



UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Friday, May 22, 2015

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**SASC CHAIRMAN JOHN McCAIN ASKS DEFENSE DEPARTMENT TO
RESPOND TO WASTEFUL CONSTRUCTION OF FACILITY IN
AFGHANISTAN**

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senator John McCain (R-AZ), Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, sent the following letter on Wednesday to Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work regarding the construction of a \$36 million command and control facility at Camp Leatherneck in Afghanistan over the objections of commanders on the ground. “It is unclear to me how the expenditure of \$36 million on a building that was never used by the U.S. military, and as I understand, has not been used by the Afghan government, can be viewed as anything other than a failure of fiscal stewardship,” Chairman McCain wrote. The text of the letter appears below.

Dear Deputy Secretary Work:

I am writing to you to express my concern about the Department of Defense’s response to the report being released today by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) regarding the construction of the command and control facility in Afghanistan at Camp Leatherneck known as “64K”. I am deeply concerned that the construction of this facility over the objections of the commanders on the ground that the facility was intended to support represents a \$36 million waste of taxpayer funds. The Department’s official response to the report, which you signed on behalf of the Department, describes the decision to deny the request from general officers on the ground to cancel this project as “prudent.” It is unclear to me how the expenditure of \$36 million on a building that was never used by the U.S. military, and as I understand, has not been used by the Afghan government, can be viewed as anything other than a failure of fiscal stewardship, let alone be described as “prudent.”

The Department’s primary justification for the decision to continue construction of this building after it was identified as being unnecessary appears to rest largely on the assertion that it was based on the “strategic vision” of CENTCOM at the time that Camp Leatherneck would serve as an enduring base for the U.S. military. While many of us may have hoped that this would be the

case, that concept was never approved by the President, and still has not. According to the SIGAR report, no authoritative documents have been produced by the Department to support that justification at the time that it was made following requests by the commanders on the ground in Afghanistan to cancel the project. If the Department has documents that support this assertion that have not been provided in the course of the three investigations that have now taken place into this matter, I request that they be provided to the committee for review.

I am also troubled by the Department's response to SIGAR's recommendations that financial management guidance and training be updated in order to prevent wasteful spending such as this, which unfortunately still happens too often at the Department. In its comments, the Department agreed with SIGAR's sentiments, but indicated that no additional action was needed to update relevant training and guidance. I believe the Department would be well served by doing more to set an expectation that its employees, military and civilian alike, do exactly what the general officers on the ground did in this case: speak up and try to stop wasteful spending before it occurs. While I recognize that this report deals with a single incident, it is unfortunately not the first, and likely will not be the last, example of wasteful spending by the Department. As such, I request that you reconsider the response to SIGAR's recommendations in particular and identify what additional actions can be taken to encourage this kind of common sense approach.

Finally, it was disturbing to read some of the comments contained in emails sent by Colonel Norman Allen regarding cooperation with SIGAR's investigation. I appreciate the Department's concurrence with SIGAR's recommendation to issue a directive regarding compliance with SIGAR's audits and investigations. I trust that you agree with me that organizations like SIGAR, the Government Accountability Office, and the Inspectors General are a critical part of effective oversight. The Department should do everything necessary to ensure that its employees comply fully with requests made by these organizations to do their work, including when it comes to investigations into the decisions made at all levels of the chain of command. Please provide me with a copy of any additional guidance or information released by the Department in response to this recommendation.

I thank you for your cooperation in this matter and for your continued service to the Department and our nation.

Sincerely,

Chairman John McCain

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