

STANDING STRONG WITH OUR AFGHAN ALLIES

The Imperative of Continuing the Afghan Special Immigrant
Visa Program to Uphold Our Commitment to Afghan Allies



COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN
RELATIONS

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OCTOBER 2026

SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS
COMMITTEE MINORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN
RELATIONS

Cover photo: U.S. Marines assigned to the Female Engagement Team with 3rd Battalion, 6th Marine Regiment, walk with an Afghan individual on Fort Pickett, Virginia, Sept. 24, 2021. **Source: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Corey A. Mathews**

THE AFGHAN SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISA PROGRAM (SIV) has brought more than 160,000 Afghans who fought alongside Americans safely to the United States. Fulfilling our promise to the Afghans who stood with us but are now stranded in the application process is necessary to completing our mission. The job is not done.



Airplane over Kabul City, Afghanistan

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

United States Senate,
Committee on Foreign Relations
October 1, 2026

Dear Reader,

Many of us have visited Afghanistan over the course of our tenure in the U.S. Senate. In doing so, we saw firsthand the commitment and sacrifice of the Americans serving there, and how much our mission depended on the Afghans who served alongside them. It was clear the danger our service members and their Afghan colleagues were in while at war. What was not always clear on these trips was the danger our Afghan allies faced after American troops went home. The Taliban knew their names. They know who the Afghans were who were fighting alongside the Americans. And they knew where they lived. Notes were left on doors with a clear message; the Taliban would come for anyone who worked with the Americans.



That is why Senator John McCain and Senator Jeanne Shaheen helped establish the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa program. The promise was simple: if Afghans risked their lives to serve alongside Americans, the United States would not abandon them when their service put them and their families in danger.

The American withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 left thousands of those allies behind. In the years that followed, the United States made significant progress in processing applications and relocating eligible Afghans.

Today, more than 160,000 Afghans have reached safety in the United States through the SIV program. But thousands more remain stranded in Afghanistan and third countries. Those still in Afghanistan are at risk of Taliban retaliation because they served alongside us.

We commissioned this report to examine the history of the Afghan SIV and relocation programs, the progress made since the withdrawal and the obstacles that continue to keep eligible Afghans from reaching safety.

This matters well beyond Afghanistan. American troops and diplomats depend on local partners around the world. Congress must ensure that Afghans who served alongside Americans can reach safety and that the United States keeps its word to them. If we fail, we weaken the trust of partners and allies who may be asked to take those same risks for us in the future.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen

*Ranking Member, Senate
Committee on Foreign Relations*



Chris Coons

United States Senator



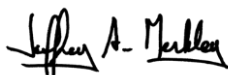
Amy Klobuchar

United States Senator



Tim Kaine

United States Senator



Jeff Merkley

United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen

United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth

United States Senator



Jacky Rosen

United States Senator

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report examines the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa program and U.S. efforts to relocate Afghans who served alongside Americans during the war in Afghanistan. It was conducted by the minority staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and is based on government reports and data, public reporting, interviews and information provided to the Committee.

For nearly two decades, the Afghan SIV program has provided a pathway to safety for Afghans whose service to the United States put them and their families at risk. The program has faced persistent processing delays and staffing shortages across administrations, but reforms after the 2021 withdrawal significantly increased processing capacity and improved efficiency.

This report finds that the second Trump Administration has reversed much of that progress. Afghan SIV issuances have effectively stopped, the office responsible for coordinating Afghan relocation has been eliminated and more than 155,000 applicants remain in the pipeline. These actions have left Afghan allies stranded and risk undermining the credibility of U.S. commitments to partners in future conflicts.

Key Findings

1. Allies Risked Their Lives Serving Alongside Americans

Afghan interpreters and other partners joined American troops on patrols, participated in combat operations and helped U.S. forces navigate local communities and gather intelligence. Their service made them and their families targets of the Taliban, and some were killed while waiting years for their SIV applications to be processed. Those who reached the United States have gone on to build businesses, serve their communities and, in some cases, join the U.S. military themselves.

2. The Afghan SIV Program Has Faced Persistent Processing Delays

The SIV program has struggled with staffing shortages and processing backlogs across administrations. During the first Trump Administration, annual visa issuances fell from 4,120 in FY2017 to 1,799 in FY2020, while average processing times more than doubled from 343 days in FY2016 to 801 days in FY2020. After the 2021 withdrawal, increased staffing and reforms significantly expanded processing capacity and improved efficiency.

3. Afghan SIV Applicants Undergo Extensive Security Vetting

Afghan SIV applicants undergo multiple layers of identity and national security screening, often beginning before they ever worked alongside the United States. A 2024 State Department Inspector General review found that State appropriately verified applicants and eligible family members and concluded that the SIV application review process was “functioning as designed.”

4. The Trump Administration Effectively Halted Afghan SIV Issuances

More than 155,000 applicants remain in the SIV process in the United States, Afghanistan and third countries. Although federal agencies have continued processing pending applications, Afghan SIV issuance has effectively stopped. State reported issuing only three Afghan SIVs from January through March 2026.

5. The Administration Dismantled the Afghan Relocation System

The Administration eliminated the CARE office, which coordinated SIV case management, third-country processing, flights and family reunification. It also suspended U.S.-funded flights and resettlement assistance, leaving Afghans with approved visas or other legal pathways stranded in Afghanistan and third countries.

6. Afghan Allies Already in the U.S. Face New Immigration Restrictions

The Administration terminated Temporary Protected Status for more than 8,000 Afghans, cut resettlement assistance and adopted policies reexamining previously approved immigration benefits for Afghan nationals. Afghan SIV holders and applicants have also faced detention and reexamination of previously approved cases, while federal courts have blocked some of the Administration’s broader policies.

7. Afghans Awaiting U.S. Resettlement Face Growing Danger Abroad

Thousands of Afghans with legal pathways to the United States remain stranded in Afghanistan and third countries. Nearly 3,000 Afghans were at U.S. processing sites in Qatar and Albania when the Administration suspended refugee admissions, while Pakistan has intensified expulsions of Afghans back to Taliban-controlled Afghanistan.

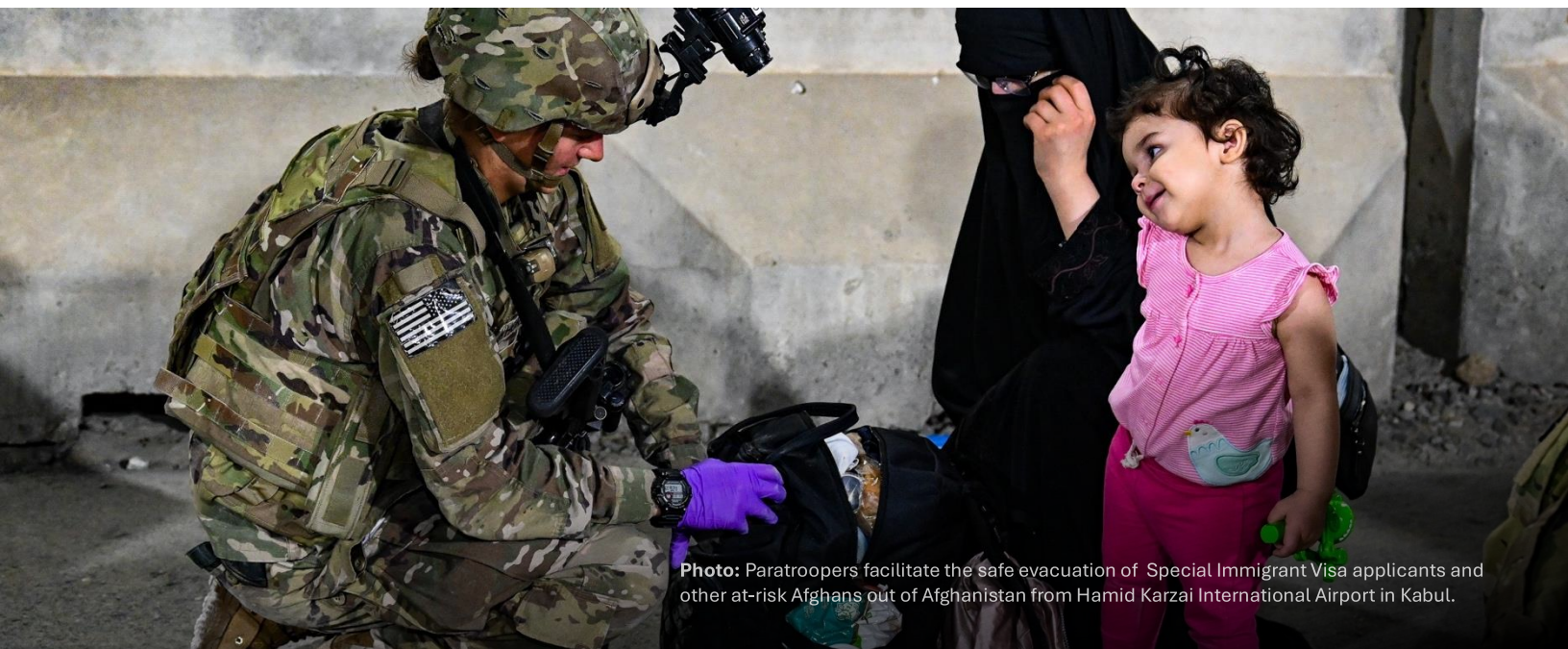


Photo: Paratroopers facilitate the safe evacuation of Special Immigrant Visa applicants and other at-risk Afghans out of Afghanistan from Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul.

CHAPTER 1: THE AFGHAN SIV AND ALLY RELOCATION PROGRAMS

In the years following the launch of *Operation Enduring Freedom* on October 7, 2001, in Afghanistan, the United States and its allies relied heavily upon Afghan local staff to support U.S. policy in the country and across the region.¹

Afghans served as interpreters and translators, engineers, security contractors, intelligence partners, administrative clerks and drivers. They worked alongside American diplomats, service members, contractors and aid workers.² In many cases, they stood shoulder to shoulder with U.S. troops under fire.³ Even when Afghans were not risking their lives in the line of duty, they and their families were targeted by the Taliban for working with the U.S. and its allies.⁴

To protect those who worked with the U.S.-led coalition from violence and retribution, in 2006, Republican Senator Richard Lugar led the Congress in establishing a limited

¹ United States Government Accountability Office, *Afghanistan: State and USAID Should Evaluate Actions Taken to Mitigate Effects of Attrition among Local Staff*, at 1, Dec. 2015, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-16-100.pdf>.

² Congressional Research Service, *Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Programs*, at 18, Jan. 2025.

³ Isaac Chotiner, “Q & A: The Urgency of Assisting Afghan Partners,” *The New Yorker*, Aug. 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/the-urgency-of-assisting-afghan-partners>.

⁴ U.S. State Department Office of the Inspector General, *Review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program*, at 32, June 2020.

special visa program for Afghan interpreters and translators.⁵ This provided Afghans who had undertaken dangerous work in support of the U.S. mission with a pathway to the United States.⁶

From the earliest years of the war, the Taliban treated Afghans who worked alongside the United States as legitimate military targets. The Taliban's official code of conduct, known as the Layha, identified interpreters, contractors, informants and others assisting coalition forces as legitimate targets, and they backed that policy with a sustained campaign of intimidation and violence.⁷ Taliban fighters distributed “night letters” warning interpreters to quit their jobs or face death, threatened family members and assassinated Afghans who worked for U.S. forces or the Afghan government. Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, the United Nations documented a steady pattern of targeted killings of interpreters, Afghan government officials, tribal elders and civilians accused of supporting the coalition.⁸ The objective was not simply to eliminate individuals, but to



U.S. soldiers and Albanian special operations forces meet with leaders of an Afghan border police checkpoint near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border in the Spin Boldak district of Afghanistan's Kandahar province, April 1, 2013. **Source: U.S. Department of Defense**

⁵ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006, Pub. L. No. 109-163, § 1051, 119 Stat. 3136.

⁶ An act to increase the number of Iraqi and Afghani translators and interpreters who may be admitted to the United States as special immigrants, and for other purposes, P.L. 110-36, § 1, 121 Stat. 227., signed into law on June 15, 2007, increased the total number of visas issued under the 1059 program to 500 for fiscal years 2007 and 2008.

⁷ Kate Clark, *The Layha: Calling the Taliban to Account*, Afghanistan Analysts Network (July 2011), https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/10/20110704_CKClark_The_Layha.pdf.

⁸ U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), *Reports on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict*, <https://unama.unmissions.org/en/reports-protection-civilians-armed-conflict> (last visited Aug. 5, 2026).

deter others from cooperating with the United States or serving in Afghanistan's government, which was backed by America and its allies.

As the war in Afghanistan continued throughout the 2000s, demand for Afghans to work in service of the U.S. mission increased. So too did a demand for U.S. visas, to ensure the safety of Afghans who supported the United States after their service concluded. In 2009, Congress passed the bipartisan Afghan Allies Protection Act (AAPA) led by Senator Jeanne Shaheen of New Hampshire and John McCain of Arizona.⁹ The AAPA provided qualifying Afghans with a path to permanent resident status in the United States. An Afghan was considered qualifying if they: served “by or on behalf of the United States” for at least one year; provided “faithful and valuable service”; experienced an “ongoing serious threat” as a consequence of their employment with the U.S. government; and cleared a background check and appropriate screening.¹⁰ This provided 1,500 additional annual visas for Afghans threatened by the Taliban to seek safety for themselves and their families each year for fiscal years (FY) 2009 through 2013. Eventually, more than 160,000 Afghans who served the U.S. mission and their families would be brought to safety in the United States due to the program.



U.S. Army soldier shakes hands with an Afghan boy outside Bagram Airfield in Janquadam, Parwan province, Afghanistan, Sept. 25, 2009. **Source:** SPC. Matthew McKinny via army.mil

⁹ Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, Pub. L. No. 111-8, § 602, 123 Stat. 807, 807–811.

¹⁰ Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009 § 602 (b)(1)(D), § 602(b)(2)(A).

To better address the threat faced by Afghans who supported American personnel, the 2009 AAPA required the Secretary of State to make a reasonable effort to provide eligible Afghan SIV applicants and their families protection or to “immediately remove such alien from Afghanistan, if possible, if the Secretary determines, after consultation, that such alien is in imminent danger.”¹¹

ELIGIBILITY IN 2009

The Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009 specifies who is eligible for the special visa program. These parameters included:

- A citizen or national of Afghanistan;
- Was or is employed “by or on behalf of the United States Government in Afghanistan” after the start of the war on October 7, 2001;
- At least one year of qualifying employment;
- Provided “faithful and valuable service,” as documented by a positive recommendation or evaluation; and
- Has experienced an “ongoing serious threat” as a consequence of the individual’s employment with the U.S. government.

The eligibility requirements have fluctuated over the course of the program, but a key development was the inclusion of work with the multinational, NATO-led International Security Assistance Force for qualifying employment.¹² Applicants have always been required to demonstrate faithful and valuable service as well as a credible threat.

¹¹ Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009 § 602(b)(6). The surviving spouse of an otherwise eligible individual is also eligible under this statute.

¹² Carl Levin and Howard P. “Buck” McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, Pub L. No. 113-291, § 1227, 128 Stat. 3553 (2014).

“We have a responsibility to honor the promises we made to the Afghan men and women who risked their lives and those of their families to assist American forces. They have been a critical resource to our troops throughout the past decade and it would be unconscionable to abandon these brave individuals who are now in danger for their service to the United States’ mission in Afghanistan.”

—SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN, 2014

In the first few years of the SIV program, the Department of State struggled to establish a process for expeditiously reviewing and issuing visas to qualifying Afghans. In 2014, Secretary Kerry described the start of the SIV program as slow. “Delays in processing applications and lack of transparency in making decisions created problems. Bluntly stated, the process wasn’t keeping up with the demand.”¹³ Wait times were endangering applicants and deserving Afghans were “falling through the cracks.”¹⁴ The State Department undertook an internal review and surged resources to address the backlog of SIV applications. State Department staff, personally committed to the safety of these Afghans who served alongside U.S. diplomats, volunteered extra hours to ensure that applications were being processed in a timely manner. As a result, more than 1,000 visas were issued in March and April of 2014.¹⁵

From 2009 through 2014, the Afghan SIV program evolved from a limited program into a larger wartime ally protection mechanism. Congress responded to growing need for visas and the ongoing processing backlogs by increasing visa allocations and extending application deadlines. In 2014, the program was due to sunset following the full use of available visas for fiscal years 2009 to 2013. Congress had allocated 3,000 additional visas in the FY2014 Consolidated Appropriations Act.¹⁶ But in June 2014, Secretary Kerry warned that these visas would be used up by the end of July 2014 and called on Congress to provide emergency visas and extend the Afghan SIV program. Senators McCain and Shaheen responded by passing the Emergency Afghan Allies Extension Act of 2014, signed into law in August 2014. It provided for an additional 1,000 visas.¹⁷

Since 2014, Congress has annually authorized additional visas through either the National Defense Authorization Act or annual appropriations spending bills. By 2016, the

¹³ John F. Kerry, “Op-Ed: From John Kerry: We need more visas, now, for our Afghan allies,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 2, 2014, <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0602-kerry-afghan-withdrawal-20140603-story.html>.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-76, § 602(b)(3), 128 Stat. 516.

