

**Statement for the Record United States Agency for International Development
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Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee
“The US-Afghanistan Relationship Following the Military Withdrawal”
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Chairman Meeks, Ranking Member McCaul, Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here to discuss the U.S.-Afghanistan Relationship Following President Biden’s announcement last month to withdraw all U.S. military forces from Afghanistan by September 11, 2021. It is an honor to testify before you and a pleasure to be alongside my colleague, Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad.

I would like to begin by thanking our military colleagues, the brave women and men in uniform who have served in Afghanistan, and their families. Our gratitude also goes to the American and international civilians who serve in Afghanistan: USAID’s Foreign Service Officers and development professionals; diplomats of the U.S. Department of State; colleagues from across the interagency, and the men and women working shoulder to shoulder with us implementing U.S. programs in Afghanistan. I would also like to thank the thousands of Afghans who work – and sacrifice – alongside us to ensure their country’s future is one filled with increased access to opportunities, enhanced stability, and a hopeful tomorrow for their children. Furthermore, I want to recognize the many who have given their lives in service to our great country, protecting what we hold most dear -- our freedom, our values, and our way of life. Each of you has the gratitude of an entire nation.

USAID’S CONTINUED PRESENCE

We are at a time when the United States is preparing for a significant change to its presence in Afghanistan. As President Biden announced, the United States will fully withdraw its military presence no later than September 11, 2021, ending U.S. military involvement in nearly two decades of war following the September 11, 2001 attacks. President Biden made it explicitly clear - as did Secretary of State Blinken - that as defense draws down, diplomacy and development must come to the forefront. The U.S. will stand with the Afghan people, through diplomacy and development assistance, as they work toward a more prosperous future. As Ambassador Khalilzad has said, the United States remains committed to the Afghan peace process, and we will use our full diplomatic, development, economic, and humanitarian toolkit to support the future the Afghan people want, including maintaining and advancing the gains made by Afghan women, an issue that I know is near and dear to many of you, as it is to us..

I want to make it clear to the Committee, to our Afghan partners, international donors, and the American people that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) will continue to support the Afghan people. The troop withdrawal announcement has not changed USAID's objectives to support the dignity of the Afghan people. Our development assistance accelerates inclusive economic growth, advances social gains in health, education, and gender equality (especially for Afghan women), fights corruption, enhances conflict resolution mechanisms, bolsters civil society and independent media, and increases the Government of Afghanistan's (GOA) accountability to its citizens. USAID provides humanitarian assistance for those most in need, including women, girls, and displaced populations.

Support for Afghan women is, and will remain, an important focus for USAID. We heard loud

and clear from your Senate colleagues and SFRC Chairman Menendez the priority they place on any future Afghan government maintaining and preserving gains for women and girls. Afghan women's rights and opportunities have rapidly advanced with continued support from the American people, and preserving those rights is a cornerstone of USAID's strategy. USAID will continue to support women's ability to meaningfully participate in the peace process and any post-settlement initiatives. There is no sustainable development without inclusive development, in Afghanistan or anywhere in the world. Conversely, the marginalization of women and girls creates inherent instability rather than the broad, sustainable development outcomes Afghanistan needs. That is why it is critical to empower young Afghan women and girls with education and economic opportunities that enable their participation as the effective, productive, and vital members of Afghan society that we know they are.

It is critical during this time of transition that the Afghan Government continues to deliver basic services and protect its citizens. USAID will continue to reinforce the capacity and capability of the Afghan government through both its contributions to the World Bank-managed Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) and those bilateral programs that work directly to strengthen Government systems. In addition, through our work with the U.S. Institute of Peace we will continue to support the peace process itself by ensuring a dialogue between the Government's negotiating team and the Afghan people.

