

Duckworth Calls for Hearing on Risks of Trump Administration's Troop Withdrawal on Efforts to Bring Home American Hostages Held in Afghanistan

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — Following the Trump Administration's announcement that U.S. troops in Afghanistan will be substantially reduced over a rapid timeline, U.S. Senator Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) wrote to U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman James Inhofe (R-OK) requesting an open hearing as soon as possible to investigate how the decision to hastily withdraw troops could make it even more challenging to safely bring home American hostages, including Mark Frerichs, an Illinoisan and Veteran of the U.S. Navy, from Afghanistan. Duckworth is a combat Veteran who served in the Reserve Forces for 23 years before retiring from military service in 2014 at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

In part, Duckworth wrote: “Significant questions remain about U.S. policy and how it contributes to the National Defense Strategy’s goal of preventing future terrorist attacks on the American homeland. Crucially, we must understand how the drawdown affects the U.S. government’s leverage to achieve concessions from the Taliban, especially the return of American hostages Mark Frerichs and Paul Overby. Additional questions include the safety of American troops that will remain after the drawdown as well as the impact of the presidential transition on U.S. policy.”

Duckworth has been warning against a hasty withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and [condemned](#) the Trump Administration’s plan to do so without getting any concessions from the Taliban. Last week, Duckworth [sent three separate letters](#) to President Trump, Secretary of State Pompeo and Acting Secretary of Defense Miller urging them to take immediate action to secure the safe return of Mark Frerichs, a Veteran of the U.S. Navy who was abducted by the Taliban in Kabul earlier this year, and hostages like him in Afghanistan. She has also been [speaking out](#) about Trump’s chaotic shakeups at the Pentagon and the implications for our national security.

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

Dear Chairman Inhofe:

I request that the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) hold an open hearing as soon as possible to examine the future of U.S. engagement in Afghanistan. Given Acting Secretary of Defense Miller’s recent announcement that U.S. troops in Afghanistan will be substantially reduced by the end of the Administration, it is imperative that Congress and the Senate Armed Services Committee fulfill its constitutional oversight duty and assess the impact this withdrawal will have on U.S. interests in Afghanistan.

On November 17, Acting Secretary Miller announced that American forces in Afghanistan would be reduced from 4,500 to 2,500 by January 15, 2021, a mere six days before the inauguration of President-Elect Joe Biden. In the wake of this announcement, there is substantial bipartisan interest in the future of the United States’ longest war. Significant questions remain about U.S. policy and how it contributes to the National Defense Strategy’s goal of preventing future terrorist attacks on the American homeland. Crucially, we must understand how the drawdown affects the U.S. government’s leverage to achieve concessions from the Taliban, especially the return of American hostages Mark Frerichs and Paul Overby. Additional questions include the safety of American troops that will remain after the drawdown as well as the impact of the presidential transition on U.S. policy.

Accordingly, I ask that SASC hold an open hearing to receive testimony from the Acting Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, the Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation and the Commander of the Resolute Support Mission and United States Forces-Afghanistan. Should these witnesses be unavailable, outside witnesses would be helpful to provide a better understanding of the rapidly evolving dynamics in Afghanistan. SASC should also hold a closed hearing in a sensitive compartmented information facility to allow for discussion of classified information. Thank you in advance for consideration of my urgent request.