¹⁷ To provide additional visas for the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program, and for other purposes, Pub. L. No. 113-160, 128 Stat. 1853 (2014).

SIV program was processing visas at a steady rate to ensure the visas allocated by Congress annually were issued.

However, the program routinely faced uncertainty as Congress was required to proactively authorize new visas each fiscal year. Opposition from a small number of Congressional Republicans jeopardized the visa authorization process year after year. In order to secure additional visas, concessions were made that slowed down the pace at which the system operated. One such concession to Republican opposition in 2018 required the State Department to develop and implement “a system to prioritize the processing of Afghan applicants for special immigrant visas.”¹⁸ The development and implementation of the prioritization scheme took U.S. government staff time away from processing applications and resulted in extended wait times for SIV applicants. As a result of obstruction from a small number of Congressional Republicans, Congress failed to provide a reliable number of visas each year, limiting the ability of the State Department to plan for its operations.

Despite many obstacles, the Afghan SIV program was successful because it provided a pathway to safety not just for the principal applicant but for their family. It brought thousands of Afghans to the United States, the vast majority of whom were seeking a safer home for their families. In many cases, the principal applicant went back to Afghanistan as U.S. service members or contractors, continuing to put themselves in harms way in service of the mission.

First Trump Administration

Upon entering office in 2017, President Trump took several steps that undermined the Afghan SIV program. On January 27, 2017, President Trump signed Executive Order 13769, “Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” colloquially referred to as a Muslim Ban.¹⁹ While Afghanistan was not included on the list of countries with nationals barred from the United States, the move to limit travel from predominantly Muslim countries complicated U.S. government processing of Afghan SIVs. At the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, SIV applicants were initially told that applications would no longer be accepted.²⁰ The Department of Homeland Security’s

“The United States is in danger of sending the wrong message to Afghan interpreters and others who risked their lives helping our troops and diplomats do their jobs in Afghanistan over the last decade.”

—SECRETARY JOHN KERRY, 2014

¹⁸ Afghan Special Immigrant Visas, Pub. L. No. 116-6, § 7076(b)(1), 133 Stat. 391(2019).

¹⁹ President Donald J. Trump, Executive Order 13769 —Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry Into the United States, January 27, 2017.

²⁰ Fahim Abed and Rod Nordland, “Afghans Who Worked for U.S. Are Told Not to Apply for Visas, Advocates Say,” *New York Times*, Mar. 10, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/world/asia/afghanistan-visa-program-united-states.html>

failure to provide airlines with guidance following the Muslim Ban resulted in SIV visa holders being turned away from flights to the United States.

The Trump Administration also undercut the Afghan SIV program through a series of management decisions that reduced staff working on the SIV program and failed to adequately support the direct hires, contractors and foreign service officers involved throughout the application adjudication process. In June 2020, the State Department's Office of the Inspector General (OIG) released a report at the request of Congress into obstacles faced by the SIV program.²¹ The report found that the State Department offices engaged in the SIV process were not sufficiently staffed to meet the application processing needs and address what was, at that point in time, a growing backlog of applications. At Embassy Kabul's Consular Section, 30 percent of the American Consular officer positions were vacant following a staff reduction in 2019.²² The OIG found that this staffing shortage increased delays in scheduling visa interviews, preparing case files and detecting fraud.

The Trump Administration also failed to appoint a Congressionally-mandated Senior Coordinating Official for the SIV program from January 2017 until March 15, 2020. The OIG report found that, as a result, "the [State] Department's management of resources and strategic planning for the Afghan SIV program is decentralized and lacks the focus needed to continuously evaluate the program and seek improvements."²³ Furthermore, without a Senior Coordinating Official, the Department was not able to keep apprised of staffing requirements in each office related to visa processing or coordinate across government departments and offices.²⁴

Over the duration of the first Trump Administration, these failures resulted in a steady decrease in the number of SIVs issued each year, despite applications to the program increasing. In FY2017, the United States issued 4,120 visas to eligible Afghans. In FY2020, it issued only 1,799. As applicants increased and visa issuances decreased, the average processing time for applicants ballooned. At the end of the Obama Administration in FY2016, the average processing time for applications was less than a year – 343 days. By the end of the first Trump Administration in FY2020, the average wait time was well over two years – 801 days.

²¹ U.S. State Department Office of the Inspector General, *Review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program*, June 2020.

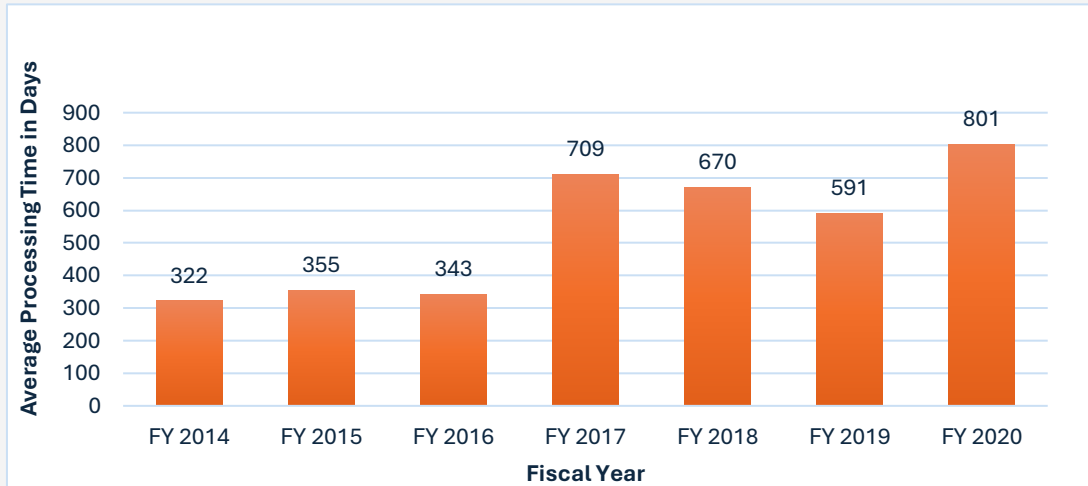
²² *Id.* at 15.

²³ *Id.* at 6.

²⁴ *Id.* at 16.

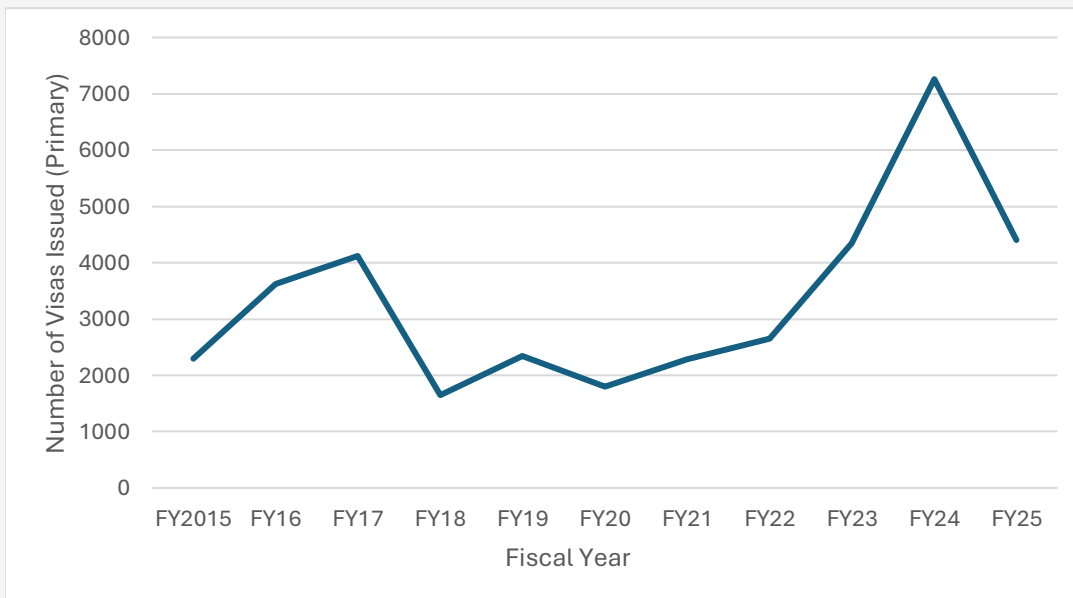
AVERAGE APPLICATION PROCESSING TIME

FY2014 - FY2020



Average processing time for SIV applications increased under the first Trump Administration.

PRIMARY VISAS ISSUED



Starting in Fiscal Year 2017, the annual number of principal visas issued declined, not recovering until Fiscal Year 2023.

At the conclusion of the first Trump Administration, the SIV program faced significant operational challenges that contributed to longstanding application backlogs and processing delays. The Department of State OIG's review in 2020 found that key components of the program were understaffed, including the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (ASIV) Unit and Embassy Kabul's consular section.²⁵ Insufficient staffing levels across multiple offices involved in SIV processing, limitations in information technology systems and lengthy processing times during both the Chief of Mission (COM) approval and visa adjudication phases contributed to the backlog.²⁶ In addition, the statutorily required Afghan SIV Senior Coordinating Official position remained vacant for more than three years, from January 2017 until March 2020.²⁷ This reduced centralized oversight of a program that required extensive interagency coordination.²⁸ These deficiencies presented significant challenges at a time when the Department of State should have been preparing for a rapid increase in demand after President Trump committed the United States to a withdrawal deadline from Afghanistan in the February 2020 Doha Agreement.²⁹

Simultaneously, the Taliban campaign against those who had worked with the United States became markedly more intense as the Taliban anticipated an American withdrawal.³⁰ The Taliban shifted toward a broader strategy of targeted assassinations designed to dismantle the Afghan institutions that had partnered with the United States. Human Rights Watch and UN reporting found a sharp increase in killings of government employees, prosecutors, judges, journalists, Afghan security personnel and others viewed as linked to the Republic or its international backers.³¹ Former U.S. interpreters reported receiving daily death threats, and some were hunted down years after leaving coalition employment.

²⁵ U.S. State Department Office of the Inspector General, *Review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program*, at 6-7, 15-17, June 2020.

²⁶ *Id.* at 6.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America*, Feb. 29, 2020.

³⁰ Human Rights Watch, *No Forgiveness for People Like You: Executions and Enforced Disappearances in Afghanistan under the Taliban*, at 7 (Nov. 2021).

³¹ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, *Special Report: Killing of Human Rights Defenders, Journalists and Media Workers in Afghanistan 2018-2021*, at 7 (Feb. 2021).



Afghan children with U.S. Soldiers in Sarobi district, Kabul province, Afghanistan, Dec. 6, 2013.

Source: SPC Sara Wakai via Department of Defense

Start of Biden Administration

When the Biden Administration entered office, the Afghan SIV program was under-resourced and significantly backlogged. In order to meet the anticipated demands on the program associated with the forthcoming withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, the program required an immediate surge in resources and political will to recover from the underinvestment of the first Trump Administration. The extent to which the Biden Administration undertook this task immediately upon entering office would determine the program's success over the coming months.

Following the April 2021 announcement that U.S. troops would withdraw from Afghanistan between May 1 and September 11, 2021, applications to the SIV program increased exponentially.³² The State Department responded by adding more resources.

³² U.S. State Department Office of the Inspector General, Evaluation of Adjustments to the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program From 2018 Through 2022, at 8, Aug. 2023.

The Afghan SIV (ASIV) Unit increased its staffing from eight personnel to 51 personnel between February and September 2021, enabling it to process substantially more applications for COM adjudication.³³ Concurrently, the National Visa Center (NVC) in the United States expanded the number of staff dedicated to Afghan SIV application processing from 9 in May 2021 to 63 by July 2021.³⁴ While these increased resources helped the Afghan SIV program recover from decisions made under the Trump Administration, they were insufficient to address overwhelming demands on the program as the U.S. wound down its mission in Afghanistan.

These demands were fueled by high profile Taliban attacks against Afghans working with the United States. One of the best-known cases came in May 2021, when former U.S. Army interpreter Sohail Pardis was stopped at a Taliban checkpoint and killed.³⁵ At the same time, the Taliban systematically targeted Afghan Air Force pilots and commandos, recognizing they posed one of the greatest threats to its military campaign. By the summer of 2021, before Kabul fell, Taliban fighters were already searching government records, setting up checkpoints to identify former employees, and carrying out reprisals in areas that came under their control.³⁶

Although the Biden Administration had increased resources, there was a fundamental failure, including within the Intelligence Community, to adequately understand the Taliban's capabilities and anticipate the speed of the Taliban's military takeover of Afghanistan.³⁷ The first of Afghanistan's 34 provincial capitals fell to the Taliban on August 6, 2021.³⁸ Nine days later, the Taliban took Kabul. The collapse of Afghan security forces and the internationally supported political order left the Biden Administration unprepared to deal with an even greater influx of Afghan SIV applications.³⁹ Several of the initial steps that the Biden Administration took to bolster the Afghan SIV program were still in their infancy when the U.S. withdrawal began. Operation Allies Refuge (OAR) was announced on July 14, 2021, with the intention of providing more robust support for Afghan SIV applicants.⁴⁰ By the time Kabul fell one month later, OAR had assisted only a fraction of

³³ *Id.* at 42.

³⁴ U.S. State Department Office of the Inspector General, Evaluation of Adjustments to the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program From 2018 Through 2022, at 9, Aug. 2023.

³⁵ Helen Regan and Abdul Basir Bina, "Interpreter for US Army was beheaded. Others fear they will be hunted down too," *CNN*, July 23, 2021.

³⁶ Human Rights Watch, No Forgiveness for People Like You: Executions and Enforced Disappearances in Afghanistan under the Taliban, at 2 (Nov. 2021).

³⁷ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Why the Afghan Security Forces Collapsed*, at 2, Feb. 2023.

³⁸ U.S. State Department Office of the Inspector General, Operation Freedom's Sentinel: Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, at 2 (2021).

³⁹ R. Scott Adams, "Afghan Evacuation and Resettlement: Two Years Later There's Still Work To Do," *Just Security*, September 12, 2023, <https://www.justsecurity.org/88182/afghan-evacuation-and-resettlement-two-years-later-theres-still-work-to-do/>.

⁴⁰ U.S. State Department Office of the Inspector General, Management Advisory: DoD Support for the Relocation of Afghan Nationals at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, at 2, Mar. 2022.

the SIV applicants that it had intended to reach before operations pivoted to address the larger influx of Afghans evacuated by the United States.⁴¹

OAR took place in two stages: from July 14 to August 15, when the Taliban moved into Kabul and from August 15 to August 30, when the last U.S. troops left Afghanistan.⁴² The Department of Defense provided emergency housing facilities and intake services at Fort Lee, Virginia, where the first plane of Afghans arrived on July 30.⁴³ After the Taliban entered Kabul on August 15, the mission shifted to immediate aerial evacuation to airlift SIV applicants, U.S. embassy personnel, American citizens and others. This operation evacuated 124,334 individuals, the largest noncombatant evacuation in U.S. history.⁴⁴ The evacuation came at a terrible cost. On August 26, 2021, a suicide bombing at Abbey Gate killed 13 U.S. service members and approximately 170 Afghans.

Following the August 2021 evacuation from Afghanistan, the State Department reassigned personnel from across the Department to manage the resulting surge in applications.⁴⁵ For example, the Bureau of Consular Affairs enlisted staff from Mission Brazil, who were available due to the COVID-19 shutdown, to process applications remotely.⁴⁶ The NVC also added staff from the Kentucky Consular Center and hired additional contracting support to assist with reviewing applicant emails and processing applications. By September 2022, NVC staffing dedicated to Afghan SIV processing had increased to 214 personnel.⁴⁷ In addition, the State Department temporarily assigned Foreign Service Officers on authorized departure due to COVID-19 to assist with application processing and data entry, while remote consular operations in Doha, Qatar, were supplemented by temporary duty consular officers and locally employed staff.⁴⁸ Although these staffing increases significantly expanded processing capacity and helped eliminate large backlogs of applicant correspondence, the State Department's OIG concluded that staffing levels ultimately remained insufficient to keep pace with the unprecedented surge in Afghan SIV applications following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan.

⁴¹ R. Scott Adams, "Afghan Evacuation and Resettlement: Two Years Later There's Still Work To Do," *Just Security*, Sep. 12, 2023, <https://www.justsecurity.org/88182/afghan-evacuation-and-resettlement-two-years-later-theres-still-work-to-do/>.

⁴² Speeches and Remarks, President Biden, Remarks by President Biden on the End of the War in Afghanistan, Aug. 31, 2021.

⁴³ U.S. State Department Office of the Inspector General, Management Advisory: DoD Support for the Relocation of Afghan Nationals at Fort Lee, Virginia, at Jan. 3, 2022.

⁴⁴ Nicholas Pilch, "Operation Allies Refuge: One year later," *60th Air Mobility Wing Public Affairs*, Aug. 17, 2022, <https://www.21af.amc.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3133917/operation-allies-refuge-one-year-later/>.

⁴⁵ U.S. State Department Office of the Inspector General, Evaluation of Adjustments to the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program From 2018 Through 2022, at 8-9, Aug. 2023.

⁴⁶ *Id.* at 9.

⁴⁷ *Id.*

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 7 and 15.



