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**Congress of the United States**  
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COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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MIDDLE EAST, NORTH AFRICA, AND GLOBAL  
COUNTERTERRORISM

ASIA, THE PACIFIC,

CENTRAL ASIA, AND NONPROLIFERATION

August 20, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden Jr.  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I write to urge you to remain flexible on the date of departure for the last American troops in Afghanistan and commit to bringing as many at-risk individuals to safety as possible. There was no easy answer to ending our involvement in Afghanistan, and I commend you for making the correct, but difficult, decision to withdraw United States forces from the country. The misguided agreement made by the Trump Administration with the Taliban left you with little choice. The last week and a half, however, has shown that there is an overwhelming demand for evacuation flights out of Afghanistan, both from American and Afghan citizens. It is clear that meeting this challenge by August 31<sup>st</sup> will be increasingly difficult given the current security situation.

The Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS) estimates, as of August 15<sup>th</sup>, there are 88,000 Afghan citizens in various stages of American visa applications, including those seeking a Special Immigrant Visa (SIV). I expect that caseload to climb in the coming days as the Taliban consolidates power and becomes increasingly repressive and violent. On August 17<sup>th</sup>, Department of Defense Spokesman John Kirby said our goal is to ultimately evacuate between 5,000 and 9,000 individuals per day. Since August 14<sup>th</sup>, we've evacuated 13,000 people, an average of more than 2,000 per day. Even if we were able to evacuate 9,000 people per day until the 31<sup>st</sup>, that does not leave us enough time to bring everyone awaiting evacuation to safety.

Furthermore, our withdrawal will mean the end of evacuation efforts for our international allies who are also working to evacuate their citizens and at-risk Afghans. 6,000 brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces are currently securing the Hamid Karzai International Airport (HKIA), allowing for military, civilian, and charter flights to take off. When the last American military forces withdraw, the Taliban will almost certainly take swift control of HKIA. If their treatment of evacuees waiting in line to access the airport is any indication, this will likely mean an end to evacuation flights. I know that you are working in close coordination with NATO and G7 allies on the withdrawal, and strongly encourage you to coordinate any ultimate withdrawal with our allies.

I understand intense deliberations went into your decision to withdraw our troops and agree that staying in Afghanistan longer would not have produced a demonstrably different result. I also understand and share your concern for the lives and safety of our troops in Afghanistan and want to bring them all home as soon as possible.

I was pleased to hear you say in your press conference on August 20<sup>th</sup> that you're committed to evacuating every American citizen from Afghanistan who wants to leave and will reassess the planned August 31<sup>st</sup> departure date depending on our progress in that regard.

I simply ask that you make the same consideration and allow for flexibility when it comes to bringing at-risk Afghan citizens to safety and allowing our allies to do the same. It may not be possible to rescue every single person who asks for our help, but we shouldn't let an arbitrary deadline stop us from making our best attempt.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gerald E. Connolly". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Gerald E. Connolly  
Member of Congress