

United States Senate

September 14, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington D.C., 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We are writing to ask you to ensure that unspent funds previously appropriated for the Department of Defense's Afghanistan war effort be reprogrammed to meet the vast humanitarian and relocation needs related to the United States' withdrawal from that country. To date, the Department of Defense has spent approximately \$837.3 billion of American taxpayers' money on the war in Afghanistan since it began.¹ There is reportedly an estimated \$2.9 billion in unspent funds appropriated for Fiscal Years (FY) 2020 and 2021 intended to support the Afghan National Army, National Police, Air Force and Special Security Forces, none of which continue to be operational.² We urge you to resist calls to reallocate this balance to the already bloated Department of Defense budget. Instead, we call upon you to work with Congress to direct those and other available military funds instead to support the humanitarian and relocation needs of the Afghan people. We appreciate that you have submitted a request for \$6.4 billion in supplemental funds to relocate Afghan refugees – we support that request and ask that you work with us to reallocate previously appropriated funds to support that effort.³

Moreover, we ask that you revise the Administration's FY2022 request for the Departments of Defense and State, as well as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), to reflect the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. They should account for the new humanitarian need inside Afghanistan as the Taliban takes control of the country, as well as the needs of Afghans who have left Afghanistan and require support as they relocate to the United States or other countries. The current FY2022 request includes \$3.3 billion for the now defunct

¹ *U.S. Military Withdrawal and Taliban Takeover in Afghanistan: Frequently Asked Questions*, Congressional Research Service (Aug. 27, 2021), https://www.crs.gov/Reports/R46879?source=author#_Toc81221091.

² Anthony Capaccio, *Pentagon's Afghan Exit Leaves Unused \$6 Billion to Fight Over*, Bloomberg (Aug. 25, 2021), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-08-25/pentagon-s-afghan-exit-leaves-unused-6-billion-to-fight-over>.

³ Franco Ordonez, *Biden Asks Congress For \$30 Billion To Help Disaster Relief And Afghan Evacuees* (Sep. 7, 2021), <https://www.npr.org/2021/09/07/1034923509/biden-asks-congress-for-30-billion-to-help-disaster-relief-and-afghan-evacuees>.

Afghanistan National Defense and Security Forces⁴ as part of a total request of \$8.9 billion for Department of Defense direct war costs in Afghanistan.⁵ We have known for years that our efforts to build Afghanistan into a representative democracy were failing. As recently as August 1 of this year, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) John F. Sopko reported that in Afghanistan, “progress has been elusive, and the prospects for sustaining this progress are dubious.”⁶ We now know just how dubious those prospects were.

With the legacies of Iraq and Afghanistan to guide us, it is very clear that we need to move away from a military dominated foreign policy to one built on a foundation of diplomacy, humanitarian and economic assistance, and cooperation with partners and allies. The challenge ahead is immense. Filippo Grandi, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, warned that a “humanitarian crisis is just beginning,” as up to 500,000 Afghans are likely to seek refuge outside of the country by the end of the year and half of the country’s population are in need of aid.⁷ Just as Operation Allies Refuge was a visible display of U.S. commitment to evacuate Afghan allies out of harm’s way, we can and must show our commitment to the displaced and non-displaced Afghan people, alike.

Therefore, we urge you to work with Congress to ensure that unspent funds, or funds meant to support the war in Afghanistan, are utilized to assist the Afghan people, who have been our steady partners for 20 years. Furthermore, we ask you to provide Congress with answers to the following urgent questions:

1. What funds were used to support the military’s evacuation and drawdown efforts that ended on August 31? How much did that effort cost?
2. What funds are being used to operate the transit centers currently used to hold Afghans going through the vetting and relocation processes run by the Department of Homeland Security? How much has this effort cost to date?

⁴ *Justification for FY 2022 Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF)*, Office of the Secretary of Defense (May 2021), https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022_ASFF_Justification_Book.pdf#page=5.

⁵ *Justification for FY 2022 Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF)*, Office of the Secretary of Defense (May 2021), https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2022/FY2022_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf#page=78.

⁶ *What We Need to Learn: Lessons from Twenty Years of Afghanistan Reconstruction*, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (Aug. 2021), <https://www.sigarmil.com/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-21-46-LL.pdf>.

⁷ “Far Greater Humanitarian Crisis” Looms in Afghanistan – UNCHR”, Reuters (Aug. 30, 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/far-greater-humanitarian-crisis-looms-afghanistan-unhcr-2021-08-30/>.

3. Will you commit to utilizing unobligated FY2021 and prior-year funds intended to support the Afghanistan war effort to instead support the Afghan people?
4. Will you work with Congress to revise the FY2022 requests for the Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, State, and USAID to meet the changing needs of Afghans both inside Afghanistan and those who have fled the country?

We applaud your decision to end America's longest war. It is our hope that future Congresses and presidents will take into consideration the many failures of Afghanistan, including the immense human cost, before entering the United States into new military conflicts. While successive U.S. presidents of both parties have dedicated billions of dollars to the war in Afghanistan with little accountability, we continue to see arguments that the Department of Defense needs more money, despite the fact that its budget already accounts for more than the eleven next largest military budgets combined.⁸ Incredibly, the nearly \$300 million⁹ we dedicated for humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan this fiscal year is approximately the same as the amount our military spent in Afghanistan every single day.¹⁰

As we close the chapter on the wars started following September 11, 2001, so, too, should we end the bloated military budgets that accompanied them. It would be an abdication of our duty to American taxpayers and to the Afghans who have supported our efforts for two decades if we continue to pour money into the Department of Defense, rather than meet the humanitarian needs of our Afghan friends and partners.


We look forward to your response to these questions by September 30, 2021.

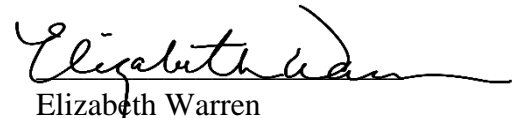
⁸ *"The United States Spends More on Defense than the Next 11 Countries Combined"*, Peter G. Peterson Foundation (Jul. 19, 2021), <https://www.pgpf.org/blog/2021/07/the-united-states-spends-more-on-defense-than-the-next-11-countries-combined>.


⁹ *"Afghanistan – Complex Emergency"*, USAID. (Aug. 27, 2021), https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/08.27.2021_-_USG_Afghanistan_Complex_Emergency_Fact_Sheet_4.pdf.

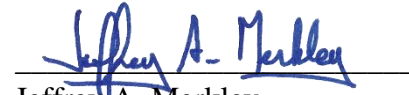
¹⁰ *"Biden Cited Brown Researchers in Measuring the Cost of the Afghan War. Here's the Background"*, Boston Globe (Aug. 31, 2021), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/08/31/metro/biden-cited-brown-researchers-measuring-cost-afghan-war-heres-background/>


Respectfully,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator


Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator


Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator


Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator


Ron Wyden
United States Senator

CC: Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin,
Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken,
Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas