

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 5, 2017

The Honorable Jason E. Chaffetz
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
2157 RHOB
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Chaffetz:

In furtherance of our oversight jurisdiction over national security as well as Department of Defense and Department of State policies and operations, we respectfully request that you hold a bipartisan hearing to examine the United States' strategies for Afghanistan and Iraq. As President Trump reportedly considers the expansion of our missions and military capabilities in both countries, this hearing would provide a critical opportunity for Members on both sides of the aisle to learn exactly what the Trump Administration's plans are and to understand and evaluate what longer term strategy we are pursuing in Afghanistan and Iraq going forward.

The devastating bombing perpetrated in central Kabul, Afghanistan on May 31, 2017 resulted in over 90 deaths and wounded over 450 individuals; it also caused extensive damage to property located as far as 2.5 miles away, including several foreign embassies.¹ This latest in a series of deadly insurgent attacks that have occurred in Afghanistan in the past year alone has again underscored the deteriorating security climate facing ongoing U.S.-coalition and Afghan Government operations to combat the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and Islamic State-Khorasan insurgencies. It also follows reports that President Trump is weighing the deployment of between 3,000 and 5,000 additional U.S. troops to supplement our current in-country U.S. force level of 8,400.² As recently reported by the *New York Times*, a review conducted by the Pentagon, the State Department, and other federal agencies recommended the additional troop deployment in order to "break the military deadlock" between the coalition and the Taliban-led insurgency.³ This recommendation accords with the testimony that Gen. John W. Nicholson, Commander of the Resolute Support Mission and U.S. Forces Afghanistan, delivered before the Senate Armed Services Committee in February of 2017. According to Gen. Nicholson, the Resolute Support mission to train, advise, and equip the Afghanistan

¹ *Deadly Bombing in Kabul is One of the Afghan War's Worst Strikes*, New York Times (May 31, 2017) (online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/31/world/asia/kabul-explosion-afghanistan.html?action=click&contentCollection=world®ion=rank&module=package&version=highlights&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=sectionfront&r=0>).

² *Obama's Dilemma on Troop Surge in Afghanistan Now Vexes Trump*, New York Times (June 3, 2017) (online at https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/03/world/asia/afghanistan-war-trump.html?_r=0).

³ *Trump Advisers Call for More Troops to Break Afghan Deadlock*, New York Times (May 8, 2017) (online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/08/us/politics/donald-trump-afghanistan-troops-taliban-stalemate.html>)

National Defense and Security Forces (“ANDSF”) has a “*shortfall of a few thousand*” that must be addressed in order to break the current “*stalemate*.”⁴

The Trump Administration is also actively considering the expansion of our military presence in Iraq as operations to oust the Islamic State from the City of Mosul and U.S. efforts to train and equip Iraqi military and counterterrorism forces continue.⁵ As recently reported by *CBS News*, “*the Pentagon has already been making quiet, incremental additions*” to troop levels by “*sending more advisers into Iraq to work with units closer to the fight in Mosul*.”⁶ Moreover, on April 26, 2017, the Pentagon confirmed that President Trump formally delegated his authority to determine troop levels in Iraq and Syria to Secretary of Defense James Mattis.⁷ While the official Force Management Level in Iraq stands at 5,262 personnel, the number of U.S. military personnel deployed in the country is reportedly closer to 7,000.⁸ According to the Pentagon, the expanded authority “*enables military commanders to become more agile, adaptive and efficient in supporting our partners*.”⁹ The *Associated Press* has subsequently reported that Secretary Mattis and Iraqi Government officials are discussing the parameters of an enduring U.S. troop presence in Iraq following the defeat of the Islamic State and that “*the talks point to a consensus by both governments that...a longer-term presence of American troops in Iraq is needed to ensure that an insurgency does not bubble up again once the militants are driven out*.”¹⁰ Under one reported proposal, U.S. forces would be stationed as advisers at Iraqi bases in at least five locations in the proximity of Mosul and along the Iraqi-Syrian border.¹¹

In the midst of such deliberations, Congress has continued to appropriate significant funds towards our missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Most recently, the *FY2017 Consolidated Appropriations Act* enacted in May of 2017 provides \$4.3 billion to train and equip the ANDSF, including \$3.3 billion for Afghan army personnel and \$931 million for Afghan national police officers.¹² The Act also provides \$980 million for the Iraq and Syria train and equip programs and directs an additional \$446.4 million in Iraqi training funds after President Trump submits a report to Congress on the U.S. strategy to combat the Islamic State.¹³

Mr. Chairman, over 15 years have passed since Congress originally debated and passed the *2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force* that is relied upon to conduct U.S. military operations in Afghanistan. It has been nearly 15 years since the enactment of the *2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq*. Clearly, the extent of our military and counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan merit bipartisan oversight and review by our Committee that hopefully will more accurately inform our determinations in Congress regarding the effectiveness of the long-term strategies envisioned for

⁴ *Testimony*, Gen. John W. Nicholson, Senate Armed Services Committee hearing entitled “*Situation in Afghanistan*” (February 9, 2017).

⁵ *On Mosul’s Front Line: A Grueling Battle on Civilian Streets*, *New York Times* (June 5, 2017) (online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/05/world/middleeast/on-mosuls-front-line-a-grueling-battle-on-civilian-streets.html>).

⁶ *Trump Gives Pentagon Power to Determine Troop Levels in Iraq, Syria*, *CBS News* (April 27, 2017) (online at <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-gives-pentagon-power-to-determine-u-s-troop-levels-in-iraq-syria/>).

⁷ *Trump Gives Pentagon Authority to Set Troop Levels*, *CNN* (April 26, 2017) (online at <http://www.cnn.com/2017/04/26/politics/troop-levels-trump-authority-mattis/>).

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Iraq, U.S., in Talks to Keep American Troop Presence After Islamic State Fight*, *Associated Press* (May 4, 2017) (online at <https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2017-05-04/urgent-iraq-us-in-talks-to-keep-american-troop-presence-after-is>).

¹¹ *Id.*

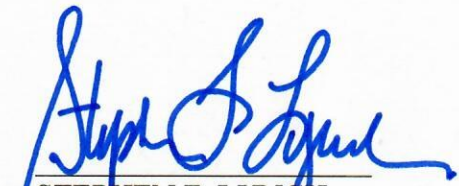
¹² *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017*, P.L. 115-31 (online at <https://www.congress.gov/search?q={%22source%22:%22legislation%22,%22search%22:%22PL115-31%22}>).

¹³ *Id.*


both countries by President Trump and his Administration. A hearing on these issues will also better ensure that the U.S. strategies in Afghanistan and Iraq wisely employ the use of American military personnel and effectively serve the national security interests of the American people.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We look forward to working with you and your staff in preparation for this hearing.

Sincerely,



STEPHEN F. LYNCH
Member of Congress



PETER WELCH
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member,
The Honorable Ron DeSantis, Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security