

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 31, 2012

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
The Pentagon

Dear Secretary Panetta:

We are concerned that a premature release of Taliban insurgent leaders from Guantanamo prison will undermine, rather than advance, the search for peace in Afghanistan. We do not believe that you can guarantee, as required, to Congress such a release of prisoners will pose no threat to the security of the United States or to the lives of our troops in the field.

On January 20, the *Washington Post* reported, “The latest Afghan National Intelligence Estimate warns that the Taliban will grow stronger, using the talks to gain credibility and run out the clock until U.S. troops depart Afghanistan, while continuing to fight for more territory.” Among those to be released are deputy Taliban intelligence minister Abdul Haq Wasiq and former army chief Mullah Mohammed Fazl, both hardcore killers who have planned the deaths of hundreds of Americans. Holding these combatants under house arrest in Qatar will not stop them from resuming their plotting; it will only help the Taliban rebuild their capabilities.

On January 29, *The New York Times* quoted a Taliban official as saying talks on the release of former Taliban were “fairly advanced”. *The Australian* called the prisoner release “the precondition for peace talks.” President Obama has often offered to talk to America’s enemies without preconditions from our side, but apparently the administration is willing accept preconditions from the enemy’s side.

The ultimatum that the U.S. gave the Taliban in 2001, after the September 11 terrorist attacks murdered 3,000 Americans, should not be abandoned; “Deliver to U.S. authorities all the leaders of al Qaeda that hide in your land.” Taliban supreme leader Mullah Mohammed Omar refused to do so, confirming his status as a full accomplice to the mass murders of 9/11. The 2001 ultimatum must remain a precondition of any peace talks. The Taliban “land” includes Pakistan where Osama bin Laden was discovered and killed last year. And the list of terrorists should be expanded to include the surrender of Mohammed Omar as an American precondition, not our release of Omar’s henchmen.

Taliban officials are now moving freely about in Pakistan, under cover of preparations for the peace talks, another giant step back from the (false) claim that Pakistan was helping to contain the Taliban. The war aims that sent a large U.S.-NATO army into Afghanistan ten years ago are being abandoned in a matter of weeks.

On Jan. 11, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that “the international community must see the insurgents renounce violence, break with al-Qaida, and support the laws and constitution of Afghanistan,” There have been no signs that these preconditions are moving forward or are even being taken seriously as the “red lines” they are often called. To the contrary, the Taliban has recently reiterated its commitment to terrorism by stating the following:

“We shall not stop our armed Jihad for a single moment as long as the invaders are present on our soil as it would be contradictory to the goals of our decade old Jihad and as long as the occupiers have not been completely gotten rid of, Islamic Emirate shall never consider ceasefire even for a single instance.”

Any chance for lasting peace depends on removing the chief architects of terror and aggression from the equation. That cannot happen if Mullah Omar and his henchmen are still free and running the Taliban.

We oppose the release of any Taliban prisoners as a precondition of talks. U.S. officials and diplomats must remember why we went to war after 9/11. Negotiations should be conducted from the position of strength won by the blood and sacrifice of American and allied warriors. There can be no discussion of “reconciliation” until after the Taliban have declared and abided by a ceasefire and Mohammed Omar has come in with the remaining members of al-Qaeda he has been sheltering.

Sincerely,



Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA)
Member of Congress



Louie Gohmert (R-TX)
Member of Congress



Steve King (R-IA)
Member of Congress