

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 24, 2023

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin,

We ask that you authorize U.S. Africa Command's March 25, 2022<sup>1</sup> request to grant Imminent Danger Pay (IDP) to servicemembers operating in Burkina Faso. Terrorist and mercenary threats have metastasized within and around the country, while the withdrawal of French forces this month will deplete crucial medical evacuation and casualty evacuation support necessary to safeguard our servicemembers. As the previous USAFRICOM Commander General Townsend hand-wrote in his endorsement for IDP, "Burkina Faso has seen the sharpest increase in VEO attacks of any country in Africa."

Burkina Faso presents United States military personnel with a threat environment that can quickly escalate and spread with little to no warning. The country is a prime example of an unstable environment that is easily exploitable by violent extremist organizations (VEOs), mercenary forces, and malign foreign powers.

Last year appears to have been the deadliest for civilians in Burkina Faso since the current conflict between Islamist insurgencies and state forces began.<sup>2</sup> Since January 2022, Burkina Faso has experienced two military coups, regional insurgencies linked to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, and overt outreach from the Wagner Group, which is active in neighboring Mali. U.S.-designated terrorist groups, including Al Qaeda-affiliated JNIM and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, control much of Burkina Faso's national territory. In particular, the northern and eastern regions face significant impacts from ongoing violence, including a surge in threats from Islamist VEOs since 2016.

The expected withdrawal of French military forces from Burkina Faso in February 2023 is expected to pose considerable additional risks to our servicemembers. French partner forces have provided crucial medical evacuation and casualty evacuation support to U.S. military personnel in the Sahel, notably including in the aftermath of the Tongo Tongo ambush in Niger, where four U.S. soldiers were killed.

Servicemembers operating in several other countries in the Sahel have been afforded IDP, including those in Niger and Mali. Those operating in Burkina Faso confront dangerous circumstances to protect our national security interests and defend innocent civilians from an

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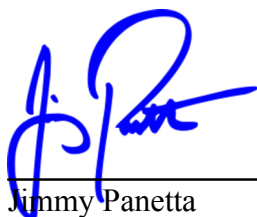
<sup>1</sup> Memorandum for Assistant Secretary of Defense (Manpower and Reserve Affairs) Director, Joint Staff, 25 March 2022. Attachments included, among others: Burkina Faso IDP Assessment, DIA Threat Assessment, USAFRICOM Threat Assessment, and Summary of ISIS-GS Attacks from JAN – NOV '21.

<sup>2</sup> Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), "Year in Review: Global Disorder in 2022," January 31, 2023.

expanding network of VEOs. The dangers they face merit the same consideration for IDP. We fear that neglecting these benefits to personnel in Burkina Faso as security threats expand sends the wrong signal to our forces, which might impact troop resolve and put into question America's commitment to the region.

Our servicemembers in Burkina Faso place their lives at risk, and Americans owe them a debt of gratitude. We hope you agree that approving Imminent Danger Pay is one step toward paying that debt. Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to working with you on this matter.

Sincerely,



Jimmy Panetta  
Member of Congress



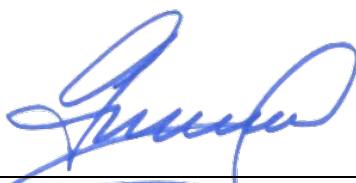
Austin Scott  
Member of Congress



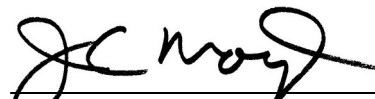
James P. McGovern  
Member of Congress



Donald Norcross  
Member of Congress



Carlos A. Gimenez  
Member of Congress



James C. Moylan  
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Gilbert R. Cisneros Jr,  
Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness

The Honorable Thomas Constable  
Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs

The Honorable James J. Mingus  
Director, Joint Chiefs of Staff