Scenario Planning

USAID provides assistance in insecure environments all over the world. In Afghanistan, we are actively planning for a range of scenarios in which we would continue providing development

assistance in combination with conflict-sensitive programming and humanitarian assistance as needs increase. Across this entire planning process, we are emphasizing the need to protect the gains made to-date, support food security, and strengthen essential services for Afghan citizens, particularly for women and girls. USAID will continue to review its programs, understand constraints, and determine the best way forward in helping to maintain a stable Afghan state. The Mission will pivot development programming to augment humanitarian assistance as necessary to respond to security and access changes in the operating environment, and increase basic service delivery, livelihoods opportunities, food security, and human rights protection.

Although U.S. and NATO forces do not provide direct security for our programs, their presence shaped the operational environment in which USAID and our partners plan and implement development and humanitarian activities. As is standard practice in Afghanistan, USAID and our implementing partners are in regular communication, discussing our ability to operate in the country, and adjusting our programming based on security conditions. Our implementing partners are responsible for, and provide their own security in Afghanistan, as they do in every other country where they operate. Recently, USAID met with our implementing partners in Washington and in Kabul, and took that opportunity to field questions and hear from our partners directly about their experiences on the ground and the collective precautions their teams are taking.

Along with other donors, the United States used the November 23-24, 2020, Geneva Afghanistan Pledging Conference to send a “no business as usual” message to Afghanistan, and to make clear that future donor aid will be conditioned on concrete action by the Afghan Government to

address the four key issues detailed in the Afghanistan Partnership Framework (APF): corruption; human rights; good governance; and progress towards peace. The APF also included a section of Key Principles that need to be upheld for the continuation of civilian assistance to any government. These principles—protecting human rights including for women and girls—were shared with the Taliban Political Commission in Doha by the Conference’s Special Envoy and UN Special Representative for Afghanistan. The United States and other donors have underscored the need to continue upholding these same principles with continued donor support, including via the ARTF.

USAID is in communication with the World Bank and other donors to better understand their potential funding restrictions to the Government of Afghanistan in the event of a power sharing agreement, particularly through the multi-donor ARTF. The U.S. and other donors remain committed to the ARTF as the most effective mechanism for supporting Afghan government core costs, delivery of services, and incentivization of reform while protecting donor assistance from corruption. Donors are of one mind when it comes to the importance of upholding the core principles mutually identified in the Afghanistan Partnership Framework, especially in relation to the rights of women and girls. USAID will continue to engage with donors and the World Bank and ensure that we each leverage our core development strengths moving forward.

The humanitarian community is also assessing how it will adjust in Afghanistan. USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) partners are engaged in robust contingency planning efforts and are prepared to stay and deliver aid as long as they have safe access to do so and the ability to operate according to internationally recognized humanitarian principles. USAID/BHA’s

existing Afghanistan program is designed to be nimbly adaptable to the country's dynamic operating environment, and partners have the capacity to shift implementation should new needs be identified and prioritized. Should increased insecurity result in a significant uptick in identified need, USAID/BHA is able to quickly allocate humanitarian assistance funds from within the Bureau's global funding ceiling to increase support to Afghanistan.

USAID ACHIEVEMENTS IN AFGHANISTAN

Afghanistan continues to face significant challenges: from a humanitarian crisis, food insecurity, to COVID-19. However, USAID investments help Afghanistan build resiliency. Our Afghan partners have made significant gains over the past two decades. The Afghanistan of 2021 is a very different place than in 2002. U.S. assistance to Afghanistan has helped promote a more resilient, inclusive, and prosperous Afghanistan that is a reliable partner to the United States in the region. USAID has invested over \$22 billion in development assistance in Afghanistan since 2002, which has yielded significant accomplishments. Citizens of Afghanistan are healthier, have more access to education, are more prosperous, and enjoy greater freedoms than two decades ago.

