

UNCLASSIFIED



**Office of Inspector General**  
**United States Department of State**

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ISP-I-23-05

Office of Inspections

November 2022

# **Inspection of the Afghanistan Affairs Unit**

BUREAU OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS

UNCLASSIFIED



# HIGHLIGHTS

Office of Inspector General  
United States Department of State

ISP-I-23-05

## What OIG Inspected

OIG reviewed the Afghanistan Affairs Unit's operating environment, and inspected the unit's executive direction, policy and program implementation, and resource management.

## What OIG Recommends

OIG made 6 recommendations: 5 to the Afghanistan Affairs Unit and 1 to the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. In its comments on the draft report, the Department concurred with 5 recommendations and neither agreed nor disagreed with 1 recommendation. OIG considers all 6 recommendations resolved. The Department's response to each recommendation, and OIG's reply, can be found in the Recommendations section of this report. The Department's formal response is reprinted in its entirety in Appendix B.

November 2022

OFFICE OF INSPECTIONS

BUREAU OF SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIAN AFFAIRS

## Inspection of the Afghanistan Affairs Unit

### What OIG Found

- The Chargé d'Affaires and the acting Deputy Chief of Mission modeled the Department of State's leadership principles following the evacuation of Embassy Kabul and in the transition to the formal establishment of the Afghanistan Affairs Unit in Doha, Qatar. During this time, the unit's leadership paid particular attention to employee welfare.
- Department and interagency stakeholders were not always clear about the lines of responsibility among the multiple Department entities with roles in the management of U.S. government policy or programs for Afghanistan.
- From September 2021 through May 2022, the Political-Economic Section organized more than 50 meetings that aided in the release of detainees and equipment and facilitated discussion of economic, humanitarian, human rights, and related issues.
- The Afghanistan Affairs Unit website, which remained branded as U.S. Embassy Afghanistan, generally lacked relevant, up-to-date content.
- The Afghanistan Affairs Unit struggled to rebuild its contact lists following the Embassy Kabul evacuation and lacked a unified, mission-wide platform for managing contact information.

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## CONTEXT

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The Department of State (Department) suspended operations at Embassy Kabul on August 31, 2021, and moved core embassy personnel to Doha, Qatar to maintain diplomatic operations and respond to the ongoing political and humanitarian crises in Afghanistan. On February 24, 2022, the Department formalized the Doha operation as the Afghanistan Affairs Unit (AAU) and confirmed its status as the official U.S. diplomatic mission to Afghanistan, following congressional notification procedures and an exchange of diplomatic notes with the Qatari government. At the time of the inspection, the U.S. government had not recognized the Taliban as the official government of Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> The AAU will operate out of Doha until political and security conditions allow the United States to reestablish a diplomatic presence in Kabul.

The AAU identified the following key policy objectives:<sup>2</sup>

- Preventing terrorist groups from using Afghanistan as a base for external operations that could threaten the United States or our allies.
- Facilitating safe passage for U.S. citizens and certain Afghans to the United States.
- Facilitating delivery of humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people.
- Advocating for U.S. values and international human rights, especially those of women, girls, and members of minority groups.
- Coordinating with the international community on shared interests and support for the people of Afghanistan.

At the AAU's formal establishment in February 2022, the Department authorized 26 U.S. direct-hire positions for the unit.<sup>3</sup> At the time of the inspection, 19 of those positions were filled by temporary duty personnel (TDY), 3 of whom worked remotely from other embassies. All but one of the TDY staff were evacuees from Embassy Kabul or officers who had been assigned to Embassy Kabul and were redirected to Doha when the embassy closed. The Joint Executive Office for the Bureaus of Near Eastern Affairs and South and Central Asian Affairs (NEA-SCA/EX) had three contractors, all former locally employed (LE) staff relocated from Afghanistan, working in the United States to assist the AAU. Staff in the Department, including NEA-SCA/EX and the Regional Support Unit in Amman, Jordan, provided additional support to the AAU, particularly on legacy issues involving Embassy Kabul. In February 2022, the AAU and Embassy Doha also signed a memorandum of agreement for the embassy to provide a range of administrative support to AAU personnel assigned to Doha. Additional details regarding AAU's staffing are discussed in a companion classified annex.

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<sup>1</sup> OIG's inspection included the period from August 30, 2021, through February 24, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> As discussed later in the report, the AAU did not have an approved Integrated Country Strategy at the time of the inspection, and the mission's policy objectives were outlined in different ways in various documents. The key policy objectives cited here were taken from a November 11, 2021, cable prepared for the Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs (see 21 Kabul 2674).

<sup>3</sup> Prior to the evacuation, Embassy Kabul had 599 U.S. direct-hire positions.

OIG reviewed the AAU's operating environment. It also inspected the AAU's executive direction, policy and program implementation, and resource management consistent with Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980.<sup>4</sup> A classified annex to this report discusses the inspection's classified and Sensitive But Unclassified findings.<sup>5</sup>

## OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

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The AAU's operating environment was unique for a U.S. diplomatic mission. As described below, the unit coordinated and collaborated with various interlocutors, including the Taliban, to advance key policy objectives, such as facilitating travel of U.S. citizens and certain Afghans out of Afghanistan. With respect to bilateral foreign assistance to Afghanistan, many programs were halted after the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan. As a result, at the time of the inspection, the AAU was not managing any foreign assistance programs from Doha. In addition, the AAU did not have dedicated workspace at Embassy Doha, creating challenges for the unit's staff. Finally, with the suspension of operations at Embassy Kabul, the Department had numerous outstanding and complex financial and administrative tasks to complete.

### **Coordination and Collaboration**

To advance the AAU's key policy objectives, the unit coordinated closely with the Department's Special Representative for Afghanistan; the Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights; the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA); the Coordination for Afghan Relocation Efforts Unit; and other U.S. government agencies. AAU personnel met regularly with Doha-based Taliban representatives through a mechanism called the Issues Solutions Channel to convey critical messages from Washington,<sup>6</sup> including on freedom of movement, human rights, inclusive governance, humanitarian assistance delivery, and counterterrorism commitments. The AAU also interacted regularly with Afghan civil society leaders, journalists and media workers, human rights defenders, and other Afghan stakeholders, both inside and outside of Afghanistan.

The AAU also worked with the Coordination for Afghan Relocation Efforts Unit<sup>7</sup> to facilitate the travel of U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, and their immediate families from Afghanistan to Qatar for processing and onward travel to the United States. In addition, the AAU partnered with the Coordination for Afghan Relocation Efforts Unit, Embassy Doha, and

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>5</sup> OIG, *Classified Annex to the Inspection of the Afghanistan Affairs Unit* (ISP-S-23-05A, November 2022).

<sup>6</sup> The Issues Solutions Channel provides the U.S. government with a regular channel of communication to the Taliban at the working level on a broad array of issues. According to the Department, this mechanism is an evolution of the Department of Defense-led "military channel" that served to deconflict battlefield movements and support the safe withdrawal of U.S. and coalition forces pursuant to the U.S.-Taliban peace agreement. The Issues Solution Channel first convened on September 5, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> The Coordination for Afghan Relocation Efforts Unit worked closely with the AAU because it is the Department entity responsible for arranging the travel of U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, and their immediate family members, as well as eligible SIV applicants from Afghanistan to Doha for processing and eventual resettlement in the United States.

U.S. interagency representatives to receive, feed, house, process, and provide health care for tens of thousands of Embassy Kabul employees, contractors, interpreters, and other prospective special immigrant visa (SIV) applicants from Afghanistan. Most of these travelers arrived in Qatar at Doha's Hamad International Airport and were processed at Camp As Sayliyah. AAU's role involved processing eligible Afghans for SIVs; other officials processed Afghans ineligible for SIVs but entitled to another status that might permit their onward travel. In addition to the Afghans who had already been processed by the AAU for onward travel to the United States and those in Doha awaiting processing, as of May 2022, there were under 14,000 SIV applicants<sup>8</sup> assumed to be in Afghanistan.

## **Foreign Assistance**

In FY 2021, bilateral foreign assistance funding to Afghanistan was \$282.5 million. Following the Taliban advance on Kabul, the Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) conducted a policy review of non-humanitarian assistance programs and identified those that could continue based on both U.S. national interests and operational and legal feasibility. Programs approved to continue totaled \$79.5 million and included those designed to prevent harm and further loss of life and mitigate the humanitarian impacts of further economic collapse. At the time of the inspection, all Department foreign assistance programs were managed in Washington,<sup>9</sup> and the AAU did not administer any programs from Doha.<sup>10</sup>

## **Workspace**

OIG found that, due to limited available space in Embassy Doha, most AAU staff worked out of several hotels and conference rooms throughout Doha. Only 3 of the 19 AAU personnel in Doha had desks in the embassy at the time of the inspection. Key AAU personnel, including the Chargé d'Affaires (Chargé) and the Political-Economic Counselor, did not have assigned embassy workspace.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, AAU staff did not have consistent access to classified computer systems. Instead, they used Embassy Doha's classified systems on a space available basis, and most accessed those systems on weekends or after Embassy Doha personnel departed for the day, leading to extended workdays for AAU staff.

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<sup>8</sup> The individual who fulfills the qualifications for the SIV program is the "principal applicant." A principal applicant may be accompanied by a spouse and children, referred to as "derivative applicants." SIV numbers are based on principal applicants who have submitted a complete SIV application package and do not include derivative applicants.

<sup>9</sup> The foreign assistance programs were managed by the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs; the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs; the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs; the Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation; the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor; and the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues.

<sup>10</sup> OIG reviewed AAU's foreign assistance coordination, as described later in this report. OIG did not assess foreign assistance programs as part of this inspection as all programs were managed in Washington.

<sup>11</sup> During the inspection, the AAU Chargé was provided workspace in the embassy while he concurrently served as Embassy Doha Chargé.

During the inspection, Embassy Doha and the AAU were awaiting unclassified Hardened Alternative Trailer Systems that would allow AAU personnel to work on the Embassy Doha compound with consistent access to the Department's computer network.<sup>12</sup> According to the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, installation of seven of these trailers was scheduled no later than the end of August 2022 and installation of an additional seven trailers was scheduled by the end of 2022. However, classified workspaces, known as Tactical Operations Centers, were not scheduled to arrive until spring of 2023. Until the classified workspaces arrive, AAU personnel will continue to rely on Embassy Doha's limited resources to conduct classified work.

On May 9, 2022, Embassy Doha broke ground on a new embassy compound scheduled for completion in 2026. In February 2022, Embassy Doha requested additional space to accommodate the unanticipated AAU staff and operations. At the time of the inspection, the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations was considering options for accommodating AAU personnel in the new embassy compound.

## **Legacy Kabul Management Issues**

With the suspension of operations at Embassy Kabul, the Department began to address numerous outstanding and complex financial and administrative tasks. These tasks required the involvement of multiple bureaus and offices: NEA-SCA/EX, the Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations, the Bureau of Administration, the Regional Support Unit in Amman, and the Bureau of the Comptroller and Global Financial Services' Post Support Unit. For example, the Department:

- Salvaged approximately 57 vehicles worth \$7.8 million.
- Wrote off abandoned property including motor vehicles, IT equipment, and aviation equipment with a combined value of \$288.4 million.
- Terminated 64 leases worth \$18.4 million annually.
- Was working to close and deobligate approximately \$167 million of outstanding Embassy Kabul unliquidated obligations.<sup>13</sup>

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTION**

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OIG assessed the AAU's leadership on the basis of interviews that included comments on Front Office performance, staff responses to OIG questionnaires, and OIG's review of documents and observations of meetings and activities during the on-site portion of the inspection.

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<sup>12</sup> Hardened Alternative Trailer Systems are easily deployable prefabricated modular units that provide protection from forced entry, ballistics, and explosions.

<sup>13</sup> Data provided by the Bureau of the Comptroller and Global Financial Services shows Embassy Kabul unliquidated obligations were at \$167.9 million as of February 2022.

## **Tone at the Top and Standards of Conduct**

The Chargé, a Senior Foreign Service officer, served as the Deputy Chief of Mission at Embassy Kabul prior to the evacuation. He arrived in Doha as Chief of Mission on August 29, 2021, when the Secretary tasked him with establishing the U.S. Mission to Afghanistan in Doha, later formally established as the AAU. From March 19 to June 12, 2022, he served concurrently as Chargé of the AAU and Chargé of Embassy Doha. The AAU acting Deputy Chief of Mission (A/DCM) served previously as the Public Affairs Advisor at the U.S. Mission to NATO. In August 2021, he was transferred to Embassy Kabul as the Public Affairs Officer, but on his arrival began assisting the evacuation at the Hamid Karzai International Airport (Kabul airport) and was designated as A/DCM. He arrived in Doha on September 8, 2021.

