

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 15, 2019

The Honorable Patrick M. Shanahan  
Acting Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Acting Secretary Shanahan:

We write regarding a concerning reduction in data available to Inspectors General (IGs) on the U.S. efforts in Afghanistan that is necessary for oversight reporting.

Two weeks ago, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction published its 43<sup>rd</sup> consecutive quarterly report. The Department of Defense (DoD), however, did not provide district-level stability assessments of Afghan government and insurgent control and influence to IGs. This is the first time the Department failed to provide such data since it began collecting it. This move is the latest in a series of changes that have decreased public transparency on the war effort.

IG reports on Afghanistan provide lawmakers and the American public with critical information regarding conditions on the ground in Afghanistan and the U.S. efforts in country. The U.S. approach in Afghanistan is based largely on training and mentoring the Afghan security forces and supporting the authority and reach of the Afghan government. Assessments detailing the percentage of districts and of the Afghan population that recognize the control and influence of the Afghan government, as well as assessments of the progress and capabilities of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) are critical to assessing these lines of effort.

In November 2017, then commander of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan General John W. Nicholson Jr. said the “most telling” metric for success in this conflict is “population control.” In October 2018, the Afghan government had control or influence over 63 percent of Afghan districts according to the Lead IG report released in January 2019. By January 2019, the Afghan government control or influence was reportedly only 53.8 percent. This was the lowest level of government control since the Department of Defense began tracking this metric. The latest IG report did not report the current percentage, and DoD has said they no longer intend to collect the underlying data. According to that report, the Department of Defense said that the district-level stability assessments “are not indicative of effectiveness of the South Asia strategy or of progress toward security and stability in Afghanistan.” It is unclear how a metric that was previously critical to understanding the conflict is no longer relevant.

Beginning in October 2017, the Resolute Support Mission moved key Afghan National Defense and Security Force (ANDSF) data to classified channels. Specifically, data on total ANDSF personnel levels, casualties, equipment readiness rates, and monthly attrition and retention rates – all of which had previously been reported in an unclassified format – was made classified

without explanation. The absence of publicly available metrics on the status, progress, and capabilities of Afghan forces hinders the American public's ability to gauge progress on these efforts.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the war, the American public knows less about the conditions on the ground in Afghanistan than it did a decade ago. Americans deserve transparency in the war in which their sons and daughters continue to fight and die.

We request a briefing on the elimination of district-level stability assessments in Afghanistan and on why previously unclassified ANDSF data is now classified. Finally, we request more information on how Afghan government control and ANDSF progress is publically assessed in its absence.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

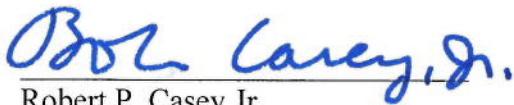
Sincerely,



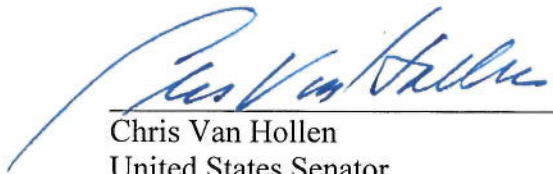
Michael F. Bennet  
United States Senator



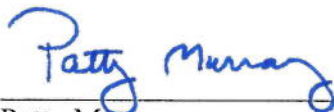
Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



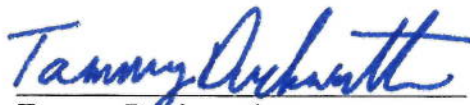
Robert P. Casey Jr.  
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator