

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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June 30, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pompeo
Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Mark T. Esper
Secretary of Defense
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

The Honorable John Barsa
Acting Administrator
Agency for International Development
1001 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004

The Honorable Chad F. Wolf
Acting Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20016

Dear Secretary Pompeo, Secretary Esper, Acting Administrator Barsa, and Acting Secretary Wolf:

We are extremely disappointed that your departments and agencies are refusing to participate in a hearing before the Subcommittee on National Security entitled, “Empowering Women and Girls and Promoting International Security.” It is deeply disturbing that the Trump Administration’s continued resistance to Congressional oversight extends to such an important matter as the rights of women and girls around the world.

On June 11, 2020, the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Agency for International Development each released plans to implement the Trump Administration’s U.S. Women, Peace, and Security Strategy, which was issued a year earlier.¹

¹ The White House, *United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security* (June 2019) (online at www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/WPS-Strategy-FINAL-PDF-6.11.19.pdf); Department of State, *The Department of State’s Plan to Implement the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security* (June 11, 2020) (online at www.state.gov/state-department-releases-women-peace-and-security-implementation-plan/); U.S. Agency for International Development, *USAID’s Women, Peace, and Security Implementation Plan* (June 11, 2020) (online at www.usaid.gov/women-peace-and-security/2020-wps-implementation-plan/); Department of Defense, *Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan* (June 11, 2020) (online at https://media.defense.gov/2020/Jun/11/2002314428/-1/-1/1/WOMEN_PEACE_SECURITY_STRATEGIC_FRAMEWORK_IMPLEMENTATION_PLAN.PDF); Department of Homeland Security, *Department and Agency Implementation Plans for The U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security* (June 11, 2020) (online www.dhs.gov/publication/dhs-implementation-plan-us-strategy-women-peace-and-security).

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Your departments launched an aggressive media rollout to publicize these implementation plans. For example, senior officials from each of your departments participated in an online webinar forum hosted by the American Enterprise Institute. All four panelists participated remotely—three via Zoom and one via phone—and all answered questions from the moderator and the public.²

Unfortunately, it appears that the Trump Administration has one standard for allowing its officials to appear before friendly conservative organizations and another standard for allowing them to testify before Congress as it conducts its responsibilities under the Constitution.

On June 17, 2020, Chairman Lynch invited officials from each of your agencies to testify at a hearing before the Subcommittee on National Security.³ Like the American Enterprise Institute, the Subcommittee planned to hold its event remotely to avoid unnecessarily exposing the Capitol Police, custodial workers, and other essential frontline workers to the risks of the coronavirus pandemic, which has surged dangerously over the past several weeks.⁴

On May 15, 2020, the House passed H. Res. 965, which authorizes remote committee proceedings due to the ongoing health risks of the coronavirus crisis.⁵ As the Attending Physician warned on June 23, 2020, “Continued vigilance to public health measures, testing, contact tracing, hand washing, contact surface cleansing, and social distancing measures remain essential.”⁶

Despite these risks, your departments refused. They cited “White House/OMB guidance sent to all House and Senate Committees on May 29th” which demands that both the Chairman and witnesses appear in person, regardless of the health risks to frontline workers.⁷

² *Webinar—Advancing the Women, Peace, and Security Strategy in 2020*, American Enterprise Institute (June 11, 2020) (online at www.aei.org/events/webinar-advancing-the-women-peace-and-security-strategy-in-2020/).

³ Letter from Chairman Stephen F. Lynch, Subcommittee on National Security, to Kelley Currie, Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues, Department of State (June 17, 2020); Letter from Chairman Stephen F. Lynch, Subcommittee on National Security, to Lisa W. Hershman, Chief Management Officer, Department of Defense (June 17, 2020); Letter from Chairman Stephen F. Lynch, Subcommittee on National Security, to Cameron Quinn, Officer for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, Department of Homeland Security (June 17, 2020); Letter from Chairman Stephen F. Lynch, Subcommittee on National Security, to Michelle Bekkering, Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Economic Growth, Education and Environment, U.S. Agency for International Development (June 17, 2020).

⁴ *Record Spikes in U.S. Coronavirus Cases Push Up Hospitalization Rates in 16 States*, CNBC (June 25, 2020) (online at www.cnbc.com/2020/06/25/record-spikes-in-us-coronavirus-cases-push-up-hospitalization-rates-in-16-states.html).

⁵ H. Res. 965.

⁶ U.S. Congress Attending Physician, *Attending Physician Pandemic Social Distancing and Daily Health Screening Implementation Guidelines for Congressional Offices and Work Centers* (June 23, 2020).

