



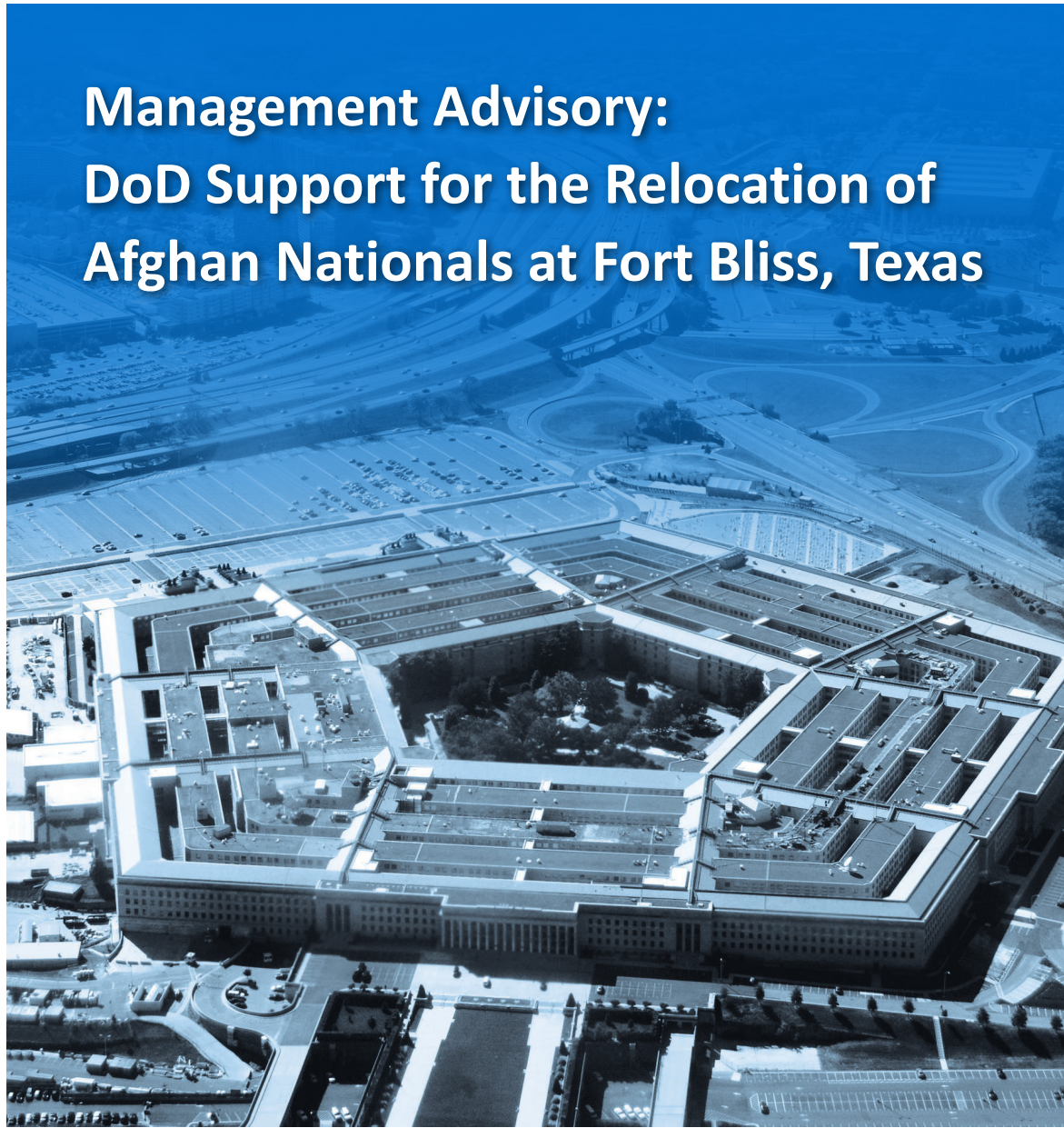
INSPECTOR GENERAL

U.S. Department of Defense

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Management Advisory: DoD Support for the Relocation of Afghan Nationals at Fort Bliss, Texas







**INSPECTOR GENERAL
DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
4800 MARK CENTER DRIVE
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February 16, 2022

MEMORANDUM FOR COMMANDER, U.S. NORTHERN COMMAND
COMMANDER, U.S. ARMY MATERIEL COMMAND
COMMANDER, U.S. ARMY NORTH
DIRECTOR, JOINT STAFF
AUDITOR GENERAL, DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

SUBJECT: Management Advisory: DoD Support for the Relocation of Afghan Nationals
at Fort Bliss, Texas (Report No. DODIG-2022-064)

The purpose of this management advisory is to provide the officials responsible for receiving, housing, supporting, and preparing Afghan evacuees for movement to their final resettlement location with the results from our site visit to Task Force (TF) Bliss at Fort Bliss, Texas. The audit team visited TF Bliss from October 25 through 29, 2021. We conducted the work on this project with integrity, objectivity, and independence, as required by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's Quality Standards for Federal Offices of Inspector General.

We conducted our review of TF Bliss operations at Fort Bliss as part of the "Audit of DoD Support for the Relocation of Afghan Nationals (Project No. D2021-D000RJ-0154.000)."¹ The objective of this audit is to determine whether the DoD adequately planned and provided support for the relocation of Afghan evacuees. The audit team visited Doña Ana Range Complex to review housing and other facilities, security, medical care, and costs associated with this effort.² Despite limited time to plan for this massive effort, TF Bliss personnel housed and sustained Afghan evacuees.³ However, TF Bliss personnel did experience challenges, such as contractor medical providers obtaining New Mexico licenses and inadequate implementation of security measures.

The 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division (2/1 AD), 528th Hospital Center, and 93rd Military Police Battalion dedicated resources to support the effort. In addition, according to TF Bliss personnel, the extensive use of 2/1 AD Soldiers for the TF Bliss mission degraded the 2/1 AD's ability to train for future combat missions.

