around the world under the Biden Administration. Since President Biden took office, the U.S. has drawn down, evacuated, or closed posts in several countries as security conditions have deteriorated. The Committee requests a briefing from the Department, in an appropriate setting, on the underlying causes behind this trend, how the Administration will pursue U.S. foreign policy interests with a diminished diplomatic presence in these and other high-threat countries, and how the Department is ensuring the security of U.S. facilities and personnel abroad in high-threat areas of the world.

Since President Biden took office, the Department has been forced to reduce or suspend operations at several posts across the globe. In late March, 2021, the Administration ordered the evacuation of non-essential personnel from the U.S. Embassy in Burma in light of escalating unrest triggered by a military coup.¹ On August 31, 2021, amid the disastrous withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan, and with U.S. citizens remaining in Afghanistan, the U.S. Embassy in Kabul suspended operations.² After Russia launched a new invasion of Ukraine, on February 28, 2022, you announced the suspension of operations at the U.S. Embassy in Minsk, Belarus, and a voluntary departure of non-emergency employees and family members at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Russia.³ On April 22, 2023, the U.S. Embassy in Sudan suspended operations and embassy personnel were evacuated from the country.⁴ On August 2, 2023, non-emergency personnel and family members were ordered to depart from the U.S. Embassy in Niamey, Niger⁵ after a military coup.⁶ Now, the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince, Haiti recently

¹ Morgan Winsor & Conor Finnegan, *US orders some diplomats to evacuate Myanmar amid deadly crackdown on protesters*, ABC NEWS (Mar. 31, 2021).

² Security Message, *Suspension of Operations*, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE, U.S. EMBASSY IN KABUL (Aug. 31, 2021).

³ Statement by Secretary Antony J. Blinken, *Suspending Operations at U.S. Embassy Minsk and Change in Status for U.S. Embassy Moscow*, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE, U.S. MISSION BELARUS (Feb. 28, 2022).

⁴ Security Alert, *Suspension of Embassy Operations*, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE, U.S. EMBASSY IN KHARTOUM (Apr. 23, 2023); Sophia Barkoff & Faris Tanyos, *U.S. government personnel evacuated from Sudan amid violence, embassy shuttered*, CBS NEWS (Apr. 23, 2023).

⁵ Alert: *U.S. Embassy in Niamey Suspended Routine Services*, U.S. DEP'T OF STATE, U.S. EMBASSY IN NIAMEY (Aug. 4, 2023).

⁶ Michael Birnbaum, *U.S. orders partial evacuation of embassy in Niger amid apparent coup*, The Washington Post (Aug. 2, 2023).

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began evacuating some personnel and enhancing security given deteriorating conditions and gang violence close to the compound.⁷

These closures and service reductions are leading to a diminished U.S. diplomatic presence abroad. Closures and reduced service status have serious implications for U.S. citizens residing in those countries, as well as foreign nationals who must travel elsewhere to access consular services. The Committee is also concerned about the repeated necessity of withdrawing U.S. personnel, and whether deteriorating conditions in those countries are the result, even in part, of failed U.S. foreign policy. The Committee therefore requests a briefing from the Department on this trend, to take place in an appropriate setting, as soon as possible but no later than April 2, 2024.

Briefers should specifically be prepared to identify and discuss all embassies or consulate posts experiencing closures or reduced services, other high-threat posts not currently in closure or reduced status, actions being taken to secure embassy personnel and assets at these high-threat posts, contingency plans to respond in emergency situations, an assessment of why this trend has occurred, and an assessment of whether this trend will continue. Briefers should also be prepared to discuss the impact of closures or reduced service status on national security, the administration and oversight of U.S. foreign assistance, and the Department's ongoing ability to effectuate U.S. interests abroad.

To schedule the briefing or to ask any related questions, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Accountability Majority staff at 202-225-5074.

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability 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.

Sincerely,



James Comer

Chairman

Committee on Oversight and Accountability

cc: The Honorable Jamie Raskin, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability

⁷ Caitlin Stephen Hu, et al., *US, Germany and EU embassies begin evacuating staff as violence spirals in gang-plagued Haiti*, CNN (Mar. 11, 2024).