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U.S. House of Representatives

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ROBERT L. SIMMONS, II, STAFF DIRECTOR

October 16, 2012

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to ask for your urgent assistance in a matter that is of utmost importance to the protection of American and coalition military and civilians currently serving in Afghanistan.

As you are aware, U.S. forces have been operating in Afghanistan under a "force cap" established by your Administration. This restriction on the number of troops is currently set at 68,000 troops. I have long been concerned that restricting the forces our military commanders need to defeat the enemy has significantly hindered the achievement of our mission. Likewise, I have feared that this decision to unilaterally restrict forces also has led to unnecessary injuries and deaths of U.S. and coalition forces. In practice, the effect of the force cap is to compel our commanders to assume greater risk as new mission or force protection requirements emerge, if addressing such new requirements would necessitate the deployment of additional troops.

As a case in point, life-saving counter rocket, artillery, and mortar (C-RAM) intercept systems are not currently deployed in Afghanistan due to the aforementioned force cap. In 2006, the Army designed a capability for intercept of rockets, artillery, and mortars based on existing counter-battery systems. This system was a significant new defense for our deployed forces and immediately, and measurably, reduced U.S. military casualties from indirect fire at forward operating bases (FOBs) in Iraq. By the time U.S. combat forces left Iraq, there were approximately two dozen intercept systems deployed in theater, protecting both U.S. and coalition FOBs.

In July 2009, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) submitted a Joint Urgent Operational Needs Statement (JUONS), validated by General David Petraeus, requesting C-RAM intercept capability for Afghanistan. The Army agreed that the systems were available for deployment and determined that approximately 80-100 additional forces per site would have to be deployed to support the C-RAM intercept capability. In order to accept this capability, the CENTCOM Commander would have been forced to withdraw an equivalent number of troops already committed to other missions. Consequently, the CENTCOM Commander decided to accept greater risk for forces in Afghanistan and submitted a revised JUONS, which eliminated the request for C-RAM intercept capability in Afghanistan. Only the sense and warn capabilities were preserved, as these could be manned by contractors. In revising the

JUONS, CENTCOM noted that, "If the risk from rockets and mortars increases, the Commander can request deployment of additional military personnel to operate the intercept capability." The end result was intercept capabilities were returned from Iraq to the United States, rather than being deployed to provide indirect fire defense to our forces in Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, according to data recently provided to the House Armed Services Committee, U.S. service members killed in action or wounded in action as a result of indirect fire from rockets and mortars in Afghanistan have, in fact, been on the rise. Although not reported by the media as often as IED casualties, we all recently saw the regrettable consequences of indirect fire when two American ground personnel were injured as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's C-17 came under attack by enemy rocket fire. Such incoming indirect fire could have been intercepted and destroyed before impact.

This trend could have been predicted and will likely get worse as retrograde proceeds and as the drawdown in U.S. forces picks up pace. Our experience and lessons learned from Iraq have shown that as U.S. forces consolidate onto large bases and conduct fewer patrols, these bases become targets – and artillery, rockets, and mortars disproportionately become the preferred weapons of choice.

Therefore, I respectfully request that you seek additional information on the C-RAM intercept system if you are unaware of its proven performance in Iraq. I also urge you to direct your commanders to conduct a re-assessment of the need for C-RAM intercept capabilities if they have not already done so. Should your commanders recommend deployment of an intercept system, I implore you to rescind the force cap restriction so that our commanders are not forced into the dilemma of choosing between executing their mission and protecting lives. If a C-RAM intercept capability would protect our troops against lethal threats without detracting from our mission in Afghanistan, please immediately order the deployment of these weapons systems.

Mr. President, please do not let another day go by before addressing this issue. Our deployed forces who are in harm's way should not have to be left vulnerable while an available defense gathers dust here at home.

I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,


Howard P. "Buck" McKeon
Chairman

HPM:jbs