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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

October 20, 2017

The Honorable James Mattis  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1400 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing in response to a report released by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) on October 19, 2017, reporting on the issue of Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) personnel going absent from U.S.-based training in excess of 24 hours without proper authority.<sup>1</sup> ANDSF personnel going Absent Without Leave (AWOL)<sup>2</sup> is a concern for public safety in the United States, as well as a concern related to the operational readiness, effectiveness, and morale of the ANDSF in Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup>

Since 2001 the United States has spent billions of taxpayer dollars as part of its effort to promote a stable and prosperous Afghan government that “contributes to the global dialogue on security, respects human rights and the rule of law, possesses the ability to plan, train, and operate with the United States and its allies, and contributes to regional international stability through the training of a professional armed force.”<sup>4</sup> A significant portion of the effort has been to build the Afghan government’s capacity to provide for its own security by equipping and training the ANDSF. One aspect of the effort is U.S.-based training, where personnel from various aspects of the ANDSF are brought to the United States to participate in numerous military training programs. These programs are sponsored by both the Department of Defense

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<sup>1</sup> Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *U.S.-Based Training for Afghanistan Security Personnel: Trainees Who Go Absent Without Leave Hurt Readiness and Morale, And May Create Security Risks* (SIGAR 18-03-SP) (Oct. 2017).

<sup>2</sup> AWOL is a legal term referring to a violation of the United States’ Code of Military Justice; however, it is used in this letter to refer broadly to a period of prolonged unexcused absence by ANDSF personnel in the United States.

<sup>3</sup> Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *U.S.-Based Training for Afghanistan Security Personnel: Trainees Who Go Absent Without Leave Hurt Readiness and Morale, And May Create Security Risks* (SIGAR 18-03-SP) (Oct. 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Department of Defense, *Combined Education and Training Program Plan for Afghanistan Budget Year 2018* (Dec. 9, 2016).

(DOD) and the Department of State in an effort to better equip ANDSF personnel so they may train other ANDSF personnel in Afghanistan.<sup>5</sup>

From 2005 to 2017, 2,537 individuals from Afghanistan came to the United States for training through various programs, including Counter Drug Training Support, International Military Education and Training, and multiple military leadership courses. During this time 152 of the trainees went AWOL, representing approximately 6% of all Afghans who received training in the United States, and over 47% of the total number of foreign military trainees that went AWOL. According to SIGAR, as of March 7, 2017, 139 of the AWOL trainees had fled the United States, gained legal status in the United States, were no longer AWOL for various reasons, or were removed or in the process of being removed, leaving 13 individuals still unaccounted for.<sup>6</sup>

SIGAR reported that 11 trainees went AWOL from Ft. Leonard Wood in my home state of Missouri. It is unclear from SIGAR's report whether all of those trainees are accounted for.<sup>7</sup>

SIGAR also noted an increase in the rate of trainees going AWOL. In 2016, the percentage of trainees from Afghanistan going AWOL doubled from the historical average of approximately 7% to 13%, mostly attributed to an uptick in violence in Afghanistan during that period.<sup>8</sup>

SIGAR reported that the most frequently cited reasons for the trainees to go AWOL are personal and job security of the trainees once they return to Afghanistan. Several Afghans who went AWOL stated they feared for the safety of themselves and their families if they were to return there. Several also stated that they were unsure they would have a job when they returned because their billets would have been given to another Afghan soldier or police officer.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to domestic security concerns, Afghan trainees going AWOL has a significant impact on the ANDSF in Afghanistan. Any reduction of training offered to ANDSF in the United States due to concerns regarding trainees going AWOL diminishes the operational readiness of Afghan home units. In addition, morale of Afghan trainees has declined because of the increased restriction on the Afghan trainees enrolled in training course, as well as the negative perception attributed to them as a result of the AWOLs. Specific complaints from

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<sup>5</sup> Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *U.S.-Based Training for Afghanistan Security Personnel: Trainees Who Go Absent Without Leave Hurt Readiness and Morale, And May Create Security Risks* (SIGAR 18-03-SP) (Oct. 2017).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

trainees include special privileges given to trainees from other foreign countries not provided to Afghan trainees because of concerns they will go AWOL.<sup>10</sup>

In response to the report, the Navy Internal Programs Office and the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, Internal Affairs offered several suggestions to “reduce the number of AWOLs and improve the effectiveness of U.S. government efforts to provide critical training to Afghan soldiers and police in the United States.” Those suggestions include different ways to increase individual oversight, increase information gathering of trainees and sharing that information across agencies, establishing a specific officer to deal directly with trainees and address their quality of life needs, improve the physical security of Afghan trainees and families in Afghanistan, guarantee trainees salary while in the United States, and work with the Afghan Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Ministry of Interior (MOI) to ensure trainees continue to receive their full salary while undergoing training in the United States.<sup>11</sup>

In order to understand DOD’s response to this report, as well as its larger effort to reduce the instances of Afghan trainees going AWOL and how it responds when such instances occur, please provide a briefing and written response to the following questions no later than November 10, 2017:

1. The SIGAR report stated that as of March 7, 2017, 13 trainees from Afghanistan remained AWOL. At this time, have those individuals been located? If not, why? If so, what is their status?
2. Of those trainees that went AWOL from Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, when did they go AWOL and what is their current status?
3. What kind of notification does DOD provide to state and local law enforcement officials and to the public when trainees go AWOL?
4. Please describe the oversight and supervision for trainees from Afghanistan. Does DOD have any plans to expand the Afghan Student Management Office to help supervise trainees while in the United States? Does DOD have any plans to expand or alter in any way its level or means of oversight and supervision of Afghan trainees?
5. What is the average cost to train an ANDSF soldier in the United States?
6. SIGAR reported that one of the major reasons for Afghan trainees to go AWOL was because of perceived job insecurity when they return. Does DOD have any plan to ensure trainees have job security when they return to Afghanistan after completing their training in the United States? Does DOD have a plan to work with individuals

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<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

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in MOD and MOI to ensure Afghan trainees return to the billets they left or will have new ones reflecting their training when they return?

7. SIGAR reported that another major reason for Afghan trainees to go AWOL was because they feared for their personal safety and that of their families when they returned to Afghanistan. What action is DOD taking to improve the physical security of Afghan trainees and their families in Afghanistan?
8. Is DOD taking any other actions to reduce the number of Afghan trainees going AWOL, find any that are currently AWOL, and improve the process to locate and apprehend ones when they go AWOL?

If you have any questions please contact Jackson Eaton with my staff at (202) 224-2627 or [Jackson\\_Eaton@hsgac.senate.gov](mailto:Jackson_Eaton@hsgac.senate.gov). Please send any official correspondence related to this request to Lucy Balczak at [lucy\\_balczak@hsgac.senate.gov](mailto:lucy_balczak@hsgac.senate.gov). Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Claire McCaskill  
Ranking Member

cc: Ron Johnson  
Chairman