¹ DoD OIG Project No. D2021-D000RJ-0154.000, "Audit of DoD Support for the Relocation of Afghan Nationals," announced on August 23, 2021.

² TF Bliss used the Doña Ana Range Complex in New Mexico to support the mission.

³ DoD, interagency, and non-governmental organization personnel supported TF Bliss. However, for the purpose of this report, we refer to TF Bliss personnel as DoD personnel.

Operation Allies Refuge

On July 14, 2021, the President announced Operation Allies Refuge, with the Department of State (DOS) as the lead Federal agency, to support the relocation of Afghan evacuees who previously supported the U.S. Government and were in the process of completing their Special Immigrant Visa applications.⁴ Applicants' immediate family members were also included in the relocation effort. During Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Freedom's Sentinel, the U.S. Government employed Afghans in supporting roles to assist in these operations. Due to that employment, some Afghans, their families, and close friends faced serious and ongoing threats.

According to a statement by the President on August 30, 2021, the DoD executed the largest airlift in U.S. history, evacuating more than 120,000 people from Afghanistan in just 17 days. The DOS activated the Afghanistan Coordination Task Force and requested and received DoD support in the form of temporary housing, sustainment, and other support at suitable DoD facilities both within and outside the continental United States.⁵

Operation Allies Welcome

On August 29, 2021, the President announced that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) would serve as the lead Federal agency for Operation Allies Welcome, coordinating ongoing efforts across the U.S. Government to resettle vulnerable Afghans in the United States, including those who worked for the United States and Coalition forces since 2001.⁶ The DHS processes, screens, and vets Afghans in coordination with the DoD, the DOS, and other Federal agencies. The DOS and the Department of Health and Human Services are responsible for the final resettlement and integration efforts.

DoD Roles and Responsibilities Supporting Operation Allies Welcome

On August 15, 2021, the Secretary of Defense directed the U.S. Northern Command to provide temporary housing, sustainment, and support inside the United States for Afghan evacuees, their families, and other individuals at risk from the Taliban. As the DoD's lead combatant command for Operation Allies Welcome, the U.S. Northern Command provides housing and security at U.S. military installations. As of February 2, 2022, there were two U.S.-based military installations supporting the relocation of Afghan evacuees under Operation Allies Welcome.⁷

⁴ In 2014, Congress amended the Special Immigrant Visa program to provide U.S. visas for translators and interpreters who performed "sensitive and trusted activities" for the U.S. Government in Afghanistan.

⁵ The DOS leads the Afghanistan Coordination Task Force that includes experts from various U.S. Government agencies, including the DoD, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

⁶ Operation Allies Refuge was the operation to airlift at-risk Afghan evacuees, who supported the DoD, out of Afghanistan. Operation Allies Welcome is an ongoing effort across the U.S. Government to support these Afghan evacuees as they resettle in the United States.

⁷ The two locations were Fort McCoy, Wisconsin and Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey. Fort Lee, Virginia; Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia; Fort Bliss, Texas; Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico; Camp Atterbury, Indiana; and Fort Pickett, Virginia, processed their final evacuees between November 17, 2021, and February 1, 2022.

Task Force Bliss's Roles and Responsibilities Supporting Operation Allies Welcome

The U.S. Northern Command formed TF Bliss to support Operation Allies Welcome with the mission to safely receive, house, support, and prepare Afghan evacuees for movement to their final resettlement locations. TF Bliss used the Doña Ana Range Complex, New Mexico, to support the mission. TF Bliss developed the 86-acre Doña Ana Range Complex area with housing, dining facilities, religious centers, recreational space, as well as working space for non-governmental organizations. TF Bliss named the life support area Doña Ana Village (DAV). Figure 1 provides images of before and after construction of DAV in support of the Operation Allies Welcome mission.



As of October 24, 2021, TF Bliss comprised 1,821 DoD personnel from six entities, with the majority of DoD personnel coming from the 2/1 AD, 528th Hospital Center, and 93rd Military Police Battalion. According to TF Bliss personnel, they had minimal advance notice to plan for the arrival of Afghan evacuees. According to TF Bliss personnel, the following timeline illustrates the time TF Bliss personnel had to prepare for housing and sustaining Afghan evacuees.

- On August 13, 2021, the U.S. Northern Command directed TF Bliss personnel to provide support for Operation Allies Welcome.
- By August 19, 2021, 6 days after receiving the official mission, TF Bliss was capable of housing and sustaining 2,000 Afghan evacuees.
- On August 21, 2021, the first 322 Afghan evacuees arrived at DAV.
- On September 1, 2021, 11 days after the first Afghan evacuees arrived, TF Bliss had received 4,951 Afghan evacuees and was capable of housing and sustaining 10,000.

- As of September 6, 2021, TF Bliss was housing and sustaining 9,754 Afghan evacuees.
- During our site visit on October 29, 2021, TF Bliss was housing and sustaining 7,466 Afghan evacuees.
- On December 30, 2021, the last Afghan evacuees left DAV, ending the Operation Allies Welcome mission for TF Bliss.

Afghan Evacuee In-Processing at Doña Ana Village

TF Bliss personnel described for the audit team how the task force and interagency partners in-processed incoming Afghan evacuees. Upon arrival at DAV, TF Bliss personnel documented each Afghan evacuee on the task force's accountability spreadsheet, capturing each individual's name, age, and housing assignment. According to TF Bliss personnel, all arriving Afghan evacuees received an initial medical screening, a coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) rapid antigen test, and a COVID-19 vaccination.⁸ TF Bliss personnel, with the help of translators, provided Afghan evacuees a welcome briefing that explained DAV building locations, local area hazards to avoid, common American customs, and the installation rules, such as maintaining a sanitary living area and not leaving children unattended. TF Bliss personnel provided Afghan evacuees with hygiene products and took them to their assigned housing. TF Bliss personnel stated that Afghan evacuees met with interagency partners at DAV. The interagency partners registered the Afghan evacuees in the Hummingbird database, starting the process for relocating Afghan evacuees to permanent homes.⁹

