

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 28, 2022

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2210 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Lloyd Austin
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Austin,

We write regarding news reports that the Taliban is targeting our Afghan partners with information from biometric databases that the United States left behind in the administration's hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan.¹

According to a new report from Human Rights Watch, the U.S. military used sensitive data, including biometric data, to register Afghan soldiers and ensure payment for services rendered in support of U.S. These systems, which were abandoned when the U.S. military withdrew from Afghanistan, contained iris scans, fingerprints, photographs, occupational data, home addresses and names of relatives. As the world focuses its attention to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Taliban is using this personal information to increase targeted killings, torture, and forced disappearances of Afghans who helped the United States.²

Since the Taliban took control, the Afghan people have suffered significant losses in security, stability, and freedom. In particular, Afghan women and girls are again losing their rights to education, healthcare, job opportunities, and independence due to restrictive policies from the Taliban.³ The Taliban will continue to target the vulnerable with equipment and information that the Biden Administration left behind. We owe these Afghans who aided the U.S. military a debt of gratitude. We should show them that we will not forget their service and will not ignore their sacrifices for a better and freer Afghanistan.

In an effort to establish transparency and clear expectations, please provide answers to the following questions:

- 1) What are the policies and procedures governing when and how the U.S. collects sensitive data, including biometric data, of individuals working with the American military around the globe, including those

who supported U.S. efforts in Afghanistan? What are the safeguards associated with those policies and procedures? For example, where is such data stored and how is it disposed of in the event of mission changes or unintended transfers of control of the data?

- 2) Are these reports credible? If so, how does the administration plan to help our Afghan partners that are being targeted with this information?
- 3) What future steps will the administration take to improve its data collection and retention policies to be sure this does not happen again in places where we are militarily involved?

We look forward to a detailed response that addresses each of the above questions.

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn
U.S. Senator



Rick Scott
U.S. Senator



Joni Ernst
U.S. Senator



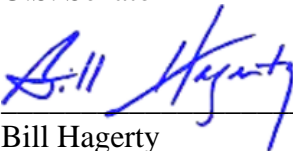
Mike Braun
U.S. Senator



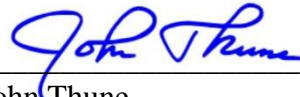
Thom Tillis
U.S. Senator



Deb Fischer
U.S. Senator



Bill Hagerty
U.S. Senator



John Thune
U.S. Senator

¹ J.P. Lawrence. "Report documents claims that Taliban are using biometric data collected by US, partners." Stars and Stripes. March 30, 2022.

<https://www.stripes.com/theaters/middle-east/2022-03-30/taliban-afghanistan-biometric-targeting-5525623.html>

² Heather Nauert. "Ukraine can be a model for helping those trapped in Afghanistan." The Hill. April 4, 2022.

<https://thehill.com/opinion/international/3258108-ukraine-can-be-a-model-for-helping-those-trapped-in-afghanistan/>

³ Margherita Stancati. "New Taliban Rules Impose Chaperones on Afghan Women." The Wall Street Journal. March 25, 2022. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/new-taliban-rules-impose-chaperones-on-afghan-women-11648200600>