

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 26, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Pompeo and Secretary Esper:

We have serious concerns about reports that the United States is preparing to sign a deal with the Taliban, the terrorists who harbored al-Qaeda before and after the attacks of 9/11. President Trump has a proven track record of putting America's security first and ensuring our country stays out of bad deals that aid our adversaries. In keeping with this policy, we are seeking assurances that you will not place the security of the American people into the hands of the Taliban, and undermine our ally, the current Government of Afghanistan.

The Taliban is a terrorist group that celebrates suicide attacks. Haibatullah Akhundzada, the overall leader of the Taliban, sacrificed his own son in a suicide bombing in 2017. Akhundzada's top deputy, Sirajuddin Haqqani, runs a network that specializes in devastating suicide bombings, including some of the most heinous attacks in the history of the war. The American people cannot rely on these terrorists to safeguard their security.

The Taliban also has a history of extracting concessions in exchange for false assurances. They will accept nothing less than a full-scale U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan as they seek to establish their totalitarian "Islamic Emirate." Our withdrawal would then allow terrorist groups in Afghanistan to grow stronger and establish safe havens from which to plot attacks against us. Any promises the Taliban may have made to the U.S. related to counterterrorism cannot be trusted, not least because the group is a long-time ally of al-Qaeda.

Indeed, if the initial U.S.-Taliban deal had been approved in September as was originally planned, one of the top al-Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan, Asim Umar, would likely still be alive. Umar threatened America and answered directly to al-Qaeda leader Ayman al Zawahiri. He was reportedly killed in a joint U.S.-Afghan raid on a Taliban stronghold in September after President Trump suspended

talks with the Taliban. It is our understanding that under the current deal, such raids are not taking place—meaning that if Umar had survived a few months longer, he would be outside America’s reach.

The Taliban is not a de facto counterterrorism partner, and pretending they are ignores their long-time jihadist mission and actions. They continue to be closely allied with al-Qaeda and fight alongside them. They have never publicly renounced al-Qaeda or turned over al-Qaeda leaders living in their safe havens. They have never apologized for harboring the terrorists who carried out the September 11 attacks that killed nearly 3,000 Americans. Instead, the group continues to blame America for 9/11 and the Afghan war. They have also repeatedly lied about the threat of terrorism emanating from Afghanistan since the 1990s.

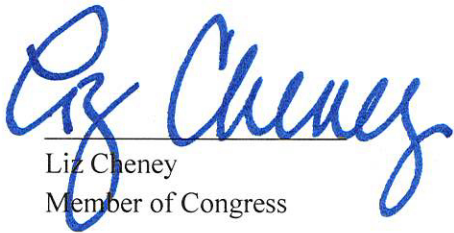
That is why it is critical that any supposed counterterrorism assurances and potential verification mechanisms contained in the State Department-led agreement with the Taliban be made public. During the Obama administration, Secretary Pompeo rightfully fought for the disclosure of secret side deals with Iran. Now some reports claim that key parts of the accord with the Taliban may be hidden in secret annexes. The safety of the American people is inextricably linked to this deal. They deserve to know its details.

With all of the above concerns in mind, we are seeking the following assurances:

1. Any deal between the U.S. and the Taliban will be public and not contain any secret annexes or side deals.
2. The Administration will not put American security at risk by pretending that the Taliban is a reliable counter-terrorism partner.
3. There will be no intelligence sharing or “joint counterterrorism” center established with the Taliban. This would be a farce and put American lives at risk.
4. Decisions about U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan must be made based on U.S. national security requirements determined by conditions on the ground. Therefore, any deal must not contain a commitment for a full U.S. withdrawal at this point. Such a commitment would embolden America’s adversaries and undermine our allies, including the Afghan government.
5. Any deal with the Taliban will include the requirement that the Taliban turn over all al-Qaeda leaders and operatives who are currently hiding in Taliban strongholds.
6. There will be no uneven or premature release of Taliban prisoners.
7. Current sanctions and designations against the al-Qaeda-allied Haqqani Network will remain in place regardless of any deal with the Taliban.

President Trump has taken crucial action to keep our nation safe, including eliminating the world’s most dangerous terrorists and destroying the ISIS caliphate. He knows a bad deal when he sees one. We urge you not to commit America to a dangerous deal with the Taliban that would abandon the President’s track record of strengthening America and putting our security and interests first.

Sincerely,



Liz Cheney
Member of Congress


Dan Crenshaw
Member of Congress


Elise Stefanik
Member of Congress


Michael Waltz
Member of Congress


Richard Hudson
Member of Congress


Jim Banks
Member of Congress



Will Hurd
Member of Congress



Don Bacon
Member of Congress


Brad Wenstrup, D.P.M.
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Troy Balderson
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Steve Chabot
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Steve Womack
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Tom Cole
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Darin LaHood
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French Hill
Member of Congress



Van Taylor
Member of Congress



Jack Bergman
Member of Congress



Mike Rogers
Member of Congress



Adam Kinzinger
Member of Congress



Kelly Armstrong
Member of Congress

CC:

President of the United States Donald J. Trump
Amb. Robert C. O'Brien, National Security Advisor