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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

RICHARD D. DeBOBES, STAFF DIRECTOR  
ANN E. SAUER, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

April 25, 2012

The President  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express our deep concern about reports that in preparations for the NATO Summit in Chicago next month, U.S. officials are advocating a long-term plan for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) after 2014 that would sharply reduce the size of those forces, based on presumptions about the security threat years from now and the affordability of sustaining these forces. The United States needs to ensure that decisions on the future size of and funding for the ANSF will be based on security conditions in Afghanistan at that time, and not set spending levels that could not only jeopardize the progress of the past decade or weaken the security of Afghanistan when they take effect down the road but could also send the wrong message in the interim.

A key part of our Afghanistan strategy has been that, as U.S. and coalition forces draw down, increasing numbers of capable Afghan forces will be available to sustain and expand the hard-won gains that U.S., coalition, and Afghan forces have secured at great cost in blood and treasure. Achieving this objective requires correctly sizing the ANSF to provide enduring security for their country, and ensuring the funding necessary to support that end-strength. We applaud the progress that has been made towards achieving this goal over the past few years, as the ANSF—and in particular, the Afghan National Army—have made significant gains both in their size and professionalism.

We were surprised and troubled, however, to learn that the United States may advocate with our NATO partners a plan to decrease the number of ANSF from 352,000 forces this year to 230,000 after 2014—a reduction of more than one-third. According to multiple news sources, this proposed reduction is being primarily driven by financial considerations rather than the strategic or military calculations of our military commanders. The commander of the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan was quoted last month as saying that the size of the post-2014 ANSF will be determined by “what the international community will provide and what the Afghans can provide for themselves.”

We believe that this is the wrong approach for determining the future size of the Afghan security forces. While we hope that security conditions in Afghanistan improve,

which could then justify reductions in the end-strength of the ANSF, our planning for the future should not presume a best-case scenario or wishful thinking regarding the security threats in Afghanistan. For the foreseeable future, the ANSF will need to be able to contend with a resilient insurgency that enjoys sanctuary in Pakistan. We believe the end-strength of our Afghan partners needed to maintain security should be based on a realistic assessment of the conditions they will be facing and it is too early to decide that conditions two to three years from now will allow a one-third reduction.

Cutting the end-strength of the ANSF based on highly speculative cost estimates is also shortsighted given the tens of billions of dollars that will be saved as U.S. forces withdraw from Afghanistan.

We fully agree with you that there is no reason the cost of sustaining the ANSF should fall on the United States alone. Our NATO allies and other coalition partners will also experience reduced costs as the International Security Assistance Force winds down, and they too share an interest in seeing security and stability in Afghanistan. We join you in urging the major economic powers of Europe, the Middle East, and Asia to join in making long-term financial commitments to sustain the ANSF.

Having labored so hard and so long to recruit, train, and mentor sufficient Afghan security forces to take lead responsibility for Afghanistan's security, we believe it would be a mistake now to undermine this achievement through premature and militarily unjustified reductions in the size of those forces. We urge you to make clear to our international partners that the United States is prepared to work with them to ensure the ANSF has sufficient funding for the end-strength and capability necessary for the enduring security in Afghanistan.

Sincerely,

  
John McCain  
Ranking Member

  
Carl Levin  
Chairman

  
Lindsey O. Graham  
United States Senator

  
Joseph I. Lieberman  
United States Senator

cc: The Honorable Leon E. Panetta  
cc: General Martin E. Dempsey, USA