Via Electronic Transmission
The Honorable Chuck Hagel
Secretary of Defense
Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to ask that you assess the seriousness of three reports of investigation that were recently brought to my attention.¹ They allege that two senior Army officers attempted to obstruct protected communications between at least three whistleblowers and the department’s Office of the Inspector General regarding “massive corruption” at the Dawood National Military Hospital (NMH) in Afghanistan. This hospital was built and is supported with U.S. tax dollars.

The allegations involve Lieutenant General (LTG) William B. Caldwell, IV, U.S. Army, former Commander, North Atlantic Treaty Organization Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A), and the former Deputy Commander of that organization, Major General Garry S. Patton.

The reports, which were provided to me on September 5, 2013, clearly indicate that Generals Caldwell and Patton engaged in a pattern of misconduct designed to effectively “restrict” five officers and a civilian Deputy to the Commander from reporting fraud and theft to the Defense Department's (DoD) Inspector General’s Office. The whistleblowers had become “increasingly concerned about the level of corruption and felt it was beyond their ability to evaluate and fix.” They wanted to ask the DoD OIG “to help root out the corruption.” Generals Caldwell and Patton attempted unsuccessfully to keep that from happening.

Putting the spotlight on the scope of the alleged corruption the whistleblowers were trying to report helps to underscore the gravity of what the generals did.

During oversight hearings, senior officials used the terms “massive and rampant corruption” to characterize what was happening at the Dawood NMH. The main problems were: “widespread theft, mismanagement, and patient neglect” -- problems reported up the chain of command beginning in 2006. According to the Chairman of the House Committee, “the misappropriation of resources was staggering.” The Afghan Surgeon General was suspected of stealing $20 million in cash and $153 million of medical supplies over a five-year period.² And that may just be the tip of the iceberg.

¹ DoD OIG Reports No. 20121205-002346, 7/2/13; No. 20121205-012358, 8/20/13; No.20121205-001943, 8/20/13;
² The Afghan Surgeon General was investigated and removed but reportedly still serves in the armed forces;
Wounded Afghan soldiers treated at the hospital were allegedly subjected to disgraceful conditions, abuse, starvation, and neglect. They were allegedly “extorted for medical care,” and there was no anesthesia for operations, no heat, maggots crawling from festering wounds, and feces on the floor. Despite egregious allegations of theft, misconduct, mismanagement, and patient abuse and neglect, the U.S. government has continued to ship medical supplies to Afghanistan without accountability controls in place.

If the goal of U.S. policy in Afghanistan is to win the “hearts and minds” of the people, then taking care of wounded soldiers is a good place to start. By allowing wounded soldiers to rot and die in this hospital, we and the Afghan government are providing the Taliban with a golden recruiting opportunity. Dawood has the makings of an effective Taliban recruiting poster.

The conditions at the Dawood NMH were humiliating and a black mark on American character and leadership in Afghanistan. This situation was totally unacceptable and required drastic and immediate corrective action. Five brave souls were willing to put their careers on the line by blowing the whistle and bucking the generals and doing what had to be done. The generals, for their part, stood in their way and did what they could to hinder that process.

In doing what they did, the reports conclude that the two generals “violated” the military whistleblower protection act, Title 10, United States Code, Section 1034(a)(1). In line with that finding, the Inspector General recommends “that the Secretary of the Army take appropriate action against LTG Caldwell and MG Patton.”

Mr. Secretary, I respectfully request that you review this matter and urge the Secretary of the Army to hold Generals Caldwell and Patton accountable for breaking the law. Attempting to “restrict” the free flow of information to the Inspector General on massive corruption and theft must never be tolerated. Whistleblowers are a key asset in the war on fraud, theft, and waste. If senior officers are allowed to restrict and control whistleblower reports, then that weapon will be seriously degraded. I guarantee it.

Your careful consideration of this matter would be appreciated.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member

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1 House Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on National Security, 9/12/12, hearing transcript, pp. 2, 12, 13;
2 House hearing transcript, 9/12/12, p. 2;