

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 14, 2016

The Honorable Ashton B. Carter
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Carter:

We write regarding reports that the Department of Defense (DoD) is experiencing challenges in supporting the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) with sustainment of its fleet of Russian-made Mi-17 helicopters, in part because of U.S. sanctions on Russia. We commend President Obama's 2014 Executive Order 13661, which bans U.S. business with the Russian arms industry as a result of Russia's illegal annexation and invasion of Crimea. In turn, this action has impacted DoD's ability to continue to support a shrinking fleet of Afghan Mi-17 helicopters.

As utility helicopters remain in high demand for mobility and close air support of the ANDSF, and Russia's aggression remains unabated, our nation must definitively and permanently end reliance on Russian-made defense articles like the Mi-17. We request detailed information regarding DoD's strategy for supporting the requirements of the ANDSF for helicopters and supplying an American-made helicopter to the ANDSF going forward.

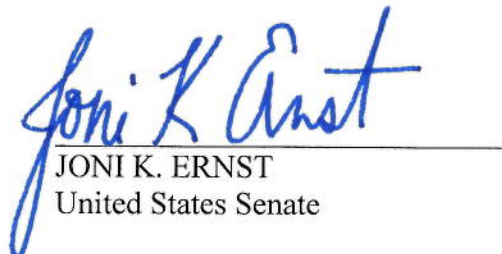
As threats in Afghanistan remain high, including from the Taliban, ISIL, and al Qaeda, the ANDSF relies on U.S. assistance and its own organic airpower to provide an asymmetric advantage over its adversaries. The need for airlift capability in a country such as Afghanistan is particularly critical with mountainous terrain and limited infrastructure. As helicopters are an essential element in the effort to secure Afghanistan, DoD must work to address this issue before the need for aviation capability becomes even more acute.

The U.S. began procuring Mi-17 helicopters in 2005 to help build the capacity of the ANDSF. While the current capability may serve as a temporary bridging solution, a more sustainable aviation fleet is required. Rosoboronexport is the sole exporter of Russian military articles, but sanctions prevent the U.S. from acquiring Mi-17 helicopters, parts, and supplies for the ANDSF. With Russia's continued and increasing aggression, it is unlikely that sanctions will be lifted. Therefore, we urge DoD to develop a plan to field an American alternative to prevent such a problem from arising again. Thank you for your consideration and we look forward to working with you on this matter.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



JONI K. ERNST
United States Senate