OIG found that the Chargé and the A/DCM led the AAU in accordance with the leadership and management principles in 3 Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM) 1214. OIG observed that the Chargé and the A/DCM engaged collaboratively with AAU employees in regularly scheduled mission-wide meetings and thematic meetings. Both the interagency community in Washington and at the AAU lauded the Front Office's leadership. AAU staff noted that the Front Office's positive leadership fostered resilience and collaboration, consistent with leadership principles in 3 FAM 1214b(7) and (10). The Chargé opened his hotel accommodations periodically for mission-wide functions and met individually with AAU employees to see how they were coping with the difficult working conditions. The A/DCM responded to specific concerns raised by individual employees. For example, the AAU staff told OIG they appreciated Front Office efforts to address questions with NEA-SCA/EX on benefits and entitlements for each individual's specific situation following the evacuation of Afghanistan.

OIG also determined that the Chargé and the A/DCM actively supported those employees who were struggling emotionally due to the pressures at the AAU, the stress of the Embassy Kabul evacuation, having witnessed traumatic scenes at Kabul airport, or separation from their families. They recognized that some AAU employees would need to seek counseling or consider returning home, and they facilitated those activities for those employees.

Finally, OIG found that the AAU and Embassy Doha Front Offices worked well together. The two staffs shared information, kept in contact daily, and found ways to maximize AAU staff access to the limited space at Embassy Doha. For example, the AAU maintained a Monday to Friday work schedule – in contrast to Embassy Doha's Sunday to Thursday schedule—in order to allow AAU staff to use Embassy Doha workstations during the embassy's "weekend."

## **Execution of Foreign Policy Goals and Objectives**

OIG found the Chargé effectively led the AAU, in accordance with guidance in 2 FAM 113.1c(1), to represent the interest of the United States. OIG found that the AAU pursued Afghanistan-focused U.S. foreign policy goals and objectives, registering several policy achievements. For example, AAU staff played a key role in the April 1, 2022, release of a detained U.S. citizen and his lawful permanent resident brother from Taliban detention in Afghanistan. In addition, the AAU used the Issues Solution Channel to secure freedom of movement for U.S. citizens and



Afghans seeking to leave Afghanistan. Specifically, the Taliban approved only sporadic flight departures from December 2021 to February 2022. Staff told OIG flights to Qatar resumed at the end of March 2022 at the rate of approximately two per week after AAU advocacy through the Issues Solution Channel. Also, AAU messaging, combined with Issues Solution Channel engagement, helped to clarify confusion among segments of Afghan society following the U.S. government's announcement of its stance on the accessibility of Afghan Central Bank reserves, culminating in May 2022 discussions in Doha among U.S. Department of the Treasury officials, the AAU staff, the Afghan Central Bank, and banking sector technical experts.

### ***The Afghanistan Affairs Unit Met Strategic Planning Responsibilities***

OIG found that the AAU carried out its strategic planning responsibilities consistent with requirements in 18 FAM 301.2-4(D) despite the lack of a Department-approved Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) at the time of the inspection. AAU staff told OIG that, following the August 2021 evacuation of Embassy Kabul, large portions of the original, approved ICS were no longer applicable. In March 2022, the AAU Front Office and staff developed a draft AAU ICS and submitted it to the Department for approval on May 4, 2022.<sup>14</sup> Pending ICS approval, OIG found that the AAU received sufficient guidance from the Department and the interagency community to carry out its mission. For example, the Chargé cited a March 2022 National Security Council paper as a roadmap for the AAU.

### ***Department and Interagency Stakeholders Were Unclear About Lines of Responsibility on Afghan Issues***

Department and interagency stakeholders told OIG that they were unclear about the lines of responsibility among the multiple Department entities that had a role in managing U.S. government policy or programs for Afghanistan, leading to lack of coordination on some issues. These entities included the AAU, the Special Representative for Afghanistan, SCA's Afghanistan Desk, and the Special Envoy for Afghan Women, Girls, and Human Rights, among others. The Special Representative and the Chargé told OIG that they, together with the Special Envoy, coordinated frequently. In this respect, the Special Representative focused on high-level engagement with Afghan figures and third-country policymakers, while the AAU concentrated on outreach to third-country embassies supportive of U.S. policy towards Afghanistan, management of the Issues Solution Channel process, and rebuilding the AAU's Afghan contact base.

Although the AAU, the Special Representative, and the Special Envoy were generally clear about their own roles, their understanding about the division of responsibilities did not extend to others working on Afghan issues, in some cases even to others in their own offices. For example, OIG learned of instances where multiple entities or individuals assumed they had the lead on a particular policy or an activity, which resulted in mixed messages or instructions. In addition, some Department offices told OIG that the roles of the AAU and SCA's Afghanistan desk in preparing annual congressionally mandated reports were not always clear, resulting in

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<sup>14</sup> As of August 2022, the ICS was not finalized.

delays in their submission.<sup>15</sup> In another instance, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs did not begin to coordinate with the AAU on its ongoing programs and activities in Afghanistan until May 2022, 9 months after the closure of Embassy Kabul. Some of this confusion resulted from the fact that, in the immediate aftermath of the closure of Embassy Kabul, several offices in the SCA and NEA bureaus assumed full, or partial responsibility for activities that previously had been performed by Embassy Kabul, but the redistribution of responsibilities had not been formalized or clarified for all parties.

According to 1 FAM 112, a bureau's Assistant Secretary "assists the Secretary of State in providing overall direction, coordination, and supervision of interdepartmental activities . . . in the countries within their geographic area. [These responsibilities include] ensuring the adequacy of U.S. policy for the countries within their regions and of the plans, programs, resources, and performance for implementing that policy." Failure to redefine responsibilities and authorities when multiple entities contribute to the Department's policies and programs can result in duplication of effort, delayed action, and resource misallocation.

**Recommendation 1:** The Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs should delineate and publicize the roles and responsibilities of the Afghanistan Affairs Unit and other Department offices dealing with Afghanistan issues. (Action: SCA)

## POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

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OIG assessed the AAU's policy and program implementation work performed by the Political-Economic, Public Diplomacy, and Consular Sections. OIG also reviewed the AAU's foreign assistance coordination. OIG found that the AAU generally met Department requirements for policy and program implementation, with the exceptions discussed below.

### **Political-Economic Section**

OIG reviewed the Political-Economic Section's leadership, policy implementation, and cable reporting. Through interviews with Department and interagency offices and a review of AAU's reporting cables, OIG determined that the section responded to a constant flow of Washington requests and taskings thoroughly and in a timely manner. Department and interagency personnel described a dedicated team who worked long hours, often from hotels due to a lack of office space. At the time of the inspection, the section had eight officers, all in TDY status.

