

**For Immediate Release:** *July 13, 2012*

**Washington, D.C.**—In a letter to Speaker John Boehner today, Representatives Duncan Hunter and Frank Wolf (R-VA) requested that the House hold two weeks of hearings this fall on the war in Afghanistan.

Representatives Hunter and Wolf point to the fact that the nation has been at war in Afghanistan for 11 years and believe the American people no longer have a clear sense of what we are trying to accomplish, why the mission remains necessary and how far we are from attaining our goal.

“Our objective for Afghanistan and the rest of the region has been clouded by uncertainty and mixed-messages,” said Representative Hunter, a veteran of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. “There must be well-defined goals that set the pace for our mission and eventual transition, and if the Administration prefers to view the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan on purely political terms, that’s all the motivation Congress needs to do the job the Administration seems uninterested in doing.”

Hunter is on the House Armed Services Committee and served in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan as a U.S. Marine. Wolf is a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee.

Below is the complete text of Wolf and Hunter’s letter to Boehner:

*The Hon. John Boehner*

*Speaker of the House*

*U.S. House of Representatives*

*H-232 The Capitol*

*Dear Speaker Boehner:*

*As we write this letter, news reports show that six more U.S. troops were killed in Afghanistan. Our nation has been at war for 11 years – the longest wartime in our history. Many members of Congress have attended the funerals of fallen soldiers and met with wounded service members and their families at Walter Reed and Bethesda Naval hospitals. Just this past Sunday, The Washington Post published an article about a widow in Washington whose husband never got to meet his third child before he was killed in Afghanistan. The thought of this child and the children of other fallen troops who will never meet their parents is truly heart-breaking.*

*We both worry that this war has gone on for so long that the American public has become desensitized to the reality that our troops are still fighting and dying overseas. In fact, public support for the war has dropped precipitously in the last couple of years. It is often said that Vietnam was not lost in Saigon; rather, it was lost in Washington. While the Vietnam and Afghanistan parallels are imperfect at best, the shadow of history looms large. Eroding political will has consequences, and in the case of Afghanistan, the stakes could not be higher. Sadly, we have seen little in the way of presidential leadership in this regard. The president rarely if ever uses the “bully pulpit” to talk to the American people about our goals in the region.*

*The Congress has a duty to ensure that everything possible is done to achieve our goals and honor the sacrifice of those who wear the uniform. Do you think we can look the parents, spouses and children of the dead and wounded in the eye and tell them that we are currently doing so?*

*We believe Congress has a moral and constitutional duty to conduct meaningful oversight of military actions to make sure that the administration has a strategy to achieve success in Afghanistan and Pakistan. □ As early as 2009, we began pressing the Obama Administration to convene a bipartisan, independent Afghanistan-Pakistan Study Group (APSG), modeled after the Iraq Study Group (ISG), to provide “fresh eyes” on the target and conduct a comprehensive analysis of U.S. strategy in the region. This group would have been charged with putting forward policy options for congressional consideration and, perhaps just as significantly, would have fostered a national conversation about the war effort: Why are we there? What are we aiming to accomplish? At what cost? What are the consequences of failure? In fact, Congress included language in the FY 2012 Defense Appropriations bill that provided the administration \$1 million to establish the APSG. □*

*Two excerpts from the book “Little America: The War Within the War for Afghanistan,” were recently published in The Washington Post. □ Sadly, the excerpts from the book paint a depressing picture of bureaucratic infighting that has undermined our policy in South Asia.□*

*These book excerpts make it clear that the Obama Administration has allowed personal differences between senior officials to distract from formulating a policy that could have led to success in the region. □ This infighting was taking place while repeated calls were being made for the administration to establish the APSG. □ We firmly believe the APSG could have negated this infighting by having a bipartisan group of experts evaluate all policy options and determine the best way forward. □□*

*Unfortunately, the excerpts mentioned above are not an isolated incident, but rather the continuation of the Obama Administration politicizing national security matters. □ On May 29 the New York Times reported that David Axelrod, the president’s political advisor and chief campaign strategist, repeatedly attended high-level national security meetings related to terrorist drone strikes when he worked at the White House. The article noted “David Axelrod...began showing up at the ‘Terror Tuesday’ meetings, his unspeaking presence a visible reminder of what everyone understood: a successful attack would overwhelm the president’s other aspirations and achievements.”*

*This revelation is in keeping with the reporting of Bob Woodward in “Obama’s Wars.” Woodward indicated that discussions of the war strategy were infused with political calculations. Woodward also wrote of an administration that “wrestled with the most basic questions about the war...What is the mission? What are we trying to do? What will work?” □ These are questions that demand answers and could have been taken up by APSG. □*

*The New York Times has also reported that President Obama reviews the pictures and biographies of suspected terrorists and personally decides which ones will be targets of drone strikes. □ Do you believe it is appropriate for the President of the United States to be shuffling terrorist “baseball cards” on a weekly basis and personally deciding who should be killed? □ Congressional oversight of the administration’s handling of the war in Afghanistan, combined with a forward-looking assessment of our overall policy in the region, is of utmost importance.□□ Our policy in this troubled region should be shaped through a frank and honest discussion about the challenges we face and the options available to solve them. □ Since it is clear that this review will not take place through internal deliberations in the Obama Administration, we ask that you direct the House Armed Services, Intelligence and Foreign Affairs committees to convene two weeks of hearings on these important issues. □*

*The hearings should include testimony from former secretaries of State, including George Shultz, Madeline Albright and James Baker, former ambassadors to Afghanistan and Pakistan, including Ronald Neumann, Ryan Crocker and Karl Eikenberry, and former CIA directors going back to the 1980s. □ In addition, we think the committee would benefit from the views of foreign policy experts such as John Hamre and Tony Cordesman from the Center for Strategic and International Studies and David Abshire from the Center for the Study of the Presidency and Congress. □ It may also be helpful to hear testimony from the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, Marc Grossman, as well as the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Stuart Bowen.□□ Additional witnesses should include former national security advisors Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcroft and former attorney general and Reagan Scholar at the Heritage Foundation Ed Meese. □ In addition, subject area experts should be called to testify, including Reuel Marc Gerech from the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, Michael O’Hanlon from the Brookings Institution, as well as representatives from the American Enterprise Institute and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. □*

*Finally, the committees should hear testimony from former members of Congress with experience in the region – including Lee Hamilton, Duncan Hunter, and Ike Skelton – current members who have served overseas, as well as former members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. □ These individuals bring a wide range of knowledge and expertise to the various military and*

*diplomatic challenges in South Asia. □ Their vast experiences should not go unused. □ The committees of jurisdiction should also call any witnesses they believe will be beneficial. □□□ Our military and diplomatic personnel have made extraordinary sacrifices protecting our national security during 11 years of war. The military families that haven't lost loved ones have still been forced to deal with long absences of their family members and the crippling injuries with which many have returned. We are concerned that the American public has lost sight of these sacrifices and that the Obama Administration has lost its bearing on key matters of national security. □ We believe Congress has a moral obligation to convene hearings that will explore what has brought us to this point and how we can move forward as a nation in a sustainable way, honoring the tremendous sacrifice that has already been made by so many. □*

*The American people, and above all our men and women in uniform deserve a full hearing on our future plans in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We urge your full support for these hearings.*

*Best wishes.*

*Sincerely,*

*Frank Wolf*

*Member of Congress*

*Duncan Hunter*

*Member of Congress*