



One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
www.foreignaffairs.house.gov

November 8, 2019

The President
The White House
Washington DC 20500

The Honorable Mick Mulvaney
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, NW,
Washington DC 20503

Dear Mr. President and Director Mulvaney:

We are seeking immediate answers concerning the role of the National Security Council staff and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in placing an indefinite and unexplained hold on \$105 million in critical security assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces against the recommendations of both the Departments of Defense and State and the explicit direction of Congress.

On September 5, 2019, the Department of State formally notified Congress of the intent to obligate \$105,000,000 in FY2019 funds to provide critical support to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). These funds are necessary for building the capacity of the Lebanese government to maintain security and stability and to support the LAF in a variety of areas including counterterrorism, border security, and implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701.

This package of assistance includes a range of vital equipment, such as military vehicles, weapons, bullet-proof vests, air-to-ground missiles, and ammunition as well as maintenance and sustainment to previously supplied aircraft, assault vehicles, and other equipment. Such funding also continues important professional military education programs and training for the LAF.

As Lebanon continues to face imminent threats to its security from a resurgent ISIS, Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, as well as an increasingly strong Hezbollah, a more capable LAF is clearly in the interests of the United States and Lebanon. Over the past year, the LAF conducted multiple successful operations against ISIS in Lebanon, reasserted control over Lebanese territory along the Syrian border, and increased its presence in southern Lebanon in support of

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the UN Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL). As Hezbollah grows in sophistication and capability, it is critical the LAF continues to grow and serve as the sole legitimate defender of Lebanese sovereignty and security.

Top American officials have reaffirmed the importance of this support including U.S. Central Command Commander General Joseph Votel stating in August 2018, "The LAF continue to do an extraordinary job in confronting extremist threats arising from across the Syrian border. The [LAF] has demonstrated to enemies and friends alike that they are strong, fully capable of defending Lebanon's borders, and have the support of the Lebanese people." Shortly thereafter, in December 2018, then-Secretary of Defense James Mattis reiterated the critical nature of the U.S. partnership with the LAF as "a necessary operation for the protection of innocent people" and expressed confidence that the "[LAF] are certainly doing their part in order to maintain stability in southern Lebanon."

We agree with the sentiments of these experts. We are confounded by the decision to hold this assistance. And we request a response in writing by no later than November 15, 2019 to the following questions.

1. What is the policy justification behind the imposition of the "implementation hold"?
2. Was the Commander of U.S. Central Command consulted prior to this decision being made?
3. When was the decision to indefinitely hold the funds communicated to the Departments of State and Defense?
4. Who directed OMB to impose the "implementation hold" on the funds?
5. Has an assessment or evaluation been conducted regarding the extent to which withholding these funds for the LAF would have an impact on Lebanon's security? If so, what conclusions did such an assessment or evaluation yield?
6. Has an assessment or evaluation been conducted regarding the extent to which withholding these funds for the LAF would have an impact on Israel's security? If so, what conclusions did such an assessment or evaluation yield?
7. What communications occurred between OMB or NSC and any foreign governments surrounding this decision?
8. What is the U.S. strategy for support to the LAF going forward?

Sincerely,



ELIOT L. ENGEL
Chairman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs



TED DEUTCH
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North
Africa, and International Terrorism