OIG found that the Political-Economic Section had a cable reporting plan that met Washington stakeholder needs. Stakeholders told OIG they welcomed reporting on Afghanistan's provinces, financial and economic issues, and human rights. However, Department, interagency, and AAU personnel also stated that the unavailability of Embassy Kabul LE staff due to the security situation negatively affected the section's ability to provide detailed, well-sourced reporting on

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<sup>15</sup> Specifically, the reports affected were the Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and the Trafficking in Persons Report.

events in Afghanistan. During the inspection, OIG observed the AAU's and the SCA Afghanistan desk's efforts to address the lack of LE staff contributions to reporting. Specifically, several former LE staff began working as contractors in the United States to research and analyze issues, using language skills and local contacts to better inform AAU reporting on developments in Afghanistan.

The Political-Economic Section focused on running the Issues Solution Channel, which served as the regular platform for U.S. engagement with the Taliban. From September 2021 through May 2022, the section organized more than 50 Issues Solution Channel meetings with Doha-based Taliban representatives to discuss U.S. priorities, current events, and issues raised by the Taliban. Department and interagency stakeholders credited the Issues Solution Channel with aiding the release of detainees and equipment as well as facilitating discussion of economic, humanitarian, human rights, and related issues. However, some stakeholders described the Issues Solution Channel as limited, in part because of uncertainty regarding its influence with the Taliban's leadership in Afghanistan. Despite this limitation, the Issues Solution Channel remained the established platform for discussions with the Taliban.

## **Public Diplomacy**

OIG reviewed the Public Diplomacy (PD) Section's strategic planning and reporting, resource and program management, media engagement, and grants administration. The Department suspended all public diplomacy activity inside Afghanistan when the embassy in Kabul closed in August 2021. At the time of the inspection, the PD Section was beginning a gradual resumption of grant-funded program activity using virtual platforms and third-country locations. During the inspection, the three-person PD Section operated under staffing constraints: the Public Affairs Officer was detailed as A/DCM from the time of the AAU's formation through the period of the inspection, while the other two officers teleworked from Prague, the Czech Republic and Seoul, South Korea. The section had no LE staff.<sup>16</sup>

Along with day-to-day press support and social media messaging, the PD Section spent the first 4 to 6 months of the AAU's operation primarily focused on two main crisis-driven tasks. First, the section helped process refugee referrals for more than 16,000 at-risk Afghan staff and family members from the section's program implementing partners (including the network of 27 American Spaces<sup>17</sup> throughout Afghanistan, called Lincoln Learning Centers), while also ensuring safety and program continuity for the 118 Afghan Fulbright students in the United States. Second, the PD Section managed the modification or termination of each award in the section's large grant portfolio, as detailed below.

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<sup>16</sup> The section was in the process of rehiring five former PD Section Kabul LE staff who would work remotely from the United States.

<sup>17</sup> American Spaces are Department-operated or -supported public diplomacy facilities that provide digitally enhanced physical platforms for engagement with foreign audiences in support of U.S. foreign policy objectives. The Department's five core programs and services for American Spaces are English language learning, alumni engagement, educational advising and promoting study in the United States, information about the United States, and cultural and community outreach.

### ***Large Public Diplomacy Grants Portfolio Transitioned to Reflect Changed Program Conditions***

With close support from the SCA public diplomacy grants unit, the PD Section successfully managed the modification or termination of each award in Embassy Kabul's large public diplomacy grants portfolio.<sup>18</sup> When Embassy Kabul closed, the section had 34 active grant awards totaling approximately \$68 million. The Department suspended all embassy grant activity at the time of the evacuation. Following a months-long senior-level review completed in December 2021, the Department authorized the PD Section to resume 18 of the grants (a combined award total of \$55.4 million), with appropriate modifications. The PD grants not authorized for continuation were terminated or allowed to end as originally scheduled by no later than December 31, 2021.<sup>19</sup> The PD Section amended each of the continuing grants and updated all of the risk assessments and monitoring plans after September 2021 to reflect the changed program conditions. To mitigate increased country risk, all of the continuing grant activity and implementing partners were shifted outside of Afghanistan or moved to virtual platforms. For example, the PD Section facilitated the relocation of 53 grant-supported Afghan scholarship students from the American University of Afghanistan to the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan so they could safely conclude their degree programs. OIG reviewed the 18 grants approved to proceed and confirmed that they generally met requirements as outlined in the Department's Federal Assistance Directive.<sup>20</sup> For example, all 18 grant files included current quarterly performance reports from the grantees, and the 10 grants with annual disbursements of \$750,000 or greater included independent audits in the files, as required.

### ***The Afghanistan Affairs Unit Provided Only Minimal Content Updates to Official Website***

The AAU website, which remained branded as U.S. Embassy Afghanistan, had some current posts on its main homepage, but the site generally lacked relevant, up-to-date content. According to 5 FAM 776.2b(2), Department website managers must "ensure that information

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<sup>18</sup> The Office of Inspector General conducted an audit of U.S. Embassy Kabul public diplomacy grants prior to the embassy's suspension of operations; see OIG, *Audit of U.S. Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan, Public Affairs Section Administration of Grants and Cooperative Agreements*, (AUD-MERO-21-42, September 2021). The audit reviewed 20 grant awards administered by the section between FY 2017 and FY 2020. It made six recommendations relating to: vetting procedures; risk assessment, mitigation, and monitoring procedures; and program evaluation. At the time of the inspection, OIG closed three of the recommendations with the issuance of its January 2022 information report; see OIG, *Information Report: Office of Inspector General's Analysis of Open Recommendations Specific to U.S. Embassy Kabul, Afghanistan* (AUD-MERO-22-18, January 2022). Three other recommendations had been resolved pending further action.

<sup>19</sup> As part of its review of open public diplomacy grants following the suspension of Embassy Kabul operations, the SCA public diplomacy grants unit found that 94 legacy Embassy Kabul public diplomacy grants conducted prior to the establishment of the AAU had not been properly closed out. The unit dedicated personnel to addressing this backlog, and between August 2021 and the time of the inspection, the unit completed full closeout of 50 public diplomacy grants, with 44 others mostly completed but still pending final documentation. In all, the amount of money already deobligated or due to be deobligated and returned to the U.S. Treasury as part of these closeout financial reconciliations totaled approximately \$2.5 million.

