

Hearing Number: HORC-03-2020

Hearing Date: September 22, 2020

Committee: House Oversight and Reform Committee

Sub-committee: House Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on National Security

QFR Title: Taliban Compliance

Requestors: Rep Robin L. Kelly

Witness: Helvey, David

QFR ID: HORC-03-001 QFR

Question Number: 1

Question: In your opening testimony, you stated that, “We have long maintained that our force presence in Afghanistan is conditions-based, and our conditions-based approach is reflected in the U.S.-Taliban Agreement.” You also noted that the United States has “reduced our force level to 8,600 and turned five bases over to our Afghan partners.” However, in response to a question from Congressman Harley Rouda, you acknowledged that the Taliban “are not fully compliant” with the February 29, 2020, agreement with respect to their counterterrorism obligations. If the Taliban are not in compliance with the terms of the February 29, agreement, why did the United States reduce our force level in Afghanistan to 8,600 by mid-summer? On what basis did the President determine that “conditions in Afghanistan were sufficient” to further reduce our force level in Afghanistan to between 4,000 and 5,000 by the end of November 2020?

Answer: Classified Answer

QFR Title: Taliban Compliance

Requestors: Rep Robin L. Kelly

Witness: Helvey, David

QFR ID: HORC-03-002 QFR

Question Number: 2

Question: During your testimony, you stated “we will be watching very carefully to assess the conditions, Taliban’s compliance with the terms of its agreement, and that will be used to inform decisions on further and future withdrawals.” You also testified that under the February 29, 2020, agreement “we do have expectations of a reduction in violence, and the violence that we are seeing today is too high.” Does the Department of Defense (DOD) consider Taliban attacks against the Afghan security forces as a violation of the February 29, 2020, agreement with the United States? If so, why is the U.S. continuing to withdraw forces from Afghanistan if the Taliban have escalated their attacks against the Afghan security forces?

Answer: Classified Answer

QFR Title: Redeployment

Requestors: Rep Robin L. Kelly

Witness: Helvey, David

QFR ID: HORC-03-003 QFR

Question Number: 3

Question: Is DOD prepared to re-deploy forces to Afghanistan if the Taliban reneges on the February 29, 2020, agreement, or withdraws from intra-Afghan talks? Has DOD identified potential tripwires or indicators that would trigger a re-deployment of forces to Afghanistan?

Answer: Classified Answer

QFR Title: Interagency Working Group

Requestors: Rep Robin L. Kelly

Witness: Helvey, David

QFR ID: HORC-03-004 QFR

Question Number: 4

Question: Ambassador Khalilzad testified that an interagency working group jointly chaired by DOD and the Department of State leads the U.S. government effort to monitor Taliban compliance with the February 29, 2020, peace agreement. 4. At what level are department and agencies represented on this interagency task force (e.g. Assistant Secretary, Deputy Assistant Secretary, etc.)? How has the interagency defined what compliance looks like? What metrics or thresholds is the interagency monitoring?

Answer: Classified Answer

QFR Title: Interagency Task Force/Working Group

Requestors: Rep Robin L. Kelly

Witness: Helvey, David

QFR ID: HORC-03-005 QFR

Question Number: 5

Question: Does the task force issue reports or products about their findings? Will these reports be provided to Congress?

Answer: Classified Answer

QFR Title: Taliban Compliance

Requestors: Rep Robin L. Kelly

Witness: Helvey, David

QFR ID: HORC-03-006 QFR

Question Number: 6

Question: As the United States continues to withdraw forces from Afghanistan, how will our reduced footprint affect the administration's ability to monitor Taliban compliance with the terms of the February 29, 2020, agreement?

Answer: Classified Answer

QFR Title: Control and Stability Data

Requestors: Rep Stephen F. Lynch

Witness: Helvey, David

QFR ID: HORC-03-007 QFR

Question Number: 7

Question: Since 2017, the Department of Defense (DOD) has steadily restricted the production and public release of information about the war in Afghanistan: • On October 30, 2017, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported that U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) had begun to classify information about the performance of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, including ANDSF casualties, unit-level authorized and assigned strength, performance assessments, and attrition information. • On April 30, 2019, SIGAR reported that the Resolute Support (RS) mission in Afghanistan had stopped producing district-by-district government control and stability assessments. • On April 30, 2020, SIGAR reported that RS had stopped releasing information about enemy-initiated attacks in Afghanistan.³ Withholding and classifying this previously unclassified and

public information inhibits Congress' ability to conduct oversight and prevents our constituents from making informed decisions for themselves about the war in Afghanistan. Will DOD resume production of district-level control and stability data in Afghanistan and will DOD commit to making this information available publicly? If so, when will the Department release this information?

