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November 30, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write with serious concerns about ongoing obstacles to evacuate at-risk Afghan allies – military translators, civil servants, humanitarian workers, and others who supported the US mission in Afghanistan. I strongly support your admirable work to secure the safe departure of Americans who are still in Afghanistan. I urge the Administration to expand on these efforts and articulate a clear, effective strategy to expedite the evacuation of these remaining Americans and at-risk Afghan allies.

Numerous Afghans who worked for the American government, served alongside our troops, or dedicated their lives to the U.S. mission in Afghanistan, remain in the country at significant imminent risk. They lack the luxury of waiting years to seek safety. Their family homes are commonly visited by the Taliban and their names are on “kill lists.” Some have already been detained, tortured, and murdered.

I have called repeatedly for an “evacuation czar” with clear Presidential direction and authority to implement such a strategy and coordinate the numerous federal agencies with responsibilities for evacuating and resettling our at-risk Afghan allies.

More creative and proactive measures can assure both our national security and the safety of these at-risk Afghan allies. Threshold security vetting and eligibility processing in Afghanistan can be conducted remotely to allow swift departure from Afghanistan to third countries, or “lily pads.” Our partners on the ground, such as Qatar, can play a role. After arrival in a third country, rigorous and thorough security screening and vetting can be completed before entry into the United States. Of course, anyone failing this security process would be denied entry to the United States. Screenings at these lily pad locations have the benefit of consular presence and a safe, secure environment. Conducted there, they can be effective and cost-efficient. To fulfil our moral

obligations as well as protect our own security, we can establish a process allowing at-risk Afghan allies to complete vetting and screening in a third country before resettlement.

Humanitarian charter flights independently organized and funded by non-profit organizations can expedite the evacuation process parallel to U.S. government efforts. Several of these charter flights manifested with at-risk Afghan allies and their families have recently sought permission to land at Al Udeid Air Base in Doha, Qatar, currently the largest lily pad site. Unfortunately, I understand they have been denied permission to land because some on their manifests do not fit certain narrowly defined categories established by the State Department. Public reports indicate that only American citizens, LPRs, and SIV applicants who have received Chief of Mission approval will receive State Department approval to depart Afghanistan.

I fear that the result of an unnecessarily restrictive policy would be to strand many of our most at-risk allies until they complete a years-long visa application process from Afghanistan.

Keeping our nation's word to these at-risk Afghan allies means swiftly establishing a clear, consistent, and compassionate strategy for evacuation, including for humanitarian charter flights seeking to land at Al Udeid and other lily pad locations. Such an effective strategy may also require investing more resources, waiving parole fees, providing funds to qualified non-government agencies, or other measures. Time is of the essence as the situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate.

Thank you for your consideration and continued leadership.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator