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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

ELIZABETH L. KING, STAFF DIRECTOR
JOHN P. KEAST, REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

March 21, 2024

President Joseph R. Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

We have strong reservations about your directing the United States military to establish a temporary pier on the Gaza Coast. While we acknowledge that this decision was taken with the consent of the Israeli government, we are concerned that the mission entails a significant risk to U.S. personnel. We are also concerned that this approach fails to address the main causes of the humanitarian crisis.

First, this deployment ignores the most basic cause of Gaza's humanitarian crisis: the fact that Hamas ignited the current war on October 7 by murdering 1,200 people, including more than 30 Americans, and taking another 240 hostages, including 12 Americans. The conditions for ending the war and the ensuing humanitarian challenges are the same today as they were on October 7: Hamas' surrender and the return of the approximately 140 remaining hostages, including six Americans.

Second, based on what has been shared with the Senate Armed Services Committee thus far, this decision appears to ignore force protection issues entirely against an enemy that tries to kill Americans every day. We are gravely concerned that the Department of Defense has given too little consideration to the likelihood that Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and other U.S.-designated terrorist organizations operating in Gaza would attempt to attack the U.S. personnel that will be deployed to this mission. Since October 7, Iran-backed proxies, of which Hamas and PIJ are two, have attacked U.S. forces in Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and off the coast of Yemen. Hamas is blatantly indifferent to the humanitarian crisis that its October 7 massacre has wrought, and it is unlikely to be deterred by the humanitarian nature of the U.S. mission to establish a pier off the coast of Gaza.

Third, while the humanitarian need in Gaza is significant, as the Commander of United States Central Command testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 7, there is already a large backlog of humanitarian trucks waiting to enter Gaza. In his words, the primary impediment to facilitating humanitarian access is "the security and distribution internal to Gaza."

As has been widely reported in the press, armed gangs are attacking aid convoys crossing into the strip. Your decision to build a pier for Gaza merely creates another port of entry that will be backlogged. There is no apparent plan to secure distribution, to keep aid in civilians' hands and out of Hamas'. The latter would provide Hamas sustenance to continue fighting rather than force it to return the hostages and end the war.

Consistent with our oversight responsibilities, we have sent the attached questions to the Department of Defense. We request your assistance in ensuring that they are answered expeditiously and in an unclassified form.

We urge you to redouble your efforts to compel Hamas to release the hostages, which would end the war and improve the humanitarian situation without deploying U.S. service members to the shores of a war zone.

Sincerely,



Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator



Deb Fischer
United States Senator



Tom Cotton
United States Senator



M. Michael Rounds
United States Senator



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator



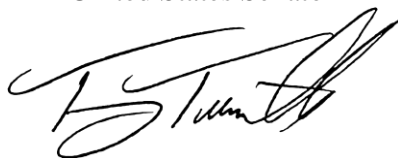
Dan Sullivan
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator



Rick Scott
United States Senator



Tommy Tuberville
United States Senator



Markwayne Mullin
United States Senator



Ted Budd
United States Senator



Eric Schmitt
United States Senator

Enclosure

Attached questions:

1. **When was United States Central Command tasked with giving the president options for delivering humanitarian aid directly to Gaza? What other options were presented, apart from establishing a temporary port in Gaza?**
2. **When did United States Transportation Command first learn that it would be tasked with executing this mission?**
3. **What is the projected timeline for executing this mission?**
4. **How many troops will be deployed for this mission, and on what date was that force size determined?**
5. **What is the projected cost of this mission? Please provide a budget, including planning costs, equipment, troop costs, fuel, and any other associated expenses.**
6. **What force protection risks does this mission entail? What are the mission's force protection requirements? How many of the troops deployed for this mission will be deployed in a force protection mission?**
7. **Are there any unique capabilities that are being deployed for this mission, which therefore will not be available in the event of a contingency elsewhere?**
8. **What is the intelligence community's assessment of the capabilities of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other terrorist groups in Gaza in terms of their ability to strike U.S. forces who will be deployed in this mission?**
9. **What is the intelligence community's assessment of whether Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other terrorist groups in Gaza would seek to attack U.S. forces who will be deployed in this mission?**
10. **What are the rules of engagement in the event that Hamas, Palestinian Jihad, or another terrorist group attacks the pier that the U.S. military intends to construct?**
11. **General Kurilla testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 7, 2024. He said that, during a recent visit to Israel, he saw 2,500 aid trucks waiting to enter Gaza, but "the challenge is the security and distribution internal to Gaza." Since the U.S. military will not (and should not) enter Gaza, what is the plan for bolstering the security of aid distribution within Gaza so that the pier does not become yet another backlogged port of entry?**
12. **Once aid is off-loaded on the shore of Gaza, who will be receiving that aid for distribution within Gaza? What vetting has taken place to ensure that these immediate recipients are not affiliated with Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, or any other terrorist group within Gaza?**
13. **What is the plan for ensuring that the humanitarian aid will not fall into the hands of Hamas or other U.S.-designated terrorist organizations?**
14. **Given the risk that humanitarian aid will fall into the hands of Hamas or other U.S.-designated terrorist organizations, has United States Central Command conferred with the Office of Foreign Assets Control for advice and/or an exception?**
15. **Please provide an update on any Department of Defense efforts and resources that are being used to rescue the hostages that Hamas is currently holding in Gaza. If applicable, are any resources being diverted away from hostage-rescue efforts for the new Gaza pier mission?**