

United States Senate

August 5, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

I write to you with grave concerns regarding the disbursement of U.S. development assistance funds to Afghanistan, and the potential for these funds to support the Taliban and their terrorist affiliates. I request your prompt attention to this matter.

According to a recent report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), the U.S. Department of State (hereafter, “State”) could not demonstrate compliance with counterterrorism vetting requirements on awards that disbursed at least \$293 million in Afghanistan.¹ SIGAR notes that, “Since its takeover in August 2021, the Taliban have sought to obtain U.S. funds intended to benefit the Afghan people through several means, including the establishment of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).” SIGAR also notes that U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) officials told SIGAR that USAID had “heard reports that over 1,000 new national NGOs have registered with the so-called [Ministry of Economy], and there are rumors that many of these newly registered NGOs may have Taliban affiliations.”¹

SIGAR’s audit report follows a congressionally requested audit published in May 2024, which found that 38 implementing partners associated with State, USAID, and the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) had paid at least \$10.9 million of U.S. taxpayer money to the Taliban-controlled government since 2021.²

SIGAR’s most recent report outlines significant lapses in counterterrorism vetting requirements that are in compliance with State’s own bureaus, including the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) and the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). This lack of compliance, according to SIGAR, has resulted in at least 29 grants being awarded to entities without proper vetting.

This failure in oversight is deeply alarming, as it has strengthened and enriched the Taliban and its terrorist affiliates. Further, when funds that are intended for humanitarian and development purposes end up supporting groups that perpetuate violence and instability, U.S. national security interests in the region are significantly undermined.

¹ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, SIGAR 24-31 Audit Report, July 2024, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/SIGAR-24-31-AR.pdf>.

² Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, U.S. Funds Benefitting the Taliban-Controlled Government: Implementing Partners Paid at Least \$10.9 Million and Were Pressured to Divert Assistance, SIGAR-24-22-AR, May 20, 2024, <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/SIGAR-24-22-AR.pdf>.

To address these issues and prevent further occurrences, I request a detailed response to the following questions and requests no later than Monday, August 19, 2024:

1. Has State frozen new disbursements of Afghan assistance until it can ensure that all implementing partners can demonstrate compliance with counterterrorism vetting requirements?
 - a. If yes, please provide the date on which such aid was frozen.
 - b. If no, please provide a timeline and explanation of steps that State has taken, since the SIGAR's July 2024 findings, to ensure that newly disbursed funds are not inadvertently supporting the Taliban.
2. Please describe how State will improve its documentation and record-keeping practices to avoid lapses as cited in the SIGAR report, including a description of the specific mechanisms that will be put in place to ensure that records are maintained even with employee turnover and office dissolutions.
3. Please outline the corrective measures that are being taken against those individuals responsible for the failure to comply with vetting requirements and documentation retention.
4. Please describe the measures that State is implementing to improve interagency coordination and communication to prevent the diversion of U.S. taxpayer funds to sanctioned parties in light of SIGAR's findings.

The mismanagement of U.S. taxpayer funds and the inadvertent support of terrorist organizations weakens our national security and the effectiveness of our foreign policy. It is imperative that State take immediate remedial and comprehensive action to rectify these issues to prevent similar occurrences in the future. I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Mike Braun
U.S. Senator