

THE SECRETARY OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

September 22, 2024

The Honorable  
Michael McCaul, Chairman  
House Foreign Affairs Committee  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I write in response to your communication dated August 12, 2024 requesting my appearance at a hearing on September 10, 2024 before your Committee regarding its investigation into the 2021 U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. This letter also memorializes our two phone conversations on August 19 and September 3, 2024 on this topic, during which I personally sought to reach an accommodation with you by sharing my availability to testify and offered alternative witnesses for a hearing on days in which I was not available. I am profoundly disappointed you have once again chosen to send me a subpoena and threaten contempt, rather than engage with me and the Department in a meaningful way to resolve this matter through the constitutionally-mandated accommodation process. As I have made clear, I am willing to testify and have offered several reasonable alternatives to the dates unilaterally demanded by the Committee during which I am carrying out the President's important foreign policy objectives. I urge you to withdraw your subpoena, reconsider your planned contempt proceedings, and begin good faith engagement with the Department to find an appropriate accommodation.

Consistent with the Department's letters to your Committee over the last 18 months, the Department remains committed to accommodating your need for information regarding the Afghanistan withdrawal. Since January 2023, the Department has expended thousands of hours fulfilling your requests for documents, briefings, and interviews related to Afghanistan.

This is in addition to the energy and resources dedicated to our own internal review of the Department's role in the withdrawal through the After-Action Review, of which a classified copy remains in the Committee's custody.

As you know, the Department has been balancing more than 50 unique investigatory inquiries from eight separate House committees, including more than a dozen from your Committee. Even so, at my direction, the Department has provided more than 20,000 pages of documents to your Committee over the course of this single investigation, and as part of the Department's substantial and continuing accommodation, these documents have been provided with minimal redactions. This includes the Department taking the unprecedented step of allowing House Foreign Affairs Committee Members to view a highly sensitive cable and providing the Committee internal memos related to the Department's After-Action Review. Many of the materials produced to the Committee are highly deliberative, but these minimally redacted documents were provided in an effort to ensure the Committee had information necessary for its stated oversight interests while making a modest accommodation to the longstanding Executive Branch institutional interests at issue.

Beyond document production, the Department has conducted nine high-level briefings for Members of Congress and their staffs throughout the investigation, and made available or engaged 15 current and former senior Department officials for transcribed interviews to House Foreign Affairs Committee staff and Members. Additionally, I have personally testified publicly before Congress 14 times on the withdrawal from Afghanistan, including four times directly before your Committee as recently as May 22, 2024. It was critical to have done so. Americans deserve to hear directly from their leaders on the decisions to end America's longest war and the steps taken to fulfill our commitment to the thousands of brave Afghans who stood side-by-side with the United States over the course of two decades.

President Biden acted in the best interests of the American people when he decided to bring our troops home and end America's longest war.

This decision ensured another generation of Americans would not have to fight and die in Afghanistan—a full decade after Osama bin Laden had been brought to justice. It strengthened our national security by better positioning us to confront the challenges of the future and put the United States in a stronger place to lead the world. It freed up critical military, intelligence, diplomatic, and other resources to ensure we are better poised to respond to today's threats to international peace and stability—whether that be Russia's brutal and unprovoked assault on Ukraine, China's increasingly assertive moves in the Indo-Pacific and around the world, or a persistent and global terrorist threat.

As Secretary of State, it is my personal responsibility to engage in critical, high-level diplomacy wherever and whenever it is required to advance the national security interests of the United States. However, after more than a year and a half of the Department's continued cooperation with your investigation, on September 3, you issued an unnecessary subpoena for me to appear at a public hearing before your Committee on September 19. As I previewed to you during our September 3 phone call before you issued the first subpoena, on September 19 I was in Egypt, where I met with President El-Sisi and Foreign Minister Abdelatty as part of our administration's tireless efforts to secure a cease-fire in Gaza. On September 18, you issued a "superseding" subpoena for me to appear on September 24, accompanied by a letter in which you claimed you had just become aware of my travel to the Middle East, despite the fact I had personally informed you in early September, and my staff had reiterated, that I would be in the Middle East on September 19. You also noticed a Committee markup of contempt proceedings on that date should I fail to appear for the hearing.

As I also indicated to you in our September 3 conversation, this week I am in New York participating in the United Nations General Assembly high-level week—an annual gathering of presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers, and other world leaders to address the most pressing issues facing the world. The events of this week were scheduled many months ago, and the dates of the General Assembly's high-level week have long been publicly noticed. Throughout the week, I will be meeting with these world leaders as

I spearhead diplomatic engagements on matters of great concern to the American people, including the conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan.

On September 24 alone—the day you have asked me to appear—I will: represent the United States at the UN Security Council debate on the war in Ukraine, during which I will debate the Russian and Chinese foreign ministers; host alongside the President a leader-level meeting of the United States-led Global Coalition on Synthetic Drugs to fight the production and trafficking of fentanyl; accompany President Biden for his address to the General Assembly and his bilateral meeting with UN Secretary General Guterres; meet with foreign ministers in the Partnership for Global Infrastructure to secure commitments for the Lobito Corridor in Africa; and conduct several other bilateral and multilateral engagements. You have been a leader in Congress on a number of issues of vital importance to the American people—particularly regarding support for Ukraine and the need to counter the threat American lives posed by synthetic drugs—and I believe you would agree U.S. representation at the highest levels in these engagements is essential. These are engagements that advance several of the President’s highest foreign policy priorities, and the Secretary of State must conduct these engagements on behalf of the U.S. Government. I cannot—and will not—agree to cede the field to our adversaries. As you said in a recent statement, “Turning a blind eye to aggression and hamstringing our friends is no way to conduct foreign policy.”

These events, which have been in the works for months, must happen while world leaders are in New York and hinge on my participation. Given my travel, I offered in our September 3 call for either one of the Deputy Secretaries of State—our two most senior and Senate-confirmed officials—to testify on behalf of the Department during this window in my stead. I reiterate that offer here as a demonstration of my willingness to try to ensure that the Committee has the information it needs to exercise its oversight functions. Additionally, I remain willing to make myself available to testify after I return from my travel.

I firmly believe it is in our nation's best interest for the Committee and the Congress to take a non-partisan approach to addressing the lessons learned from U.S. involvement in and withdrawal from Afghanistan. As I said to you during our September 3 call, I am happy to engage with you immediately on any legislative proposals from the Committee, and my testimony is not necessary to begin that process. You acknowledged in a September 11 hearing with Under Secretary John Bass that I had already made that commitment to you, and I reaffirm that the Department stands ready to work alongside any Member who expresses serious interest in improving the Department's crisis preparedness and response mechanisms.

I am committed to engaging with you in accordance with the constitutionally-mandated accommodation process and hope we can reach agreement on one of the reasonable alternatives I have offered for your consideration. My staff is available to further discuss these or other accommodations at any time.

Sincerely,



Antony Blinken  
Secretary of State

cc: The Honorable Gregory Meeks, Ranking Member  
House Foreign Affairs Committee