Air Force service member with an Afghan evacuee at Holloman Air Force Base, N.M. during Operation Allies Welcome, Jan 13, 2022.
Source: Army Pfc. Anthony Sanchez via Department of Defense

In addition to addressing staffing shortages, the State Department implemented a series of reforms designed to streamline the SIV process. To improve employment verification, a longstanding bottleneck in the COM approval process, the State Department coordinated with the Department of Defense to design and implement Project Rabbit, a system to verify qualifying employment using contractor and personnel records.⁴⁹ The Department also streamlined bureaucratic steps by eliminating multiple layers within the COM approval process, including the COM review committee. Approval authority was delegated directly to senior ASIV Unit officials. In July 2022, the State Department and the Homeland Security Department further simplified the process by eliminating the separate Form I-360 petition requirement for most applicants and consolidating petition adjudication with Chief of Mission approval. Following the suspension of operations at U.S. Embassy Kabul, the State Department established the Afghan Affairs Unit in Doha to conduct

remote immigrant visa processing and expanded interview and visa issuance capabilities across diplomatic posts worldwide. According to the OIG's 2023 report, these measures significantly improved processing efficiency, enabled the Department to eliminate a substantial email backlog, increased the number of applications processed and expanded global visa issuance capacity.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 12-13.

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 14-15.



Marine assigned to Special Purpose Air Ground Task Force Crisis Response Central Command carries a child to be processed during an evacuation in Kabul. **Source: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Sgt. Isaiah Campbell.**

The U.S. Effort to Resettle Afghans

As the mission to evacuate Afghans transitioned to the United States, Operation Allies Refuge became Operation Allies Welcome (OAW). On August 29, 2021, President Biden directed the Department of Homeland Security to lead and coordinate efforts across the federal government to assist in the safe resettlement of the Afghans involved in Operation Allies Refuge. The Department of Defense, through U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM), provided temporary housing and processing facilities across eight bases.⁵¹ 72,600 Afghans were hosted at these installations, supported by roughly 12,720 service members at the height of operations.⁵² Resettlement agencies and their local affiliates and community partners stepped up around the country to support the Afghans temporarily housed at these bases. During nearly seven months of Defense Department operated safe havens, 526 babies were born to Afghan evacuees on U.S. military installations. The last Afghans left Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst on February 19, 2022. The Administration also secured transit arrangements with third countries, known

⁵¹ Military installations used for Operation Allies Welcome included: Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia; Fort Pickett, Virginia; Fort Lee, Virginia; Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico; Fort McCoy, Wisconsin; Fort Bliss, Texas; Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey; and Camp Atterbury, Indiana.

⁵² U.S. Department of Defense, United States Northern Command, DoD Support to Operation Allies Welcome, <https://www.northcom.mil/OAW/> (last visited Aug. 2026).

CONSIDERATIONS FOR WOMEN IN CARE OPERATIONS



A Female Engagement Team member acts as a safety for a female Afghan National Police recruit in Kandahar, Afghanistan, December 7, 2013.

Source: Defense Visual Information Distribution Service

A key aspect of CARE's mission was addressing the unique vulnerabilities faced by Afghan women and girls. In coordination with interagency partners and humanitarian organizations, CARE worked to identify and prioritize relocation pathways for women human rights defenders, judges, journalists, educators, civil society leaders and other individuals at heightened risk of persecution in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. The office also sought to address protection barriers affecting women and girls throughout the relocation and resettlement process, including access to case processing, family reunification and support services.¹ Through its role in Operation Enduring Welcome and related relocation initiatives, CARE incorporated efforts to protect and resettle vulnerable Afghan populations, recognizing the disproportionate risks faced by women and girls under Taliban rule.

as 'lily pads', in Qatar, Kuwait, Germany, Italy, Spain, UAE, Bahrain, Kosovo and Albania. Transit points in these countries developed into small cities where Afghans underwent medical screening, security vetting, and additional processing.⁵³

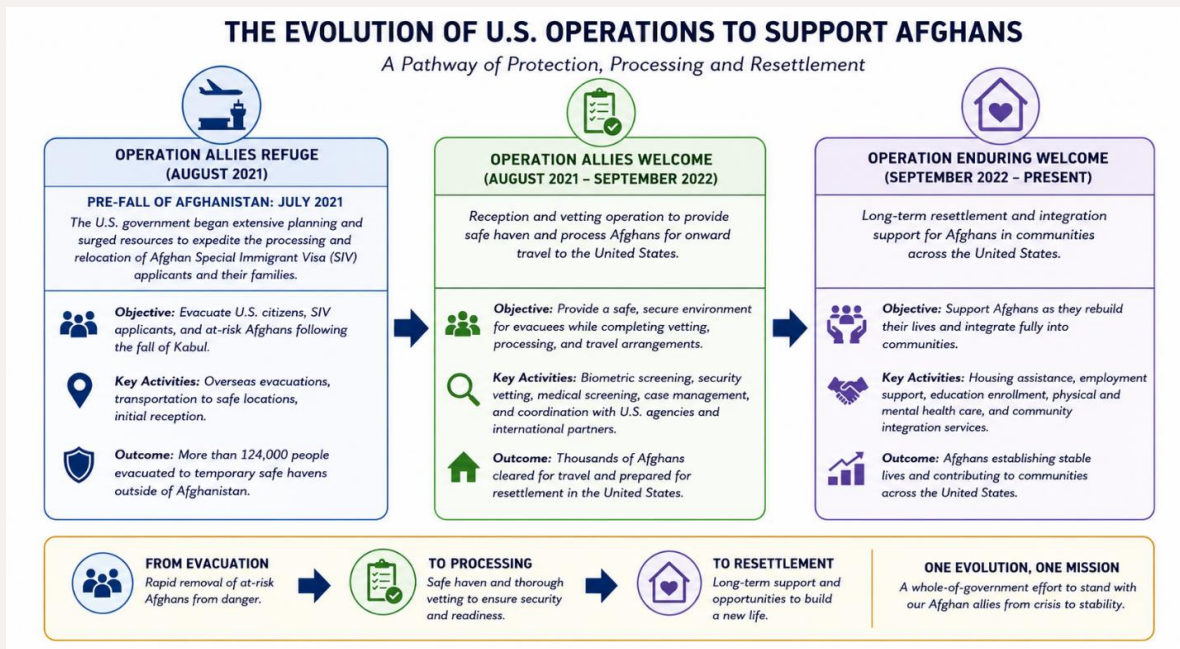
Following the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan on August 30, 2021, the Department of State's Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE) was established in October 2021 to support Operation Enduring Welcome.⁵⁴ Created to coordinate the U.S. government's response to the relocation and resettlement of at-risk Afghans, CARE served as the central interagency office responsible for managing the movement of Afghans, including SIV applicants, refugees and others with legal pathways to the United States. CARE also coordinated with civil society partners and advocates such as AfghanEvac, a veteran-led coalition that supported the Department's Afghan relocation efforts. CARE was charged by President Biden to coordinate with the Departments of Homeland Security, Defense and Health and Human Services to oversee security vetting, processing in third-country transit locations, transportation logistics, family reunification efforts and resettlement in the United States. Once established,

⁵³ President Joe Biden, *U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, The White House, at 10, Apr. 2023, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/US-Withdrawal-from-Afghanistan.pdf>.

⁵⁴ U.S. State Department Office of the Inspector General, *Evaluation of Department of State Accounting, Screening, and Vetting of Afghan Evacuees*, at 9-12, July 2024.

CARE played a key role in streamlining relocation processes and addressing challenges facing Afghans awaiting resettlement, serving as the State Department’s lead office for Afghan relocation and resettlement policy and operations.

On September 1, 2022, the Biden Administration announced a shift towards longer-term resettlement of Afghans in communities across the United States.⁵⁵ Operation Enduring Welcome focused on utilizing existing legal pathways to the United States. These included SIVs, family members of Afghans already in the United States and those who received priority referrals through the U.S. Refugee and Admissions Program (USRAP). Led by the State Department and supported by the Departments of Homeland Security and Defense, Operation Enduring Welcome coordinated overseas processing, security vetting, transportation and domestic resettlement assistance. The initiative reflected the Administration’s commitment to honoring U.S. obligations to Afghan partners who faced persecution, retaliation or other threats following the Taliban’s return to power. Through a whole-of-government approach, Operation Enduring Welcome sought to provide a durable mechanism for relocating and integrating Afghan allies into American communities while continuing efforts to assist those still awaiting departure from Afghanistan or third-country processing locations.⁵⁶



⁵⁵ Priscilla Alvarez, “Biden administration pivoting to long-term strategy to assist Afghans,” *CNN*, Sep. 1, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/09/01/politics/afghan-resettlement>.

⁵⁶ Press Release, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Operation Allies Welcome Announces Departure of All Afghan Nationals from the National Conference Center Safe Haven in Leesburg, VA,” Sep. 27, 2022, <https://www.dhs.gov/archive/news/2022/09/27/operation-allies-welcome-announces-departure-all-afghan-nationals-national>.

IMMIGRATION PATHS AVAILABLE TO AFGHANS

There were two primary pathways available to Afghans from August 2021 until the Trump Administration moved to close off all options to eligible Afghans.

THE IMMIGRANT VISA SYSTEM:

When functioning properly, this system processes individuals and their eligible family members through overseas consular posts and results in the issuance of immigrant visas. It previously included three major pathways.

1. Afghan SIVs and Derivative Family

Members under the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009, as amended.

- Eligible family members:
 - Spouse; and
 - Unmarried children under 21 (children do not age out of eligibility if they are under the age of 21 at the time the application is filed).

2. Family-Based Immigrant Visas (I-130)

Filed by:

- U.S. citizens for spouses, children, and parents; and
- Lawful Permanent Residents for spouses and unmarried children under the age of 21.

3. Follow-to-Join Asylee (FTJ-A):

FTJ-A is a consular immigrant visa process, not a refugee pathway.

- Applies to spouses and unmarried children under 21 of individuals granted asylum in the United States.

THE REFUGEE RELOCATION SYSTEM:

The Refugee Relocation System operates through the State Department's PRM Bureau with support from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and previously, CARE relocation efforts to support Afghans.

1. USRAP Refugee Admissions (Priority-1 and Priority-2) Includes:

- Principal applicants who had an association with the U.S. government's operations in Afghanistan through a U.S. government official or a U.S.-affiliated company. (NOTE: Afghan citizens cannot apply directly for refugee resettlement to the United States. Their U.S.-based family members, friends or lawyers also cannot refer them.); and
- Eligible spouses and children.
- Special Priority Categories Within USRAP
- Immediate family of Active Duty and recently separated U.S. military or Department of Defense personnel.

2. Follow-to-Join Refugee (FTJ-R)

- Applies to spouses and unmarried children under 21 of admitted refugees.

3. Parolee Family Reunification (DS-4317):

Afghans paroled into the United States under Operation Allies Welcome initially had no formal reunification channel. The DS-4317 process was later established to allow:

- Spouses;
- Unmarried children under 21; and
- Parents and guardians of unaccompanied minors.

Since its inception, the SIV program has been a bipartisan effort that has safely brought thousands of Afghans to the United States. While the requirement for Congress to proactively raise the visa cap level annually introduced a degree of uncertainty that at times slowed the processing of visas, it also served as an annual demonstration of the strong bipartisan support for this important program.

The Afghan SIV program was intended to provide safety to the Afghans whose service with the U.S. and our allies put them at risk of retribution from the Taliban. The State Department reported in 2026 that approximately 160,000 Afghan SIVs have been issued to principal applicants and their eligible family members since the program began in 2009. Congress has authorized a cumulative total of 50,500 principal applicant visas. This includes Afghan SIV primary recipients and their eligible family members. These Afghans have become integral members of their communities across the United States.

The following chapters will tell the rest of the story of the SIV program and its most important component: the Afghan men and women who joined the U.S. mission and the U.S. service members they stood shoulder to shoulder with.

WELCOME CORPS

The Biden Administration's Welcome Corps initiative, launched in January 2023, was a significant expansion of private refugee sponsorship in the United States and allowed groups of at least five Americans to directly sponsor and support refugees arriving through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP).¹ Sponsors were able to help arriving refugees secure housing, enroll children in school, access employment opportunities and integrate into their new communities.

The Welcome Corps was designed in part from lessons learned during the earlier efforts to assist Afghans and created an additional pathway to safety and resettlement for Afghans. It also enabled veterans, Afghan diaspora communities, faith-based organizations and other Americans with personal ties to Afghanistan to play a direct role in welcoming and supporting Afghan newcomers. By mobilizing private citizens alongside established resettlement agencies, the Welcome Corps expanded the U.S.'s ability to receive vulnerable refugees, strengthened community-based integration efforts and demonstrated a sustained commitment to Afghans who had been displaced by conflict or who had supported U.S. missions during the two-decade war in Afghanistan.

The program reflected the broader effort to rebuild and modernize the U.S. refugee resettlement system while providing Afghans with greater opportunities to achieve long-term stability, security and belonging in the United States.



A former Afghan interpreter who served alongside Marines applied for and received a Special Immigrant Visa. He later enlisted in the U.S. marines.
Source: U.S. Central Command

CHAPTER 2: THE U.S. SERVICE MEMBERS AND AFGHANS WHO FOUGHT BESIDE THEM

SIV recipients were key partners for U.S. servicemembers and diplomats throughout the war in Afghanistan. As described in the previous chapter, they served alongside U.S. service members and diplomats in a number of different roles that were instrumental to the day-to-day operations of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan.

They joined patrols with U.S. and coalition troops along roads rigged with improvised explosive devices and accompanied infantry patrols across Afghanistan. Interpreters and translators participated in village stability operations, helping local villagers with access to clean water and medical assistance, schooling and community empowerment.⁵⁷ They were key members of special operations missions and advised U.S. commanders on local customs and navigated cultural misunderstandings. They picked up guns and

⁵⁷ Thomas J. Brennan, "My Afghan Interpreter Earned His U.S. Citizenship. Then He Left.," *The War Horse*, Aug. 18, 2021, <https://thewarhorse.org/us-citizen-in-afghanistan-fights-visa-program-and-taliban/>; Ahmad Khalid Siddiqi, "An Afghan Interpreter's Journey to the U.S.," *The Foreign Service Journal*, Mar. 2022, <https://afsa.org/afghan-interpreters-journey-us/>.

entered the same firefights as American soldiers despite serving without earning veteran status.

The Taliban targeted Americans and Afghans alike. 2,465 U.S. military personnel were killed in Afghanistan between October 7, 2001 and August 30, 2021.⁵⁸ 1,160 service members from coalition partner nations were killed, with the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Australia sustaining the largest losses among allied forces.⁵⁹ 3,846 U.S. contractors were killed and approximately 70,000 Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) personnel were killed between the establishment of the ANDSF after 2001 and the collapse of the Afghan government in August 2021.⁶⁰

While Americans and international partners went home at the end of their tour of duty, Afghans stayed in Afghanistan—and in danger. There is no verified estimate of the number of Afghan interpreters killed because of their service with U.S. and coalition forces. In many cases, they were also known personally to Taliban fighters from patrols, negotiations or detainee interrogations. They were targeted by the Taliban and considered traitors. Family homes were searched by the Taliban and threats were posted to doors. Janis Shinwari, a former Afghan interpreter and founder of No One Left Behind, found the message scratched into his car, warning “your day of judgement is coming.”



Source: PJF Military Collection via atamy.com

“Your day of judgment
is coming.”

**—TALIBAN THREAT
TO AFGHAN ALLIES**

⁵⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, *Casualty Status as of 10 A.M. EST Jan. 30, 2025*, Jan. 30, 2025, <https://www.war.gov/casualty.pdf>.

⁵⁹ icasualties.org, “Fatalities by Coalition Country,” <https://icasualties.org/WorldMap> (last visited Aug. 5, 2026).

⁶⁰ Neta C. Crawford & Catherine Lutz, *Human Cost of Post-9/11 Wars: Direct War Deaths in Major War Zones*, Watson Institute of International & Public Affairs at Brown University & Frederick S. Pardee Center for the Study of the Longer-Range Future at Boston University, at 1 (Sep. 1, 2021), https://costsofwar.watson.brown.edu/sites/default/files/papers/Costs-of-War_Direct-War-Deaths_9-1-21.pdf.

Despite the acute danger they faced, Afghan SIV applicants still had to endure a grueling, years-long wait for their visas to be processed. Many did not survive the wait. Sakhidad Afghan worked as an interpreter for the U.S. Marine Corps in Helmand Province from 2009 until 2014. During his service, he participated in major combat operations, including the Battle of Marjah.⁶¹ After receiving Taliban death threats, he applied for an SIV. His application remained pending for three years. In March 2015, while traveling to find a new job after coalition forces withdrew from his area, Sakhidad was kidnapped by the Taliban, tortured and murdered. His body was left along a road with a letter warning that his brothers, who had also worked with coalition forces, would be next.

“Mohammad” was an interpreter who worked for the U.S. Army, U.S. Special Forces and the U.S. Embassy over 12 years of service. Despite years of qualified employment, his application process took 10 years. In December 2020, he was finally notified of his approval for a visa for him and his family. Tragically, Mohammad was shot and killed by the Taliban in January 2021.

For SIV applicants, the long application process is worth the wait. They leave behind their homes, extended family, friends and lives in Afghanistan. When they arrive in the U.S. with only their immediate family, they must rebuild their lives in a new country. But they have safety and new opportunities in the United States. Afghans have not only survived in America, they have thrived. SIV holders have contributed to their communities and their new country.

