

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051

<http://oversight.house.gov>

February 9, 2015

The Honorable Chuck Hagel
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1400

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We are writing to request information and a briefing on a recent decision (apparently partially rescinded since) by NATO and the U.S. Department of Defense to classify previously unclassified information relating to U.S. spending in Afghanistan. The information at issue has long been unclassified, and was previously made public in quarterly reports by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR).

On January 4, 2015, SIGAR was notified of the NATO-led Resolute Support Mission's plan to begin classifying information SIGAR used previously in its role of evaluating waste, fraud and abuse in U.S. programs in Afghanistan. In its most recent quarterly report to Congress on January 30, 2015, SIGAR wrote:

The classification of this volume of data for SIGAR's quarterly report is unprecedented. The decision leaves SIGAR for the first time in six years unable to publicly report on most of the U.S.-taxpayer-funded efforts to build, train, equip, and sustain the [Afghan National Security Forces].¹

According to SIGAR's report, details on the number of Afghan police and soldiers, absenteeism, anti-corruption initiatives, and even literacy training would be available only as part of a classified annex to which very few congressional staff have access.²

The Department's justification for this decision was explained by Resolute Support Commander General John F. Campbell, who wrote:

While I cannot comment upon the precise reason why certain information was considered unclassified in the past, I can advise that given the risks that continue to exist to our forces and those of Afghanistan, I have directed that sensitive

¹ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress*, at 94 (Jan. 30, 2015).

² *Id.* at 197-202.

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operational information or related materials, that could be used by those who threaten the force, or Afghan forces, be classified at the appropriate level.³

After making inquiries about this decision, Committee staff was informed that General Campbell recently told SIGAR about a partial reversal of the classification decision. On February 2, 2015, the *New York Times* reported that “basic data” would be declassified but certain key information would remain classified, such as readiness assessments of Afghan force capabilities.⁴ It remains unclear which categories of information that were previously unclassified will continue to be classified.

The safety and security of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan are paramount. However, inappropriately classifying information severely restricts the ability of Congress to conduct meaningful oversight and impairs the ability of the American people to know how billions of their taxpayer dollars are being spent in Afghanistan.

For these reasons, we request an inventory of the specific items that were previously unclassified, but are now classified due to the recent decision. The Committee also requests a briefing on these actions and the current status of any decision to classify previously unclassified information relating to Afghanistan. Additionally, the briefing should include the Department’s plans to ensure that overclassification of information does not impair the proper oversight of U.S. assistance in Afghanistan. If you have any questions, please contact Sang Yi of the Majority’s staff at (202) 225-5074 or Valerie Shen of the Minority’s staff at (202) 225-5051. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



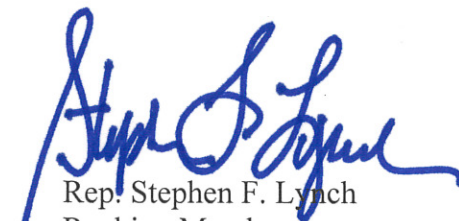
Rep. Jason Chaffetz
Chairman



Rep. Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member



Rep. Ron DeSantis
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security



Rep. Stephen F. Lynch
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security

³ Memorandum from General John F. Campbell, Commander, Resolute Support Mission, to John F. Sopko, Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (Jan. 18, 2015).

⁴ Matthew Rosenberg, *U.S. Declassifies Some Information on Afghan Forces*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 2, 2015 available at www.nytimes.com/2015/02/03/world/asia/in-reversal-us-declassifies-data-on-afghan-army-and-police.html.