<sup>20</sup> The Department of State Federal Assistance Directive, updated annually, establishes internal guidance, policies, and procedures for all domestic and overseas grant-making bureaus, offices, and posts within the Department of State administering federal financial assistance.

published on their [websites] is current, relevant, and accurate.” For example, in April 2022, the website’s “News and Events” tab had no press releases, speeches, or other content more recent than May 2021. The “Gender Issues” topic link had no content more recent than 2020, missing an opportunity to promote a priority AAU policy focus by including the activity of the Department’s Special Envoy for Afghan Women and Girls. Additionally, although the website’s homepage included current consular and security messages, that content was not replicated on relevant intermediate pages such as “Messages for U.S. Citizens.” Section staff explained that without LE staff to support website management and Dari and Pashtu translations for posted content, the PD Section could not fully support all digital media platforms and chose to prioritize the official Facebook and Twitter accounts. Although staff updated some older content during the inspection, they opted to defer a full refresh effort until the Department’s roll-out of new website software, scheduled for deployment to the AAU in the summer of 2022. Failing to maintain current, relevant, and accurate information on an official website undermines the dissemination of priority content to target audiences and increases the chance of misunderstandings due to incorrect or outdated information.

**Recommendation 2:** The Afghanistan Affairs Unit, in coordination with the Bureau of Global Public Affairs and the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, should maintain its official website with current and relevant information. (Action: AAU, in coordination with GPA and SCA)

***The Afghanistan Affairs Unit Lacked a Unified, Mission-Wide Platform for Managing Contact Information***

The AAU lacked a unified, mission-wide platform for managing its contact information. Because Embassy Kabul did not use a cloud-based contact database, the contact information stored in various formats on local drives was mostly lost when the embassy suspended operations. Contact information is important to building strategic relationships and engaging foreign contacts. OIG found that PD and other AAU sections were struggling to rebuild contact lists and lacked a coordinated approach or shared platform to guide this exercise. The Contact Relationship Management platform,<sup>21</sup> a cloud-based system, is the Department’s preferred platform to manage contacts and outreach activities. As stated in 2 FAM 113.1c(10), chiefs of mission are required to maintain appropriate, systematic contact with all significant elements at their posts, to include a coordinated effort to establish relations with potential leaders from all levels of society, including those outside the power structure. Without a contact management system, AAU lacked the ability to efficiently manage contacts and engagement and ensure continuity of operations, especially during a period of high Foreign Service and LE staff turnover.

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<sup>21</sup> Deployment and operational support for the Department’s Contact Relationship Management is overseen by the Office of Contact Relationship Management in the Bureau of Global Public Affairs, in coordination with the Department’s Bureau of Information Management, the Chief Technology Officer for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, and the regional and functional bureaus.

**Recommendation 3:** The Afghanistan Affairs Unit should implement a unified, mission-wide contact management system. (Action: AAU, in coordination with GPA)

## **Consular Operations**

The AAU's Consular Section was atypical in that it provided a limited range of consular services to only two groups of customers, with all other traditional consular services being provided by Embassy Doha's Consular Section. Despite the limited range of its operations, the section's work was unique and carried out under difficult circumstances and tight time constraints. The three-officer AAU Consular Section had two responsibilities.<sup>22</sup> The first was to identify U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, and their accompanying family members arriving from Afghanistan and facilitate their onward travel to the United States by commercial air or on U.S. government charter flights. The second was to complete visa processing for final-stage Afghan SIV applicants arriving in Doha.<sup>23</sup>

To achieve these goals, consular staff told OIG they met incoming relocation flights from Kabul to identify U.S. citizens and family members to determine their status and next steps for onward travel to the United States. At the time of the inspection, the Consular Section had an SIV processing space at Camp As Sayliyah, where Afghan citizens were housed, to complete processing of the SIVs. In addition to the consular officers at Camp As Sayliyah, at any given time, other consular personnel may be working from their hotel rooms or at borrowed desks at Embassy Doha. AAU consular staff were also required to coordinate regularly with Embassy Doha's Consular Section, which printed AAU's approved SIVs, issued emergency passports for U.S. citizens who had arrived from Afghanistan without valid documentation, collected fees as needed, and maintained control of consular accountable items.

During the inspection, OIG reviewed Consular Section leadership, U.S. citizen services, management controls, and the fraud prevention program. OIG did not review SIV processing because OIG's Office of Audits was conducting a review of the Afghan SIV program.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The Consular Section is regularly augmented by two to five temporary duty officers as well as two experienced locally employed staff immigrant visa assistants from neighboring countries.

<sup>23</sup> Congress established the Afghan SIV program in 2009 to resettle Afghans who worked on behalf of the United States and who experienced an ongoing and serious threat as a result of their employment with the U.S. government. Since then, additional actions have been taken to redefine "ongoing and serious threat." On August 25, 2021, the Deputy Chief of Mission for Afghanistan determined that any noncitizen who was employed in Afghanistan by or on behalf of the U.S. government or by the International Security Assistance Force or any successor mission, has experienced or is experiencing an ongoing serious threat as a consequence of their employment. As a result, Afghan SIV applicants have not needed to submit a statement to establish that they have experienced an ongoing and serious threat as part of their SIV application submitted to the Chief of Mission.

<sup>24</sup> OIG's Office of Audits conducted a comprehensive review (complemented by related work by the OIGs from USAID and the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security) in response to Congressional requests issued in September and October 2021 seeking an OIG review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa program. OIG, *Information Report: Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program Metrics* (AUD-MERO-22-38, September 2022), and *Compliance Follow-Up Review of the Afghan Special Immigrant Visa Program* (AUD-MERO-23-01, October 2022).



During the inspection, OIG identified two consular internal control issues that the AAU corrected. Specifically, the AAU:

- Established a Visas Viper Committee to submit AAU monthly reports to meet Visas Viper reporting as required by 9 FAM 304.4-4(B).<sup>25</sup>
- Designated a Fraud Prevention Manager, as required by the Foreign Affairs Handbook (FAH) in 7 FAH-1 H-942.2a.

OIG determined that AAU's consular operations generally complied with guidance contained in 7 FAM, 9 FAM, 7 FAH, applicable statutes, and other Department policies, with the exception noted below.