Afghan Evacuee Sustainment Procedures and Observations

TF Bliss housed Afghan evacuees at DAV in Doña Ana County, New Mexico, in the existing buildings of an area used to house DoD personnel during range training. According to TF Bliss personnel, on August 17, 2021, TF Bliss began converting these existing buildings into barracks for the initial group of Afghan arrivals. In addition to the barracks, TF Bliss and contractor personnel erected tents to provide additional housing for Afghan evacuees. According to TF Bliss personnel, as of October 28, 2021, the task force had divided DAV housing into three living areas. Each area had a TF Bliss mayor cell responsible for public safety and care of Afghan evacuees.¹⁰

⁸ Rapid antigen testing for COVID-19, which is inexpensive and provides results in 15-30 minutes, uses a nasal swab to detect infection.

⁹ The Hummingbird database is a DOS-owned database used to support Operation Allies Welcome. The system captures Afghan evacuee identification data, such as name, date of birth, and passport number; medical data, such as lab results, vaccinations, and medical exams; and biometric data, such as fingerprints and photographs for immigrants seeking resettlement.

¹⁰ TF Bliss personnel serving as "mayors" of the DAV mayor cells were battalion commanders.

Existing Buildings Used as Barracks

As of October 29, 2021, TF Bliss was using 58 existing buildings as barracks to house Afghan evacuees. Out of the 58 barracks, 43 barracks housed families, 3 barracks housed single females, and 2 barracks housed unaccompanied minors. TF Bliss had an additional 10 barracks available for medical isolation. According to TF Bliss personnel, each barrack could accommodate a maximum of 26 Afghan evacuees sleeping on bunk beds. Figure 2 is an example of the barracks and life support areas for Afghan evacuees at DAV.



Tents

TF Bliss personnel and contractors erected tents to expand DAV's capacity. According to TF Bliss personnel, the tents generally housed up to 100 Afghan evacuees each; some tents housed more than 100 Afghan evacuees in order for TF Bliss personnel to house families together. TF Bliss also used these tents for multifunctional humanitarian purposes, such as providing spaces for educational activities, dining facilities, religious services, and donation distribution, as well as working spaces for Federal agencies and non-governmental organizations responsible for resettling Afghan evacuees. TF Bliss personnel said that they used curtains, later replaced with partitions, to divide the interior of the tents into private family areas. On October 29, 2021, DAV had 131 tents—98 for housing and 33 for other humanitarian support. Out of the 98 housing tents, 75 tents housed families, 2 tents housed single females, 20 tents housed single males, and 1 tent was not usable at the time of the site visit.

Figure 3 is an example of the tents used as barracks for Afghan evacuees and as space for humanitarian support activities on DAV.



Figure 3. Housing and Humanitarian Activities Tents at DAV
Source: The DoD OIG.

Amenities Provided to Afghan Evacuees

During the walkthrough of DAV, we observed the TF Bliss operations designed to provide housing and sustenance for Afghan evacuees.

Food and Water

On October 28, 2021, DAV contained four dining facilities. TF Bliss personnel said that the dining facilities were contractor-operated and served three hot halal meals a day, with each meal containing a protein, a grain, and a vegetable.¹¹ TF Bliss personnel said that the four dining facilities served approximately 32,000 plates daily. During our walkthrough, we observed no lengthy wait for Afghan evacuees at the dining facilities. TF Bliss personnel said that Afghan evacuees either ate in the dining facility or returned to their barracks with their food. We observed clean dining facilities and preparation kitchens. We also observed two, 24-hour, grab-and-go facilities stocked with bottled water, fruit, and snack items that TF Bliss personnel said were available in unlimited quantities for Afghan evacuees. TF Bliss personnel said that the contractor also created, and continuously stocked, 36 outdoor covered stations with bottled water that were available to Afghan evacuees at all times.

Restroom and Shower Facilities

As of October 26, 2021, Afghan evacuees housed at DAV used the preexisting hard structure shower and restroom buildings, as well as portable restroom facilities in the areas of DAV containing tents. TF Bliss personnel said that the hard structure shower and restroom

¹¹ "Halal" is Arabic for "permissible" and indicates that food was prepared in accordance with Islamic law.

buildings were handicap-accessible. In the tented areas, TF Bliss personnel provided temporary toilets, mobile restroom trailers, and mobile shower units. Handwashing stations were available for use outside of the restroom facilities in both the hard structure barrack and tented areas. TF Bliss personnel stated that contractor personnel maintained and cleaned the showers, restrooms, and portable restrooms six times per day. We observed contractor personnel cleaning these facilities during the site visit. Table 1 shows the number of showerheads and toilets available to male and female Afghan evacuees, respectively, in the hard structure barracks and tented areas of DAV.

Table 1. Shower and Restroom Facilities at DAV

Hard Structure Barrack Area	Male	Female	Total
Showerheads	110	112	222
Toilets	111	124	235
Tented Area	Male	Female	Total
Showerheads	158	158	316
Toilets	116	116	232

Source: TF Bliss.

Worship Tents

On October 29, 2021, DAV had five prayer tents—three male-only tents, one female-only tent, and one co-ed tent. Figure 4 is an example of the type of tent used for prayer tents.



Figure 4. Prayer Tent for Afghan Evacuees at DAV
Source: The DoD OIG.

Initial Provisions, Donations, and Laundry Facilities

TF Bliss personnel provided Afghan evacuees with clothing, towels, soap, and shampoo. We observed a warehouse where volunteers from a non-governmental organization received and sorted donations from both the local community and across the nation for delivery to distribution points within DAV. At one such distribution point, volunteers from the DHS distributed baby-related items, such as formula, diapers, and wipes. To distribute clothing, TF Bliss arranged one of the multifunctional humanitarian tents as a “storefront” where Afghan evacuees could receive and try on shirts or dresses, pants, and shoes. In addition, TF Bliss personnel said that each of the three mayor cells contained two modern laundry facilities where Afghan evacuees could drop off clothes to contractor personnel for laundering. During our site visit, TF Bliss personnel said they were in the process of building laundry facilities with 10 basin sinks each where Afghan evacuees could hand wash and hang dry their clothes. TF Bliss personnel stated that the Afghan evacuees requested this type of laundry facility. We observed one such facility under construction, and TF Bliss personnel stated there were plans for building five additional facilities.