H.N., an Afghan SIV holder, arrived in Virginia with his wife and four children after working alongside the U.S. in Afghanistan. He received employment counseling and obtained his commercial driver’s license training. H.N. had over 20 years of commercial truck driving experience in Afghanistan and used his experience and commercial driver’s license to start his own freight shipping and trucking company. Within six months of their arrival, his family achieved economic self-sufficiency. H.N. now owns a fleet of trucks and employs 15 people.

The rest of this chapter details the stories of Afghans who worked with the United States and the U.S. service members they served alongside. These individuals provide a snapshot of the lives of Afghan SIV recipients, their families and what they sacrificed in service of the U.S.-led mission.

⁶¹ T.A. Frail, “The Tragic Fate of the Afghan Interpreters the U.S. Left Behind,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, Nov. 2016, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/tragic-fate-afghan-interpreters-left-behind-180960785/>.

The Stories of Afghan Allies

** Where noted, names have been changed to protect their families who remain in Afghanistan.*



U.S. soldiers meet with local Afghan women and children to address general concerns in their villages, December 6, 2013. **Source: Department of Defense**

AHMED*, Translator

Ahmed fought alongside U.S. service members, translating between U.S. troops and the Afghans while on patrols and as part of efforts to engage the local community. Ahmed arrived in the United States in 2015. After supporting the U.S. mission in Afghanistan, his service was not done. Within six months of arriving in the U.S. and receiving his Green Card, he enlisted in the U.S. Army. He deployed to Iraq and even went back to Afghanistan as part of the U.S. military.

Ahmed has several brothers who remain in Afghanistan. He lives in fear that his brothers will be hunted down and punished by the Taliban for Ahmed's dedicated service to the United States and the international force in Afghanistan.

QAIS*, Former Afghan National Contractor Supporting U.S. Contracts

As a construction Project Manager, Qais worked closely with U.S. Army personnel, Special Forces and civilian staff starting in 2009. In 2014, he oversaw the delivery of vehicles to a military installation and reported attempted contract-related corruption to U.S. authorities. As a result, he was targeted by the Taliban and forced to resign from that job for his family's safety. But he continued to work with the U.S. mission.

From 2014 to 2016, he worked with a U.S.-contracted logistics company, and in 2017, he served as a Contract Manager with a telecommunications company supporting U.S. contracts. In 2020, he was awarded a major U.S. Forces contract that was directly supervised by a U.S. Army officer. In that role, he supported mission-critical communications projects in contested areas, further exposing his identity as a U.S. ally to the Taliban.

During the U.S. withdrawal in 2021, Qais had the opportunity to evacuate. Refusing the chance to leave, he volunteered to assist the evacuation mission as a translator and helped coordinate U.S. personnel and evacuees at the airport and later at a military installation. Finally, after repeated threats and 12 years of faithful service, Qais came to the United States as an SIV applicant.

Qais and his family have rebuilt their lives in the safety of the U.S. Qais has developed his IT career at a major U.S. company, allowing him to support multiple family members, purchase a home, and start a small contracting business. "These accomplishments reflect not only personal satisfaction but the ability to maintain responsibility for family members who rely on me. I have grown to appreciate the value of living with an attitude of growth, with each day providing new opportunities," says Qais.

Qais still has close family members in Afghanistan who continue to face the threat of Taliban retaliation due to their years of service supporting U.S. military operations. Despite being SIV eligible, these family members have been unable to come to the U.S. and now face the prospect of indefinite delays due to the Trump Administration's halt in SIV issuance. Qais continues to fight for their safety. "I dream of a day when all SIV-eligible members of my family and their children can attend school in a safe environment and pursue professional goals without interruption."

JANIS SHINWARI, Interpreter and Co-Founder of No One Left Behind

Janis signed up to serve as an interpreter for the U.S. military in 2006 after learning English watching American movies. He served alongside U.S. soldiers because he knew that his family could not thrive under the Taliban's rule.

In a firefight in 2008, Janis armed with his AK-47, joined the rescue mission of a team of U.S. Army combat advisers pinned down by a Taliban ambush. Janis repeatedly put himself in harm's way to help save American lives. For his efforts, he was put on a Taliban "kill list," and the Taliban sent death threats to his family.

With the help of the Afghan SIV Program and the support of the American soldiers he served with, Janis made it to the United States in 2013. With \$35,000 that was crowd-funded to support his resettlement by new neighbors, friends and strangers in the U.S. he co-founded No One Left Behind.

Since 2013, No One Left Behind has evacuated thousands of Afghan allies, assisted even more with their resettlement upon arrival in the United States, raised millions of dollars to fund these efforts and worked closely with Congress to support life-saving legislation for other Afghans.

Thousands more Afghans have found safety after their selfless service in support of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan thanks to Janis's work.



REBEKAH EDMONDSON, U.S. ARMY VETERAN, NXT MISSION

Rebekah Edmondson completed four deployments to Afghanistan with the U.S. Army, serving alongside U.S. Special Operations Forces. She helped recruit and train Afghan women to serve in the Female Tactical Platoon of the Ktah Khas, an Afghan special operations unit that partnered with U.S. forces.

When the Taliban seized Kabul in August 2021, she helped evacuate 50 of those women to the United States. Because the women did not qualify for Afghan SIVs, they were required to apply for asylum. Five years later, most remain in limbo awaiting green cards, and many have lost employment, access to education and health coverage because of immigration processing delays.

Edmondson now leads NXT Mission, a nonprofit she runs in partnership with the women, advocating for their long-term stability in the United States.



SHAWN VANDIVER, U.S. NAVY VETERAN AND FOUNDER OF AFGHANEVAC

Shawn VanDiver was 17 and already serving in the U.S. Navy on September 11, 2001, and served 12 years. He never deployed to Afghanistan. In August 2021, a text from an Afghan friend trapped in Afghanistan as Kabul fell drew him into the ad hoc effort of dozens of volunteers, veterans, advocates and ordinary Americans trying to help Afghan allies stuck in Afghanistan. VanDiver founded AfghanEvac to coordinate the civil society network helping Afghans and grew the coalition to more than 250 organizations.

AfghanEvac helped build the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE) office and supported its codification into law and closely tracked visa issuance that led to Congress authorizing 12,000 additional SIVs in 2024. Its Battle Buddies program pairs U.S. veterans with Afghan allies facing immigration appointments and court dates. "We have to follow through for our mission partners. This is about the very promise of America," VanDiver says, "and whether or not our word means anything."

Source: Shawn VanDiver



SWEETA AZIMI, ATTORNEY AND FORMER ACTING DEPUTY MINISTER OF LABOR, AFGHANISTAN

Sweeta Azimi is an Afghan attorney who served as Acting Deputy Minister of Labor and as a law and anti-corruption expert at the Presidential Palace. She worked on U.S. government projects, including with the Drug Enforcement Administration and U.S. Central Command, affiliations that put her family at risk when the Taliban returned to power.

She now helps other displaced Afghan families through the California Immigration Project. But her own family remains divided. Sweeta was evacuated in 2021. For the last 5 years, she has been separated from two of her children, then ages 5 and 9 and now 10 and 14, who remain in Afghanistan. Despite following every step required of them, the family's reunification has been canceled or disrupted five times, most recently by the November 2025 suspension of Afghan visa processing. Her 10-year-old son now has a serious orthopedic condition, has undergone multiple surgeries, and cannot walk.

"My children have grown from ages 5 and 9 to 10 and 14 without their mother physically present for their everyday lives," Azimi says. "A mother who helped this government! We are not asking to bypass security screening or immigration requirements. We are asking for the opportunity to complete the process."





CHAPTER 3: THEIR SAFETY IS OUR SAFETY: THE ESTABLISHED VETTING AND SECURITY MEASURES RELATED TO THE RELOCATION OF AFGHAN ALLIES

Thorough vetting of applicants has been a cornerstone of the Afghan SIV program since its inception. Before ever working with the U.S. government, individuals undergo extensive vetting as a condition of their qualifying employment.

Once they apply to the SIV program, their identity is confirmed along with their qualification for the visa. Vetting and security measures are implemented throughout the visa application process to screen for national security risks and fraud.⁶² After an

⁶² U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General, Audit of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Participation in the Handling of Afghan Evacuees During Operation Allies Refuge and Operation Allies Welcome, at 3 (June 2025), <https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/25-056.pdf>; U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General, Evaluation of Department of State Accounting, Screening, and Vetting of Afghan Evacuees, at 15 (July 2024), https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/report/report_pdf_file/aud-geer-24-21.pdf; U.S. Department of State, "The Steps of the Afghan SIV-Process," <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/special-immig-visa-afghans-employed-us-gov/steps-of-the-afghan-siv-process.html> (last visited July 29, 2026).

individual has received Chief of Mission approval and is otherwise eligible for the program, they and their immediate family members undergo rigorous security vetting, conducted by the Intelligence Community. While time-intensive, the full and thorough vetting of applicants has always been prioritized.

The Offices of the Inspector General for the Departments of State, Homeland Security, Justice and Defense have released several reports into the SIV process, including its vetting procedures.⁶³ These reports have repeatedly shown that the vetting process is effective at denying improper applicants and functions as intended. In its July 2024 report, *Evaluation of Department of State Accounting, Screening and Vetting of Afghan Evacuees*, the State Department OIG specifically examined whether the Department properly screened and vetted Afghan SIV applicants. The investigation determined that the State Department appropriately confirmed applicants' identities, verified identities of eligible family members and conducted all screening procedures.⁶⁴ It concluded that "the SIV application review process is functioning as designed" in the applications from 2021 that it sampled for its investigation.⁶⁵



A U.S. Soldier with an Afghan American interpreter in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. **United States Armed Forces**

⁶³ See, e.g., U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General, *Evaluation of Department of State Accounting, Screening, and Vetting of Afghan Evacuees* (July 2024), https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/report/report_pdf_file/aud-geer-24-21.pdf; U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, *DHS Encountered Obstacles to Screen, Vet, and Inspect All Evacuees During the Recent Afghanistan Crisis (REDACTED)* (Sep. 2022), <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2022-09/OIG-22-64-Sep22-Redacted.pdf>; U.S. Department of Defense Inspector General, *Evaluation of the Screening of Displaced Persons from Afghanistan* (Feb. 2022), <https://media.defense.gov/2022/Feb/17/2002940841/-1/-1/1/DODIG-222-065.PDF>; U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General, *Audit of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Participation in the Handling of Afghan Evacuees During Operation Allies Refuge and Operation Allies Welcome* (June 2025), <https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/25-056.pdf>.

⁶⁴ U.S. State Department Office of the Inspector General, *Evaluation of Department of State Accounting, Screening, and Vetting of Afghan Evacuees*, at 2, July 2024.

⁶⁵ *Id.*

Vetting as a Condition of Employment

In addition to the extensive vetting involved in the Afghan SIV application process, most Afghans were vetted as a condition of their qualifying employment with the U.S. government. Afghans who ultimately became eligible for SIVs underwent extensive vetting before they were ever hired by the U.S. government or its contractors. Afghans who worked in positions that required access to U.S. military installations, coalition facilities or sensitive operations were required to be thoroughly screened and vetted prior to employment. To obtain those jobs, they generally underwent:

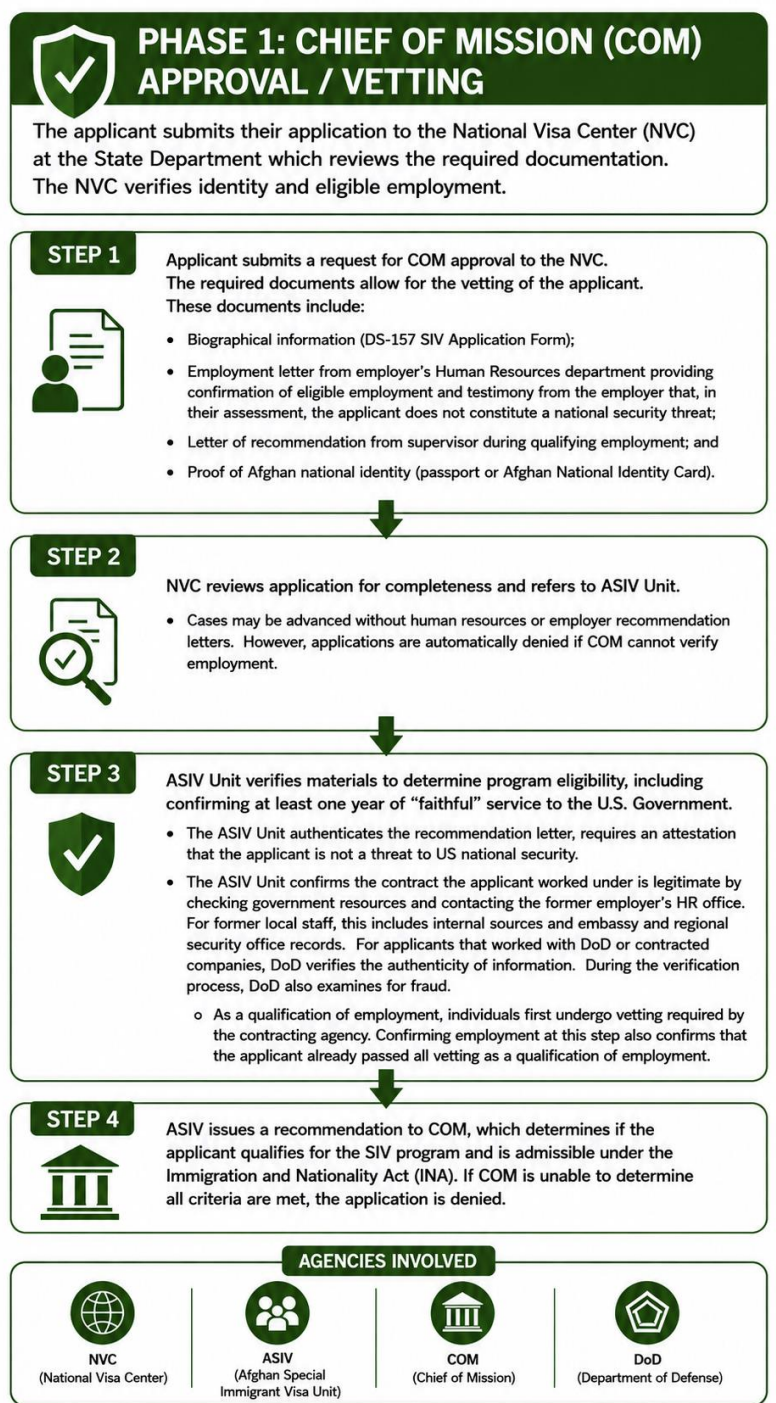
- identity verification;
- local background investigations;
- reference and employment checks;
- biometric enrollment (fingerprints, photographs, iris scans);
- counterintelligence and force-protection screening; and
- issuance of installation access credentials.

Interpreters were often among the most heavily screened local employees because they accompanied U.S. forces on combat patrols, participated in tactical planning, had access to operational information or interacted directly with commanders. For these interpreters working directly with U.S. forces, commanders often had to certify that the individual was trustworthy enough to accompany patrols and operations outside secure bases. Furthermore, this was not a one-time check. Many interpreters worked alongside the same U.S. units for months or years, and poor performance or security concerns could lead to removal.

Reconstructing old employment records is often the biggest hurdle these individuals face when applying for the SIV program. Many contractors had dissolved or lost personnel files when the war ended, which made this process more difficult. The Defense Department later sought contractors specifically to verify historical employment, locate former personnel records, identify applicants with problematic employment histories and research difficult-to-verify cases. That procurement effort reflects the challenge of reconstructing documentation years later, not a lack of employment-based vetting.

The Afghan SIV Application Process and All Relevant Vetting and Screening

The Afghan SIV process consists of four phases: confirming eligibility, preparing for visa processing, security screening and interview and arrival in the United States.



*Denotes vetting or screening

Endnotes for SIV Process
Charts: i ii iii iv v vi vii viii ix



PHASE 2: U.S. CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES (USCIS), INTERVIEW READINESS

Once COM has approved the application to proceed, the applicant must submit all supporting documents which are checked for completeness by the NVC.

AGENCIES INVOLVED:
USCIS, NVC

STEP 1



Some older and more specific cases require applicants to file a petition with USCIS. USCIS determines whether the applicant qualifies to be treated as a “special immigrant” under the SIV category.

(Since July 2022 most applicants submit documentation during phase one).



STEP 2



After receiving COM and, if required, USCIS approval, NVC notifies the applicant. The applicant and all eligible family members must complete a DS-260 immigrant visa application, which requires a copy of their passport, a birth certificate or national ID card, marriage or divorce documents, police certificates, and the DS-0234 SIV Biodata Form, and more. Upon receiving COM approval, applicants are able to travel to an approved third country for consular review.



STEP 3



NVC vets the package for completeness, accuracy and interview readiness before the caseworker schedules an interview and sends the case to administrative processing.

AGENCIES INVOLVED



USCIS
(U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services)



NVC
(National Visa Center)

Endnotes: xi xii xiii



PHASE 3: ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSING – CONSULAR AFFAIRS (CA), INTERAGENCY PARTNERS

Once all documents have been submitted, the State Department requests interagency vetting and screening. If an applicant and eligible family members pass vetting, they are scheduled for an interview at a U.S. embassy or consulate. Once their visas are issued, they must secure a medical examination before being approved for travel to the United States.

