

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 15, 2020

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Esper:

We are writing to inquire about the status of security assistance to the government of Afghanistan. We have heard conflicting messages from the administration on this assistance since Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's announcement on March 23rd that \$1 billion would be cut due to lack of progress by Afghanistan's political leaders in forming a government. Despite many inquiries at a staff level to the Department of Defense and Department of State since late March, it remains unclear if this reduction has actually taken place and if so, in what specific areas.

In a press availability on June 1st, Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad said, "I think the money is cut and the implementation is – and – with the Pentagon, so you'll have to get on the details of the implementation as to when, what part, from which account they are taking that's – that end of it handled – the Pentagon, and I would like you ask them that."

Bearing in mind Ambassador Khalilzad's request, we have the following questions:

1. Did the Department of Defense cut \$1 billion in security assistance for Afghanistan? If not, did the Department cut any amount of such assistance, and if so, what amount?
2. If so, what fiscal year and accounts was this funding cut from? If not, is there still a cut under consideration for the current fiscal year or future fiscal years?
3. How did the administration determine that \$1 billion was the correct level to cut?
4. Please describe the interagency process that led to this decision. Was the Department of Defense consulted prior to Secretary Pompeo's announcement? What analysis and input from other parts of the interagency like the intelligence community went into this determination? Had the Department of Defense already identified where the cuts would come from in its budget when Secretary Pompeo made the announcement?
5. Will the execution of such funding cuts impact the U.S. military presence on the ground in Afghanistan and our ability to pursue our national security objectives in the country?
6. If the administration has determined that this cut in security assistance does not diminish our ability to pursue our national security objectives, what conditions have changed to create such a sizeable surplus?
7. Now that Afghan political leadership has formed a governing arrangement, is the administration considering restoring these funds to incentivize further positive actions?

This continued lack of transparency has real implications for the Afghan government as it continues to defend itself from attacks by both the Taliban and ISIS. We understand from Afghan government officials that they have not been informed about any details related to a funding cut or even whether the funding cut will actually take place. We also understand that our NATO allies were not informed about the decision in advance though it could have significant implications for the security of their troops serving in Afghanistan as well as their own willingness to uphold funding commitments going forward.

The U.S. security assistance program for Afghanistan is the largest of its kind in the world. Congress authorizes and appropriates this funding because it is in our direct national security interest and the Department of Defense has an obligation to be transparent with Congress on how these funds are administered.

We request a response no later than June 26, 2020. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Jack Reed
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator

CC: Secretary Mike Pompeo
U.S. Department of State