Education and Recreation

TF Bliss developed several education and recreation opportunities for Afghan evacuees. Personnel from a non-governmental organization staffed the daycare. The non-governmental organization staff stated they opened the daycare facility daily from 9:00 a.m. to noon and 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. TF Bliss personnel said the daycare facility provided separate areas for younger children, aged 0 to 13 years, and older children, aged 13 to 17 years. TF Bliss also cleared land and created sports fields that Afghan evacuees could use to play soccer and volleyball. In addition, TF Bliss personnel had a military band perform two outdoor concerts for Afghan evacuees. TF Bliss personnel stated that non-governmental organization personnel provided job training, legal education, and cultural education for adult Afghan evacuees.

In response to Afghan evacuee interest in teaching English at DAV, TF Bliss also created a school for Afghan evacuees. For the school, TF Bliss personnel said they used a curriculum that a non-governmental organization developed specifically for Afghan refugees, which offered English and mathematics lessons in Pashto and Dari. TF Bliss personnel said they subsequently added social studies and art lessons to this curriculum. As of October 28, 2021, 60 volunteers from the Afghan evacuee community were serving as teachers and teaching assistants. TF Bliss personnel said that over 1,200 students, aged 3 to 73 years, enrolled in the first week of the school’s operation.

TF Bliss personnel said that providing educational and recreational opportunities helped increase security and well-being for Afghan evacuees at DAV. In their after-action report on the Operation Allies Welcome mission, TF Bliss personnel said they observed a reduction in criminal activity and lost child incidents and an increase in child safety after implementing

educational programming at DAV. Additionally, TF Bliss personnel said that the robust education and recreation program at DAV kept Afghan evacuees occupied and hopeful, and improved material conditions of life for the evacuees.

Information Dissemination

TF Bliss personnel said that they established multiple methods to communicate information to Afghan evacuees. TF Bliss personnel stated that they purchased an off-the-shelf radio broadcasting system and used it to broadcast information in Dari and Pashto, as well as music in English, over frequency modulation (FM) radio at DAV. In addition, TF Bliss used 32 information and security kiosks, located throughout DAV and staffed with military personnel, to provide Afghan evacuees with key information about their stay in the village or instructions for ways to receive help with the immigration process. TF Bliss personnel also placed information boards throughout the DAV living areas and near each dining facility, continually updating them with posters and flyers written in Pashto, Dari, and English. TF Bliss personnel used the information boards to report meal times, availability and location of services, safety and medical guidelines, information about animals and bugs indigenous to the area, and the school schedule. Figure 5 provides examples of informative flyers posted to the information boards at DAV.



Figure 5. Information Board Flyers Posted for Afghan Evacuees at DAV

Note: Top left flyer announces the unacceptability of crimes against women at DAV, bottom left flyer provides the school schedule, and the flyer on the right lists dining facility hours.

Source: The DoD OIG.

Finally, TF Bliss personnel said that they and interagency partners selected specific Afghan evacuees to participate in Key Leader Engagements. TF Bliss personnel stated that they and interagency partners selected these Afghan evacuees based upon previously working with them in Afghanistan and believed the overall Afghan population at DAV looked up to these Afghan evacuees for guidance and leadership. At the Key Leader Engagements, TF Bliss personnel shared updates and information on DAV operations and the immigration process, as well as heard and responded to any Afghan evacuee concerns. TF Bliss personnel said they conducted one all-male and one all-female Key Leader Engagement each week. TF Bliss personnel said that they stressed at each Key Leader Engagement that the representatives should disseminate the information learned during the meeting back to their tent or housing areas. TF Bliss personnel stated that although attendance was not required, at least one representative from each tent and housing area was usually present at each Key Leader Engagement.

In addition to the Key Leader Engagements, TF Bliss personnel said that the mayors of the DAV housing cells facilitated town halls in each mayor cell twice a week for all Afghan evacuees who wanted to discuss DAV operations, Afghan evacuee concerns, and upcoming events. According to TF Bliss personnel, each DAV mayor cell held both female-only and either male-only or co-ed town halls in order to facilitate open communication with Afghan evacuees who may not express concerns in the presence of the opposite gender due to cultural sensitivities. At the town halls, DoD, DHS, and contractor personnel taught classes to Afghan evacuees on U.S. law, hygiene, life outside of DAV, gender-based violence, childcare, and American customs and courtesies.

Afghan Evacuee Medical Procedures and Observations

TF Bliss medical personnel performed medical exams and administered immunizations required by the DHS and provided medical services to Afghan evacuees. TF Bliss medical personnel stated that they initially supported the medical mission for TF Bliss; however, TF Bliss transitioned all medical services to contractor personnel in early September 2021.

Immigration Exams and Vaccination

To satisfy immigration requirements, each Afghan evacuee received a medical exam that included a routine physical, screenings for communicable diseases, and screenings for mental health and substance abuse. A September 5, 2021, DHS letter stated that Afghan evacuees are required to receive 13 age-appropriate immunizations recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and undergo a tuberculosis screening at a federally funded facility. On September 8, 2021, the Commander, U.S. Northern Command ordered DoD personnel to provide all Afghan evacuees the immunizations recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Table 2 lists the 13 age-appropriate immunizations, required by the DHS, in support of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Table 2. Required Immunizations for U.S. Immigration

Required Immunizations	
1. Measles, Mumps, and Rubella	8. Influenza
2. Polio	9. Pneumococcal pneumonia
3. Tetanus and diphtheria toxoids	10. Rotavirus
4. Pertussis	11. Hepatitis A
5. Haemophilus influenza type B	12. Meningococcal
6. Hepatitis B	13. COVID-19
7. Varicella	

Source: The DoD OIG.

