Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

May 22, 2014

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

Mr. President,

We are writing you about the delayed submission of the detailed Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) budget request for Fiscal Year 2015. We are concerned about a number of issues relating to the OCO budget and its use to circumvent budget caps. There has been a bipartisan effort in Congress to end this misuse and we hope that you will join us in this effort to bring greater transparency and discipline to the budget process.

We are deeply concerned by the migration of base budget funding into the OCO budget as well as the use of war funds to finance activities and procure items that are unrelated to the war in Afghanistan. OCO budgets have remained at high levels despite the fact that war operations are winding down. While there will be 39 percent fewer personnel deployed to Afghanistan this year, the amount of OCO funding provided to the Pentagon actually increased as compared to last year. In FY 2014, some analysts estimate that as much as $30 billion of unrelated activities were funded using the OCO designation.

Both branches of government are to blame for this misuse. For 2014, Congress provided $7 billion more than the Administration requested for overseas contingencies. This included funding to procure a CV-22 Osprey aircraft that was destroyed during a training operation in Florida, a clear example of an item that should be budgeted in the base budget. Senior military leaders also recently testified before the House Armed Services Committee that the OCO budget is being used to fund a host of operations outside of Afghanistan and regular day-to-day activities. The Air Force testified that 20 percent of its operations are being financed from the OCO budget. Using the OCO budget for these non-war related operations obfuscates the true cost of America's national security commitments. If we need to fund these activities, we should do so using the base budget.

Despite the coming end to combat operations in Afghanistan and the return of most, if not all, of our troops, senior officials at the Pentagon have indicated they plan on continuing to request OCO funding for several years to come. In fact, even in the event of a full redeployment by December 31, 2014 should the government of Afghanistan continue its refusal to sign a Bilateral Security Agreement, Pentagon officials indicated they may request tens of billions in OCO funding per year into Fiscal Year 2017 and perhaps beyond.

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Last year on a bipartisan basis, we offered and passed in the House of Representatives an amendment to the defense appropriations bill that rejected increases to the OCO budget that exceeded the military's request. And this year, the House-passed budget included bipartisan language highlighting the need to end the use of the OCO budget as a mechanism to circumvent budget caps. As the military puts together its final OCO budget submission, we request that the Administration also provide greater emphasis on ensuring only war-related items are included.

As we end military operations in Afghanistan we also hope we can get your commitment to end the use of the OCO budget. For nearly thirteen years, the Pentagon has requested - and Congress has authorized and appropriated - off-budget funding to support military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. As the last of our troops prepare to come home, it is also time to wind down the OCO budget and fund the operations of the Defense Department entirely through the base budget.

Respectfully,

Mick Mulvaney
Member of Congress

Chris Van Hollen, Jr.
Member of Congress

Mike Coffman
Member of Congress

Patrick Murphy
Member of Congress

Scott Garrett
Member of Congress

Jackie Speier
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

Barbara Lee
Member of Congress

Steve King
Member of Congress

Walter Jones
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Lee Terry
Member of Congress

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress

Jared Polis
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Kurt Schrader
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Justin Amash
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Mark Sanford
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Alan Grayson
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Kerry Bentivolio
Member of Congress

Keith Ellison
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David Cicilline
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Mike Honda
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Ron Kind
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Jim McGovern
Member of Congress