

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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December 31, 2019

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

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Esper and Secretary Pompeo:

On August 12, 2019, Ranking Member Hice and I wrote to you requesting information on the United States' strategy in Afghanistan, including how your Departments plan to address the eight "high-risk challenges" identified in the 2019 Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) high-risk list report.<sup>1</sup> Since then, a series of troubling documents and interview records released by the Washington Post have shed light on how multiple Administrations have obfuscated the situation on the ground in Afghanistan and the United States' seeming inability to achieve our political, strategic, and security objectives.

SIGAR John Sopko, who testified previously before our Subcommittee in April 2019, has acknowledged that the Washington Post reporting demonstrates that, "the American people have constantly been lied to."<sup>2</sup> For example, Bob Crowley, an Army colonel who served as a senior counterinsurgency adviser to U.S. military commanders in 2013 and 2014, told investigators:

[I]t's clear how the strategy became self-validating. Every data point was altered to present the best picture possible. Surveys, for instance, were totally unreliable but reinforced that everything we were doing was right and we became a self-licking ice cream cone.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Chairman Stephen F. Lynch and Ranking Member Jody Hice, Subcommittee on National Security, to Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (Aug. 12, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> *The Afghanistan Papers Part 1: At War With the Truth*, Washington Post (Dec. 9, 2019) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afghanistan-war-confidential-documents/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afghanistan-war-confidential-documents/)).

<sup>3</sup> Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Bob Crowley Lessons Learned Interview* (Aug.

Similarly, according to Douglas Lute, a three-star Army general who served as the White House's Afghan war czar for both President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama, "We were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan—we didn't know what we were doing."<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Eggers, a retired Navy SEAL and White House staffer for multiple Administrations, likewise told interviewers, "Collectively the system is incapable of taking a step back to question basic assumptions."<sup>5</sup> After nearly two-decades of war, 2,400 servicemembers killed, more than 20,000 injured, and nearly \$1 trillion spent or appropriated, the need for oversight of U.S involvement in Afghanistan is now more urgent than ever.

I am not reassured by the Trump Administration's current Afghanistan strategy. In late 2018, the Trump Administration reportedly ordered the Pentagon to develop plans for a withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Afghanistan, including contingency plans for a complete withdraw, and on October 21, 2019, Resolute Support Mission Commander Gen. Austin S. Miller confirmed the Department of Defense has been gradually withdrawing U.S. military forces from Afghanistan throughout the last year, even though the U.S. has not yet reached a peace agreement with the Taliban.<sup>6</sup>

Given the enormous sacrifices the American people have made to promote the security and stability of Afghanistan, any strategic withdrawal of U.S. military forces must prioritize the safety of U.S. personnel while maintaining the advances made on behalf of Afghan women and girls, as well as broader U.S. counterterrorism objectives. That said, I remain deeply concerned that President Trump's tendency to govern by impulse could lead to the abrupt withdrawal of U.S. military, diplomatic, and humanitarian personnel from Afghanistan, resulting in disastrous consequences for our hard-won advances in Afghanistan and for U.S. national security interests.

For all of the above reasons, I respectfully request the testimony of you or your designee at a hearing before the Subcommittee on National Security on Tuesday, January 14, 2020, at 10:00 a.m., in room 2154 of the Rayburn House Office Building. The hearing will examine the current U.S. strategy in Afghanistan and, as requested in the Subcommittee's August 12, 2019, letter, how your Departments plan to address the below challenges as identified in SIGAR's 2019 report on high-risk U.S. reconstruction program areas in Afghanistan:

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3, 2016) (accessed Dec. 20, 2019) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/documents-database/?document=background\\_11\\_07\\_xx\\_woodbridge\\_08032016](http://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/documents-database/?document=background_11_07_xx_woodbridge_08032016)).

<sup>4</sup> *The Afghanistan Papers Part 1: At War With the Truth*, Washington Post (Dec. 9, 2019) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afghanistan-war-confidential-documents/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afghanistan-war-confidential-documents/)).

<sup>5</sup> *The Afghanistan Papers Part 2: Stranded Without a Strategy*, Washington Post (Dec. 9, 2019) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afghanistan-war-strategy/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/investigations/afghanistan-papers/afghanistan-war-strategy/)).

<sup>6</sup> *Trump Administration Orders Pentagon to Draw Up Afghan Troop Withdrawal Plans*, NBC News (Dec. 20, 2018) (online at [www.nbcnews.com/news/military/white-house-has-asked-pentagon-draw-plans-afghanistan-troop-withdrawal-n950591](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/military/white-house-has-asked-pentagon-draw-plans-afghanistan-troop-withdrawal-n950591)); *U.S. Is Quietly Reducing Its Troop Force in Afghanistan*, New York Times (Oct. 21, 2019) (online at [www.nytimes.com/2019/10/21/world/asia/afghanistan-troop-reduction.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/21/world/asia/afghanistan-troop-reduction.html)).

1. Widespread Insecurity;
2. Underdeveloped Civil Policing Capability;
3. Endemic Corruption;
4. Sluggish Economic Growth;
5. Illicit Narcotics Trade;
6. Threats to Women's Rights;
7. Reintegration of Ex-Combatants; and
8. Restricted Oversight.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X.

The enclosed Witness Instruction Sheet provides information for witnesses appearing before the Subcommittee. Please note the procedures for submitting written testimony at least two business days prior to the hearing.

We ask that you please contact the Subcommittee by Tuesday, January 7, 2020, to confirm your attendance. If you have any questions, please contact Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,



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Stephen F. Lynch  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on National Security

cc: The Honorable Jody B. Hice, Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on National Security

Enclosure