As of October 29, 2021, TF Bliss reported vaccinating 100 percent of eligible Afghan evacuees against COVID-19, measles, mumps and rubella, and varicella, and vaccinating 98 percent of eligible Afghan evacuees against polio. According to TF Bliss, TF Bliss and contractor medical personnel documented Afghan evacuee medical records on an SF 600 “Chronological Record of Medical Care” form. According to TF Bliss personnel, a nonprofit organization working with the DOS on Afghan evacuees’ immigration cases retained this form until an Afghan evacuee was ready to depart to a permanent home. According to TF Bliss medical personnel, the Afghan evacuees received this form before final departure.

Health and Wellness Medical Services

TF Bliss contracted for two medical clinics—one for males and the other for females and minors. Both clinics operated 24 hours per day, seven days per week, providing Afghan evacuees with immediate medical support for illnesses and injuries.

Figure 6 is an example of the inside of one of the medical clinics at DAV.



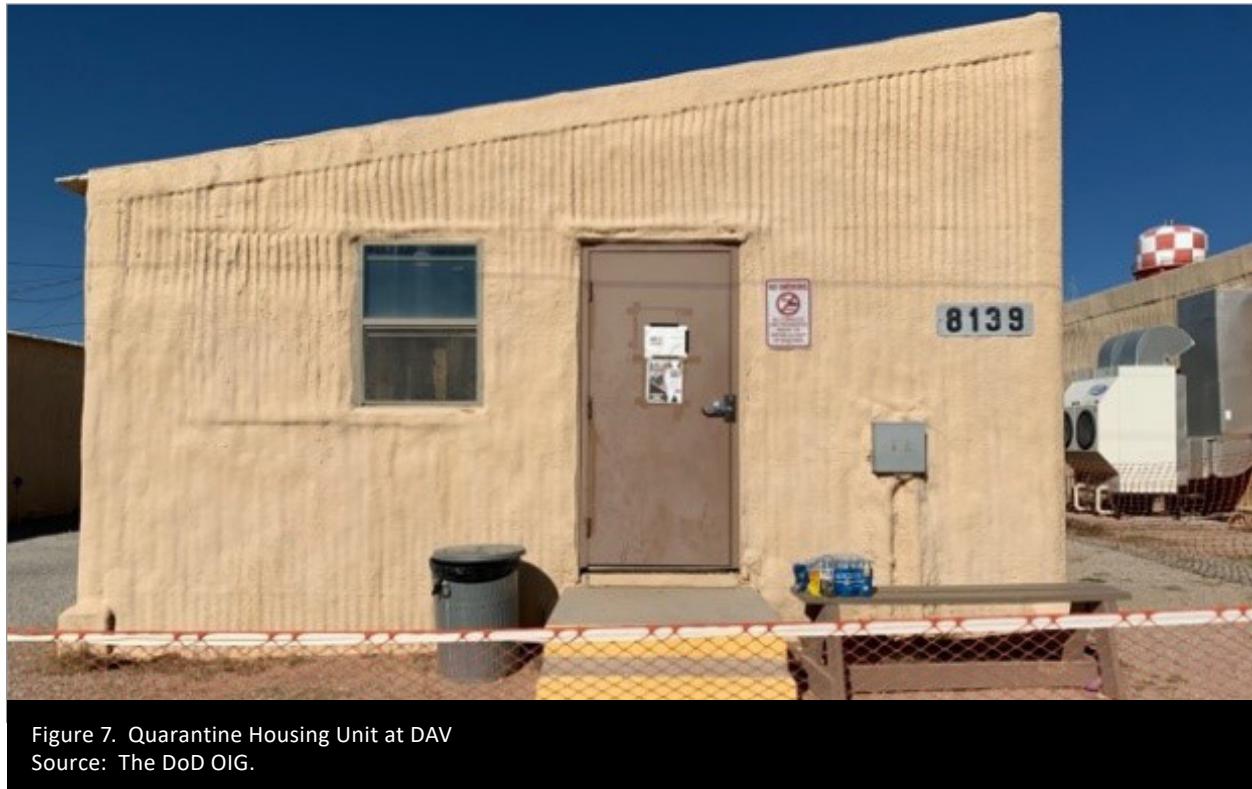
Figure 6. Examination Area at DAV Medical Clinic for Females and Minors
Source: The DoD OIG.

Emergency and Off-Base Medical Care

TF Bliss medical personnel stated that the Department of Health and Human Services coordinated with specialists from local El Paso medical centers to provide specialty medical care for Afghan evacuees. TF Bliss had six contracted ambulances stationed at DAV for emergency medical transport to off-base providers. TF Bliss medical personnel stated that they transported any Afghan evacuees identified as medically vulnerable, due to high-risk pregnancy, childbirth, or other medical conditions, to a local contracted hotel. Medically vulnerable Afghan evacuees stayed at the hotel for the duration of their convalescence period. TF Bliss medical personnel stated that they were in regular communication with local area hospitals to ensure TF Bliss did not overburden local medical resources, especially since unaccompanied minors from Mexico detained while attempting to enter the U.S. border, as well as Haitian refugees, were relying on the same medical system as the Afghan evacuees at DAV.

Medical Quarantine Capabilities

TF Bliss had 17 dedicated, hard structure buildings with 442 beds, to quarantine or isolate Afghan evacuees with communicable diseases, such as measles and COVID-19. Figure 7 provides an example of one of the quarantine housing units at DAV.



COVID-19 Safety Measures

According to TF Bliss medical personnel, they provided Afghan evacuees with health and hygiene education, including strategies for the prevention of communicable diseases such as COVID-19. TF Bliss medical personnel stated that face masks were available for Afghan evacuees. We observed TF Bliss personnel consistently wearing face masks during our site visit. However, during our walkthroughs, we observed few Afghan evacuees consistently wearing face masks, although most Afghan evacuees wore face masks while in the medical clinic and the in-processing area.

