

# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

December 1, 2017

CHRISTOPHER R. HIXON, STAFF DIRECTOR  
MARGARET E. DAUM, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

General Joseph L. Votel  
Commander  
U.S. Central Command  
7115 South Boundary Boulevard  
MacDill AFB, FL 33621-5101

Dear General Votel:

I am writing this letter in response to a report released by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) regarding a Department of Defense (DOD) program intended to help Afghanistan interdict illicit contraband and improve its ability to collect custom duties. The report describes how millions of dollars' worth of non-intrusive inspection (NII) equipment procured by U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) is at risk of being wasted because it cannot be sustained by Afghanistan.

In 2006, CENTCOM purchased eight pieces of NII equipment and installed them at five locations across Afghanistan. The cost to procure the equipment totaled \$12.1 million. CENTCOM spent an additional \$36.5 million to train the Afghan personnel to use the equipment properly and between \$10.8 million and \$14.4 million to maintain it, bringing the total amount CENTCOM spent to "procure, operate, and maintain NII equipment installed at Afghan border crossings and custom depots" to between \$59 million and \$62.6 million. The equipment was intended to interdict illicit narcotics, precursor chemicals, and other illegal contraband from crossing the border, as well as improve Afghanistan's ability to effectively and efficiently collect custom duties—a key source of government income and necessary to enable Afghanistan to begin to support itself more.<sup>1</sup>

SIGAR's investigation into the NII program revealed only one of the five sites had any "functional CENTCOM-purchased NII equipment...being used for its intended purpose." None of the equipment at any of the other four locations was operational at all, representing a \$9.48 million loss to the U.S. taxpayer for the idle equipment alone. This amount does not include the millions more wasted on training and maintenance for equipment that is unused. Moreover, any attempt to resurrect the program and rehabilitate the equipment will require additional donor country money, which predominately comes from the United States.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, *DOD Procured Non-Intrusive Inspection Equipment: \$9.48 Million Worth of Equipment Sits Unused at Borders in Afghanistan* (SIGAR-18-14-SP) (Nov. 27, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

Afghan officials indicated to SIGAR that technical and software problems, maintenance issues and broken parts, and a lack of capable operators were reasons for the non-functional equipment. Some Afghans noted they had not received basic training to maintain or trouble-shoot even minor problems with the equipment.<sup>3</sup>

Instead of sitting idle and deteriorating in Afghanistan, the equipment could have been used here in the United States. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) uses the same NII technology we provided to Afghanistan at and in between points of entry across the United States in order to secure our own borders. According to CBP, it has deployed 304 NII systems similar to the ones used in Afghanistan; conducting more than 6.5 million examinations resulting in more than 2,600 seizures and over 163,000 kilograms of seized narcotics in fiscal year 2016.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, NII technology is used by CBP to efficiently and effectively detect and prevent unreported currency, guns, ammunition, inadmissible persons, and nuclear and radiological threats against the United States. The Department of Homeland Security's 2017 budget request included over \$173 million for new NII equipment.<sup>5</sup>

In order to better DOD's response to the report, determine what steps it is be taking to minimize the waste of U.S. taxpayer money on Afghan border security, and address the concerns raised in the report regarding similar programs please provide a written response to the following questions no later than December 22, 2017:

1. What CENTCOM officials were responsible for the decision to provide NII equipment to Afghanistan? Please describe any favorable or adverse performance evaluation or personnel action they received related to the decision.
2. Having provided NII equipment, maintenance and training to Afghanistan at a cost of approximately \$60 million, what DOD officials were responsible for the oversight of its use by Afghans? Please describe any favorable or adverse performance evaluation or personnel action they received related to their oversight.
3. Please describe what sustainability planning, if any, DOD made to support the continued use of the equipment by Afghan personnel.
4. Please describe the training DOD provided to Afghan personnel in the operation and maintenance of the NII equipment.

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<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Testimony of CBP Acting Executive Assistant Commissioner for Operations Support Robert Perez, *Stopping the Shipment of Synthetic Opioids: Oversight of U.S. Strategy to Combat Illicit Drugs*, 115th Cong (May 25, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Department of Homeland Security, *Fact Sheet: DHS FY 2017 Budget* (Feb. 9, 2016) ([www.dhs.gov/news/2016/02/09/fact-sheet-dhs-fy-2017-budget](http://www.dhs.gov/news/2016/02/09/fact-sheet-dhs-fy-2017-budget)).

General Joseph L. Votel  
December 1, 2017  
Page 3

5. Please describe what, if any, steps DOD is taking or intends to take to resurrect the program and rehabilitate the equipment.

If you have any questions please contact Jackson Eaton with my staff at (202) 224-9872 or Jackson\_Eaton@hsgac.senate.gov. Please send any official correspondence related to this request to Lucy Balcezak at Lucy\_Balcezak@hsgac.senate.gov. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Claire McCaskill  
Ranking Member

cc: Ron Johnson  
Chairman