USAID increased education access for approximately three million Afghan girls and established 31 new degree programs in partnership with 13 U.S. universities and 11 public Afghan universities that link private sector needs with a skilled workforce. This created new job opportunities previously out of reach for many Afghans, in particular Afghan women. To address a shortage of qualified teachers, USAID helped the Ministry of Education increase the number of teacher training colleges from just four in 2002 to 48 by 2014. USAID provided direct technical

support to eleven public universities to enhance their academic achievements, improve organizational development, and achieve quality assurance and accreditation. Importantly, USAID established 30 strategic partnerships between Afghan and U.S. universities that help to design academic policies and by-laws, improve curriculum development, and strengthen teacher capacity. This year, USAID's first-ever cohort of women's scholarship endowment recipients will graduate with degrees in business administration, science, and economics—fields once exclusive to men.

USAID investments in health service delivery led to the creation of Afghanistan's Basic Package of Health Services and Essential Package of Hospital Services. Support from the American people helped cut Afghanistan's child mortality rate in half since 2000, and decreased maternal mortality by 70 percent between 2000 and 2018. USAID helped the Ministry of Public Health increase the number of health facilities across Afghanistan from 498 in 2002 to more than 2600 in 2019, ensuring that 87 percent of Afghans are within a two-hour distance of a health facility. USAID programs also contributed to increasing the number of female health workers in public facilities which has allowed more women to access health services.

Afghanistan's agricultural sector and economy have seen great leaps in access to global markets. USAID facilitated more than \$1.41 billion in increased sales of agricultural products since 2006, supporting the creation of over 657,000 full-time jobs. USAID-supported agribusinesses exported to international markets \$532 million in fresh and dried fruits, nuts, and cashmere since 2006. USAID, the Government of Afghanistan, and our regional partners recognize that access to electricity drives economic growth. USAID continues to partner with the Government and the

private sector to expand and increase access to reliable and affordable energy for Afghan citizens and businesses across the country. USAID helped expand access to power from just four percent of the population to 36 percent over the past eight years. USAID also helped Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat (DABS)— Afghanistan’s National Power Utility—to bring an additional 313.5 megawatts to Afghanistan’s national power grid from 2010 to 2016. USAID efforts help connect transmission lines from Afghanistan to its Central Asian neighbors, fostering regional energy integration that is central to Afghanistan’s future. The completed 10-megawatt solar power plant in Kandahar provides affordable power to 75,000 Kandahar residents and the Shorandam Industrial park enabling additional private-sector investment in the area. This clean electricity offset diesel-generated power to save Da Afghanistan Breshna Sherkat, the national electric utility, approximately 5.3 million liters of fuel per year.

In 2001, under the Taliban, there were almost no print or broadcast media outlets. USAID supported the growth of independent media and civil society to establish an open, robust, and energetic civil society and media sector and fostered a thriving independent media in Afghanistan. In the past two decades, the number of media outlets expanded from zero to 464 operational media outlets in the country. The current number of NGOs stands at 1550, with approximately 53 percent of them implementing activities in more than one province. USAID trained 3,995 judges and court staff (15 percent female) to improve their knowledge of law and their capacity for appropriate judgement, and to adjudicate cases faster.

CONCLUSION

Afghanistan’s gains have been hard won, earned with great sacrifice and effort from the United

States and the Afghan people to improve the country and its prospects for our shared future. Afghanistan's trajectory matters to American national security interests. USAID's work in Afghanistan does not end following the U.S. military's departure. Over the past several years, with vital support from Congress, we have taken clear measures in Afghanistan to ensure our assistance promotes a more stable, inclusive, and increasingly prosperous country. We appreciate Congress' recognition that USAID's development programs are critical for achieving U.S. national security objectives, and that the stability our programs help countries achieve will ultimately improve the prosperity and security of the United States, Afghanistan, and our regional partners. Mr. Chairman, the President has reassured the Afghan people and our allies that the United States will remain Afghanistan's steadfast partner. As military forces withdraw from Afghanistan, USAID will do its part to use our development and humanitarian assistance to support the Afghan people. We will continue to strategically invest in Afghanistan while also safeguarding taxpayer funds. It is an honor to discuss with you today what USAID is doing in that regard.

Thank you and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.