TF Bliss personnel stated that both task force and contractor medical personnel had vaccinated 100 percent of eligible Afghan evacuees at DAV against COVID-19. Specifically, TF Bliss personnel stated task force and contractor medical personnel administered the

COVID-19 vaccine as soon as Afghan evacuees arrived at DAV. TF Bliss medical personnel said they and contractor medical personnel tested Afghan evacuees for COVID-19 on routine occasions, including:

- during the initial U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services medical screening at DAV;
- at each clinic visit; and
- whenever exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms or after exposure to the disease (in accordance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines).

In addition, TF Bliss personnel stated that as of October 27, 2021, the COVID-19 positivity rate among Afghan evacuees at DAV was 0.1 percent as determined by testing and surveillance.

Medical Challenges with Medical Licensing of Contractor Medical Providers

TF Bliss personnel encountered medical challenges before the relocation of all Afghan evacuees at DAV on December 30, 2021. In October 2021, TF Holloman personnel, at Holloman Air Force Base, New Mexico, advised TF Bliss personnel that contractor medical providers working at DAV required a medical license issued in the State of New Mexico.¹² TF Bliss personnel explained that properly licensed military medical providers were able to work at any military installation regardless of which state issued the provider's medical license.

On November 3, 2021, the U.S. Northern Command issued a memorandum to the State Medical Licensing Boards that stated that medical providers within the DoD are normally only required to maintain a current, unrestricted license in one state. Federal law grants these providers the ability to practice medical care across all jurisdictions as long as the scope of practice is within the DoD mission. The memorandum further explained that the statute does not apply to the contractors delivering medical care services in support of Operation Allies Welcome even though their scope of practice is within the DoD mission. The memorandum requested the states supporting Operation Allies Welcome authorize DoD contractor medical providers to practice in the scope of the care provided to Afghan evacuees being housed within the state on Federal installations until the conclusion of Operation Allies Welcome.

On December 16, 2021, TF Bliss personnel stated that they had not yet received a licensure waiver for contractor medical providers, and that the contractor had submitted licensing applications to the State of New Mexico for all their medical providers. As of December 15, 2021, TF Bliss personnel stated the State of New Mexico had approved 10 applications, and was still processing 60 applications for the 70 medical providers currently at DAV. We are not making a recommendation regarding contractor personnel medical licensing because TF Bliss completed Operation Allies Welcome operations on December 30, 2021.

¹² DAV is located in New Mexico; therefore, TF Bliss personnel stated that contractor medical providers needed a medical license from New Mexico.

Afghan Evacuee Accountability and Security Procedures and Challenges

The TF Bliss security personnel provided physical security and accounted for the Afghan evacuees at DAV. For example, TF Bliss security included security checkpoints and traffic control procedures. Furthermore, TF Bliss personnel accounted for Afghan evacuees in a housing spreadsheet. However, TF Bliss still faced challenges with the security of the Afghan evacuees. For example, when we entered DAV, TF Bliss personnel did not check our identification, and we were able to enter DAV without showing the appropriate DAV access card.

Accountability and Security Observations and Procedures

During our site visit from October 25 through 29, 2021, we observed accountability screening, security checkpoints, information and security kiosks, and traffic controls. Furthermore, TF Bliss personnel explained their Misconduct Review Board process for incidents involving Afghan evacuees at DAV.

Accountability Screening

TF Bliss personnel stated that they had controls in place to ensure accountability of the Afghan evacuees under their supervision. Upon arrival at DAV, TF Bliss personnel immediately recorded Afghan evacuees in the TF Bliss housing tracker. According to TF Bliss personnel, they tracked the individual's Hummingbird number, name, age, and tent number in the housing spreadsheet. Furthermore, TF Bliss personnel stated that they conducted a weekly census, which accounted for all evacuees at DAV and their location. TF Bliss personnel then updated the housing tracker with the new number and location of Afghan evacuees at DAV. According to TF personnel, they conducted the census at DAV since the first guests arrived on August 21, 2021.

Security Checkpoints

TF Bliss security personnel set up a security checkpoint approximately 4.5 miles from the DAV entrance. The checkpoint consisted of three armed military police Soldiers assigned to screen civilian and military personnel attempting to enter. Specifically, the military police checked access cards, performed random vehicle inspections, and visually examined arriving personnel. TF Bliss personnel stated the visual exam let Soldiers identify whether the incoming vehicle was a U.S. Government vehicle, and observe the mannerisms of personnel inside the vehicle. Furthermore, they stated that the military police had the authority to pull over suspicious vehicles for further inspection.

Information and Security Kiosks

On November 29, 2021, TF Bliss personnel stated that they established 32 information and security kiosks at DAV. The kiosks primarily served two purposes. The first purpose was as a security measure by providing 24 hours per day, 7 days per week surveillance and security,

and as a place for Afghan evacuees to report an incident at DAV, such as violence among the evacuees. The second purpose was as a place where Afghan evacuees could interact with Soldiers and obtain information about DAV or their out-processing status. TF Bliss security personnel placed the kiosks, each staffed by two Soldiers, at strategic points around DAV to provide maximum visibility and security. Additional Soldiers performed daily safety and security inspections inside barracks and tents and inspected for potential signs of violence, such as Afghan evacuees remaining in their tent for days at a time. TF Bliss personnel stated that the Soldiers became familiar with the Afghan evacuees in their kiosk and inspection areas, and that helped Soldiers identify potential concerns such as violence or abuse among evacuees. According to TF Bliss leadership, all TF Bliss security personnel supporting Operation Allies Welcome at DAV were required to complete training, such as gender-based violence training, to ensure they were prepared to identify and report any security incidents in DAV.

