

**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 Antony J. Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

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

The Honorable Samantha Power  
Administrator  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
Ronald Regan Building  
Washington, D.C. 20523

Dear Secretary Blinken, Secretary Austin, and Administrator Power:

Oversight Committee Republicans are continuing to conduct oversight of the Biden Administration's botched withdrawal from Afghanistan. It has come to the Committee's attention that the Department of State (State), Department of Defense (DOD) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) continue to keep information classified that would help both Congress, the Office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)—an independent and nonpartisan investigative body—, and the Lead Inspector General for Overseas Contingency Operations (Lead IG) examine the failed withdrawal. The agencies began classifying more information about Afghanistan at the request of the former Afghan government.<sup>1</sup> This information would have been helpful for Congress to navigate decisions regarding engagements in Afghanistan. Due to the collapse of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) and Afghan government—the classified justifications are no longer reasonable. Committee Republicans request the agencies begin

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Aftergood, *The Expanding Secrecy of the Afghanistan War*, FEDERATION OF AMERICAN SCIENTISTS (Feb. 7, 2018).

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declassifying information that could help the U.S. taxpayer understand how decisions were made regarding Afghanistan.

The agencies' decision to classify information at the request of the former Afghan government assumed flawed premises. The information—according to the SIGAR John Sopko—detailed “casualty, force strength, equipment, operational readiness, attrition figures, as well as performance assessments.”<sup>2</sup> According to SIGAR, the information had “previously been provided to us in an unclassified, releasable format” and that “[n]one of the material now classified or otherwise restricted discloses information that could threaten the U.S. or Afghan missions.”<sup>3</sup> The information was “essential to understanding mission success”<sup>4</sup> and would have allowed SIGAR to conduct credible oversight. Committee Republicans asked SIGAR and Lead IG to submit declassification requests to State, DOD, and USAID for the classified portions of their quarterly reports.<sup>5</sup> Committee Republicans are concerned that the agencies have not acted on SIGAR’s requests.

Now that Afghanistan is under the Taliban’s repressive rule,<sup>6</sup> the Biden Administration should declassify information about ANDSF, the Afghan government, and the withdrawal. Information concerning ANDSF force strength, operational readiness, and performance assessments is needed by Congress and the American taxpayer to assist them in figuring out what went wrong ahead of August of 2021.

It appears the agencies began classifying more information to shield weakness. The American people deserve to know what the U.S. government knew and when they knew it. U.S. policy makers—and the American people—deserve to have access to as much information as possible about the hasty exit from Afghanistan to hold relevant parties accountable, learn from the Biden Administration’s mistakes, and strengthen our capabilities for future high stress national security events.

Therefore, we respectfully request you declassify and provide the House Oversight and Reform Committee the following documents and information no later than December 20, 2022:

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<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Afghan National Defense and Security Forces Data Classified or Restricted for SIGAR’s October 2017 Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION (Oct. 31, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> Letter from Hon. James Comer, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight & Reform, et. al, to John Sopko, Inspector Gen. for Afghanistan Reconstruction (September 15, 2021); Letter from Hon. James Comer, et. al., Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight & Reform, to Sean O’Donnell, Inspector Gen., U.S. Dep’t of Defense, et. al. (Sept. 15, 2021); Letter from James Comer, Ranking Member, H. Comm. on Oversight & Reform, et. al, to John Sopko, Inspector Gen. for Afghanistan Reconstruction (October 5, 2021).

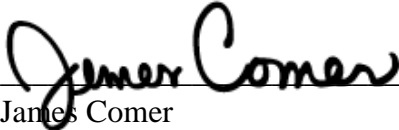
<sup>6</sup> *Afghanistan: Taliban’s Catastrophic Year of Rule*. HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (Aug. 11, 2022).

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1. All classified appendices produced in conjunction with SIGAR's quarterly reports including information that was classified at the request of the Afghan government—as requested by Committee Republicans' September 15, 2021 and October 5, 2021 letters to SIGAR John Sopko.<sup>7</sup> To facilitate this process, we ask you prioritize the declassification of those appendices produced since January 1, 2020; and
2. The classified annex to the August 17, 2021 Quarterly Report on Operation Freedom Sentinel as requested by Committee Republicans' September 15, 2021 letter.<sup>8</sup>

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. To make arrangements to deliver documents or ask any related follow-up questions, please contact 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. We appreciate your cooperation with this inquiry.

Sincerely,



James Comer  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Oversight and Reform

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

The Honorable John Sopko  
Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

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<sup>7</sup> Comer, *supra*, note 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*