

October 3, 2022

Amy Liu  
Interim President  
Brookings Institution  
1775 Massachusetts Ave. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Ms. Liu:

I am writing to request additional information about how Brookings ensures that its agreements with and funding from foreign governments do not undermine the independence of its research, and about my concern that the organization does not appear to be able to ensure that its officials and leaders are avoiding illegal or inappropriate lobbying.

I wrote to you in July 2022 after press reports indicated that Brookings' previous president, retired Marine Corps General John R. Allen, was under investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for "mak[ing] false statements and withh[olding] 'incriminating' documents about his role in an illegal foreign lobbying campaign on behalf of the wealthy Persian Gulf nation of Qatar."<sup>1</sup>

I appreciate your written response to my questions. But your answers raise several new concerns. First, your letter indicates that Brookings has policies in place to "protect the integrity and objectivity of Brookings' scholarship and operations."<sup>2</sup> But in the case of General Allen these policies appeared to be a complete and unmitigated failure. Indeed, according to your response, Brookings only learned of General Allen's work for Qatar – which is reported to be extensive – "through media reports."<sup>3</sup>

I also have significant concerns about agreements that Brookings has in place with foreign governments, and the extent to which these agreements undermine the organization's "devot[ion] to independent, in-depth research."<sup>4</sup> My July letter described specific concerns with Brookings's memorandum of understanding with Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to establish its Doha Center:

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Senator Elizabeth Warren to Brookings, July 15, 2022, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2022.07.15%20Letter%20to%20Brookings%20regarding%20illegal%20foreign%20lobbying.pdf>; Associated Press, "FBI seizes retired general's data related to Qatar lobbying," Alan Suderman and Jim Mustian, June 7, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/politics-us-news-think-tanks-nato-ap-top-5c30827587d2295012549d5d65fc806e>.

<sup>2</sup> Brookings response to Senator Elizabeth Warren, August 22, 2022, p. 1. <https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Response%20to%20Senator%20Elizabeth%20Warren.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Brookings, "About Us," <https://www.brookings.edu/about-us/>.

The memorandum of understanding—part of an agreement for Qatar to provide Brookings \$14.8 million over four years 11—included Brookings committing to the Ministry that the Doha Center would “engage in regular consultation,” submit an annual budget, and provide an “agenda for programs that will be developed by the Center.” It also required the Doha Center to consult with the Ministry “prior to making any material modifications, additions, and/or amendments” to its planned activities.<sup>5</sup>

In your response you said that “Brookings’s financial support from foreign governments is documented in funding agreements” and disclosed in Brookings’ Annual Report.<sup>6</sup> The 2021 annual report revealed funding from at least nine other foreign governments in addition to Qatar, as well as multiple multinational entities and corporations.<sup>7</sup> However, Brookings does not make public, and did not provide to me in response to my questions, any copies of those agreements.

While you noted that funders must acknowledge commitments to “objective and rigorous scholarship” and that Brookings’ scholars “make the final determinations regarding their scholarly activities” it remains unclear whether other foreign funders are entitled to regular consultation, budget review, and agenda reviews,<sup>8</sup> and to what extent this may affect the overall integrity of Brookings’ research. This is why I remain concerned that these foreign governments – as well as the many private sector corporations and wealthy individuals that are listed as Brookings contributors – can use Brookings and other think tanks to covertly peddle their influence before Congress and the administration.

In order to answer my outstanding questions and to improve the public’s understanding of how Brookings works with foreign government and corporate donors, I ask for you to provide answers to the following questions no later than October 24:

1. You indicated Brookings learned about the allegations against retired General Allen through press reports. Based on public reports, does it appear that General Allen violated Brookings conflict of interest policies?
2. Brookings agreement with Qatar’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs included commitments to “engage in regular consultation,” submit an annual budget, and provide an “agenda for programs that will be developed by the Center.”<sup>9</sup> Please indicate how these activities are consistent with Brookings conflict of interest policy.

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<sup>5</sup> Letter from Senator Elizabeth Warren to Brookings, July 15, 2022, p. 2, <https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2022.07.15%20Letter%20to%20Brookings%20regarding%20illegal%20foreign%20lobbying.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Brookings response to Senator Elizabeth Warren, August 22, 2022, p. 3. <https://www.warren.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Response%20to%20Senator%20Elizabeth%20Warren.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> These foreign governments were Switzerland, Australia, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Norway, Japan, South Korea, Finland, and France. Brookings, “2021 Annual Report,” <https://annualreport.brookings.edu/honor-roll>.

<sup>8</sup> Brookings response to Senator Elizabeth Warren, August 22, 2022, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Politico, “Brookings Doha Center Establishment Agreement: Memorandum of Association,” January 1, 2007. <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/22062334-20070101-brookings-doha-center-establishment-agreementmemorandum-of-association?responsive=1&title=1>.

- a. How often do the consultations occur? Please provide copies of agenda items for each consultation that occurred in 2021 and 2022.
  - b. Does Qatar’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs have the ability to veto material on the agenda, or otherwise influence the content of “the agenda for programs . . . developed by the Center”?<sup>10</sup> Does it have the ability to place items on the agenda?
3. Has Brookings agreed to allow other donors to “engage in regular consultation” with Brookings scholars or staff as part of the funding agreement?<sup>11</sup> How many agreements provide this requirement and for which donors?
  4. Has Brookings allowed other donors to review a work agenda with Brookings scholars or staff as part of the funding agreement? How many agreements provide this requirement and for which donors?
  5. Do other Brookings funding agreements provide donors the ability to review program budgets? How many agreements provide this requirement and for which donors?
  6. How does Brookings apply its donor conflict of interest policy when it comes to non-scholarly activities, including events, private meetings, or other briefings?
  7. Has Brookings received contributions from any foreign governments or foreign-government related entities that are not explicitly disclosed in the annual report?
  8. Please provide my office a copy of all funding agreements with foreign entities.

Congress and the public deserve to know how foreign countries and corporations may be buying influence over the federal government through think tanks that are designed to influence federal government decisions and actions. I appreciate your assistance in helping to understand Brookings’ role in this process.

Sincerely,



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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

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<sup>10</sup> Politico, “Brookings Doha Center Establishment Agreement: Memorandum of Association,” January 1, 2007. <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/22062334-20070101-brookings-doha-center-establishment-agreementmemorandum-of-association?responsive=1&title=1>.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*