Traffic Control

Due to the many children at DAV, TF Bliss personnel implemented lower speed limits to ensure Afghan evacuees were safe as they walked around the village. In addition, TF Bliss personnel required any commercial vehicles larger than a Gator Utility Vehicle operating in DAV to use a ground escort.¹³ The ground escort walked in front of the vehicle and limited its speed, providing additional safety for Afghan evacuees walking around the village. Lastly, TF Bliss personnel placed barriers along the busiest road in DAV, separating pedestrians from vehicle traffic, and creating a walking path for Afghan evacuees.

Misconduct Review Board

According to TF Bliss personnel, they tracked misconduct incidents reported at DAV. TF Bliss personnel further explained that they referred any incident classified as a felony to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for investigation and the FBI would determine whether to refer the incident to an Assistant United States Attorney for prosecution. If the FBI did not investigate or an Assistant United States Attorney decided not to prosecute, the FBI returned the case to TF Bliss personnel to review.

TF Bliss personnel stated that they established a Misconduct Review Board to manage cases not investigated by the FBI or turned down by an Assistant United States Attorney for the District of New Mexico-Las Cruces for prosecution. The board consisted of a battalion commander and sergeant major not from the same mayor cell as the Afghan evacuee alleged to have committed the misconduct, and another TF Bliss commander not working at DAV. The Misconduct Review Board held meetings to examine incidents, develop recommendations for actions to take in response to the incidents, and direct the implementation of the recommended actions. The meetings included support personnel from the DHS, the DOS, the FBI, a DoD lawyer, and a DHS or DOS cultural expert. TF Bliss personnel stated that support personnel were available

¹³ The Gator Utility Vehicles at DAV were small, four-passenger vehicles that some TF Bliss personnel used to travel around the village.

to answer any questions asked by Misconduct Review Board members and offer opinions related to the incident under discussion. TF Bliss personnel said they would gather evidence related to each incident and present the evidence to the Misconduct Review Board. The board members reviewed the evidence, and ultimately made administrative determinations.

The Misconduct Review Board imposed corrective actions including assigning cultural training to help evacuees assimilate to the United States, writing warning letters, and expelling Afghan evacuees from DAV. TF Bliss personnel stated that as of October 28, 2021, the Misconduct Review Board had expelled one Afghan evacuee from DAV. In that case, the Misconduct Review Board had expelled the Afghan evacuee for abusive sexual contact, indecent exposure, and assault against a contractor. According to TF Bliss personnel, local authorities arrested and incarcerated the Afghan evacuee; however, an Assistant United States Attorney declined prosecution.

Security Challenges

TF Bliss personnel experienced security challenges at DAV. Although TF Bliss personnel established security measures at the checkpoint we used to enter DAV, the 93rd Military Police Battalion Commander stated that complacency among his personnel resulted in inadequate implementation of the security measures in place. On October 28, 2021, we accompanied TF Bliss personnel to the security checkpoint at the entrance to DAV. TF Bliss personnel stated that the military police on duty were required to check everyone in the vehicle for DAV access cards before granting access. Military police were also required to stop every 10th vehicle to perform a security inspection. The security inspection required all passengers to step out of the vehicle so military police could open all doors and let trained working dogs inspect the vehicle. We observed TF Bliss military police following these procedures while we were with the Commander. However, when we traveled through the same security checkpoint to enter and exit DAV without the Commander, military police allowed us access without showing DAV access cards. Instead, military police on duty granted the audit team access to DAV after showing only a gift card and Metro SmarTrip card.

Figure 8 provides images of the access cards used to gain access to DAV.



Figure 8. Gift Card, Proper DAV Access Card, and Metro SmarTrip Card

Note: Image on the left is a gift card, image in the middle is a proper DAV Access Card, image on the right is a Metro SmarTrip card.

Source: The DoD OIG.

We provided this information to the 93rd Military Police Battalion Commander and he stated that his battalion had started to experience complacency problems. On December 16, 2021, TF Bliss personnel stated that they were retraining their security personnel as a result of our site visit. Their retraining consisted of refreshing personnel on the security procedures at DAV. After the refresher training, TF Bliss personnel stated that there was a noticeable improvement with security at DAV. For example, they stated that TF Bliss security personnel stopped and questioned a U.S. Army major and requested to see a DAV access badge because the major's coat was covering the badge. We are not making a recommendation to improve security procedures because TF Bliss ended Operation Allies Welcome operations on December 30, 2021.

According to TF Bliss personnel, TF Bliss security personnel were supposed to conduct daily safety and security inspections of Afghan evacuees' barracks. The TF Bliss personnel stated that safety and security inspections should consist of checking for exposed electrical wires, excess trash, structural damage to tents, and signs of potential violence among evacuees. However, the 2/1 AD Commander stated that his Soldiers had not always conducted thorough safety and security inspections. Specifically, the Commander stated that his Soldiers did not always feel comfortable entering the Afghan evacuees' private living spaces within the evacuees' tent to conduct the safety and security inspections. Instead, his Soldiers would

check the exterior of the tent or just walk through the hallways of the tent, which prevented them from conducting a complete inspection. According to the Commander, he verbally reiterated the importance of safety and security inspections to his Soldiers before our site visit, and stated that complacency was the cause of TF Bliss Soldiers not conducting thorough inspections. We are not making a recommendation to improve security procedures because TF Bliss ended Operation Allies Welcome operations on December 30, 2021.

Afghan Evacuee Perceptions

During our site visit, we met with Afghan evacuees in three different venues to hear their thoughts regarding the TF Bliss-provided housing, medical care, and essential items (such as clothing and personal hygiene items), as well as their perceptions of the security environment. First, we attended two TF Bliss-sponsored town halls that were organized by gender. One town hall was for women and had 13 female Afghan participants. The other town hall was for men and had 11 male Afghan participants. The town halls were sit-down exchanges with Afghan evacuees to ask and answer questions using interpreter assistance. The feedback was positive with the exception of two complaints. One complaint concerned undercooked food in the dining facility. A second complaint concerned medical treatment and a request for medication. Specifically, an Afghan evacuee said that he took his child to the doctor several days in a row to seek treatment for an eye infection. The Afghan evacuee explained that the doctor would not give medication to treat the child's swollen eye and said the doctor believed the child was only experiencing an allergic reaction. We reported the concern at the exit conference and TF Bliss personnel stated that they were going to look into the complaint.

