

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

COMMITTEE ON  
EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE

CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE COAST  
GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION



**Duncan Hunter**  
**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**50th District, California**

WASHINGTON, DC OFFICE:  
223 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
TELEPHONE: (202) 225-5672

DISTRICT OFFICES:  
EL CAJON TELEPHONE: (619) 448-5201  
ESCONDIDO TELEPHONE: (760) 743-3260  
TEMECULA TELEPHONE: (951) 695-5108

December 8, 2014

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The recent death of two hostages in captivity underscores the dangers and challenges associated with kinetic rescue efforts. In any hostage rescue attempt, operators must always consider that captives are moved frequently to avoid detection and intelligence is not always reliable. The operators in the most recent rescue attempt made their best effort, under difficult circumstances, and unforeseen events prevented a successful recovery.

Though because rescue efforts are not always successful, it is imperative that non-kinetic lines of effort are always pursued and fully exhausted in a parallel track. And while I do not believe the process for conducting raids must be independently examined, the organization and prioritization of recovery options—including rescue missions—must be a factor in the ongoing White House hostage policy review.

Presently, there is a growing disconnect between government organizations that deal with American captives in hostile areas, thereby limiting recovery options to a kinetic rescue, possible escape or defection. Of course, it is sound policy not to pay ransoms, but we must also acknowledge that incentives are regularly offered that do not coincide with the formal definition of a ransom and communications do often occur—and must continue—through the captor network. However, without the right coordination or authority, opportunities are regularly lost.

For instance, in the case of Bowe Bergdahl, Pakistan was ready to assist the U.S. without the exposure created by a disproportionate prisoner exchange. In the end, your administration sided with Qatar, which incentivized the Taliban, who in turn incentivized the Haqqani Network. Through the entire situation, regardless of the decisions that were made, various options existed but were either ignored or overlooked.

In other captive situations in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region, options exist to recover Americans in captivity but, because of the of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the State Department control on these operations, various lines of effort are being sidelined and even discarded. In fact, I am aware of one case in particular in which an organization within the government, which currently lacks authority to initiate a recovery effort, has appealed to join the operation and can present credible information that could lead to the return of several Americans. So far, this organization has been dismissed by the FBI, which has worked these cases for several years without any actionable leads.

No less alarming, family engagement by the Administration has been abysmal. I am sure you are aware of the criticism by the families of those who were killed and those who are still in captivity. As part of your review, it is absolutely necessary that you involve the families and seriously consider their experiences and recommendations. They should be a cornerstone of your review, especially when they often receive conflicting guidance on information they receive—including demands for proof of life or various types of contact from individuals associated with captors. Further, the FBI discourages families from public engagement. On a case by case basis, public engagement could prove critical and by no means should be discounted based on organizational preference.

It is my understanding that your staff is meeting with several families of current and former captives this week. Several have asked to participate in the review and share their experiences. I ask that you and your staff take their invitation to participate seriously—and learn from their experiences to better adjust hostage recovery efforts and engagement to meet the realities of today.

I also sent you a number of recommendations several weeks ago that will address many of the concerns provided. I ask that you take these seriously, given they were developed in coordination with individuals who experienced much of the bureaucratic obstacles erected by the FBI and the Department of State.

If your staff is interested in meeting with me, to discuss these issues more broadly and overlooked options to recover Americans in Afghanistan/Pakistan, they are invited to contact me as soon as possible. The hostage review is an opportunity to make meaningful and much needed changes—and I look forward to your favorable action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Duncan Hunter", with a large, stylized flourish extending from the end of the name.

Duncan Hunter  
Member of Congress