Answer: U.S. Forces - Afghanistan (USFOR-A) discontinued district-level stability assessments in late 2018 because measures of the population in territory controlled by the Afghan Government or the Taliban were not indicative of the effectiveness of the South Asia Strategy. The previous focus of the military campaign in Afghanistan was on supporting efforts by the Afghan Government to expand its control of territory, which the government believed would cause the Taliban to seek a peace settlement. In conjunction with the appointment of the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation (SRAR) in September 2018, USFOR-A shifted its military campaign to instead intensify military pressure on mid- and senior-level Taliban leaders to influence them to begin substantive negotiations to end the war. This shift in focus and the South Asia strategy's commitment to supporting the Afghan forces—rather than focusing on government control of districts accounting for an arbitrary percentage of the population—alongside SRAR's diplomatic efforts, has led to the commencement of negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan Government. At this time, USFOR-A does not plan to resume the district-level stability assessments, as they are of limited value to the USFOR-A Commander. SIGAR reported DoD's position on the district-level stability assessments in its January 2019 Quarterly Report to Congress.

QFR Title: Control and Stability Data

Requestors: Rep Stephen F. Lynch

Witness: Helvey, David

QFR ID: HORC-03-008 QFR

Question Number: 8

Question: Since 2017, the Department of Defense (DOD) has steadily restricted the production and public release of information about the war in Afghanistan: • On October 30, 2017, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported that U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) had begun to classify information about the performance of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, including ANDSF casualties, unit-level authorized and assigned strength, performance assessments, and attrition information. • On April 30, 2019, SIGAR reported that the Resolute Support (RS) mission in Afghanistan had stopped producing district-by-district government control and stability assessments. • On April 30, 2020, SIGAR reported that RS had stopped releasing information about enemy-initiated attacks in Afghanistan.³ Withholding and classifying this previously unclassified and public information inhibits Congress' ability to conduct oversight and prevents our constituents from making informed decisions for themselves about the war in Afghanistan. Will DOD commit to releasing data about enemy-initiated attacks in Afghanistan? If so, when will the Department release this information?

Answer: Following the signing of the U.S.-Taliban Agreement on February 29, 2020, Commander, USFOR-A, recommended, and Commander, U.S. Central Command, concurred, that data on enemy-initiated attacks should be classified and withheld from public release while the data are being considered in critical interagency discussions and deliberations regarding Taliban compliance with their commitments under the Agreement, which will inform decisions about further U.S. force reductions. DoD has, however, continued to provide the data to the DoD Inspector General and SIGAR for use in their classified reports to Congress, and DoD has included it in the classified appendix to the semi-annual report to Congress on "Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan." DoD continually reviews and assesses whether data should continue to be classified.

QFR Title: Control and Stability Data

Requestors: Rep Stephen F. Lynch

Witness: Helvey, David

QFR ID: HORC-03-009 QFR

Question Number: 9

Question: Since 2017, the Department of Defense (DOD) has steadily restricted the production and public release of information about the war in Afghanistan: • On October 30, 2017, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) reported that U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) had begun to classify information about the performance of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, including ANDSF casualties, unit-level authorized and assigned strength, performance assessments, and attrition information. • On April 30, 2019, SIGAR reported that the Resolute Support (RS) mission in Afghanistan had stopped producing district-by-district government control and stability assessments. • On April 30, 2020, SIGAR reported that RS had stopped releasing information about enemy-initiated attacks in Afghanistan.³ Withholding and classifying this previously unclassified and public information inhibits Congress' ability to conduct oversight and prevents our constituents from making informed decisions for themselves about the war in Afghanistan. Will DOD commit to releasing ANDSF performance and capability metrics? If so, when will the Department release this information?