AGENCIES INVOLVED:
CA, DHS, USCIS,
Intelligence Community

STEP 1



Applicants vetted for visa inadmissibility under the Immigration and Nationality Act

- Each applicant completes online application with biographic data, biometric data is collected and verified by CA.

STEP 2

Administrative Processing:



- CA requests additional documents, interviews and interagency security checks. CA's Office of Screening, Analysis, and Coordination conducts in-house security checks or coordinates the applicant package for interagency processing.

Interagency screening:



- Biometric and biographic data are run through multiple State Department and Interagency databases. This process includes State, DoD, DHS and the intelligence and law enforcement communities. The full details of the process are not publicly available, but can include:

- Screening via the FBI, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), Infrastructure Anti-Corruption Toolbox (IACT), Consular Consolidated Database (CCD), the USCIS Fraud Detection and National Security (FDNS) Directorate, checking for Terrorism-Related Inadmissibility Grounds (TRIG), and enhanced vetting by others in the interagency and intelligence communities.
- DHS also uses the CAMINO system to track cases and perform, if necessary, identity checks, DNA tests and "background checks by querying USCIS, DHS and other U.S. Government systems."

STEP 3



Interview of applicant and all family members conducted by CA officials

- CA officials conduct through interviews, take biometric data and determine if an applicant is eligible for an SIV. During the interview, officers look to confirm identity, family relationships, document reliability, employment consistency, admissibility issues and screen for fraud or misrepresentation. Any drug trafficking, visa overstay, fraudulent documents or deliberate misrepresentation or fraud result in denial. Interviewers also look for "cues to identify domestic violence" and check whether additional information surfaces during national security vetting.

STEP 4



Medical Examination and Vaccination:

- An NVC-authorized physician examines applicants for any mental and physical health-related inadmissibility under INA.

STEP 5



Additional Vetting

- Specific flags can result in additional vetting, which many applicants are subject to. For example, the Fraud Prevention Unit can conduct interviews, database checks and review proof of relationship. If, while reviewing existing information, interview materials, database check results (including U.S. and international arrest records), the consular official suspects involvement in human trafficking, the case receives additional vetting from the Office of the Assistant Legal Adviser for Consular Affairs for additional processing. If necessary, CA prepares a Security Advisory Opinion.

STEP 6



Visa Issued

- Following COM approval, visa application, consular interview, identity verification, biometric and biographic checks and any required administrative processing and security reviews and medical clearance, the consular officer makes a final decision and issues an SIV to the applicant or denies their request.

AGENCIES INVOLVED



CA
(Consular Affairs)



DHS
(Department of
Homeland Security)

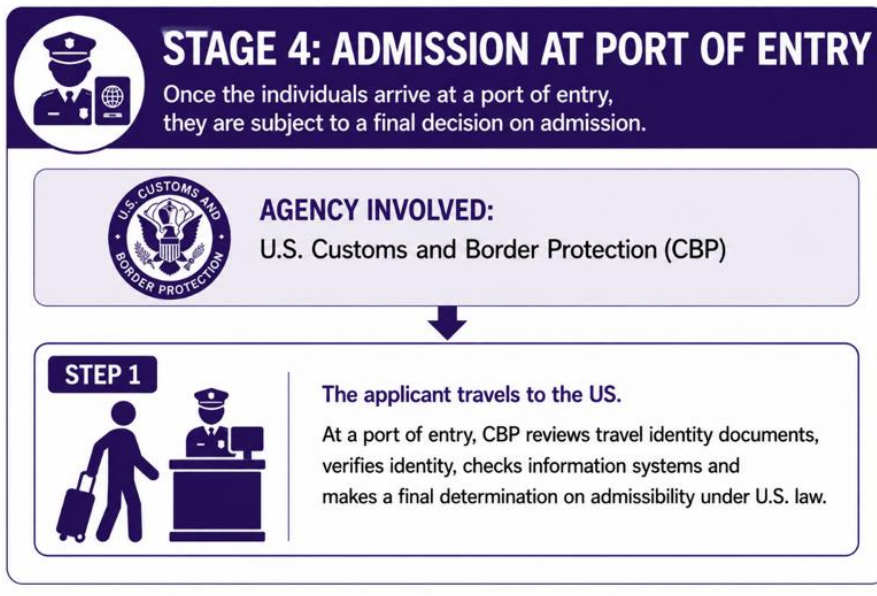


USCIS
(U.S. Citizenship and
Immigration Services)



Intelligence Community
(Intelligence and Law
Enforcement Partners)

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ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of State & U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Joint Department of State/Department of Homeland Security Report: Status of the Iraqi Special Immigrant Visa Program*, at 3, (Oct. 2021), <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/24810963/joint-dos-dhs-security-report-re-status-of-the-iraqi-special-immigrant-visa-program2.pdf>; U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General, *Review of Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program*, at 4 (June 2020), https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/report/report_pdf_file/aud-mero-20-35_7.pdf.

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^{iv} U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General, *Review of Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program*, at 21 (June 2020), https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/report/report_pdf_file/aud-mero-20-35_7.pdf.

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^{vii} *Id.*

^{viii} *Project Rabbit Processing SOP*, at 1 (Apr. 2024), <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/24663355-project-rabbit-processing-sop/>.

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^{xi} U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General, *Information Report: Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program Metrics*, at 6, (Sep. 2022), https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/report/report_pdf_file/aud-mero-22-38.pdf.

^{xii} U.S. Department of State, *The Steps of the Afghan SIV-Process*, <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/special-immig-visa-afghans-employed-us-gov/steps-of-the-afghan-siv-process.html> (last visited July 29, 2026).

^{xiii} Office of U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen, *Standing Up For Our Afghan Allies*, at 16 (Sep. 2022), <https://www.shaheen.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Afghan%20SIV%20Report%20-%20FINAL.pdf>.

^{xiv} U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General, *Evaluation of Department of State Accounting, Screening, and Vetting of Afghan Evacuees*, at 4 (July 2024), https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/report/report_pdf_file/aud-geer-24-21.pdf.

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- ^{xvii} U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General, FY 2023 NDAA Section 5275 Mandated Review of the Department of State Efforts to Support and Process Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Applicants and Other Afghan Evacuees, at 2 (Sep. 2024), https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/report/report_pdf_file/aud-geer-24-28-web-posting_508_0.pdf.
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- ^{xxi} Email from Amanda Baran, Department of Homeland Security OP&S Chief, *HQ Review of Certain Afghans*, to Staff, Oct. 19, 2021, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/23790551-email-hq-review-of-certain-afghans-19-october-2021/>.
- ^{xxii} Anne Chiorazzi et. al., *IRAP FOIA Emails*, 2021, 3-4. <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/23790300-emails-fbi-cleared-the-case-27-september-2021/>; Statement of Barbara L. Strack, Chief, Refugee Affairs Division, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Terrorist Exploitation of Refugee Programs*, Hearing before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence, Dec. 4, 2012, at 10-13.
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- ^{xxiv} Congressional Research Service, *Iraqi and Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Programs*, at 10, Jan. 15, 2025.
- ^{xxv} U.S. Department of State, “The Steps of the Afghan SIV-Process,” <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/special-immig-visa-afghans-employed-us-gov/steps-of-the-afghan-siv-process.html> (last visited July 29, 2026).
- ^{xxvi} U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General, *Evaluation of Department of State Accounting, Screening, and Vetting of Afghan Evacuees*, at 15 (July 2024), https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/report/report_pdf_file/aud-geer-24-21.pdf.
- ^{xxvii} U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General, *Review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program*, at 8-9 (June 2020), https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/report/report_pdf_file/aud-mero-20-35_7.pdf.
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- ^{xxix} U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General, *Evaluation of Department of State Accounting, Screening, and Vetting of Afghan Evacuees*, at 13-14 (July 2024), https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/report/report_pdf_file/aud-geer-24-21.pdf.
- ^{xxx} *Id.* at 14.
- ^{xxxi} *Id.* at 5.
- ^{xxxii} *Id.* at 13.

Vetting During the Noncombatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) in August 2021

Once the Taliban entered Kabul on August 15, 2021, the U.S. mission turned to the evacuation of U.S. government personnel, U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, SIV applicants and other designated groups. The evacuation rapidly became a noncombatant emergency evacuation under extreme conditions. In July 2024, the State Department's OIG found that State was responsible for "vetting applicants for U.S. evacuation priorities" and directing them into appropriate processing lines at Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA). The Department of Defense (DoD) was responsible for manifesting the evacuation flights. One of the OIG's principal findings is that the Department of State did not have complete records of everyone evacuated during the NEO because DoD controlled the operation and passenger tracking.⁶⁶

For many evacuees, especially those without complete documentation, the most comprehensive screening occurred overseas after they left Afghanistan, at transit locations such as:

- Al Udeid Air Base (Qatar);
- Ramstein Air Base (Germany);
- Camp As Sayliyah (Qatar); and
- Camp Bondsteel (Kosovo).⁶⁷

Vetting under Operation Allies Welcome

Operation Allies Welcome (OAW), started on August 29, 2021, to support the evacuation, reception, processing and resettlement of Afghan nationals, used a multi-layered, interagency screening and vetting process to screen and vet the individuals who were evacuated from Afghanistan to posts around the world and military installations in the United States.⁶⁸ This included a number of steps which confirmed the identities of Afghans and conducted national security vetting:

⁶⁶ U.S. Department of State Office of Inspector General, *Evaluation of Department of State Accounting, Screening, and Vetting of Afghan Evacuees*, at 3 (July 2024), https://www.stateoig.gov/uploads/report/report_pdf_file/aud-geer-24-21.pdf.

⁶⁷ U.S. Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, *DHS Encountered Obstacles to Screen, Vet, and Inspect All Evacuees During the Recent Afghanistan Crisis (REDACTED)* (Sep. 2022), <https://www.oig.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/assets/2022-09/OIG-22-64-Sep22-Redacted.pdf>.

⁶⁸ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, "Operation Allies Welcome," <https://www.dhs.gov/archive/operation-allies-welcome> (last visited July 29, 2026).

1. Biographic screening: Officials collected and reviewed available identifying information which was checked against U.S. government records and intelligence databases.⁶⁹

- name and aliases;
- date and place of birth;
- family relationships;
- passport or Afghan identity documents (if available); and
- other available identifying information.

2. Biometric screening: Evacuees underwent biometric collection. Those biometrics were compared against databases maintained by DHS, Department of Defense, the FBI, the Department of Defense's Automated Biometric Identification System (ABIS) and other intelligence and law enforcement repositories.⁷⁰

- fingerprints;
- photographs; and
- when available, iris scans.

3. Intelligence and terrorism screening: Multiple agencies participated in national security vetting to identify known or suspected terrorists, individuals with derogatory intelligence, persons appearing in criminal or terrorism watchlists and other national security concerns.⁷¹

- Department of Homeland Security (CBP, USCIS, ICE);
- Department of Defense;
- FBI;
- National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC); and
- other Intelligence Community partners.

4. Flight-manifest vetting: Before flights departed overseas transit locations (“lily pads”) such as Qatar, Germany, Kuwait, Bahrain, Italy, Spain and the UAE, passenger manifests were vetted against U.S. government databases.⁷²

5. Inspection at the U.S. port of entry: Even after overseas screening, every evacuee arriving in the United States underwent inspection by U.S. Customs and Border

⁶⁹ *Id.*

⁷⁰ U.S. Department of Homeland Security, “Operation Allies Welcome,” <https://www.dhs.gov/archive/operation-allies-welcome> (last visited July 29, 2026).

⁷¹ *Id.*

⁷² *Id.*; U.S. Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General, Audit of the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Participation in the Handling of Afghan Evacuees During Operation Allies Refuge and Operation Allies Welcome, at 12 (June 2025), <https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/25-056.pdf>.

Protection (CBP), which determined whether the individual could be admitted or paroled into the United States.⁷³

6. Recurrent vetting after arrival: It is crucial to note that vetting under Operation Allies Welcome did not end once an evacuee entered the United States. DHS continued recurrent vetting,⁷⁴ meaning new derogatory information discovered after arrival could trigger investigation, revocation of parole, detention or removal.

Throughout the course of efforts to resettle Afghans in the United States, safety has been the number one priority—both for Americans and Afghans alike. The rigorous vetting process that happened before employment, during the visa application process before coming to the United States and on an ongoing basis once Afghans were in the U.S. kept Americans and Afghans safe. Continuing to fund these vetting programs and the resettlement assistance that Afghans were provided once in the U.S. is crucial to ensuring the long-term success of the integration of Afghans into American society. Without a whole-of-government approach to supporting our wartime allies, we risk undermining an important program with a strong history of success.

⁷³ Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General, Audit of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Participation in the Handling of Afghan Evacuees During Operation Allies Refuge and Operation Allies Welcome, at 3 (June 2025), <https://oig.justice.gov/sites/default/files/reports/25-056.pdf>.

⁷⁴ *Id.*



Group of children watching USAREUR Band & Chorus perform for Operation Allies Welcome to lift morale. **Source: U.S. Air Force**

CHAPTER 4: THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S DISMANTLING OF THE SIV PROGRAM AND PROTECTIONS FOR AFGHANS

Upon taking office in January 2025, the second Trump Administration adopted policies and administrative changes that served to weaken the United States' long-standing commitment to protect the Afghans who risked their lives in service of the United States.

In September 2024, the State Department under Secretary Blinken released a report titled "A Plan to Wind Down the Program Authorized by the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009," which noted the numerous steps that would be required to "ensure a smooth, timely and orderly wind down" of the SIV program.⁷⁵ These steps included the additional authorization of visas, continued operations of the Office of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE) and sustained funding of the Enduring Welcome Administrative Expenses account. On each of these points, the second Trump Administration has failed

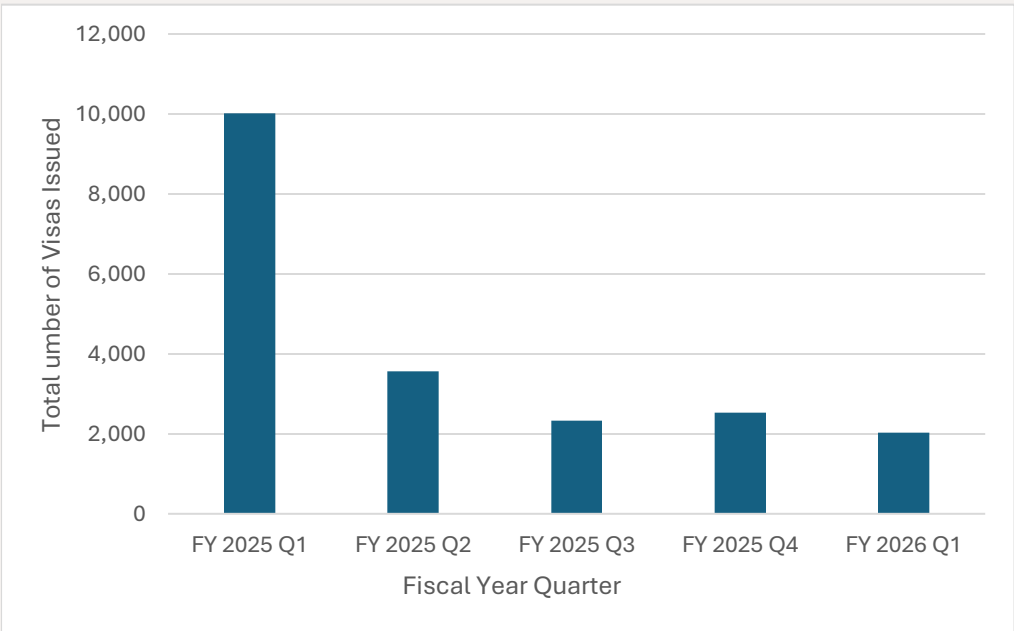
⁷⁵ U.S. Department of State, "A Plan to Wind Down the Program Authorized by the Afghan Allies Protection Act of 2009" (Sep. 25, 2024), <https://afghanevac.org/s/SIV-WINDDOWN-FY25-wex6.pdf>.

to deliver, instead taking specific steps to undermine and end the program, washing its hands of our Afghan allies and harming Afghans here in the United States legally.

Immediately prior to President Trump’s second term, on January 20, 2025, the State Department was steadily processing SIV applications, conducting interviews and issuing visas. Between October 1, 2024 and December 31, 2024, visas were issued to 2,206 principal applicants and 7,809 family members, resulting in 10,015 total visas issued over the three months of this reporting period.⁷⁶ Afghan SIV processing precipitously declined during the following reporting period from January 1, 2025 to March 31, 2025, which included the first two months of the second Trump Administration.⁷⁷

TOTAL NUMBER OF VISAS ISSUED, FY2025 TO FY2026

By Fiscal Year Quarter



⁷⁶ U.S. Department of State, “Posting of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Quarterly Report on the Department of State’s Website” (Jan. 2025), <https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/SIVs/Afghan-Public-Quarterly-Report-Q1-Jan-2025.pdf>.

⁷⁷ U.S. Department of State, “Posting of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Quarterly Report on the Department of State’s Website” (Apr. 2025), <https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/SIVs/Afghan-Public-Quarterly-Report-Q2-April-2025.pdf>.

