

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-1316**

August 18, 2010

The Honorable Robert Gates  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Gates:

In light of the protests recently filed by American companies against U.S. Naval Air Systems Command (Navair) demanding the suspension of a request for proposals (RFP) for Russian Mi-17 helicopters for Afghanistan, I would like to once again highlight my concerns about the link between acquisition criteria and the U.S. defense industrial base.

Since the Revolutionary War, the U.S. defense industrial base has been a critical part of America's economic and military power. Noted free trade economist Adam Smith said in his 1776 *Wealth of Nations* that "it is of importance that the kingdom should depend as little as possible upon its neighbors for the manufacturers necessary for its defense." American warfighters cannot be sustained without a vibrant and robust U.S. industrial base.

Current policy, however, leaves Defense Department contracting officials incapable of adequately considering our nation's defense industrial base when evaluating major federal defense contract proposals. I urge the Defense Department – particularly the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology & Logistics – to examine current acquisition practices and provide recommendations for policy changes that would provide a more thorough examination of "best value" to the American taxpayer, including an assessment of U.S. defense industrial base impacts for major procurements.

I understand the desire of the Defense Department to quickly transfer helicopters to Afghan authorities to help address immediate needs, but continued procurement of Russian-made helicopters will only exacerbate the current difficulties of integrating Western, particularly American-made, equipment into the Afghan armed forces. If we can't start converting their helicopter fleet away from Russian technology now, what makes us think that we'll be able to sell them U.S.-made helicopters in the future? The Afghan forces will be even more reluctant years from now to buy from U.S. sources with a large contingent of Russian-made equipment already in stock. Now is the time for

Afghanistan to bite the bullet and upgrade to better U.S. technology, especially when the U.S. taxpayer is footing the bill. Because Russia is also not a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Government Procurement Agreement (GPA) does not apply in this case. Russia is also not a signatory to any of the Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) that the Defense Department has signed over the years with other countries to promote interoperability.

As you may recall, the Pentagon dealt with a similar issue when the U.S. was planning to supply AK-47 assault rifles to the Iraqi forces after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. The Pentagon decided, appropriately, that future firearm procurements using American tax dollars would instead consist of M-16 rifles, which helped wean the Iraqi armed forces away from its dependence upon Russian-made defense products. I see an analogy here in that we have a unique opportunity to convert the Afghan helicopter fleet to American-built technology. U.S. taxpayers would no doubt demand nothing less.

I recognize that the aforementioned protests are currently being investigated and evaluated by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) as part of an independent appeal process, and I look forward to their determination. I strongly believe, though, that this particular case once again highlights the deficiencies in the status quo. I look forward to working with my colleagues in Congress and with your office to come up with workable policies that simultaneously provide the best technology at the best possible price to the warfighter while, at the same time, preserving our vital defense industrial base.

Sincerely,



Donald A. Manzullo  
Member of Congress