

# **Duckworth Writes to Pompeo Demanding a Call to Discuss Plans for Illinoisan's Safe Return from Afghanistan**

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WASHINGTON, D.C. — 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, wrote to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to express her dismay at Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad's refusal to take phone calls with Mark Frerichs' family. Mark Frerichs, an Illinoisan and a Veteran of the U.S. Navy, was abducted by the Taliban in Kabul earlier this year and is currently being held hostage. Duckworth's letter comes in response to the recent Defense Department decision to hastily withdraw troops from Afghanistan without securing any concessions from the Taliban, a decision that gives away one of our biggest bargaining chips to the Taliban for nothing, could extinguish any hope that families of American hostages held

in the region, like Mark Frerichs, will ever see their loved ones again. Duckworth also included National Security Advisor Robert O'Brien and White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows on her letter.

In part, Duckworth wrote: “ safe return depends on the negotiations headed by Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad. However, Ambassador Khalilzad has apparently refused to speak with Mr. Frerichs’ family, who are counting on him to help secure Mark’s release.”

She continued: “There are only two Americans that we know of being held in the region. As such, speaking with their families, who are living with stress and fear that most of us cannot imagine, should not present an undue burden to Ambassador Khalilzad, particularly if he is invested in securing these Americans’ safe return. Given that Ambassador Khalilzad is unable to accommodate Mark Frerichs’ family, I request instead that he take a call with me before December 23, 2020, to discuss the latest developments in Mr. Frerichs’ case and how his release is being factored into negotiations.”

Last month, Duckworth [wrote 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 and hostages like him in Afghanistan. She [released a statement](#) condemning the Trump Administration’s plan to hastily withdraw troops from Afghanistan and Iraq without concessions, during negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban.

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

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

I write today to express my dismay at the treatment of the family of American citizen and Illinoisan Mark Frerichs. Mr. Frerichs has been missing from Afghanistan since January 31, 2020 and is believed to have been kidnapped by members of the Taliban, Haqqani Network or their affiliates. According to reports from representatives of the Hostage Recovery Fusion Cell, the Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Mr. Frerichs is being held in Afghanistan or Pakistan. As such, his safe return depends on the negotiations headed by Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad. However, Ambassador Khalilzad has apparently refused to speak with Mr. Frerichs’ family, who are counting on him to help secure Mark’s release.

I understand that, in the past, Ambassador Khalilzad took calls with members of Mr. Frerichs’ family, who are understandably invested in receiving updates on his status.

Especially now, as the Administration pushes forward on an accelerated withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan without public mention of Mr. Frerichs' continued captivity, his family is questioning what efforts are underway to secure his return. They valued these calls with Ambassador Khalilzad as a way to ensure that Mark is not forgotten. When they received word in October that Ambassador Khalilzad will no longer speak with them, they feared that he does not view Mark Frerichs' release from captivity as a priority.

There are only two Americans that we know of being held in the region. As such, speaking with their families, who are living with stress and fear that most of us cannot imagine, should not present an undue burden to Ambassador Khalilzad, particularly if he is invested in securing these Americans' safe return. Given that Ambassador Khalilzad is unable to accommodate Mark Frerichs' family, I request instead that he take a call with me before December 23, 2020, to discuss the latest developments in Mr. Frerichs' case and how his release is being factored into negotiations.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter. If you have any questions about my request, please contact Katie Sudhoff, at 202-257-1737 or [katie\\_sudhoff@duckworth.senate.gov](mailto:katie_sudhoff@duckworth.senate.gov).