Actions to Undermine the SIV Program

On his first day in office, President Trump signed Executive Order 14163, which suspended refugee admissions beginning January 27, 2025, and paused decisions on pending refugee applications.⁷⁸ EO 14163 did not directly suspend the Afghan SIV program. While the Afghan SIV program is separate from the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), many Afghans who still worked with the U.S. government in Afghanistan but were not eligible for the SIV program sought entry through the refugee system. This included Afghans who worked with the U.S. through grants and cooperative agreements and thus were not considered to be employed “by or on behalf of the U.S. government.” Instead, they pursued legal immigration pathways through the Priority-1 and Priority-2 and family reunification cases. Afghans already approved for refugee resettlement were denied entry due to this Executive Order. Family members of U.S. service members were stranded and minors were prevented from reuniting with their families in the United States.⁷⁹

While this executive order did not address the Afghan SIV program, another order issued within hours of President Trump taking office did. Executive Order 14169,⁸⁰ *Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid*, paused all foreign aid, including assistance for SIV travel. This suspended U.S. flights out of Afghanistan and from platforms where SIV processing was taking place. Afghans who had already been evacuated from Afghanistan were stranded at U.S. bases while even more Afghans were stuck in Afghanistan despite holding U.S. visas or COM approval.

The foreign assistance pause also suspended the work of resettlement agencies, as those organizations were considered by the Trump Administration to be part of the foreign assistance apparatus. On January 24, 2025, the State Department's PRM Bureau sent stop-work orders to resettlement agencies directing them to halt activities funded through the Reception & Placement (R&P) program—the federal program that helps newly arrived refugees during their first months in the United States.⁸¹ Agencies were instructed to “stop all work,” incur no new costs and cancel outstanding obligations where possible. The agencies responsible for helping Afghan SIV recipients and other Afghans newly arrived in the U.S. were suddenly unable to provide housing assistance, case management, employment support, school enrollment assistance and other support services.

⁷⁸ Exec. Order No. 14163, 90 Fed. Reg. 8459, Jan. 20, 2025.

⁷⁹ Rikki Almanza, “Veterans Groups Urge President Trump to Reconsider Executive Order on Refugee Program,” *California American Legion*, Feb. 3, 2025, <https://calegion.org/veterans-groups-urge-trump-to-reconsider-executive-order-on-refugee-program/>.

⁸⁰ Exec. Order No. 14169, 90 Fed. Reg. 8619, Jan 30, 2025.

⁸¹ Tiffany Stanley & Peter Smith, “Trump Orders Them to Halt Their Federally Funded Work,” *AP News*, Jan. 29, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-refugees-resettlement-funding-pause-afghan-allies-3f35577f504246132ede00dddf46f27>.

Other Department-wide actions also limited the ability of the SIV program to function. The State Department's staffing decisions and reorganization forced out many staff who were previously responsible for facilitating safe Afghan immigration efforts. Most significantly, the Trump Administration shut down the CARE Office, which served as the central coordinating office for relocating and resettling Afghan SIV recipients, refugees and asylum seekers.⁸²

On July 11, 2025, the State Department carried out a reduction in force affecting roughly 1,350 employees as part of the department-wide reorganization. This included CARE staff with expertise vital to the efficient functioning of the SIV program, including—

- Chief of Mission approval processing;
- SIV case management;
- Interagency coordination and coordination with military veterans and nonprofit sponsors;
- Management of transit hubs in third countries; and
- Movement of approved Afghan allies to the United States.⁸³

⁸² Rebecca Beitsch, "State Department Restructuring Scraps Office Dedicated to Relocating Afghan Allies," *The Hill*, May 30, 2025, <https://thehill.com/policy/international/5325809-state-department-restructuring-scraps-office-relocating-afghan-allies/>.

⁸³ Humeyra Pamuk, "State Department Starts Firing More than 1,350 Workers in Trump's Shake-Up of Diplomatic Corps," *Reuters*, July 13, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/legal/litigation/state-department-says-it-will-fire-more-than-1350-workers-trumps-shake-up-2025-07-11/>.

Immigration Crackdown

While Afghan SIV applicants were exempt from the second Trump Administration's Proclamation severely curtailing legal immigration, applicants and visa holders have still been caught up in the crackdown conducted by DHS against legal and illegal immigration.⁸⁴ Afghan SIV holders and applicants have been detained by ICE, had their COM approval revoked and been cut off from resettlement support.⁸⁵

'Wherever they end up, they end up' is the administration's view, official says

"They are now another country's problem," the official said, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe internal deliberations.

(WASHINGTON POST)

⁸⁴ Proclamation No. 10949, 90 Fed. Reg. 24497 (Jun 4, 2025).

⁸⁵ Madeleine May & Hannah Marr, "Afghan Ally Detained by ICE After Attending Immigration Court Hearing," *CBS News*, July 1, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/afghan-ally-detained-by-ice-immigration-court/>; Beth Bailey, "Abandoning America's Afghan Allies," *Washington Examiner*, Mar. 21, 2025; Press Release, Global Refuge, "Global Refuge Condemns Federal Stop Work Order Halting Refugee Resettlement Assistance," Jan. 27, 2025, <https://www.globalrefuge.org/news/refugee-stop-work-order/>.

SAYED NASER: Sayed Naser is an Afghan national who worked alongside U.S. military forces in Afghanistan as an interpreter and logistics contractor.⁸⁶ He legally entered the United States in 2024 after receiving humanitarian parole. He applied for asylum and a SIV based on his service supporting U.S. military operations in Afghanistan. On June 12, 2025, Sayed was detained by ICE, immediately after appearing for a scheduled immigration hearing at the San Diego Immigration Court. He has no criminal record in either the U.S. or Afghanistan. Naser served as a civilian interpreter for U.S. military forces between 2015 and 2018 and co-owned a logistics company providing support services to U.S. troops, including anti-landmine operations. According to his asylum declaration, after the Taliban returned to power in 2021, his affiliation with the United States placed him and his family at significant risk. Taliban fighters killed one of his brothers, abducted his father and forced his wife and children into hiding because of his work with U.S. forces. Following his arrest in the United States, DHS terminated his pending removal proceedings before the immigration court and instead placed him into expedited removal, a process that permits the government to remove certain noncitizens without a full immigration court hearing. An immigration judge agreed to dismiss his regular removal proceedings, making him subject to expedited removal.⁸⁷ Sayed, who worked to save American lives, was released from ICE custody in September 2025 and still does not have status that will protect him from future deportation. He may be forced to return to Afghanistan where he will be targeted by the Taliban.

ZIA: On July 16, 2025, ICE arrested an Afghan publicly identified as "Zia" immediately after he attended a scheduled USCIS biometrics appointment in East Hartford, Connecticut.⁸⁸ Zia lawfully entered the United States on humanitarian parole, had received COM approval and approval of his Afghan SIV petition and was completing the process to adjust his status to lawful permanent residence. Despite his approved SIV pathway, ICE placed him into expedited removal proceedings, asserting that he had entered the United States unlawfully. A federal district court stayed Zia's removal and he was released from ICE custody in October 2025. After his release, the government sought to overturn the district court's order, arguing that Zia should remain in mandatory detention because of alleged national security concerns. In October 2025, U.S. District Judge Leo T. Sorokin denied that request, finding that the government had not established a sufficient legal basis to reverse his release.⁸⁹ The judge did not resolve the merits of Zia's immigration case, which continues in immigration and federal courts. Despite his proven faithful and valuable service, Zia must now fight to stay in the United States with his family.

⁸⁶ Press Release, Shawn VanDiver, On the Occasion of the Release from ICE detention of Sayed Naser, Sep. 15, 2025, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/shawnvandiver_sayed-is-free-statement-from-afghan evac-activity-7377700269486297088-dVu6.

⁸⁷ Madeleine May & Hannah Marr, "Afghan Ally Detained by ICE After Attending Immigration Court Hearing," *CBS News*, July 1, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/afghan-ally-detained-by-ice-immigration-court/>.

⁸⁸ Press Release, Richard Blumenthal, Blumenthal Statement on Release of Afghan Interpreter from ICE Custody, Oct. 15, 2025.

⁸⁹ Mona Mahadevan, "ICE-Detained Afghan Interpreter Comes Home," *New Haven Independent*, Oct. 16, 2025, <https://www.newhavenindependent.org/2025/10/16/ice-detained-afghan-interpreter-comes-home/>.

The Shooting of Specialist Sarah Beckstrom and Staff Sergeant Andrew Wolfe

On November 26th, 2025, two West Virginia National Guard members, Sarah Beckstrom and Andrew Wolfe, were stationed near the White House in Washington D.C., when they were targeted and shot in an ambush-style attack.⁹⁰ Specialist Sarah Beckstrom later died from her injuries, while Staff Sergeant Andrew Wolfe was critically wounded.⁹¹ Authorities identified the suspect as Rahmanullah Lakanwal, a 29-year-old Afghan national who entered the United States in 2021 through Operation Allies Welcome. He had previously worked with CIA-backed Afghan counterterrorism units, often referred to as “Zero Units,” during the war in Afghanistan.⁹² Lakanwal was screened by the National Counterterrorism Center before his evacuation in 2021 and was granted asylum by the Trump Administration in 2025.⁹³ In response to the shooting, President Trump announced a “permanent pause on third-world migration,” part of a newly intensified crackdown targeting asylum seekers from what he called “hellholes like Afghanistan, Haiti, Somalia and many other countries.”⁹⁴ USCIS released updated guidelines pausing all asylum decisions for migrants currently in the United States; reviewing the green cards that allowed people from 19 countries, mostly from the Middle East or Africa, to live and work permanently in the United States; reassessing the asylum approvals issued during the Biden administration; indefinitely halting immigration applications filed by Afghan nationals; and barring Afghans from entering the country.⁹⁵

The alleged shooter of the National Guard was part of the Zero Units in Afghanistan. The Zero Units were part of a classified C.I.A. counterterrorism program that served as a surrogate force, armed, paid and controlled by the United States.⁹⁶ While the C.I.A. has established other surrogate forces since the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, the Afghan program was reportedly the biggest.⁹⁷ After the Taliban swept to power in 2021, the Biden

⁹⁰ Press Release, U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia, Afghan National Charged with the Murder of National Guard Soldier Sarah Beckstrom, Dec. 2, 2025.

⁹¹ Press Release, U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia, Afghan National Accused in Ambush Killing of National Guard Member Near White House Is Indicted on Additional Federal Charges, June 16, 2026; Gabe Cohen, Nicky Robertson & Nicquel Terry Ellis, “National Guard Member Sarah Beckstrom Dies, Andrew Wolfe Remains Hospitalized After Shooting in Washington, DC,” *CNN*, Nov. 27, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/11/27/us/sarah-beckstrom-andrew-wolfe-national-guard>.

⁹² Anna Schechter et al., “D.C National Guard Shooting Suspect Identified as Afghan National Who Worked with CIA. Here's What We Know,” *CBS News*, Nov. 28, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/suspect-dc-national-guard-shooting-afghan-national-what-we-know>.

⁹³ Anne Flaherty, “National Guard shooting suspect was likely vetted by US before being granted asylum,” *ABC News*, Nov. 28, 2025, <https://abcnews.com/Politics/national-guard-shooting-suspect-vetted-us-granted-asylum/story?id=127930034>.

⁹⁴ Matthieu Aikins & Wesley Morgan, “They Fought for the C.I.A. in Afghanistan. In America, They're Living in Fear,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 23, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/23/magazine/zero-units-cia-afghanistan.html>.

⁹⁵ Hamed Aleaziz, Jazmine Ulloa, & Allison McCann, “Trump's Crackdown in Wake of Shooting Blocks Legal Pathways for Migrants,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 1, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/01/us/politics/trump-dc-shooting-immigration.html>; News Release, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, USCIS Implements Additional National Security Measures in the Wake of National Guard Shooting by Afghan National, Nov. 27, 2025; Procl. No. 10998, 90 Fed. Reg. 59717, Dec. 16, 2025.

⁹⁶ Matthieu Aikins & Wesley Morgan, “They Fought for the C.I.A. in Afghanistan. In America, They're Living in Fear,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 23, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/23/magazine/zero-units-cia-afghanistan.html>.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/23/magazine/zero-units-cia-afghanistan.html>.

⁹⁷ *Id.*

Administration evacuated nearly ten thousand Zero Unit fighters and their families, but many of these soldiers have found themselves mired in America's complex immigration system and struggled for years to gain permanent asylum and necessary work visas.⁹⁸

Shortly after the Trump Administration took office in 2025, the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) sent stop-work letters to all ten national refugee resettlement agencies directing those agencies to immediately cease work under their federally funded Reception and Placement (R&P) cooperative agreements, including services for refugees and SIV holders who had already arrived in the United States. The agencies were instructed to "stop all work" and "cancel as many outstanding obligations as possible," including services for refugees and SIV holders already in the United States.⁹⁹

Following the National Guard shooting, the Trump Administration took additional actions that further restricted protections for Afghan nationals. These measures included pausing asylum adjudications for migrants already in the United States, initiating reviews of lawful permanent resident programs, reassessing asylum grants approved during the Biden Administration, indefinitely suspending the processing of immigration applications submitted by Afghan nationals and restricting the entry of Afghan citizens into the United States.¹⁰⁰

These policies affected not only Afghans already residing in the United States, but also thousands of Afghans in third countries and on U.S. military installations who were in the pipeline for resettlement. Beyond their immediate humanitarian consequences, these actions carry significant long-term national security implications. Future partners and allies may look to the treatment of Afghans following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and question the reliability of U.S. commitments to local partners in future conflicts.¹⁰¹ This will make it harder for the United States to successfully execute diplomatic, military or economic partnerships around the world.

⁹⁸ Brian Mann, "Afghan 'Zero Unit' fighters in the U.S. Faced Despair Before National Guard attack," *NPR*, Nov. 10, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/12/10/nx-s1-5637497/afghan-zero-unit-fighters-in-the-u-s-faced-despair-before-national-guard-attack>.

⁹⁹ "2025.01.24 PRM Stop Work Letter to Resettlement Agency," Immigration Policy Tracking Project, Jan. 24, 2025, <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/report-tump-memo-bars-resettlement-agencies-from-providing-services-to-refugees-currently-in-the-united-states>.

¹⁰⁰ Alana Wise, "Trump Administration Pausing All Asylum Decisions After National Guard Shooting," *NPR*, Nov. 28, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/11/28/g-s1-99760/trump-vows-permanent-pause-on-some-immigration-after-national-guard-shooting>; Hamed Aleaziz & Edward Wong, "Trump Pauses All Asylum Applications and Halts Visas for Afghans," *The New York Times*, Nov. 28, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/28/us/politics/trump-affirmative-asylum.html>.

¹⁰¹ Luke Coffey, "Abandoning Our Afghan Allies is a Moral and Strategic Mistake," *Hudson Institute*, June 18, 2025, <https://www.hudson.org/defense-strategy/abandoning-our-afghan-allies-moral-strategic-mistake-luke-coffey>.

Camp As Sayliyah, Doha, Qatar

When President Trump issued EO 14163 suspending USRAP, nearly 3,000 Afghans were at lily pads in Qatar and Albania, awaiting onward travel to the United States.¹⁰² ¹⁰³ The population in Albania were largely SIV recipients who eventually were able to come to the United States with the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) since the Executive Order removed funding but did not ban entry. The Afghans who remained in Camp As Sayliyah (CAS) when Executive Order 14163 went into effect

included SIVs and refugees. The remaining individuals were stranded as CAS – where they remain to this day. Congress has repeatedly inquired with the Trump Administration about the status of these Afghans and how they will be taken care of if they will not be allowed into the United States despite the majority having a legal pathway to the U.S. as refugees or asylees.¹⁰⁴ The State Department briefed Congressional committees in January 2026 on its intention to remove all Afghans from CAS by March 31, 2026, with the intention of decommissioning CAS by September 30, 2026. The United States would seek third country relocations for the remaining 1,100 or provide them with the untenable and potentially deadly option of returning to Afghanistan.¹⁰⁵

Members of Congress of both parties have repeatedly pushed the Administration to exercise due diligence and responsibly care for the population at CAS.¹⁰⁶ This includes allowing them to travel to the United States through the use of waiver authority provided in Executive Order 14163 or finding satisfactory third countries in which the population can safely resettle. In a June 2026 Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, Secretary Rubio suggested that there are at least five countries who are open to receiving



¹⁰² Exec. Order No. 14163, 90 Fed. Reg. 8459, Jan 20, 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/realigning-the-united-states-refugee-admissions-program/>

¹⁰³ Priscilla Alvarez, Haley Britzky, & Jennifer Handler, “Thousands of Afghans Who Helped the US Lose Access to Critical Resources Following Trump Directives,” *CNN*, Jan. 27, 2025, https://www.local3news.com/regional-national/thousands-of-afghans-who-helped-the-us-lose-access-to-critical-resources-following-trump-directives/article_8d0a7ded-6458-51f9-a5e9-690daaa45ef6.html.

¹⁰⁴ Press Release, Senator Shaheen, Ranking Member Shaheen to Secretary Rubio: We Must Stand with our Afghan Allies and Fulfill our Commitment to Protect, Mar. 18, 2025, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/dem/release/ranking-member-shaheen-to-secretary-rubio-we-must-stand-with-our-afghan-allies-and-fulfill-our-commitment-to-protect>.