⁷ Email from Office of Legislative Affairs Director, Department of Homeland Security, to Staff,

Apart from this obstruction, it is revealing that the Trump Administration is refusing to testify at a hearing regarding the rights of women and girls around the world. Since assuming office, the Trump Administration has aggressively pursued policies that conflict with its own Women, Peace, and Security Strategy.

For example, the Strategy claims that the Administration will “prevent and respond to violence against women and girls” by “supporting multilateral efforts, including at the United Nations (UN), to address violence in conflict, including sexual violence, human trafficking, and slavery.”⁸ However, the Administration threatened to veto a UN resolution aimed at combatting the use of rape as a weapon of war “because of its language on reproductive and sexual health,” resulting in a significantly watered-down resolution.⁹

Similarly, in April 2017, the Trump Administration announced that it would suspend funding to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) because it “supports or participates in the management or [sic] a program of coercive abortion or involuntary sterilization” in China.¹⁰ According to the UNFPA, U.S. contributions funded life-saving support to 10.5 million women, children, and young adults, as well as sexual and reproductive health services and programs to fight gender-based violence, which helped 9 million people worldwide.¹¹

Even worse, the Trump Administration’s peace negotiations with the Taliban, which resulted in an agreement on February 29, 2020, did not include any guarantees to protect the rights of women and girls, instead leaving the issue to be handled internally.¹² During the 1990s, the Taliban brutally oppressed women and girls, who “were prohibited from attending school, barred from seeking employment, and could not go outside without a male guardian.”¹³

Subcommittee on National Security (June 24, 2020); Email from Director, House Affairs, Department of Defense, to Staff, Subcommittee on National Security (June 24, 2020); Email from House Division Chief, Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs, U.S. Agency for International Development, to Staff, Subcommittee on National Security (June 24, 2020);

⁸ The White House, *United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security* (June 2019) (online at www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/WPS-Strategy-FINAL-PDF-6.11.19.pdf).

⁹ *US Threatens to Veto UN Resolution on Rape as Weapon of War, Officials Say*, Guardian (Apr. 22, 2019) (online at www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/22/us-un-resolution-rape-weapon-of-war-veto).

¹⁰ *US Aid Cuts to UN Agency Will Hurt Vulnerable Women and Children, Critics Say*, CNN (July 15, 2020) (online at www.cnn.com/2019/07/15/politics/us-aid-cut-unfpa/index.html).

¹¹ *Rohingya, Syrian, and Yemeni Women are Paying for Trump’s Ideological Withdrawal of UN Funds*, Quartz (Nov. 22, 2017) (online at <https://qz.com/1135083/rohingya-syrian-and-yemeni-women-are-paying-for-trumps-ideological-withdrawal-of-un-funds/>).

¹² *No Guarantees for Afghan Women in Draft U.S.-Taliban Deal*, NBC News (Feb. 23, 2020) (online at www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/no-guarantees-afghan-women-draft-u-s-taliban-deal-n1140471); Human Rights Watch, *A Crucial Moment for Women’s Rights in Afghanistan* (Mar. 5, 2020) (online at www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/05/crucial-moment-womens-rights-afghanistan).

¹³ Letter from Rep. Brenda Lawrence et al. to Secretary Michael Pompeo, Department of State (Apr. 3, 2020) (online at

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The Subcommittee has significant questions about how your departments plan to implement the Women, Peace, and Security Strategy, but your refusal to make witnesses available to testify does a disservice to this mission and sends the wrong message to our allies and partners about the United States' commitment to promoting the rights of women and girls around the world.

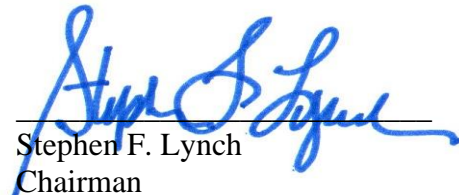
Given this importance of this topic, and as an accommodation, we are prepared to convene this hearing in-person, with the option for Members to participate remotely. Please contact Committee staff by July 2, 2020, to confirm that witnesses from the Departments of State, Defense, Homeland Security, and U.S. Agency for International Development will testify on Thursday, July 23, 2020, at 10:00 a.m. in room 2154 of the Rayburn House Office Building.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. If you have any questions regarding this request, please contact Committee staff at (202) 225-5051.

Sincerely,



Carolyn B. Maloney
Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform



Stephen F. Lynch
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security

cc: The Honorable Jim Jordan, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Reform

The Honorable Glenn Grothman, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security