



# Duckworth to Esper: Gold Star Families Deserve to Know Whether Any Troop Casualties in Afghanistan Were Connected to Reported Bounty Payments

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WASHINGTON, DC – Combat Veteran and U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL), a member of the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) who served in the Reserve Forces for 23 years, today wrote to U.S. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper requesting he answer whether DoD is investigating U.S. troop casualties in Afghanistan to determine whether any U.S. servicemember deaths are connected to the alleged Russian bounty program and confirm that DoD is tracking any concurrent or completed intelligence community investigations into those casualties. Duckworth also expressed her frustration with the closed briefing provided to the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) on July 1—which did not include any member of the intelligence community—and asked Esper to commit to publicly disclosing the findings of all investigations on this issue with Gold Star Family members, Congress and the American people.

In part, Duckworth wrote “It is unacceptable that to date, the Trump administration appears to be ignoring a matter of great importance to Gold Star Family members whose loved ones were killed while serving in Afghanistan: were any U.S. troop casualties in Afghanistan connected with the alleged GRU bounty payments to Taliban-linked militants? Gold Star Families deserve an answer to this question.”

At the end of June, Duckworth [wrote](#) a letter to U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) Chairman James Inhofe requesting that SASC hold a public hearing as soon as possible to examine these revelations. Duckworth also recently [delivered](#) a floor speech and [penned](#) an op-ed on the issue for USA Today.

Full text of the letter included below and [here](#).

July 9, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

The Honorable Mark Esper

Secretary of Defense

U.S. Department of Defense

1000 Defense Pentagon

Washington, DC 20301-1300

Dear Secretary Esper:

I write to follow up on the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD) disappointing closed briefing provided to the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) on July 1, 2020. DoD provided two witnesses—the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs and the Deputy Director Politico-Military Affairs, Middle East, Joint Staff J-5—who were unprepared to respond to questions related to the disturbing public reports alleging that the Intelligence Community (IC) assessed that Unit 29155 of the Russian military intelligence service (GRU) offered bounties to Taliban-linked militants for killing U.S. servicemembers deployed to Afghanistan.

It is unacceptable that to date, the Trump administration appears to be ignoring a matter of great importance to Gold Star Family members whose loved ones were killed while serving in Afghanistan: were any U.S. troop casualties in Afghanistan connected with the alleged GRU bounty payments to Taliban-linked militants? Gold Star Families deserve an answer to this question. Accordingly, I request that you confirm:

1. Whether DoD is conducting an investigation into U.S. troop casualties in Afghanistan to assess whether any U.S. servicemember deaths are related to the alleged Russian bounty program that has been extensively reported on by multiple news organizations;
1. Whether DoD is tracking any concurrent or completed IC investigations into U.S. troop casualties in Afghanistan; and
1. Commit to disclosing the findings of all investigations on this subject with Gold Star Family members, Congress and the American people.

Sincerely,

Tammy Duckworth

United States Senator