¹⁰⁵ Press Release, Senator Shaheen, Ranking Member Shaheen Statement on Trump Administration Decision to Shut Down Afghan Relocation Operations in Qatar, Jan. 15, 2026, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/dem/release/ranking-member-shaheen-statement-on-trump-administration-decision-to-shut-down-afghan-relocation-operations-in-qatar>.

¹⁰⁶ Josh Schumacher, “More than 80 U.S. Lawmakers Demand Answers on Afghan Allies,” *World News Group*, June 12, 2026, <https://wng.org/sift/more-than-80-u-s-lawmakers-demand-answers-on-afghan-allies-1781281064>.

this population.¹⁰⁷ On September 29, 2026, Secretary Rubio approved a nine-month extension of operations at CAS in coordination with the Government of Qatar.¹⁰⁸ As of September 30, 2026, 1,034 Afghans remained at CAS, about 72 percent of them women and children, including roughly 150 family members of U.S. service members.¹⁰⁹

Temporary Protected Status for Afghans

In 2022, DHS announced the designation of Afghanistan for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for 18 months.¹¹⁰ TPS is a legal protection granted by the Secretary of DHS to eligible foreign-born individuals who are unable to return home safely due to conditions or circumstances preventing in their country of origin. At the time of the determination, Secretary Mayorkas stated that “this TPS designation will help to protect Afghan nationals who have already been living in the United States from returning to unsafe conditions. Under this designation, TPS will also provide additional protections and assurances to trusted partners and vulnerable Afghans who supported the U.S. military, diplomatic and humanitarian missions in Afghanistan over the last 20 years.”¹¹¹ According to DHS at the time of determination, the TPS designation would allow approximately 74,500 Afghans who were residing in the United States as of March 15, 2022, to remain and work legally through November 20, 2023. In September 2023, Secretary Mayorkas extended Afghanistan's TPS designation for another 18 months, through May 20, 2025.

In May 2025, the Trump Administration announced the termination of Afghanistan's TPS designation, effective July 14, 2025.¹¹² As of March 31, 2025, 8,105 Afghan nationals were covered by TPS according to USCIS.¹¹³ At the time of the termination, conditions facing Afghans – in particular Afghan women and girls and those who were supportive of the U.S. mission in Afghanistan – were, and remain, dire. Senator Shaheen and Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska sent a letter to Secretaries Rubio and Noem urging them to reconsider this decision and immediately reinstate TPS protections for Afghan nationals – a letter the Trump Administration has not responded to.¹¹⁴ By July 2025, Afghan women

¹⁰⁷ Statement of Marco Rubio, Secretary of State, Review of the FY27 State Department Budget Request, Hearing before the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, June 2, 2026, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/review-of-the-fy27-state-department-budget-request>.

¹⁰⁸ Matthew Lee and Farnoush Amiri, “US delays closure of Qatar camp housing more than 1,000 Afghans who helped the US war effort,” *AP*, September 29, 2026, <https://apnews.com/article/afghans-qatar-camp-refugees-rubio-trump-5ebbc85b0564a52227cba75ae66ff9ac#>.

¹⁰⁹ *Id.*

¹¹⁰ Designation of Afghanistan for Temporary Protected Status, 87 Fed. Reg. 30976, May 20, 2022.

¹¹¹ Press Release, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Secretary Mayorkas Designates Afghanistan for Temporary Protected Status, March 16, 2022, <https://www.uscis.gov/archive/secretary-mayorkas-designates-afghanistan-for-temporary-protected-status>.

¹¹² Termination of the Designation of Afghanistan for Temporary Protected Status, 90 Fed. Reg. 20309-20312, May 13, 2025.

¹¹³ Data provided to SFRC by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

¹¹⁴ Press Release, Senator Shaheen, Ranking Member Shaheen, Senator Murkowski Send Letter Condemning Termination of Temporary Protected Status for Afghan Nationals, May 30, 2025, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/dem/release/ranking-member-shaheen-senator-murkowski-send-letter-condemning-termination-of-temporary-protected-status-for-afghan-nationals>.

and human rights defenders were facing one of the most restrictive human rights environments in the world. Taliban authorities have systematically dismantled women's legal rights and civil society. By mid-2025, these restrictions had become deeply institutionalized, while women activists, journalists and human rights defenders continued to face arrest, intimidation, torture and forced exile. Those who were seen as sympathetic to the previous government and the U.S. mission in Afghanistan faced continued harassment. In total, not only had conditions in Afghanistan not improved to allow for the return of TPS-protected Afghans, but they were materially worse at the time that the Trump Administration decided to end TPS for Afghans. As a result of the TPS termination, all Afghans in the U.S. under TPS protections had to apply for asylum or “self-deport” to a third country or Afghanistan.¹¹⁵ Those choosing to seek an alternative legal pathway through the asylum system are subject to lengthy adjudication times under an already strained immigration system.¹¹⁶

Dismantling of the CARE Office at State Department

As the central coordinating body for third-country processing, flight coordination, family reunification and case escalation, the CARE office was critical to the efficient processing of Afghan cases.¹¹⁷ Under the Biden Administration, Congressional offices with the House and Senate Foreign Affairs Committee received monthly briefings from CARE to receive updates on processing of Afghan SIVs, P1/P2s, refugees and humanitarian parole. The last Congressional briefing received was on December 18, 2024.¹¹⁸ During that meeting, staff learned that there were, on average, approximately 5,000 resettlements per month in 2024. CARE also briefed staff on the remaining Afghans currently located at “lily pad” sites. At the start of the Trump Administration those briefings came to a halt, and all requests for information regarding the CARE office from Congressional offices were not answered by the Department.

¹¹⁵ Mandy Taheri, “Trump Admin Tells Afghan Refugees Who Fled Taliban to Self-Deport—Report,” *Newsweek*, April 17, 2025, <https://www.newsweek.com/trump-admin-tells-afghan-refugees-who-fled-taliban-self-deportreport-2061049>.

¹¹⁶ Ximena Bustillo, “The Trump Administration Has Undercut the U.S. Asylum Program. These 3 Charts Show How,” *NPR*, July 30, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/07/30/nx-s1-5891889/trump-asylum-program-changes-charts>.

¹¹⁷ Mona Garimella & Zahra Rahimi, “CARE’s Closure Signals a Deeper Crisis in Afghan Resettlement Policy,” *The Diplomat*, Aug. 18, 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/08/cares-closure-signals-a-deeper-crisis-in-afghan-resettlement-policy/>.

¹¹⁸ Staff notes from briefing.

Over the first few months of the Trump Administration, it became clear that CARE was being targeted by the Administration for termination. Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff spoke to CARE employees who confirmed that there was a wind down plan for CARE operations that had been sent to Department leadership for approval. Personal service contractors were fired, including entire case management teams. In May of 2025, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee received a congressional notification on the State Department's reorganization which eliminated the CARE office and realigned its functions into the Afghanistan Affairs Office.



Leaving Afghans Stranded in Neighboring Countries

Following the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban and the establishment of their authoritarian regime, millions of Afghans were forced out or sought refuge in neighboring countries. By the end of 2024, the number of Afghan refugees reported globally was 5.8 million - accounting for one of the largest protracted refugee situations in the world.¹¹⁹ In both Iran and Pakistan, Afghans represent a large portion of the refugee population; Iran hosts at least 3.5 million Afghan refugees and Pakistan hosts 1.6 million refugees.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2024, U.N. Doc. HCR/GTR/2024/01 (June 2025), <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/global-trends-report-2024.pdf>.

¹²⁰ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Afghan Refugee Crisis Explained," Sept. 10, 2025, <https://www.unrefugees.org/news/afghanistan-refugee-crisis-explained/>.

According to UNHCR's 2024 Global Trends report, returns of Afghans to Afghanistan from both Iran and Pakistan resulted in a decrease of global Afghan refugees by 10 percent. Afghans are not returning to Afghanistan because of improved conditions in Afghanistan, but rather because of deteriorating conditions in their host countries or government policies to refoul refugees.

Pakistan

Pakistan has hosted millions of Afghan refugees over decades of conflict in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan does not have a domestic refugee law or a permanent procedure allowing Afghans to apply individually for refugee status.¹²¹ In 2006 and 2007, Pakistan conducted its largest refugee registration exercise when it issued Proof of Registration (PoR) cards.¹²² In 2017, Pakistan conducted a second documentation exercise for many unregistered Afghans. Instead of recognizing them as refugees, the government issued Afghan Citizen Cards (ACCs), which did not confer refugee status.¹²³ Afghans arriving after the Taliban takeover in 2021 have not had the opportunity to register under any refugee or recognition scheme, resulting in an uncertain situation for those Afghans seeking safety in Pakistan.¹²⁴ These Afghans include SIV applicants, applicants to USRAP and family reunification cases.

On September 26, 2023, Pakistan's Ministry of Interior internally issued the Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan (IFRP), establishing a three-phased approach to removing foreign nationals without legal status, with Afghans constituting the overwhelming majority of those affected.¹²⁵ The government gave undocumented foreigners until

¹²¹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Pakistan, Protection, <https://www.unhcr.org/pk/what-we-do/protection> (last visited July 30, 2026).

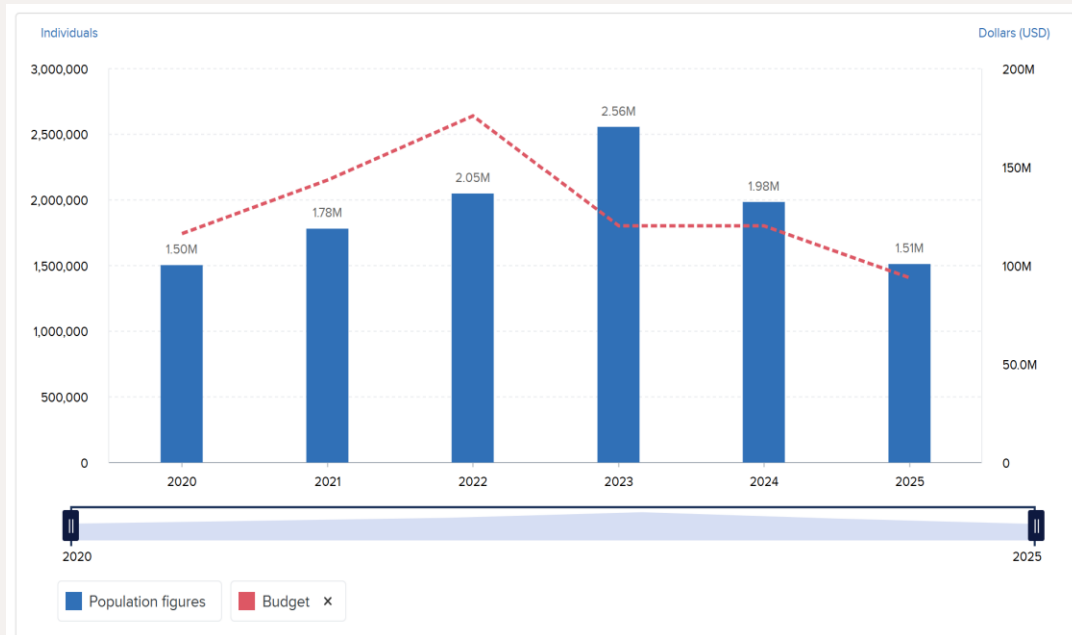
¹²² Briefing Notes, UNHCR Spokesperson Ron Redmond, Registration of Afghans in Pakistan, Feb 16, 2007.

¹²³ International Organization for Migration Pakistan, Undocumented Afghans, <https://pakistan.iom.int/undocumented-afghans> (last visited July 30, 2026).

¹²⁴ Devon Cone & Sabiha Khan, "They Left Us Without Any Support": Afghans in Pakistan Waiting for Solutions, Refugees International, at 11 (July 2023).

¹²⁵ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Rights Mapping and Analysis Platform, Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan, 2023, <https://rimap.unhcr.org/node/63575>, (last visited July 30, 2026); Asia Displacement Solutions Platform, Briefing Note: Deported to What? Afghans in Pakistan, <https://adsp.ngo/publications/briefing-note-deported-to-what-afghans-in-pakistan/> (last visited July 30, 2026).

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Source: UNHCR

October 31, 2023 to leave voluntarily or face arrest and deportation beginning November 1. According to the original Ministry of Interior plan, the stages of the plan included—

- **Phase 1 (November 2023):** Deportation of undocumented and unregistered foreigners and those who had overstayed their visas.
- **Phase 2 (implemented in 2025):** Removal of ACC holders, who had previously been allowed to remain in Pakistan despite having a more limited legal status than registered refugees.
- **Phase 3 (proposed):** Repatriation of PoR cardholders—Afghans formally recognized by Pakistan and UNHCR as refugees. As originally conceived, this phase contemplated the eventual return of registered refugees, though its implementation has depended on subsequent government decisions and extensions of PoR validity.

Under the Biden Administration, Afghans arriving in Pakistan after 2021 with a viable legal pathway to the United States but not registered as refugees were given a letter to be provided to Pakistani deportation officials stating their status with the U.S. refugee system.¹²⁶ These letters largely prevented deportations of Afghans with a pathway to the U.S. In 2025, Pakistan expanded its removal program into Phase 2 while the Trump Administration cut off those legal immigration options that were giving Afghans in

¹²⁶ Committee Staff meetings with CARE officials, 2023 and 2024.

Pakistan a pathway out. Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff were informed by the Embassy of Pakistan that individuals who had proof that they were being processed by the United States had until September 30, 2025 to be processed and leave the country, when the existing arrangement between the Government of Pakistan and the United States expired.¹²⁷ In 2026, as Afghanistan and Pakistan have escalated military clashes and closed their borders, the Pakistani authorities have intensified expulsion efforts, deporting nearly 450,000 Afghans back to Afghanistan.¹²⁸

Iran

With its geographic proximity and shared language and cultural ties, Iran has hosted millions of Afghan refugees over the years of conflict in Afghanistan.¹²⁹ The fate of the Afghan population in Iran has been less tied to the actions of the United States than its counterpart in Pakistan due to the longstanding lack of diplomatic ties between the countries.¹³⁰ In Iran, there are approximately 770,000 registered refugees holding Amayesh cards, which provide Afghans with recognized refugee status and access to certain services, although rights remain limited compared with Iranian citizens. Without Amayesh cards, millions of Afghans have relied on temporary registration or “headcount” documents that allowed limited access to education, health care, work authorization, banking and rental housing.¹³¹ In 2025, Iranian authorities narrowed or revoked many of these arrangements, leaving many at risk of deportation. A substantial portion of the Afghan population lacks legal status, making them particularly vulnerable to arrest and removal. In 2025, Iran announced that undocumented Afghans should leave voluntarily or face removal, and deportations increased throughout the spring.¹³² Following the June 2025 Iran-Israel conflict, expulsions accelerated dramatically amid heightened security concerns and public allegations—often unsupported by evidence—that some Afghans had collaborated with Israel.¹³³

¹²⁷ Notes from Committee Staff Meeting, March 2025.

¹²⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Afghanistan Situation, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/afghanistan>, (last visited July 29, 2026); Elian Peltier & Zia Ur-Rahman, “Fed Up with the Taliban, Pakistan Expels One Million Afghans,” *The New York Times*, Dec. 2, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/11/30/world/asia/pakistan-afghans-mass-expulsions.html>.

¹²⁹ Mitra Naseh, “One of the World’s Largest Refugee Populations, Afghans Have Faced Increasing Restrictions in Iran,” *Migration Policy Institute*, Jan. 7, 2025, <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/journal/feature/one-worlds-largest-refugee-populations-afghans-have-faced-increasing-restrictions>.

¹³⁰ U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, “U.S. Relations With Iran,” Bilateral Relations Fact Sheet, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-iran/> (last visited July 30, 2026); U.S. Virtual Embassy Iran, “Policy & History,” <https://ir.usembassy.gov/policy-history/> (last visited July 30, 2026).

¹³¹ Amnesty International, “Afghanistan: Forced Returns to Taliban Rule Must End as Latest Figures Reveal Millions Unlawfully Deported in 2025,” Dec. 17, 2025, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2025/12/afghanistan-forced-returns-to-taliban-rule-must-end-as-latest-figures-reveal-millions-unlawfully-deported-in-2025/>; UNHCR Iran, “CAFIA Announcement on the Decision for Headcount Slip Holders,” Mar. 12, 2025, <https://help.unhcr.org/iran/en/2025/03/12/cafia-announcement-on-the-decision-for-headcount-slip-holders/>.

¹³² International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Afghanistan Flash Update: Sharp Rise in Forced Returns from Iran*, at 1 (June 2025), <https://afghanistan.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbd11071/files/documents/2025-06/iom-afghanistanflash-update-1.pdf>; Mixed Migration Centre, “Iran’s Afghan Expulsion Surges: Dangerous Returns for Scapegoated Afghans,” *Mixed Migration Review* 2025, Nov. 20, 2025, <https://mixedmigration.org/publications/mmr/2025/iran-afghan-expulsion-dangerous-returns/>.

