

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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August 24, 2021

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

Dear Secretary Blinken:

President Ashraf Ghani fled the country of Afghanistan on August 15, precipitating the rapid collapse of the Afghan government in Kabul and paving the way for the Taliban's entry into the capital city and presidential palace.¹ The Taliban are now in control of Afghanistan for the first time in nearly two decades.² President Ghani is residing in the United Arab Emirates, which has granted him humanitarian protection.³ However, reports state that President Ghani may have been self-dealing with U.S. funds intended for the Afghan people, having fled the country with enormous sums of cash totaling well over a hundred million dollars. If true, this was not the dignified exit of a benevolent head of state, but that of a coward and grifter. The United States must do everything in its power to seize any illicitly gained funds that were corruptly embezzled by President Ghani. If he diverted funds from their intended purposes, the U.S. should bring him to justice.

Not only did President Ghani flee the country of Afghanistan prematurely and contribute to the rapid fall of the American-backed democratic government in Kabul, but he brought with him duffle bags full of cash totaling \$169 million dollars.⁴ Reports indicate that President Ghani

¹ Matthew Rosenberg & Adam Nossiter, *After 7 years of Failing to Fix Afghanistan, Ghani Makes a Hasty Escape*, N.Y. TIMES (Aug. 16, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/16/world/asia/afghanistan-president-ashraf-ghani.html>.

² Scott Neuman, *Afghanistan Falls To The Taliban Again As The U.S.-Backed Government Collapses*, NPR (Aug. 15, 2021), <https://www.npr.org/2021/08/15/1027860324/the-taliban-win-control-of-afghanistan-as-the-u-s-backed-government-collapses>.

³ Sudarsan Raghavan, *UAE says former Afghan president Ghani was welcomed into country 'on humanitarian grounds' after fleeing Kabul*, WASH. POST (Aug. 18, 2021), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/08/18/afghanistan-kabul-taliban-live-updates/#link-WSXTBNZJ2NFELD2KWBV5334A3E>.

⁴ Brigid Kennedy, *Afghan President Ashraf Ghani reportedly fled Kabul with \$169 million in cash*, THE WEEK (Aug. 18, 2021), <https://theweek.com/afghanistan/1003879/afghan-president-ashraf-ghani-reportedly-fled-kabul-with-169-million-in-cash>.

in fact had so much looted money with him when he fled Afghanistan that not all of it would fit in his helicopter, and that he was forced to leave money lying on the tarmac.⁵

It is unclear how President Ghani obtained such a large sum of cash, but the amount and nature of his flight from Afghanistan raises the specter that he illegally and corruptly embezzled these funds from U.S. assistance intended for the Afghan people's welfare and defense. In fact, until recently, approximately 80% of Afghanistan's total budget was funded by the United States and other international assistance.⁶ Thus, if Ghani was embezzling funds from the government of Afghanistan, he was likely embezzling U.S. taxpayer funds.

U.S. taxpayers have provided \$145 billion to Afghanistan reconstruction efforts over the last 20 years in addition to \$837 billion directly spent on warfighting.⁷ This includes \$17.28 billion in "on-budget assistance to the government of Afghanistan," of which President Ghani was head since 2014.⁸ These amounts pale in comparison to the total cost of the Afghanistan war to the United States, which is estimated to be \$2.26 trillion.⁹

It is imperative that corrupt foreign government officials not be permitted to personally enrich themselves with U.S. taxpayer money intended to safeguard the welfare and security of the Afghan people. This is particularly the case where President Ghani's reckless and cowardly actions likely contributed to the speed with which the Taliban took over the country and toppled the Afghan government and led to the resulting chaotic situation now faced by American citizens and our allies who are now trapped in a country controlled by a hostile regime.

To assist the Republicans on the Oversight Committee in conducting important oversight into the potential embezzlement of U.S. taxpayer money initially intended to assist and secure the people of Afghanistan, please make arrangements to provide a staff-level briefing and all necessary information sufficient to answer the following questions no later than August 31, 2021:

1. Can the U.S. Department of State confirm that President Ghani fled the country with duffle bags full of cash totaling well over a hundred million dollars?
2. Was the cash embezzled from accounts funded with U.S. taxpayer funds or other international assistance provided to the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan? If not, what does the U.S. Department of State assess to be the provenance of the cash in President

⁵ *Russia says Afghan president fled with cars and helicopter full of cash*, REUTERS (Aug. 16, 2021), <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/russia-says-afghan-president-fled-with-cars-helicopter-full-cash-ria-2021-08-16/>.

⁶ Jeff Stein, *Biden administration freezes billions of dollars in Afghan reserves, depriving Taliban of cash*, WASH. POST (Aug. 17, 2021), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/us-policy/2021/08/17/treasury-taliban-money-afghanistan/>.

⁷ WHAT WE NEED TO LEARN: LESSONS FROM TWENTY YEARS OF AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION, SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION, (Aug. 2021), <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/lessonslearned/SIGAR-21-46-LL.pdf>.

⁸ QUARTERLY REPORT TO THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS, SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION (July 30, 2021), <https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/quarterlyreports/2021-07-30qr.pdf>.

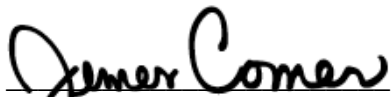
⁹ *Id.*

Ghani's possession?

3. If the funds in Ghani's possession were illegally embezzled from U.S. assistance to the Afghan government for purposes of reconstruction, what is the U.S. Government planning to do, in partnership with our allies, to seize and recover those funds?
4. If President Ghani engaged in corrupt actions as President of Afghanistan to enrich himself at the expense of the U.S. taxpayers, what is the U.S. Government planning to do, partnership with our allies, to bring him to justice?

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. To make arrangements to schedule the briefing and 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. Thank you in advance for your cooperation with this inquiry.

Sincerely,



James Comer
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Glenn Grothman
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security

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

The Honorable Stephen F. Lynch, Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security