Answer: DoD fulfills all statutory reporting requirements related to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) in its semi-annual report to Congress, "Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan." Section 1225 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, as amended, enumerates a series of specific criteria that DoD is required to assess that are indicative of the Afghan Government's progress toward meeting shared security objectives. In addition, Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) focuses on its Top 10 "Challenges and Opportunities" and assesses progress in each of these areas, including equipment accountability, logistics capacity, addressing attrition, and payroll processes. This information and other data are reported in detail in the unclassified version of the report. However, some of this information is classified and cannot be released publicly. Thus, DoD provides a classified annex to its semi-annual report to Congress that includes classified operational data, including data on unit-level readiness. DoD has worked closely with the Afghan Government since 2017 to make more Afghan-provided information unclassified and publicly available. Most of the data cited by SIGAR that was classified in 2017 was classified at the request of the Afghan government. At that time, DoD honored the request to keep certain ANDSF information classified or restricted from public release while undertaking an effort to seek to restore as much of it to unclassified reporting as possible. Therefore, in January 2018, then-USFOR-A Commander General Nicholson led a DoD effort to negotiate with the Afghan government for the release of some of the classified data to align it with how DoD classifies information on U.S. forces. Following these high-level engagements with the Afghan government, it was determined that 18 of 29 categories of the Afghan-provided data should be released publicly. The only category of data that the Afghan government insisted on classifying that does not align with DoD's own classification practices is casualty data. Our respect for Afghan government views on this matter is consistent with our approach to other nations' treatment of their security information that might be shared with us. As SIGAR later reported, based on USFOR-A's engagement with the Afghan Government, more unclassified data was provided for SIGAR's April 2018 Quarterly Report than in the two prior quarterly reports. It is DoD's current policy that if the Afghan government seeks to classify previously unclassified information, USFOR-A is to engage the Afghan government to seek to ensure its classification guidelines align with DoD's for similar metrics.

QFR Title: Oversight

Requestors: Rep Stephen F. Lynch

Witness: Helvey, David

QFR ID: HORC-03-010 QFR

Question Number: 10

Question: While I appreciate your testimony at our September 22 hearing, DOD only allowed your participation after the Subcommittee requested your appearance for the better part of a year. Will the Department of Defense commit to ensuring that the next time the Committee on Oversight and Reform, or another Committee, asks it to testify or provide information to Congress about the War in Afghanistan, that it will do so without delay?

Answer: Yes, in accordance with applicable laws and long standing Department and Executive Branch practice.

QFR Title: Withholding Assistance to Afghanistan

Requestors: Rep Debbie Wasserman Schultz

Witness: Helvey, David

QFR ID: HORC-03-011 QFR

Question Number: 11

Question: During your testimony, you stated that Secretary of Defense Esper is still working to determine whether to reduce assistance to the Afghan Security Forces pursuant to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's March 2020 announcement that the United States would withhold \$1 billion in foreign assistance to Afghanistan. Has the Department of Defense (DOD) identified the funding accounts from which this assistance would be withheld?

Answer: Any reduction in support would be applied to the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) appropriation.

QFR Title: Afghan National Defense and Security Forces

Requestors: Rep Debbie Wasserman Schultz

Witness: Helvey, David

QFR ID: HORC-03-012 QFR

Question Number: 12

Question: You further testified on September 22 that "we believe that a strong and capable ANDSF focused on combating terrorist threats in defending the Afghan people is going to be our best chance at supporting and defending U.S. interests." If DOD views a strong and capable ANDSF as critical to the defense of U.S. interests, why is Secretary Esper considering future cuts to our support for the ANDSF?

Answer: Any reduction in support would be applied to the Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 Afghanistan Security Forces Fund (ASFF) appropriation and would affect items that can be deferred to a future year without impacting current ANDSF operations, if the President's full budget request of \$4.015 billion for FY 2021 is enacted. DoD will also seek ASFF funding in FY 2022 and will continue to urge other donor nations to maintain their funding levels to ensure the ANDSF remain sufficiently resourced.

QFR Title: Afghan National Defense and Security Forces

Requestors: Rep Debbie Wasserman Schultz

Witness: Helvey, David

QFR ID: HORC-03-013 QFR

Question Number: 13

Question: You further testified on September 22 that "we believe that a strong and capable ANDSF focused on combating terrorist threats in defending the Afghan people is going to be our best chance at

supporting and defending U.S. interests.” Has DOD conducted any assessments or evaluated how withholding this assistance would affect ANDSF capabilities?

Answer: Yes, and we do not believe that key ANDSF capabilities would be affected.

QFR Title: Afghan National Defense and Security Forces

Requestors: Rep Debbie Wasserman Schultz

Witness: Helvey, David

QFR ID: HORC-03-014 QFR

Question Number: 14

Question: You further testified on September 22 that “we believe that a strong and capable ANDSF focused on combating terrorist threats in defending the Afghan people is going to be our best chance at supporting and defending U.S. interests.” When does Secretary Esper expect to decide whether to withhold U.S. assistance funding from the ANDSF?

Answer: The Department will notify Congress of any decision to reduce ASFF support to the ANDSF. DoD will consult with the appropriate committees of Congress on the implementation of any such reduction.