¹³³ “Hundreds of Thousands of Afghans Forced to Leave Iran Amid Crackdown, UN Says,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Radio Azadi*, July 6, 2025, <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-pakistan-deportation-afghan-migrants/33465419.html>; Center for Human Rights in Iran, “Iran Forcibly Deports Nearly 600,000 Afghan Migrants Amid Post-War Crackdown,” July 9, 2025, <https://iranhumanrights.org/2025/07/iran-forcibly-deports-nearly-600000-afghan-migrants-amid-post-war-crackdown/>;

Halting the SIV Process and Stranding Afghans

The decision to suspend the SIV program has left 155,367 applicants in the SIV process. These individuals are in the United States, in third countries and stuck in Afghanistan.¹³⁴ Federal agencies continue to process many pending Afghan SIV cases, including COM reviews, security screening, NVC processing and, in some instances, consular interviews. However, under executive policy implemented effective January 1, 2026, the State Department has suspended the issuance of immigrant visas to Afghan nationals, including Afghan SIVs. Consequently, applicants who have otherwise completed the statutory requirements remain unable to receive visas or travel to the United States while the suspension remains in effect. The State Department reported that one principal applicant and three family members were issued visas between January and March 2026.¹³⁵ Administrative processing of pending cases continues. The FY2014 National Defense Authorization Act requires the State Department to complete SIV processing within nine months.¹³⁶ According to the Department's own quarterly reporting, average processing time for the first quarter of FY2026 was 1,191 days, more than four times the statutory standard.¹³⁷

The suspension has been the subject of ongoing litigation. In *Afghan and Iraqi Allies v. Rubio*, a class action filed by the International Refugee Assistance Project in 2018 over unlawful SIV processing delays, the court issued an order on February 6, 2026 enforcing the government's adjudication obligations.¹³⁸ The federal district court held that the government may not indefinitely suspend adjudication of Afghan SIV applications already in the pipeline, distinguishing between processing applications and issuing visas. More recently, in *Dorcas International Institute of Rhode Island v. USCIS*,¹³⁹ a Rhode Island District Court vacated several USCIS policies that had broadly paused or delayed adjudication of immigration benefits for nationals of designated countries, including Afghanistan. Following that decision, USCIS announced that it would resume adjudicating affected applications while pursuing appellate review.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁴ AfghanEvac, "SIV Current State," <https://afghanevac.org/siv-current-state> (last visited July 30, 2026).

¹³⁵ U.S. Department of State, *Report to Congress on Posting of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Quarterly Report*, Report to Congress (May 2026), <https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/visas/SIVs/Quarterly-Congressional-Afghan-SIV-Report-Q2-FY2026.pdf>.

¹³⁶ National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-66, § 1213(b), 127 Stat. 672, 901-02 (2013).

¹³⁷ U.S. Department of State, Congressional Afghan Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Report: First Quarter, Fiscal Year 2026, at 7 (2026).

¹³⁸ *Afghan & Iraqi Allies Under Serious Threat Because of Their Faithful Service to the United States v. Rubio*, No. 18-cv-1388 (TSC), slip op. at 1 (D.D.C. Feb. 6, 2026).

¹³⁹ *Dorcas Int'l Inst. R.I. v. U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Servs.*, No. 26-cv-132-JJM-PAS 2026 WL 1622708 (D.R.I. June 5, 2026).

¹⁴⁰ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), Alert, "Court Order on Hold Policies," June 12, 2026, <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/court-order-on-hold-policies>.

Chief of Mission (COM) Revocations and “Improvidently Issued” Notices

Within two months of the start of the second Trump Administration, several SIV holders in the United States received notices that the government was pursuing rescission of lawful permanent resident (LPR) status based on reexamination of the underlying SIV eligibility. Beginning in March 2025, Afghan lawful permanent residents who had legally arrived in the U.S. through the SIV program received notices from USCIS questioning or seeking to revoke their immigration status. According to guidance published by the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP), withdrawal of COM approval does not itself revoke permanent resident status.¹⁴¹ However, because COM approval is the statutory basis for an Afghan SIV, withdrawal of that approval may prompt USCIS to issue a Notice of Intent to Revoke (NOIR) the underlying SIV petition (typically Form I-360).¹⁴² If USCIS revokes the petition, the government may then seek rescission of lawful permanent resident status or initiate removal proceedings.

Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff independently reviewed documentation sent by the COM Designee at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul withdrawing previously-granted COM approval to Individual X. The letter cites “lack sufficient documents to make a determination,” and claims that the applicant in this case “did not provide a valid letter of recommendation with your application.”¹⁴³ In appealing the denial, the applicant again provided the letter of recommendation from the Department of the Army to the COM at Embassy Kabul, which includes certification of eligible employment, testimonial that the applicant provided “exceptional, faithful and valuable service to the U.S. Army” and confirmed that the letter writer believed that the applicant did not pose a threat to national security. Despite the provision of this letter of recommendation, the appeal was denied, citing “You did not provide a valid letter of recommendation.”¹⁴⁴

Following the National Guard shooting, President Trump announced that the U.S. would “re-examine” all Afghan nationals who came to the United States under the Biden Administration.¹⁴⁵ The Comprehensive Re-Review Policy required USCIS to reopen and reexamine previously approved immigration benefits for applicants from certain countries, including Afghanistan. The Trump Administration erroneously claimed that the

¹⁴¹ International Refugee Assistance Project, “What to Know About Chief of Mission (COM) Revocations for Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs),” <https://support.iraplegalinfo.org/hc/en-us/articles/36237176957460-What-to-Know-about-Chief-of-Mission-COM-Revocations-for-Lawful-Permanent-Residents-LPRs> (last visited July 30, 2026).

¹⁴² U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Affairs, “Afghan Frequently Asked Questions,” <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/immigrate/special-immig-visa-afghans-employed-us-gov/afghan-faq.html> (last visited July 30, 2026).

¹⁴³ Letter viewed by Committee Democratic staff titled “Chief of Mission Withdrawal of Support for Afghan Special Immigrant Visa” and issued in May 2025.

¹⁴⁴ Letter viewed by Committee staff titled “Denial of Chief of Mission Appeal for Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Status” and issued November 2025.

¹⁴⁵ Phil Helsel & Jennifer Jett, “Trump Says U.S. Must ‘Re-Examine’ Everyone Who Came from Afghanistan Under Biden After National Guard Shooting,” *NBC News*, Nov. 27, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-re-examine-afghan-nationals-biden-administration-national-guard-rcna246172>.

Biden Administration prioritized expediency of processing applications over “detailed screening and vetting,” despite the extensive and ongoing nature of the vetting under the Biden Administration.¹⁴⁶ A coalition of immigrant service organizations and labor unions challenged this policy as well as related policies of USCIS that were implemented in late 2025 and early 2026 that suspended or delayed adjudication of immigration benefits for nationals of designated “travel ban” countries, including Afghanistan, and indefinitely paused affirmative asylum adjudications.¹⁴⁷ On June 5, 2026, a federal court ruled that the Comprehensive Re-Review Policy was illegal, preventing the U.S. government from reviewing all cases for certain nationalities as a whole. The government can still review previously approved cases based on individual factors, and the Department of Justice has said that it intends to appeal the ruling.

¹⁴⁶ “Trump Administration Plans to Review Refugees Admitted Under Biden, Memo Obtained by the AP Says,” *PBS News*, Nov. 25, 2025, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-administration-plans-to-review-refugees-admitted-under-biden-memo-obtained-by-the-ap-says>.

¹⁴⁷ *Dorcas Int’l Inst. of Rhode Island v. United States Citizenship & Immigr. Servs.*, No. 26-CV-132-JJM-PAS, 2026 WL 1622708 (D.R.I. June 5, 2026) at *8-9. (alleging that the policies violated the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), and the Fifth Amendment by placing otherwise eligible applicants into indefinite legal limbo based largely on their nationality.)

THE DEATH OF MOHAMMAD NAZEER PAKTIAWAL IN ICE CUSTODY

Mohammad Nazeer Paktiawal, a 41-year-old Afghan national, husband and father of six, died on March 14, 2026, less than 24 hours after being taken into ICE custody in the Dallas area. Paktiawal served alongside U.S. Army Special Forces in Afghanistan for more than a decade before being evacuated to the United States with Operation Allies Refuge. He entered the United States on humanitarian parole and was living in Richardson, Texas, with his family while pursuing an asylum claim.¹ ICE stated that his humanitarian parole had expired in August 2025 and that he was subject to removal proceedings. ICE also cited pending criminal charges related to alleged SNAP fraud and theft, although public reporting indicated he had not been convicted of those offenses at the time of his death.

According to family members, ICE agents arrested Paktiawal outside his home on the morning of March 13, 2026, while he was preparing to take several of his children to school. Family members stated he was arrested in front of his children, who witnessed him being taken away. ICE's Detainee Death Report states that later that day, while being processed at the Dallas Field Office, Paktiawal complained of shortness of breath and chest pain. He was transported to Parkland Hospital in Dallas, where physicians recommended overnight observation. According to ICE, the following morning hospital staff observed his tongue swelling and administered epinephrine. Despite subsequent lifesaving efforts, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation, he was pronounced dead at 9:10 a.m. on March 14, 2026.

In June 2026, the Dallas County Medical Examiner ruled Paktiawal's death an accident, although ICE had not yet publicly released the findings of its internal investigation.¹ The Dallas County Medical Examiner's autopsy report was signed on June 17, 2026. Family members continue to seek additional information regarding the medical events preceding his death and the care he received while in federal custody. Members of Congress have requested greater transparency from the Department of Homeland Security concerning the circumstances of his death.



CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

For over decades, the Afghan SIV Program has allowed Afghans to safely resettle in the United States, supporting our long-term national security by standing by our allies just as they stood by us through two decades of war.

It is necessary now that we demonstrate to our partners present and future that the United States stands by its commitments. Anything less than fulfillment of our promises to our Afghan allies in return for their faithful service undermines this mission. To this end, the U.S. should immediately undertake a number of steps to see this mission through to completion.

1. **Immediately resume the issuance of visas** and provide the National Visa Center and Afghan SIV Unit with adequate staffing and resources to process applications. The Trump Administration should immediately resume issuing Afghan SIVs to address the backlog of 155,367 applicants in the pipeline, including 23,431 with COM approval. The resumption of visa issuance should coincide with increased staffing at the National Visa Center to support the processing of approximately 67,225 principal applicants who are undergoing pre-COM review at the NVC. The Department of State should also fully resource the Kabul COM or their designee to review the 64,711 applicants who are pending COM approval.

2. **Extend apply-by deadline and issue additional visas to cover the remaining pipeline.** Congress has routinely provided the necessary visas for the Afghan SIV program in year-end funding and defense authorization bills, but has authorized no new visa numbers since March 2024. For calendar year 2026, Congress should extend the date by which applicants must apply for Chief of Mission approval and authorize a sufficient number of visas to responsibly wind down the SIV program. 100,000 additional visas would ensure the responsible winding down of the program. Such a one-time authorization should also make it clear that these visas are not transferable and expire when there are no additional applications pending COM approval. This would allow all remaining eligible applicants to receive a SIV, as the United States promised they would.
3. **Develop a comprehensive strategy to address the backlog of applicants.** Under the previous Administration, changes were continually made to the Afghan SIV process to improve its efficiency while maintaining rigorous standards of vetting and screening. The Trump Administration should continue these advances while developing a strategy for processing applications. The Secretary of State, in coordination with the Secretaries of Homeland Security and Defense, should develop a strategy that includes—
 - a. A review of current staffing levels and resourcing across all interagency offices engaged in the SIV process;
 - b. An analysis of expected COM approvals and denials of those in the pipeline in order to most efficiently resource the process;
 - c. A plan for collecting disaggregated data, including by gender, of those applying to the program and those who have been issued visas;
 - d. An assessment of the procedures across the SIV application process for communicating with the applicant, and areas to improve these procedures; and
 - e. Regular consultation with Congress, legal aid groups and advocacy groups engaged in supporting Afghan SIV applicants.
4. **Restore the Afghan Refugee Relocation System.** The actions taken to halt the Afghan SIV program and the other protections provided to Afghans in the United States should be reversed and the protections restored. This includes—
 - a. Restoring the SIV exception to proclamation 10998 so that Afghans who are otherwise eligible can receive visas;
 - b. Restoring and fully staffing the Office of the Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE), which Congress codified in Section 7810 of the FY2025 National Defense Authorization Act, and resume relocation flights conducted by the CARE office;
 - c. Reopening the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program to Afghans, including P-1 and P-2 referrals;

- d. Utilize the nine-month extension at Camp As Sayliyah to complete processing for eligible residents, U.S. military family members and family reunification cases, and ensure no one is forcibly returned to Afghanistan; and
- e. Reinstate TPS status for Afghans previously eligible.

5. **Enhance record keeping.** The Department of Defense should develop a strategy to improve recordkeeping and biometric enrollment. This should include standardization of record keeping for all non-U.S. personnel employed by the military.

6. **Establish a permanent wartime allies program.** While the Afghan SIV program was established in 2009 not foreseeing another 12 years of war in Afghanistan, it still provided immeasurable benefit to the U.S. national security, including our military, diplomatic and intelligence personnel. The program created a promise of a safe pathway for those that risked their lives working on behalf of the U.S. mission. It is conceivable that the U.S. will call upon allies in future conflicts to support our work at great personal risk. To best provide for these future allies and as a demonstration of our commitment to fulfilling our end of the deal, a permanent wartime allies program should be established, structured on the following priorities—

- a. **Geographic and Partner Force Flexibility:** A future wartime allies program should reflect the evolving and unpredictable nature of global events and the range of partner forces that the U.S. cooperates with by giving certain officials the authority to designate and revoke eligibility for the program based on geographic and national security needs, the composition of our partner forces and the nature of their work.
- b. **Streamlined Processing:** Past SIV and U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) Direct Access Programs have involved unnecessary slow and circuitous applicant processing driven by systemic bureaucratic hurdles that have not resulted in improved vetting. A permanent program should take expedient action to streamline the application process with a goal of significantly speeding up adjudication, minimizing the burden on applicants, improving communication with applicants and clarifying the entire process to provide greater visibility on petition status for both applicants and advocates.
- c. **Clear Delineation of Roles and Responsibilities Across the Interagency:** As part of efforts to streamline the application process and reduce bureaucracy, the permanent SIV program should also ensure that the various steps in the SIV process are assigned to the appropriate lead agency. Further, the relevant federal agencies should ensure that an individual is clearly designated as the agency point of contact, responsible for coordinating SIV matters across the interagency process. The need for coordinating officials is reflected in the requirements in the

FY2014 NDAA, which established relevant coordinators at both the Department of State and the Department of Defense.

- d. **Data Collection and Retention Requirements:** A permanent SIV program should ensure that the relevant federal agencies appropriately delineate responsibilities for data collection and retention pertaining to partner forces and, as appropriate, ensure that U.S.-affiliated contracting companies are obligated to collect and maintain the information required to process future SIVs.
- e. **Enhanced Transparency and Oversight:** The permanent SIV program should take the lessons learned from the Afghan SIV program and incorporate comprehensive transparency and oversight mechanisms into its foundation. In addition to recurring, comprehensive reports to Congress, the administrators of the program should maintain a public-facing webpage with periodic reports on applicant figures, trends, processing information and other relevant information required by applicants and advocates.
- f. **Resourcing:** Prior to the implementation of a permanent wartime allies program, there should be an assessment of the required resourcing to effectively and efficiently administer such a program. While further refinements and additional resourcing may be identified after the initial creation of the permanent program, the Federal agencies should arrive at the development of those requirements through a deliberative process that reflects the needs of a long-term program.



CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The Afghan SIV program is not simply an immigration program—it is a national security imperative. For two decades, thousands of Afghan interpreters, engineers, intelligence specialists and other professionals stood shoulder to shoulder with American servicemembers and diplomats.

They enabled military operations, translated during combat patrols, gathered critical intelligence, and, when necessary, took up arms to defend American lives. They helped the United States advance its mission in Afghanistan under extraordinarily dangerous circumstances. Their service saved American lives and strengthened our ability to accomplish difficult missions. Protecting those who answered our call is both a moral obligation and a strategic necessity.

America's credibility depends on keeping its promises. Around the world, the United States relies on local partners who accept enormous personal risk to support U.S. forces and advance our national security interests.

Whether confronting terrorism, responding to humanitarian crises or competing with authoritarian adversaries, future operations will require trusted local allies. If those partners believe the United States will abandon them when circumstances become difficult, they will be

less willing to work alongside us. That loss of trust would undermine our ability to build coalitions, gather intelligence and protect American personnel in future conflicts.

The Afghan SIV program also advances U.S. security by recognizing that these applicants are not strangers to the United States government. To qualify, applicants must demonstrate qualifying employment by or on behalf of the U.S. government, obtain independent verification of that service through the COM process, and complete extensive interagency security screening before a visa is issued. These requirements reflect the commitment Congress made to safeguarding the homeland through rigorous vetting, while honoring the Afghans who served with our nation.

Delays in the SIV process have real national security consequences. Afghans who supported the United States continue to face threats from the Taliban because of their service to our country. The Trump Administration's reckless halt in visa issuance leaves these individuals and their families in danger while also sending a troubling message to current and future partners that American commitments may not be reliable. Improving the efficiency of the SIV program is therefore not only a humanitarian priority but also an investment in the credibility of U.S. foreign policy and the effectiveness of future military and diplomatic operations.

Supporting the Afghan SIV program has long been a bipartisan priority because it reflects enduring American values and enduring American interests.

It demonstrates that the United States stands by those who stand with us, strengthens our reputation as a reliable partner and reinforces the trust upon which successful military and diplomatic partnerships depend. In a world of increasingly complex security challenges, preserving that trust is an essential element of American leadership.