

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 5, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

The Honorable Kathleen Hicks  
Deputy Secretary  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1010 Defense Pentagon Washington  
Washington, D.C. 20301-1010

Dear Secretary Austin and Deputy Secretary Hicks:

We are writing to request your assistance in balancing the demand signal of combatant commanders against the overdue need for force modernization. Specifically, we would like to address the significant disparity in the Combatant Commands' (COCOMs) demand signals and the services' ability to provide said forces without significant disruption to longer-term readiness and modernization efforts.

Additional Request for Forces (RFFs) are supposed to be an exception used when there has been a change in the operational environment. They are not a method to circumvent the Global Force Management Plan (GFMAP) that the Department carefully constructs each year to ensure the proper balance between operational requirements and achieving the modernization goals articulated in the National Defense Strategy (NDS). However, COCOMs have few incentives to be frugal in their force requests, leading to an overtaxing and overworking of the services in an attempt to fulfill COCOM demands when the SECDEF approves an expansive number of RFFs. We have seen this happen with previous SECDEFs. Moreover, we have serious concerns that these near-limitless RFFs are driving readiness costs to unsustainable levels, servicemembers and platforms are getting burned through at breakneck paces, and much-needed modernization efforts are getting delayed as restricted funds are directed to addressing short-term requirements and risks.

We believe the service chiefs' plans to modernize and revolutionize their respective services, both the active and reserve components, put us in the right direction to prepare for the future fight while simultaneously balancing an appropriate amount of readiness to support ongoing operations. We fear, however, our ability to modernize the services for a future Great Powers competition and conflict will be undermined by the COCOM's failure, unwillingness, or inability to make do with their approved GFMAP allocations. Each request that falls outside of the approved GFMAP should be appropriately scrutinized based on whether it is mission-critical or if the operational environment has changed to a degree that requires a departure from the approved plan codified therein. Further, each request must be evaluated based on the extent to which it represents necessary mission, activity, and task prioritization in alignment with the NDS. Finally, these requests should be evaluated based on their impact on long-term readiness,

both for personnel and platforms. Fundamentally, the services and COCOMs must manage what are at times competing priorities of force modernization and readiness against immediate mission demands. This requires striking the right balance between assessing long-term risk if the force is not sufficiently modernized, and the short-term risk faced by the COCOMs if their demands go unmet.

The “tyranny of the now” is wearing out man and machine at too high a rate to ensure success both now and later. Future readiness can no longer be sacrificed at the altar of lower-priority requirements. All the RFFs, and their approvals, represent more than just a failure to adhere to the existing GFMAP; they also reflect a failure to prioritize. The consistent high operational tempo of our military assets is creating unsustainable deploy-to-dwell ratios. Put plainly, regular circumvention of the GFMAP is leaving the services scrambling at a time when they need to rebuild the health of the force. At this rate, the desire to solve every immediate problem, regardless of its strategic prioritization, may hollow the force for the next generation. It is imperative that the COCOMs accept and share the appropriate amount of risk required to balance their needs against the chiefs’ requirement to recruit, train and modernize the services in the long term.

In a budget-constrained world, balancing these two needs is no small task; the status quo, however, is not working. As such, we believe there is a need for increased prudence and scrutiny on the approval of RFFs that fall outside the established GFMAPs may result in a more equitable balance of needs. Finally, we believe communicating the expectation that the COCOMs will only request forces for tasks that are truly mission-critical and will be more disciplined with their demand signals and accept some short-term risk to support long-term readiness, this will make the United States better prepared to face current and future threats.

As such, we formally request a written response to the following questions. Where responses include classified information, please provide them in a separate document to be briefed separately.

- RFFs should only be approved if there is a significant change in the operation environment. What is your threshold for approving RFFs? What would qualify as a change in the operating environment that is significant enough to warrant a departure from the carefully planned GFMAP?
- In the past two years, do you believe that your threshold for approval was met by the high volume of RFFs? Did operational environments change enough to warrant so many departures from the carefully planned GFMAPs at the expense of long-term readiness?
- When SECDEFs approve a high volume of RFFs, it suggests that the GFMAP is incorrect. Do you believe that the GFMAPs have consistently been incorrect over the past few years? Do you believe that the current GFMAP is incorrect? If the GFMAP process is not in error, and there has not been a significant change in the operational environment, do you believe that such a large number of RFFs should have been approved?
- RFFs against the GFMAP is not a recent phenomenon. What steps can the Department of Defense take to reset the balance between near-term crises driving RFFs and long-term readiness? Does the GFMAP process itself need to be restructured?

The challenge of balancing modernization and readiness is significant, but so is the damage of getting it wrong. We look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,



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ROBERT J. WITTMAN  
Member of Congress

*/s/ Michael R. Turner*

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MICHAEL R. TURNER  
Member of Congress

*/s/ Doug Lamborn*

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DOUG LAMBORN  
Member of Congress

*/s/ Joe Wilson*

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JOE WILSON  
Member of Congress

*/s/ Jack Bergman*

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JACK BERGMAN  
Member of Congress

*/s/ Kaiali'i Kahele*

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KAIALI'I KAHELE  
Member of Congress

*/s/ Scott DesJarlais*

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SCOTT DESJARLAIS



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SETH MOULTON  
Member of Congress

*/s/ Jackie Speier*

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JACKIE SPEIER  
Member of Congress

*/s/ Elise Stefanik*

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ELISE STEFANIK  
Member of Congress

*/s/ Don Bacon*

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DON BACON  
Member of Congress

*/s/ Mo Brooks*

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MO BROOKS  
Member of Congress

*/s/ Van Taylor*

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VAN TAYLOR  
Member of Congress

*/s/ Blake Moore*

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BLAKE MOORE