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# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

December 13, 2012

The Honorable Barack H. Obama  
The President  
The White House  
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

This week, the *New York Times* reported on the bleak state of affairs in Afghanistan. Citing a Pentagon report, the article stated, "The assessment found that the Taliban remain resilient, that widespread corruption continues to weaken the central Afghan government and that Pakistan persists in providing critical support to the insurgency. Insider attacks by Afghan security forces on their NATO coalition partners, while still small, are up significantly: there have been 37 so far in 2012, compared with 2 in 2007." Given this disturbingly dreary assessment, I remain deeply disappointed that you have refused to use the money provided by Congress to appoint the Afghanistan/Pakistan Study Group (APSG) to review United States strategy.

The report's stark assessment of Afghan capabilities is all the more discouraging, given the recent comments of Afghan President Hamid Karzai. As you may know, in a recent interview, President Karzai blamed the insecurity in Afghanistan on the United States and our NATO countries, saying, "Part of the insecurity is coming to us from the structures that NATO and America created in Afghanistan." It is appalling that President Karzai would make such statements, given the enormous sacrifice made over the last 11 years by coalition forces.

With your policy faltering and the Afghan president blaming us for all the ills in his country, it perplexes me that you refuse to use appropriated dollars to establish the APSG. More than 2,000 service members have been killed since fighting commenced in 2001. Many service members have served four or more tours in multiple theaters, yet you refuse to use money authorized by Congress to convene a panel that could offer solutions that could decrease the number of U.S. casualties. In fact, both your current and former Defense secretaries served as members of the Iraq Study Group, so they both know the success it achieved and that similar results could be produced by the APSG.

In addition to the strategic failure of your policy, the most recent report from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) documented numerous incidents of U.S. aid money being wasted through graft, corruption and mismanagement. In just one example, the SIGAR report notes that an Army sergeant pleaded guilty to approving fake documents that allowed \$1.5 million worth of fuel to be stolen. While I am sure your administration takes the

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SIGAR reports seriously and is trying to address the problems raised, at the same time you are actively ignoring policy resources that could provide valuable insight and possible solutions to these and other problems.

I find all the arguments your administration officials have used to oppose the creation of the APSG to be woefully insufficient. In his November 5 letter to me, General Martin Dempsey claims that using the \$1 million authorized for the APSG would be an unwise diversion of resources. Yet in May, the media reported that more than \$800,000 had been spent to fly your secretary of defense to his home in California many weekends, a figure that now likely exceeds \$1 million. I do not know if this was an arrangement you made specifically with Secretary Panetta before he accepted the job, but the money spent flying him to and from California could have more than paid for the APSG.

The wasted money cited by the SIGAR report, as well as the money spent flying Secretary Panetta back to the comfort of his home in California, would provide more than enough resources to establish the APSG. Do you believe that flying Secretary Panetta home every weekend -- a luxury certainly not provided to a service member on their fifth tour of duty -- is a better use of taxpayer money than getting the best minds in our country to provide "fresh eyes" on U.S. policy in this troubled region? As public officials, we have a solemn duty to protect those we order into combat. For the sake of our forces in theater and the safety of our nation, I once again implore you to use the money available to create the APSG.

As I have stated many times, I do not have the answers on how to assure a successful outcome in Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, I firmly believe that the APSG could provide insight into the problems plaguing the region and ways that we can better protect national security for decades to come.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf  
Member of Congress

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