

For Immediate Release: August 26, 2010

CONNECTICUT CONGRESSIONAL LEADERS QUESTION PENTAGON OVER RUSSIAN-BUILT HELICOPTER ORDER

Washington, DC— Six members of the Connecticut Congressional delegation wrote to Secretary Robert M. Gates, questioning the recent decision by the Department of the Navy, Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) to purchase 21 Russian-made helicopters.

The aircraft, which would be used by the Afghan Security Forces, are to be purchased without a competitive bidding process by the Defense Department from a state-owned Russian corporation that manufactures its helicopters in Russia. The Members of Congress who signed the letter request the analysis of alternative platforms considered by the Defense Department and make clear they believe the contract should be open to a fair competition that considers American made options.

In their letter to Secretary Gates, the Members of Congress wrote, “Particularly in light of the great commitment the United States is making to Afghanistan, rather than procuring Russian helicopters with unclear reliability and cost, we believe it is only prudent to consider proposals from U.S. manufacturers, employing American workers, with a history of providing the Defense Department with the best equipment at the best value to the U.S. taxpayer.”

The letter was signed by: Senators Chris Dodd (D-CT) and Joe Lieberman (ID-CT), and U.S Representatives Rosa DeLauro (CT-3), John Larson (CT-1), Joe Courtney (CT-2), and Christopher Murphy (CT-5).

The text of the letter is below.

August 26, 2010

The Honorable Robert M. Gates

Secretary of Defense

The Pentagon

Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Gates,

We write to express our concern with the Department of the Navy, Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) Request for Proposals (RFP) to procure twenty-one Russian-made Mi-17 helicopters for use by the Afghan Security Forces (No. 00019-10-R-0032). Specifically, we are troubled that the Department seeks to continue purchasing Russian-made aircraft without opening the contract for a fair competition that considers U.S. manufactured helicopters.

As you know, there have been concerns over the Department of Defense's previous purchases of Russian-made aircraft for the Iraqi Armed Forces and Afghanistan Security Forces. In response to these concerns, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michèle Flournoy advised in January that you directed a comprehensive review to identify non-standard rotary requirements

and alternative platforms. Yet, last month NAVAIR issued an RFP limited to Mi-17 variant helicopters, which are only manufactured in Russia by the state-owned corporation Kazan Helicopters.

Executing what is effectively a sole source contract to a Russian corporation rather than providing for a full and open competition ignores the fact that other American made options are available that can not only meet or exceed the requirements, but can more assuredly do so on time and on budget. In fact, the State Department is currently procuring modernized S-61 aircraft with capabilities similar to those of the Mi-17 for use in Afghanistan.

In addition, we believe that awarding the contract to Kazan Helicopters would violate the Buy American Act as its helicopters are manufactured in Russia without more than 50 percent of its helicopter components manufactured in the United States or another qualifying country. With a viable American made alternative readily available, any Buy American Act requirement waiver would be very difficult to justify.

As you are aware, a protest has been filed with the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) raising these and other concerns with the RFP. As the GAO considers the protest, we respectfully request that you provide us with the analysis of the non-standard rotary requirements and alternative platforms your Department presumably completed prior to issuing the RFP. In addition, we strongly urge you to re-issue the RFP in a manner that provides for a full and open competition in compliance with the Buy American Act. Particularly in light of the great commitment the United States is making to Afghanistan, rather than procuring Russian helicopters with unclear reliability and cost, we believe it is only prudent to consider proposals from U.S. manufacturers, employing American workers, with a history of providing the Defense Department with the best equipment at the best value to the U.S. taxpayer.

We appreciate your prompt attention to this critical matter, and look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Christopher J. Dodd
U.S. Senator

Joseph I. Lieberman
U.S. Senator

Rosa L. DeLauro
Member of Congress

John B. Larson
Member of Congress

Joe Courtney
Member of Congress

Christopher J. Murphy
Member of Congress

CC:
Michèle Flournoy, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
Ray Mabus, Secretary of the Navy

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