

AMI BERA, M.D.

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September 30, 2021

Diana Shaw
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of State
Office of Inspector General
SA-39, 1700 North Moore Street
Arlington, VA 22209

Sean O'Donnell
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of Defense
Office of Inspector General
4800 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22350

Thomas J. Ullom
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Agency for International Development
Office of Inspector General
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20523

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction
2530 Crystal Drive
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Acting Inspector General Shaw, Acting Inspector General O'Donnell, Acting Inspector General Ullom, and Special Inspector General Sopko,

I request the U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General (State OIG), U.S. Department of Defense Office of Inspector General (DOD OIG), U.S. Agency for International Development Office of Inspector General (USAID OIG), and Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) conduct a comprehensive joint audit of the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) process in Afghanistan.

The Afghan SIV program was enacted through the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009 to provide a lifesaving path to resettlement for Afghan nationals who have assisted U.S. military and government officials. Although the law requires SIV applications to be processed within nine months, the program has been plagued by backlogs leading to processing times that can last over three years. These delays put our Afghan allies at an increased risk of facing violent retribution by the Taliban.

As Congress conducts oversight on U.S. involvement in Afghanistan, it is critical that we examine the execution of the SIV program, and ways in which the program can be streamlined. Therefore, I am interested in the IG community's past and future oversight of the SIV program to identify where the United States succeeded, fell short, and must improve to protect our allies.

The IG community should thoroughly examine individual department and interagency processes and practices pertaining to the Afghan SIV process. I request all responses be provided in an unclassified form, to the extent possible, with a classified annex where necessary. At a minimum, the review should include:

- 1) the numbers of SIV applications received, approved, and denied, by year, since enactment of The Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009;
- 2) the average time taken to process an application from the date of submission until final disposition;
- 3) the degree to which the Department of State implemented recommendations made by the Department of State Office of Inspector General in its June 2020 reports on Review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program (AUD-MERO-20-35) and Management Assistance Report: Quarterly Reporting on Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program Needs Improvement (AUD-MERO-20-34);
 - a) the success implementation of report recommendations had in addressing barriers in the SIV program;
- 4) what changes, if any, the Department of State made in vetting SIV applicants since the establishment of Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation (SRAR) in 2018;
- 5) the extent to which the Department of State adjusted practices and procedures to vet applicants at any point following the February 2020 Doha Agreement with the Taliban;
- 6) the impact of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) on the Afghan SIV process, if any, and adjustments the Department of State made to account for COVID-19 impacts;
- 7) to the extent practicable, the current location and status of all SIV applicants; where not possible, a description of the approximate number of applicants;
- 8) the resettlement outcomes for SIV recipients as compared to U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP);
 - a) factors to be examined should include location of resettlement, school enrollment, employment status, and housing placement during the Reception and Placement (R&P) program, as well as the number of recipients who become naturalized U.S. citizens;
- 9) recommendations to strengthen and streamline the SIV process;

- 10) the lessons learned on best practices for SIV programs in countries with ongoing U.S. military involvement; and
- 11) any additional points of interest deemed necessary by the IG community.

I request that all agencies utilize existing audits while compiling the report to avoid duplicative efforts. Thank you for your attention to this important matter and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ami Bera". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ami Bera, M.D.
Chairman
Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific,
Central Asia, and Nonproliferation