



# Durbin, Menendez, Reed Seek Details On Pompeo's, Esper's Awareness Of Russian Bounties On U.s. Troops

June 30 2020 10:12 AM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL); Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Ranking Member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; and Senator Jack Reed (D-RI), Ranking Member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, called on Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Secretary of Defense Mark Esper to detail their knowledge of and actions resulting from the U.S. intelligence community's discovery that a Russian intelligence unit offered to pay militants in Afghanistan to target U.S. troops, as first reported by the *New York Times*.

The Senators also reiterated their concerns with President Trump's inexplicable admiration and praise for Vladimir Putin, citing the President's refusal to impose mandatory sanctions on Russia's government, his failed bid to have Russia participate in and re-admitted into the G7, and his latest effort to withdraw U.S. forces from Germany without consulting either Congress or allies in Berlin.

"These decisions clearly support the interests of Russian President Vladimir Putin, while putting U.S. service members at unnecessary risk. Instead of using all of the tools at his disposal to fight back against Russian threats against our troops, the President has sought to normalize U.S. relations and reward the Kremlin," the Senators wrote. "U.S. service members raise their right hands to protect and defend the United States. They deserve a Commander in Chief who will respond forcefully if bounties are put on them by enemies of the United States."

The letter concludes with a request for Secretaries Pompeo and Esper to appear before the Senate this week to shed light on their knowledge of the reported Russian bounties and to answer the Senators' questions about the resulting measures undertaken by the Department of State and Department of Defense.

Durbin, as Co-Chair of the Senate Ukraine Caucus, is also leading an amendment to the *National Defense Authorization Act of 2021* (NDAA) that opposes Russian re-entry into the G7 until it withdraws from Ukraine.

A copy of the letter is available [here](#) and below:

June 29, 2020

Dear Secretaries Pompeo and Esper:

We are writing to express our serious concern about press reports asserting that the Russian military intelligence service Unit 29155 offered and paid bounties for the killing of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. Yet the president has reportedly taken no steps to confront the Kremlin. In fact, in recent months, he has increased calls for closer ties with Moscow.

The President was reportedly briefed on this information in March. Since then, he has apparently taken no punitive action against Russia. Instead, he has called for Russia to be re-admitted into the G7, saying that Russia should be included in the next meeting of the group in the United States this fall. He also abruptly decided to withdraw a significant number of U.S. forces from Germany without consultation with the United States Congress or our close allies in Berlin. These decisions clearly support the interests of Russian President Vladimir Putin, potentially at the expense of U.S. service members. Instead of using all of the tools at his disposal to fight back against Russian threats against our troops, the President has sought to normalize U.S. relations and reward the Kremlin.

Secretary Pompeo, we request that you respond to the following questions:

1. When did you first learn of concerns about efforts by the Russian military intelligence service Unit 29155 to pay militants in Afghanistan to target U.S. troops? Did you play any role in recommending that the President be briefed or not briefed on this intelligence?
2. What specific efforts did you personally make in your engagements with Russian officials to verify these reports and demand that they stop targeting U.S. forces? You have had several engagements with Russian officials in recent years. You last spoke with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on May 6, 2020. Did you raise this issue with him?
3. Special Representative for Afghan Peace Zalmay Khalilzad made several visits to Moscow over the past year. During these visits, did he raise the alleged bounties that the Russian GRU put on U.S. servicemembers?

4. Which officials from the Department of State, Department of Defense, and intelligence community participated in the March 2020 interagency meeting on this intelligence? What policy recommendations did the group generate to take action against this Russian behavior?
5. Which officials from the Department of State knew about this intelligence? What actions did they recommend the Department or the U.S. take in response?

Secretary Esper, we request that you respond to the following questions:

1. When did you learn of the alleged intelligence?
2. Are you aware of any information that any U.S. casualties in Afghanistan were due to a bounty placed by Russian military intelligence?
3. What force protection measures were put in place as a result of this intelligence and when?
4. Given that coalition partners were also reportedly targeted, what conversations did you have with coalition partner military officials regarding this intelligence and when?

U.S. service members raise their right hands to protect and defend the United States. They deserve a Commander in Chief who will respond forcefully if bounties are put on them by enemies of the United States. Given the grave nature of these allegations, we request that you appear before the Senate this week to address these question