***Consular Section Lacked Required Fraud Prevention Strategy and Standard Operating Procedures***

The Consular Section lacked a written fraud prevention strategy and standard operating procedures (SOPs). As required in 7 FAH-1 H-943.7a, each consular section must define its fraud prevention program in a written strategy to include specific responsibilities, goals, and priorities. This strategy should lead, in turn, to the development of SOPs used to organize, communicate, and implement best practices. AAU's Consular Section had not developed SOPs, as required in 7 FAH-1 H-943.7e. Relevant SOPs could include identifying legitimate Afghan documents, detecting anomalies by understanding cultural norms, and forwarding information in cases needing further review by U.S. agencies. The Consular Section had not established a fraud prevention strategy because emergency responsibilities after the closure of Embassy Kabul took priority over this task. However, without a fraud prevention strategy, incoming consular staff will not have ready access to established procedures essential to reducing fraud risks and increasing the efficiency of consular operations.

**Recommendation 4:** The Afghanistan Affairs Unit should develop and implement a written fraud prevention strategy and standard operating procedures in accordance with Department standards. (Action: AAU)

**Foreign Assistance**

***The Afghanistan Affairs Unit Took Steps to Improve Foreign Assistance Coordination***

The AAU took steps shortly before the inspection to improve foreign assistance coordination with Department bureaus and agencies operating programs in Afghanistan. OIG found that the AAU had coordinated some foreign assistance activities through staff meetings and other ad hoc communications, consistent with Department standards 1 FAM 013.2k(6)<sup>26</sup> and 2 FAM

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<sup>25</sup> The Visas Viper program is a mechanism for overseas missions to provide information on foreign nationals with possible terrorist connections.

<sup>26</sup> 1 FAM 013.2k(6) states the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, the Arms Export Control Act, and other statutes authorize a range of programs for foreign assistance and foreign military sales. The chief of mission has a

113.1c(3) and (4).<sup>27</sup> However, several bureaus with ongoing Foreign Assistance Act programs in Afghanistan, including the Bureaus of Political-Military Affairs, International Security and Nonproliferation, and International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, told OIG they did not have direct contact with the AAU. Two of the bureaus did not believe that coordination with the AAU was yet necessary and the other had reached out to the AAU but had not heard back. Guidance in 1 FAM 013.2k(6) gives chiefs of mission authority to direct and supervise all programs authorized under the Foreign Assistance Act. OIG has found in previous inspections that insufficient coordination on foreign assistance programs raises the risk of program duplication, lack of alignment with ICS goals, and inadequate monitoring.<sup>28</sup> Interagency staff told OIG that lack of coordination led to incorrect information in cables and miscommunication in discussions with the Taliban on humanitarian assistance. During the inspection, the AAU designated an assistance coordinator, at the request of the SCA Front Office, to facilitate communication between the AAU and Department bureaus and agencies with programs operating in Afghanistan. OIG also observed increased efforts by the AAU and the Department to improve foreign assistance coordination. For example, the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs initiated coordination with the AAU and visited Doha to meet with the AAU during the inspection. As a result, OIG did not make a recommendation to address this issue.

## RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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The AAU had one employee in Doha, a U.S. direct-hire Management Officer, to interface with Embassy Doha and Department offices on management issues. The Management Officer addressed issues such as processing travel payments for former Embassy Kabul staff, obtaining special benefits and allowances for AAU staff, hiring contract drivers, and finding living and workspace for AAU staff. During the inspection, OIG identified and the Management Officer corrected one deficiency related to the designation of AAU officers to key roles, consistent with guidance in 2 FAM 113.3. OIG also found deficiencies in records management and domestic employee teleworking overseas policy, as described below.

### ***The Afghanistan Affairs Unit Did Not Comply With Department Records Management Requirements***

The AAU's records management program did not comply with Department standards in 5 FAH-4 H-200 and 5 FAM 410 for records organization and oversight. OIG's review of files on shared drives and SharePoint sites found that some AAU sections did not maintain their electronic files and records in a systematic and organized manner to allow efficient retrieval as required in 5

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significant role in directing and supervising the implementation of all programs authorized by these Acts in the chief of mission's country of responsibility, consistent with the President's Letter of Instruction.

<sup>27</sup> 2 FAM 113.1c(3) and (4) require the chief of mission to keep fully and currently informed with respect to all activities and operations of the U.S. government within that country and manage all U.S. executive branch resources, with certain exceptions, in country. (The exceptions are listed in 2 FAM 113.1c(2).)

<sup>28</sup> One example is OIG, *Inspection of Embassy Nairobi, Kenya* (ISP-I-19-08, October 2018).



FAH-4 H-218.3. For example, the Political-Economic and PD Sections did not maintain their documents on AAU's shared drive, but rather saved their documents on their individual drives.

In addition, the AAU did not adhere to guidance in 5 FAM 444.2, "Communications via Non-Government Messaging Applications and Platforms," which allows for the use of messaging applications, but requires messages created or received while conducting official business to be captured and stored on official Department systems within 20 days to be preserved in accordance with the Federal Records Act. OIG found that AAU staff used messaging apps such as WhatsApp to perform their daily work and to communicate with each other and with Department officials, such as the Special Representative for Afghanistan and other SCA staff. However, they did not systematically archive these records within the 20 days, as required. OIG found that messages were not archived in accordance with guidance because the AAU did not have a designated records coordinator, as required in 5 FAM 414.5b, to regularly review the unit's record systems and record management practices for compliance with policies and procedures. The absence of an effective records management program increased the risk of loss of important data and historical records that could affect the Department's and the AAU's ability to conduct policy analysis, decision-making, and archival research.

**Recommendation 5:** The Afghanistan Affairs Unit should comply with Department records management requirements for records storage and the capturing and archiving of electronic messages. (Action: AAU)

***The Afghanistan Affairs Unit Authorized Domestic Employee Teleworking Overseas Status for an Employee Who Did Not Meet Eligibility Requirements***

The AAU authorized a Foreign Service officer to fill the Information Officer position remotely from Seoul, South Korea on a 2-year assignment under a 3 FAM provision for domestically assigned employees teleworking overseas.<sup>29</sup> However, this employee did not meet Department requirements for such an assignment. According to 3 FAM 2371.3a, the domestic employee teleworking overseas status is a workplace flexibility that the Department may consider to allow U.S. direct-hire employees who are assigned to domestic positions to accomplish the duties of their position from a foreign country. The assigned duty station for the AAU Information Officer position is Doha, Qatar; it is not a domestic position. In addition, the employee did not have an authorized arrangement for this work status or approval from NEA/SCA-EX, as required by 3 FAM 2371.4(2). Instead, the officer had an informal arrangement with the AAU Front Office that did not meet Department requirements. AAU management told OIG that they did not realize they were not in compliance with Department requirements. By not adhering to Department personnel policies, standards, and procedures governing personnel systems, AAU risked providing unequal benefits to its personnel, contrary to Department personnel objectives.

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<sup>29</sup> Guidance in 3 FAM 2371.3a provides for certain employees assigned to a domestic position to telework from an overseas location for a limited period.

**Recommendation 6:** The Afghanistan Affairs Unit should comply with the Department's domestic employee teleworking overseas policy and eligibility requirements. (Action: AAU)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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OIG provided a draft of this report to Department stakeholders for their review and comment on the findings and recommendations. OIG issued the following recommendations to the Afghanistan Affairs Unit and the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. The Department's complete response can be found in Appendix B.<sup>1</sup>

**Recommendation 1:** The Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs should delineate and publicize the roles and responsibilities of the Afghanistan Affairs Unit and other Department offices dealing with Afghanistan issues. (Action: SCA)

**Management Response:** In its October 20, 2022, response,<sup>2</sup> the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs concurred with this recommendation.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs delineated and publicized the roles and responsibilities of the Afghanistan Affairs Unit and other Department offices dealing with Afghanistan issues.

**Recommendation 2:** The Afghanistan Affairs Unit, in coordination with the Bureau of Global Public Affairs and the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, should maintain its official website with current and relevant information. (Action: AAU, in coordination with GPA and SCA)

**Management Response:** In its October 20, 2022, response, the Afghanistan Affairs Unit concurred with this recommendation.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the Afghanistan Affairs Unit maintained its official website with current and relevant information.

**Recommendation 3:** The Afghanistan Affairs Unit should implement a unified, mission-wide contact management system. (Action: AAU, in coordination with GPA)

**Management Response:** In its October 20, 2022, response, the Afghanistan Affairs Unit concurred with this recommendation.

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<sup>1</sup> OIG faced delays in completing this work because of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting operational challenges. These challenges included the inability to conduct most in-person meetings, limitations on our presence at the workplace, difficulty accessing certain information, prohibitions on travel, and related difficulties within the agencies we oversee, which also affected their ability to respond to our requests.

<sup>2</sup> In an email to OIG dated November 7, 2022, the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs cleared the Afghanistan Affairs Unit's response to recommendation 1.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the Afghanistan Affairs Unit implemented a unified, mission-wide contact management system.

**Recommendation 4:** The Afghanistan Affairs Unit should develop and implement a written fraud prevention strategy and standard operating procedures in accordance with Department standards. (Action: AAU)

**Management Response:** In its October 20, 2022, response, the Afghanistan Affairs Unit concurred with this recommendation. The unit noted an estimated completion date of March 31, 2023.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the Afghanistan Affairs Unit developed and implemented a written fraud prevention strategy and standard operating procedures in accordance with Department standards.

**Recommendation 5:** The Afghanistan Affairs Unit should comply with Department records management requirements for records storage and the capturing and archiving of electronic messages. (Action: AAU)

**Management Response:** In its October 20, 2022, response, the Afghanistan Affairs Unit concurred with this recommendation.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the Afghanistan Affairs Unit complied with Department records management requirements for records storage and the capturing and archiving of electronic messages.

**Recommendation 6:** The Afghanistan Affairs Unit should comply with the Department's domestic employee teleworking overseas policy and eligibility requirements. (Action: AAU)

**Management Response:** In its October 20, 2022, response, the Afghanistan Affairs Unit neither agreed nor disagreed with this recommendation. The unit noted the Joint Executive Office for the Bureaus of Near Eastern Affairs and South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA) and SCA's Office of Press and Public Diplomacy completed the necessary steps to bring the Afghanistan Affairs Unit into compliance with the domestic employee teleworking overseas policy and eligibility requirements.

**OIG Reply:** OIG considers the recommendation resolved. The recommendation can be closed when OIG receives and accepts documentation that the Afghanistan Affairs Unit complied with the Department's domestic employee teleworking overseas policy and eligibility requirements.

## PRINCIPAL OFFICIALS

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<b>Title</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Arrival Date</b>
<b>Chiefs of Mission:</b>		
Chargé d’Affaires, ad interim	Ian McCary	8/2021
Deputy Chief of Mission	none	
<b>Chiefs of Sections:</b>		
Management	Kevin Allen	8/2021
Consular	Greg Floyd	8/2021
Political-Economic	Yuriy Fedkiw	8/2021
Public Affairs	John Johnson <sup>a</sup>	9/2021
Regional Security	Roger Thyen	9/2021
<b>Other Agencies:</b>		
U.S. Agency for International Development	Peter Duffy	9/2021

<sup>a</sup> At the time of the inspection, John Johnson was serving as the acting Deputy Chief of Mission.

**Source:** Generated by OIG from data provided by the Afghanistan Affairs Unit.

## APPENDIX A: OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

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This inspection was conducted from March 14 to July 25, 2022, in accordance with the Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation, as issued in 2020 by the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency, and the Inspections Handbook, as issued by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) for the Department and the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM).

### Objectives and Scope

The Office of Inspections provides the Secretary of State, the Chief Executive Officer of USAGM, and Congress with systematic and independent evaluations of the operations of the Department and USAGM. Inspections cover three broad areas, consistent with Section 209 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980:

- **Policy Implementation:** whether policy goals and objectives are being effectively achieved and U.S. interests are accurately and effectively represented; and whether all elements of an office or mission are being adequately coordinated.
- **Resource Management:** whether resources are being used and managed with maximum efficiency, effectiveness, and economy; and whether financial transactions and accounts are properly conducted, maintained, and reported.
- **Management Controls:** whether the administration of activities and operations meets the requirements of applicable laws and regulations; whether internal management controls have been instituted to ensure quality of performance and reduce the likelihood of mismanagement; and whether instances of fraud, waste, or abuse exist and whether adequate steps for detection, correction, and prevention have been taken.

### Methodology

OIG used a risk-based approach to prepare for this inspection. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and taking into consideration relevant guidance, OIG conducted some portions of the inspection remotely and relied on audio- and video-conferencing tools in addition to in-person interviews with Department and other personnel. Specifically, the public diplomacy and consular portions of the inspection were conducted remotely. The executive direction, political-economic, foreign assistance, and resource management portions of the inspection were conducted in-person at the Afghanistan Affairs Unit in Doha, Qatar. OIG reviewed pertinent records; circulated surveys and compiled the results; and reviewed the substance of this report and its findings and recommendations with offices, individuals, and organizations affected by the review. OIG used professional judgment and analyzed physical, documentary, and testimonial evidence to develop its findings, conclusions, and actionable recommendations.