Second, during our housing walkthrough, we spoke with 14 Afghan evacuees using an interpreter. Of those 14 Afghan evacuees, 12 reported being happy with the care provided by TF Bliss. For example, one Afghan evacuee said that he and other Afghan evacuees appreciated the U.S. Army's efforts to help them live comfortably at DAV, and that the services the U.S. Army provided at DAV were phenomenal and timely. One Afghan evacuee was happy with the services provided but raised a concern regarding a hole in his tent. TF Bliss personnel subsequently placed a work order with the contractor. Two Afghan evacuees stated that they felt the task force provided adequate housing and security as well as sufficient clothing, personnel hygiene products, and baby food. However, the same two Afghan evacuees also stated that they were not provided requested dental care and that they did not like the fish at the dining facility.

Lastly, we walked around DAV with an interpreter and only one TF Bliss military escort, rather than the many uniformed personnel and agency representatives present during the town halls and our housing walkthrough.¹⁴ We collected Afghan evacuees' impressions, often volunteered by one person and then supported by listeners who had gathered around.

¹⁴ The audit team informally collected feedback from Afghan evacuees.

We did not record specific numbers of each comment, as the interpreter moved back and forth between individual comments and group responses. Afghan evacuees at DAV reported the following concerns.

- Baby food was either not received or difficult to find.
- Dental care was insufficient. For example, one Afghan evacuee stated that he went to the clinic for dental pain, but he was only provided with pain medication that did not solve his dental problem.
- The wait to receive medications was too long. One Afghan evacuee stated that it took a week for his son to receive medication, while two other Afghan evacuees stated that it took 30 days or more to fill prescriptions.
- Some of the interpreters at DAV were not accurately interpreting what was said or had dismissed voiced concerns.
- It was unclear how long they would remain at DAV before resettlement.

After we met with Afghan evacuees in the three separate venues, we discussed their perceptions with TF Bliss personnel. TF Bliss personnel stated that the task force provided food for babies, infants, and toddlers up to the age of 24 months at DAV. As a result of our feedback, TF Bliss directed its staff members to improve the information dissemination for baby food availability with the Engagement Board and at Key Leader Engagements at DAV.

TF Bliss medical personnel acknowledged that they had not provided dental care to Afghan evacuees. However, TF Bliss medical personnel stated they had activated “dental care” on the medical services contract. During a December 17, 2021, followup meeting with TF Bliss personnel, they stated that TF Bliss started providing dental care for Afghan evacuees in November 2021. TF Bliss medical personnel also stated that they had decreased the length of time for providing medications.

TF Bliss personnel added that it had terminated a contracted interpreter due to improper translation, and that TF Bliss decided to keep two Service member interpreters to help monitor this translation concern. We provided TF Bliss personnel with information concerning the tents where Afghan evacuees reported inaccurate interpretations. TF Bliss personnel stated that they directed their staff member working with the Engagement Board and Key Leader Engagements to ensure that interpreter accuracy was monitored.

TF Bliss personnel also stated that they understood the Afghan evacuees’ frustration with the lack of clarity regarding the resettlement process. However, TF Bliss personnel were responsible for housing, feeding, and securing the Afghan evacuees. The resettlement process was the responsibility of the DOS and the Department of Health and Human Services. Therefore, TF Bliss personnel were unable to provide Afghan evacuees with information regarding their resettlement dates or details of future relocation or permanent housing. TF Bliss personnel stated that they continued to work with interagency personnel to assist

in disseminating information throughout DAV. A DOS representative at DAV told us that he was reviewing the DOS's procedures to identify how to improve the information dissemination process.

Financial Costs of Task Force Bliss Operations

In an August 19, 2021 memorandum, the DoD Deputy Comptroller established cost reporting requirements and procedures for DoD Components supporting the relocation effort.¹⁵ The Deputy Comptroller required the DoD Components to submit weekly flash reports of all direct and reimbursable costs associated with the relocation of Afghan evacuees and directed the Defense Finance and Accounting Service to provide additional reporting instructions to DoD Components. The Deputy Comptroller also stated that the DoD Financial Management Regulation provided instruction on reporting the cost of contingency operations.¹⁶

TF Bliss personnel stated that as of January 6, 2022, the total cost to support Operation Allies Welcome was \$686.8 million. TF Bliss personnel stated that the total cost will likely increase based on costs associated with the deconstruction of all erected facilities and returning the remaining facilities to their previous conditions.

We are providing this management advisory for information and use. This advisory identifies observations during our site visit to Fort Bliss, Texas, and the DAV, located in New Mexico. We provided this information to the TF Bliss Commander during an exit conference on October 29, 2021.

The interagency partners, as well as the commands directly and indirectly responsible for the relocation of Afghan evacuees, should read this advisory to be aware of the challenges and opportunities for improvement regarding the in-processing, sustainment, and physical security for the relocation of Afghan evacuees. The DoD OIG will issue additional advisories for each site visited to the appropriate organizations responsible for the Afghan relocation effort for their review and use.

We considered management's comments on a discussion draft copy of this management advisory when preparing this final memorandum. A written response is not required. If you have any questions, please contact me at [REDACTED].



Richard B. Vasquez
Assistant Inspector General for Audit
Readiness and Global Operations

cc:
Commander, TF Bliss

¹⁵ Office of Under Secretary of Defense, Comptroller, "DoD Support to the Department of State for Afghan Special Immigration Visa (SIV) Applicants," August 19, 2021.

¹⁶ DoD Financial Management Regulation 7000.14-R, volume 12, chapter 23.



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