

August 6th, 2021

Dear President Biden:

As American veterans who have watched in earnest as your administration begins its plans to evacuate Afghans who applied for the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) program and their families, we appreciate your commitment to getting this done and we are excited to see the initial arrival of 2,500 SIV Afghans to Fort Lee as they complete the final steps of their applications.

We appreciate your administration's attention to this urgent matter and as you know, we strongly believe that Afghans who risked their lives to serve with American armed forces must be evacuated safely to American territory. The SIV application process is long and cumbersome, and it can take years for an application to be reviewed, much less approved. With the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan almost complete, our allies do not have the luxury of such time. We must immediately evacuate all those who fought alongside us and have requested our help. As veterans, we believe we owe these Afghans a debt of honor; as our armed forces withdraw from Afghanistan, we must honor that debt.

As your administration plans this evacuation, we ask you to consider these factors:

- Evacuate all 20,000 Afghans in the Special Immigrant Visa pipeline:

Recent reports have indicated that only a fraction of those eligible for SIVs will be included in the evacuation as currently planned. While the security situation may be challenging, we ask your administration to leave no one behind in an evacuation. That must include the 10,000 pre-Chief of Mission approval applicants whose applications remain in the National Visa Processing Center. The application process averages around 800 days, they should not be denied a place in the evacuation due to our agencies' bureaucratic practices.

- Stage the evacuation in U.S. territory:

These Afghan allies served with American forces, it is only right for them to seek American protections. History shows that an evacuation to U.S. territory can be done quickly, safely, and securely. It also offers our government full control of the operation, minimizes diplomatic interactions with foreign governments, and ensures that our government can maintain maximal operational security. Equally important, it allows our immigration system to work as it should by providing legal assistance to evacuees as they navigate the complicated SIV process.

- If a third country is necessary, partner with those with strong records of human rights and party to the Refugee Convention:

Media reports have indicated that a third country is being considered as a first step or staging ground for an evacuation. If this is the case, your administration must work with a country that upholds democratic ideals, has a strong record of human rights, and is a signatory of the

Refugee Convention. This would help to ensure that Afghans who served alongside American forces are treated with dignity and their rights are respected. We also encourage your administration to ensure that any Afghans who are transiting through a third country are processed to the United States as swiftly as possible.

- Begin the evacuation as soon as possible:

In your recent remarks, you said that an evacuation could start as soon as this month. It is critical that this operation begin without delay, as the situation on the ground in Afghanistan is changing to the detriment of our allies there. Recent atrocities by the Taliban as they move through the country illustrate the critical need for the immediate evacuation of our Afghan allies. We strongly urge you to start evacuating our allies now.

Around the globe, American military efforts have only been possible because of the assistance of local allies like those in Afghanistan. Future potential allies will study how we treat these Afghans when choosing whether to partner with us.

We are grateful for your commitment to honor our promise to our wartime allies. We stand ready to help your administration evacuate our Afghan allies, honor our promises, and bring all of our allies to safety.

Very,

AMVETS
Association of Wartime Allies
Combined Arms
Common Defense
High Ground Veterans Advocacy
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America
Military Veterans in Journalism
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
Student Veterans of America
The Veterans Bar Association
Truman National Security Project
Veterans for American Ideals
Veterans of Foreign Wars
Wharton Veterans Club
With Honor Action
Wounded Warrior Project