

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 12, 2023

## VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of State

Dear Secretary Blinken:

On March 15, 2023, I sent you a letter with respect to 14 open recommendations made by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR).<sup>1</sup> Those recommendations include nearly \$40 million in questioned costs.<sup>2</sup> As of July 12, 2023, according to SIGAR only \$8.819 million has been evaluated with the remaining amount still questioned.

On April 19, 2023, SIGAR Sopko testified before the House Oversight and Accountability Committee concerning taxpayer funds sent to Afghanistan. Sopko, who is tasked with overseeing U.S. spending in Afghanistan, lamented the near impossibility of tracking U.S. taxpayer dollars. He also stated his efforts to track that taxpayer money “is more complicated by the fact that the State Department (State) and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) have not been cooperating” since we left Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> Sopko testified that there has been “a tremendous amount of obstruction...by USAID and State” hindering SIGAR’s efforts.<sup>4</sup>

Sopko also stated, “[u]nfortunately, as I sit here today I cannot assure this committee or the American taxpayer, we are not currently funding the Taliban.”<sup>5</sup> As one example, he testified that “[a]id workers at non-profit organizations in Afghanistan that receive financial support from

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Senator Grassley to Antony Blinken, *2023-03-15 CEG to Blinken (SIGAR Findings)*, (Mar. 15, 2023), [https://www.grassley.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/grassley\\_to\\_blinken\\_-\\_sigar\\_findings.pdf](https://www.grassley.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/grassley_to_blinken_-_sigar_findings.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Letter from John Sopko, Special Inspector General, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, to Antony Blinken, Secretary, Department of State, *Outstanding Financial Audit Recommendations to State*, Page 1, (Mar. 1, 2023), <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/alerts/SIGAR-23-17-AL.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Farnoush Amiri, *Watchdog warns US money could be flowing to Taliban*, AP NEWS, (Apr. 19, 2023), [Watchdog warns US money could be flowing to Taliban | AP News](#).

<sup>4</sup> *Hearing on The Biden Administration’s Disastrous Withdrawal from Afghanistan, Part I: Review by the Inspectors General Before the House Committee on Oversight & Accountability*, 118<sup>th</sup> Cong. (2023) (Question of Cory Mills, Rep., 7<sup>th</sup> District of Florida, to John Sopko, Special Inspector General, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction).

<sup>5</sup> Amiri, *supra* note 3.

the U.S. government say they're being forced to pay fees and provide services to the Taliban."<sup>6</sup> Funding of the Taliban is not only reprehensible, but also illegal.<sup>7</sup>

Not only has the State Department failed to respond to my inquiries in a timely manner, but the Department has also apparently stonewalled SIGAR.<sup>8</sup> SIGAR recently told my office that since Sopko's testimony to the House, the State Department communicated a willingness to cooperate with SIGAR. This is unacceptable – State Department *must fully cooperate* with SIGAR and should've done so already.

In order for Congress to perform an independent and objective review of this matter, please answer and provide the following no later than July 26, 2023:

1. What accounting and auditing mechanisms do you have in place to monitor all money sent to Afghanistan? Please describe and provide records.<sup>9</sup>
2. Who is responsible for monitoring the funds sent to Afghanistan? Please provide a list of personnel and what stages of transfer they are responsible for overseeing.
3. Will you commit to full compliance with SIGAR's reviews and document requests? If not, why not?
4. Will you instruct your personnel, implementation partners, subcontractors, and grantees to fully comply with SIGAR's reviews and document requests? If not, why not?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. If you have any questions, please contact Jace Pimentel at (202) 224-0642.

Sincerely,



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<sup>6</sup> Haley Ott & Sami Yousafzai, *U.S. taxpayers helping fund Afghanistan's Taliban? Aid workers say they're forced "to serve the Taliban first"*, CBS NEWS, (Apr. 21, 2023), <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/afghanistan-taliban-tax-dollars-after-withdrawal/>.

<sup>7</sup> Office of Foreign Assets Control: Sanctions List Search

<https://sanctionssearch.ofac.treas.gov/Details.aspx?id=6636> (last updated Apr. 24, 2023); *See also*, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-328, §7044, §8116 (These provisions prohibit making any Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs, or Department of Defense funds available for the Taliban).

<sup>8</sup> Matthew Lee, *Afghan aid auditor accuses State, USAID of withholding info*, AP NEWS, (June 22, 2022), [Afghan aid auditor accuses State, USAID of withholding info | AP News](#).

<sup>9</sup> "Records" include any written, recorded, or graphic material of any kind, including letters, memoranda, reports, notes, electronic data (emails, email attachments, and any other electronically created or stored information), calendar entries, inter-office communications, meeting minutes, phone/voice mail or recordings/records of verbal communications, and drafts (whether they resulted in final documents).

Secretary Blinken

July 12, 2023

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Charles E. Grassley

Ranking Member

Committee on the Budget