

ROBERT MENENDEZ, NEW JERSEY, CHAIRMAN

BENJAMIN L. CARDIN, MARYLAND
JEANNE SHAHEEN, NEW HAMPSHIRE
CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, DELAWARE
CHRISTOPHER MURPHY, CONNECTICUT
TIM KAINE, VIRGINIA
EDWARD J. MARKEY, MASSACHUSETTS
JEFF MERKLEY, OREGON
CORY A. BOOKER, NEW JERSEY
BRIAN SCHATZ, HAWAII
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, MARYLAND

JAMES E. RISCH, IDAHO
MARCO RUBIO, FLORIDA
RON JOHNSON, WISCONSIN
MITT ROMNEY, UTAH
ROB PORTMAN, OHIO
RAND PAUL, KENTUCKY
TODD YOUNG, INDIANA
JOHN BARRASSO, WYOMING
TED CRUZ, TEXAS
MIKE ROUNDS, SOUTH DAKOTA
BILL HAGERTY, TENNESSEE

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

June 29, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Blinken:

As the United States draws down in Afghanistan and the security situation there continues to deteriorate rapidly, I write to express my strong support for U.S. efforts to immediately relocate Special Immigrant Visa applicants to locations outside of Afghanistan while they await processing. I urge the Administration to move quickly to ensure that these 18,000 individuals and their 56,000 family members are not harmed by extremist groups like the Taliban in the days to come.

I continue to have significant concern about the safety and security of Afghans who have served alongside our forces and other Afghans who are also facing increasing threats to their lives from extremists including those who worked for the U.S. government, defense contractors, and the International Security Assistance Force / Resolute Support Mission, as well as Afghans who worked for U.S.-supported democracy, human rights, and civilian security programs. Additionally, I am deeply concerned about the future of the many Afghan women who embraced and worked to advance their country's freedoms. The United States has a moral obligation to these Afghans and their families who face persecution and threats to their lives because of their support for Americans in Afghanistan.

I welcome President Biden's announcement on June 24th that the United States government would begin relocating thousands of Afghans who worked with American forces and diplomats outside Afghanistan to keep them safe while they apply for entry to the United States. This evacuation will be a significant diplomatic, military, and logistical undertaking. As such, I would appreciate prompt responses to the following questions.

1. At what stage is the planning for evacuating our Afghan partners at the relevant U.S. government agencies involved, to include the Departments of State, Defense, and Homeland Security? Have lead officials been designated to steward the planning and execution of an evacuation operation?
2. Which agency has the lead for evacuation planning and implementation, and what is the State Department's role?
3. For which visa and resettlement programs are our Afghan allies eligible to evacuate

outside Afghanistan? If applicants for programs other than the Special Immigrant Visa are not being relocated, why not?

4. What is the expected total number of Afghans, including visa applicants and their family members, to be relocated?
5. What locations are under consideration as destinations for relocated visa applicants awaiting adjudication of their applications?
6. What factors are being used to determine the above selected locations?
7. If the selected locations are in third countries:
 - a. What is the status of diplomatic engagement with those governments on the planned evacuations?
 - b. What is the expected legal status of relocated Afghan visa applicants to these countries? If under the control of the U.S. military, will they be subject to protections under existing Status of Forces Agreements or will separate legal status be established?
 - c. What are the potential second and third order effects of any agreement to host Afghan visa applicants on the broader bilateral relationships with these countries? What obligations, if any, will the United States incur to them? How long is the Department anticipating applicants may need to wait in third countries for their visa adjudications?
8. If the selected locations are on sovereign United States territory, what is the status of coordination with state/territory and/or local governments?
9. To what extent is housing, sustenance, medical, and administrative support available at the locations under consideration? If unavailable on the scale needed, how expeditiously can this support structure be built?
10. Does the Department have the resources needed to forward deploy consular capability to process visa applications at these locations? If not, are there plans to provide access for relocated Afghan visa applicants to local U.S. posts? What other agencies are involved in the vetting procedures necessary to adjudicate the applicants' visas?
11. What recourses will the Department afford to relocated Afghan applicants who do not qualify for any U.S. visa or resettlement program? Will the Department assist with resettlement in third countries? If so, what is the status of bilateral and/or multilateral diplomatic engagement with potential destination countries for Afghan visa applicants disapproved by the United States?
12. If relocated visa applicants are disapproved for resettlement in the United States and

third countries, to which location will they be deported? Under what conditions in Afghanistan will deportation to Afghanistan be impracticable? What contingency plans exist?

Due to the time constraints involved, I ask that you submit a response to the following questions within 30 days of receipt of this letter. I know you share my view that the United States has an important responsibility to demonstrate our commitment to our allies and partners, as well as to the human rights of those at risk of persecution. I urge the use of all available tools to give shape to these sentiments and to address this population in urgent need as the United States continues its withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Robert Menendez
Chairman