Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 22, 2015

The Honorable Ashton B. Carter
Secretary, Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20310

Dear Secretary Carter:

On September 9, it was reported that several intelligence analysts working under Central Command filed a complaint alleging that intelligence reports on terrorist activities in Syria were being inappropriately altered by senior Defense Department staff. As Members of Congress, we write to share our concerns with you.

For years, this administration has struggled to develop a coherent strategy in Syria. When fighting broke out in 2011, our administration's policy was to idly observe the Assad regime as it oppressed and murdered numerous dissidents and innocent civilians. Several years have gone by, and there has been no credible progress in Syria.

Russia and Iran continue to provide significant financial and material support to Assad and collude against our regional interests. Despite the President's misguided efforts to reverse longstanding policies towards Russia and Iran, there have been no indications that those countries are willing to side with the United States on Syria. To the contrary, as recently as September 14, the New York Times reported that Iran continues to allow the Russian government access to its airspace to deliver military equipment and personnel into Syria – in direct defiance of American efforts to block shipments into Syria.

Several months ago, the administration initiated a program to train Syrian forces to fight ISIS. Recruitment numbers for this program, however, have been woefully short of expectations as result of a limited mission scope that does not include combating Assad. Further, it appears the majority of rebels successfully recruited have either been kidnapped or killed in combat.

Congress authorized $500 million for this program, but only $41 million has been allocated – the majority of dollars being spent on arms and supplies rather than recruitment and training. Unfortunately, administration testimonies on the matter and subsequent media reports conveyed a very inaccurate accounting of these efforts, implying that $500 million was spent on training only 60 people.

Despite Secretary Kerry's efforts to blame training program managers for the shortcomings of this initiative, its failure serves as a larger reflection of this administration's inability to implement sound foreign policy in Syria or provide true and accurate information to the American people. Moreover, the administration never sought to clarify or request the legal authorization necessary to provide assistance to these forces on the battlefield – further illustrating our government's lack of strategic direction and foresight on these matters.

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With these issues in mind, we find reports of senior-level Defense Department staff altering intelligence documents in Syria especially troubling. As you have stated, the intelligence-gathering process should remain non-partisan, and senior officials should not alter or disturb the impartiality of the process.

As elected officials, we respectfully request that you update our offices on your investigative efforts, including the accuracy of the news reports, the extent of the inappropriate editing, and your solutions to mitigate the problem. We are aware the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform has requested similar information, and we fully support that Committee's interest in the matter.

Thank you for your prompt response to this important issue.

Sincerely,

Representative Robert Pittenger

Representative David Rouzer

Representative Matt Salmon

Representative Scott Perry

Representative Doug LaMalfa

Representative Steven Palazzo

Representative Ralph Abraham

Representative Scott Garrett

Representative John Culberson

Representative Rick Allen

Representative Richard Hudson

Representative Michael Fitzpatrick

Representative Chris Smith

Representative John Mica

Representative Bill Flores

Representative Randy Hultgren

Representative Mo Brooks

Representative Lou Barletta

Representative Robert Aderholt

Representative Trent Kelly

Representative Jeff Duncan

Representative Sam Johnson

Representative Bill Posey

Representative Kevin Cramer

Representative Bob Latta

Representative Pete Olson

Representative Paul Gosar

Representative Blaine Luetkemeyer

Representative Dave Brat

Representative Louie Gohmert

Representative Leonard Lance

Representative Lynn Jenkins

Representative Cresent Hardy

Representative David Young