

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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October 25, 2022

The Honorable John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
2530 Crystal Drive
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Inspector General Sopko:

Oversight Committee Republicans are continuing to conduct oversight over the United States' botched withdrawal from Afghanistan. More than a year ago, on September 10, 2021, the Committee sent a bipartisan letter requesting you:

Examine the underlying causes that may have led to the rapid collapse of Afghanistan, the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF), any potential loss or compromise of U.S. reconstruction assistance resulting from the Taliban's return to power, and the ramifications of the U.S. military and diplomatic withdrawal for U.S. national security and the people of Afghanistan.¹

Since then, you have been working on five different reports to fulfill this request.² On two separate occasions you have informed the Committee that the Biden Administration is obstructing your work by failing to produce required information. This is unacceptable. Therefore, we request a briefing on your continuing oversight efforts and any obstacles put in place by the Biden Administration.

On June 22, 2022, you notified the Committee that the Biden Administration is refusing to respond to your requests for information.³ Information that is necessary and critical to completing reports the Committee requested. For example, the U.S. Department of State (State) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have refused to provide basic

¹ Letter from James Comer, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight and Reform, et. al, to John Sopko, Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (September 10, 2021).

² QUARTERLY REPORT TO THE U.S. CONGRESS, SPECIAL INSPECTOR GEN. FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION, 31 (July 30, 2022).

³ Letter from John Sopko, Inspector Gen. for Afghanistan Reconstruction to H.Comm. on Oversight & Reform, et. al. (June 22, 2022).

information relevant to SIGAR's audit concerning efforts to ensure that ongoing programs supporting the people of Afghanistan do not result in the illegal transfer of U.S. taxpayer funds to the Taliban or Haqqani Network.⁴ Furthermore, a State official informed SIGAR that department staff have received internal direction to not engage with or speak with SIGAR without prior clearance from State legal counsel.⁵

Historically, State and USAID have honored SIGAR's mission. But since the Biden Administration's botched Afghanistan withdrawal—which is in desperate need of oversight—State and USAID have denied travel, delayed, obstructed, and even questioned SIGAR's jurisdictional authority.⁶ The Biden Administration's obstruction directly violates the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2008⁷ and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended,⁸ which both require agencies to provide Inspectors General information or assistance.

Recently, your office notified us that State and USAID are continuing to obstruct your work by refusing to cooperate with SIGAR's requests for information necessary to complete statutorily mandated Quarterly Reports to Congress.⁹ These quarterly reports provide Congress with up-to-date information on the reconstruction mission in Afghanistan. Specifically, USAID failed to provide SIGAR with information on funds allocated for The Economic Support Fund, which is explicitly required to be included in your Quarterly Report by SIGAR's authorizing statute.¹⁰ Additionally, State and USAID failed to provide SIGAR with data on continued humanitarian assistance programs pertaining to economic growth, women's rights, and public health. Furthermore, both the Department of Treasury and State refused to respond to SIGAR's requests for information about the recently created, "Afghan Fund."¹¹

The Biden Administration's obstruction of your investigations is unprecedented, matching the unprecedented Afghanistan withdrawal. If the Biden Administration does not begin cooperation with SIGAR's requests, SIGAR will not be able to provide Congress with its independent, whole-of-government assessment of U.S. engagements in Afghanistan. Since President Biden's disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan, the U.S. has spent more than \$1.1 billion on humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people.¹² It is SIGAR's responsibility to examine this money for waste, fraud, and abuse and to what extent the Taliban may have access

⁴ Letter from John Sopko, Inspector Gen. for Afghanistan Reconstruction to Antony Blinken, Sec'y, U.S. Dep't of State and Samantha Powers, Administrator, U.S. Ag'y for Int'l Dev. (June 22, 2022).

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-118, § 1229 (h)(5)(A) (2008).

⁸ The Inspector General Act of 1978, Pub. L. No. 95-452, § 6(c)(1), (1978).

⁹ Email from Robert Lawrence, Dir. Of Congressional Relations and Gov. Affairs, Special Inspector Gen. for Afghanistan Reconstruction to Mark Marin, Staff Director, H. Comm. on Oversight and Reform, et al. (October 11, 2022).

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² Press Release, U.S. Dep't of State, United States Announces Humanitarian Assistance for Afghanistan (September 23, 2022).

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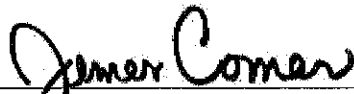
to those funds, as it has done since 2008. The lack of cooperation from the Biden Administration raises serious questions. What do they have to hide? Are funds being given to the Taliban? What is being done to assist women and girls? How is the U.S. engaging with the U.N. and other multilateral organizations on these matters?

To help us better understand these and other issues, we respectfully request a staff-level briefing to take place as soon as possible, but no later than November 1, 2022. To ask any follow-up or related questions, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Reform 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 for your attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,



James Comer
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Glenn Grothman
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security

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

The Honorable Stephen F. Lynch, Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security