## APPENDIX B: MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

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Thursday, October 20, 2022

UNCLASSIFIED

THRU: SCA Assistant Secretary Donald Lu

TO: OIG – Sandra Lewis, Assistant Inspector General for Inspections

FROM: Afghanistan Affairs Unit Chargé d’Affaires Karen Decker

SUBJECT: Response to Draft OIG Report – Inspection of the Afghanistan Affairs Unit

The Afghanistan Affairs Unit has reviewed the draft OIG inspection report. We provide the following comments in response to the recommendations provided by OIG:

**OIG Recommendation 1:** The Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs should delineate and publicize the roles and responsibilities of the Afghanistan Affairs Unit and other Department offices dealing with Afghanistan issues. (Action: SCA)

**Management Response:** SCA and AAU concur with this recommendation, while noting that conditions in Afghanistan continue to evolve, as does the Department’s approach to advancing U.S. interests in Afghanistan. The Department’s lines of effort will thus likely remain somewhat flexible as USG policies and priorities come into greater focus, but not to such an extent that improved communication and deconfliction will not achieve the end state OIG recommends. As part of a series of strategic planning exercises that will occur before December 31, 2022, SCA and AAU will continue to refine their respective roles and responsibilities.

**OIG Recommendation 2:** The Afghanistan Affairs Unit, in coordination with the Bureau of Global Public Affairs and the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs, should maintain its official website with current and relevant information. (Action: AAU, in coordination with GPA and SCA)

**Management Response:** Post concurs with the recommendation, but notes that short staffing has impacted our ability to fulfill these obligations. Nor has the new webmaster software rolled out to post. Post has recently onboarded a new Afghan contract staff webmaster. That employee will support the Public Affairs Section’s updating and constant refreshing of website material, in accordance with the OIG recommendation.

**OIG Recommendation 3:** The Afghanistan Affairs Unit should implement a unified, mission-wide contact management system. (Action: AAU, in coordination with GPA)

**Management Response:** Post concurs with this recommendation, while noting that many USG contact databases were lost during/as a result of the non-combatant evacuation operation from Embassy Kabul. Moreover, since the evacuation, many former Afghan contacts of the embassy have either relocated abroad, or become unreachable in Afghanistan due to security or other concerns. In August 2022, post began been painstakingly collecting and validating contact information of persons who still wish to be in contact with the U.S. government. That effort is and will be ongoing, likely for several years. Still, post has already begun to collate the information available into a controlled file housed on its SharePoint site and will integrate the contents of that file into the Contact Records Management platform once staffing resources become available to do so.

**OIG Recommendation 4:** The Afghanistan Affairs Unit should develop and implement a written fraud prevention strategy and standard operating procedures in accordance with Department standards. (Action: AAU)

**Management Response:** Post concurs with the recommendation, while noting that the AAU Consular Section continues to operate in an *in-extremis* manner with a heavy reliance on TDY staff. AAU/CONS is coming to its full USDH compliment by the end of calendar year 2022 and seeks to finalize a fraud prevention strategy by March 31, 2023. In the interim, AAU CONS has already taken a number of steps to detect and deter fraud in the adjudicating process, to include:

- producing several processing SOPs, including how to handle cases that would ordinarily fall under the responsibility of a Fraud Prevention Unit. (Estimated timeframe: Already completed)
- initiating the hiring of give permanent consular LES (Visa Assistants), all of whom will have shared anti-fraud responsibilities. (Estimated timeframe: Dependent on Embassy Doha's Human Resources Office's processing)
- scheduled the one-month TDY to post of an adjudicator from CA's Office of Fraud Prevention Programs, whose expertise post will leverage to establish appropriate SOPs and draft a written fraud prevention strategy. (TDY: Before December 31, 2022)
- routinely consulting the A/SIV office in NEA-SCA/EX for any case involving potentially fraudulent employment letters and using the Advisory Opinion channel to the Bureau of Legal Affairs' consular attorney advisers for cases involving fraud requiring a finer assessment or the law, and with CA/FPP to compare less commonly presented Afghan-government documentation that might be fraudulent.

**OIG Recommendation 5:** The Afghanistan Affairs Unit should comply with Department records management requirements for records storage and the capturing and archiving of electronic messages. (Action: AAU)

**Management Response:** Post concurs with this recommendation, while noting that some contract staff lack access to the designated storage location for official records (the AAU SharePoint site) either due to complicated information technology glitches which often recur after resolution or take extended time to resolve. Nevertheless, post has established a



common naming convention for files and has been taking steady steps toward organizing files within SharePoint so that they can be retrieved and retired on an appropriate schedule. All USDH employees have been reminded of FAH-required records management practices and are now compliant with those practices. Specifically for Public Diplomacy grants, post maintains a separate Kabul Shares site that is painstakingly maintained with the help of SCA/PPD in Washington and maintains files of photos and videos on a USG-licensed Box account.

Post has also recirculated for Mission awareness and use the 5 FAM 443-444 guidance regarding electronic messages.

**OIG Recommendation 6:** The Afghanistan Affairs Unit should comply with the Department's domestic employee teleworking overseas policy and eligibility requirements. (Action: AAU)

**Management Response:** In July-August 2022, NEA/SCA/EX and SCA/PPD completed necessary steps to bring post into compliance with the domestic employee teleworking overseas policy and eligibility requirements.

The point of contact for this memorandum is Deputy Chief of Mission April Wells, [WellsAS@state.gov](mailto:WellsAS@state.gov).

## ABBREVIATIONS

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A/DCM	Acting Deputy Chief of Mission
AAU	Afghanistan Affairs Unit
FAH	Foreign Affairs Handbook
FAM	Foreign Affairs Manual
ICS	Integrated Country Strategy
LE	Locally Employed
NEA-SCA/EX	Joint Executive Office for the Bureaus of Near Eastern Affairs and South and Central Asian Affairs
PD	Public Diplomacy
SCA	Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs
SIV	Special Immigrant Visa
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TDY	Temporary Duty
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development

## OIG INSPECTION TEAM MEMBERS

---

Bruce Williamson, Team Leader

Daniel Chen, Team Manager

Jefferson Brown

Calvin Carlsen

Robert David

Laura Hettinger

Mark Jeleniewicz

Sharon Umber

Gregory Winstead

### **Other Contributors**

Dolores Adams

Leslie Gerson

Nina Iskandarsjach



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