

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 15, 2016

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to express our ongoing support for the Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan. It continues to be in the United States' vital interest that Afghanistan remains a friendly, stable, and sovereign country that is no longer a terrorist safe haven or a place from which terrorist groups can launch attacks against our allies and partners – and the U.S. homeland.

Therefore, we urge you to maintain at least 9,800 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. The 9,800 U.S. troops currently in Afghanistan are the minimum number required to train, advise, and assist the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF); conduct counterterrorism operations; gather critical intelligence; and protect U.S. personnel and facilities. The best, long-term guarantor of stability and security in Afghanistan is a stable unity government and a capable ANDSF.

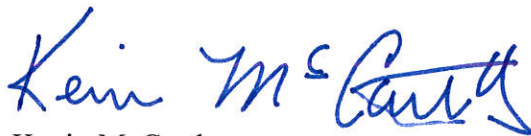
However, as General Campbell testified to the House Armed Services Committee on February 2, 2016, "...Afghan shortfalls will persist well beyond 2016. Capability gaps still exist in fixed and rotary-wing aviation, combined arms operations, intelligence collection and dissemination, and maintenance." Moreover, the gains that the Taliban have made in Helmand Province and their temporary holding of Kunduz – the first time that they have held a major city in Afghanistan in 14 years – are extremely concerning. The ANDSF have fought bravely over the past several fighting seasons, taking high numbers of casualties, but they still require training and support. We believe the best policy to reinforce the gains achieved, build the capacity of the ANDSF, and mitigate the gains made by the Taliban is to maintain 9,800 U.S. troops in Afghanistan beyond 2016.

However, maintaining U.S. troops alone is not sufficient. The U.S. commander in Afghanistan must have the authorities he needs to address the threat and enable the ANDSF. We support your recent decision to provide the U.S. commander in Afghanistan with the authority to

strike the Islamic State-Khorasan Province, an affiliate of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. However, your decision on this matter was long overdue. Moreover, the commander must have the authority to unilaterally strike the Taliban and Haqqani network. The Taliban remain committed to challenging the government of Afghanistan, which could lead to the government's downfall. Further, the Haqqani network, a group designated as a Foreign Terrorist Organization that continues to harbor al-Qaeda, remains the most lethal actor on the battlefield in Afghanistan and is directly responsible for the deaths of U.S. troops. We remain concerned that you have not permitted U.S. forces to unilaterally strike the Haqqani network and the Taliban both to protect U.S. troops as well as to support stability and security in Afghanistan. We urge you to grant that authority.

Much progress has been made in Afghanistan, and we have strong partners in President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah. We must maintain the progress while at the same time adjust to the threats as they evolve. We must also ensure that we do not lose our resolve and withdraw from our Afghan partners prematurely. We have seen the consequences of those actions in Iraq. We urge you to continue to robustly support our partnership with the Afghan government and its people.

Most Respectfully,



Kevin McCarthy
House Majority Leader



Edward R. Royce
Chairman
Committee on Foreign Affairs



Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense



William M. "Mac" Thornberry
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services



Devin Nunes
Chairman
House Permanent Select Committee
on Intelligence

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Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Paul D. Ryan, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Ashton B. Carter, Secretary of Defense
The Honorable John F. Kerry, Secretary of State
General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff