

Coffman Demands Panetta Address Threat of Radical Islam

Cites Arrest of Abdo and Fort Hood Attacks as Latest Examples of Leadership Failure

(WASHINGTON) — Congressman Mike Coffman (R-CO) sent a strongly worded letter to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta today repeating his warning of the dangerous risk to national security posed by the failure to recognize the threat of radical Islam within the military. In the letter, Coffman referenced the 2009 Fort Hood attack by U.S. Army Major Nidal Malik Hasan that killed 13 and wounded 30 and the recent arrest of Army Private First Class Naser Abdo, who was conspiring to commit another terrorist attack on Fort Hood military personnel. In the letter, Coffman demanded to see Abdo's complete service record along with any records of the proceedings granting him status as a conscientious objector. Coffman was highly critical of the Army's inability to take precautions when it became clear, prior to the 2009 incident, that Hasan was becoming radicalized and he questioned if that same pattern was evident with Abdo. Coffman believes the possibility needs to be considered that the Pentagon's failure to properly address Islamic radicalization within its ranks once again resulted in a uniformed domestic terrorist.

The text of the letter is below:

August 3, 2011

The Honorable Leon Panetta

Secretary of Defense

1000 Defense Pentagon

Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Panetta:

In the wake of the tragic murder of 13 U.S. Army personnel at Fort Hood on November 5, 2009, I corresponded with your predecessor, then-Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, about my concerns with the investigation into that incident. I believe that the U.S. Army's "Final Report on Fort Hood" failed to identify and articulate many of the lessons that could prevent a similar incident in the future.

Although I applaud the apprehension of U.S. Army Private First Class Naser Abdo before he could carry out his planned attack, I am deeply troubled by the fact that we have apparently continued to ignore the threat of violent radical Islam within the ranks of our military, as demonstrated by Nidal Hasan nearly two years ago. In his case, it is clear that warning signs of his violent radicalization were ignored. While Hasan repeatedly demonstrated his radical beliefs, not only was he retained on active duty, but he was also promoted to the rank of Major.

I am concerned that there is a pervasive attitude of political correctness imposed upon the command structure of our military that discourages frank and honest reporting from junior leaders. I believe that many of Major Hassan's fellow Army officers had serious and well-founded concerns about his loyalty to the United States but were afraid to voice these concerns due to fear of reprisal from the chain of command. In my estimation, similar warning signs may have been ignored in the case of Private First Class Abdo. I am thankful that no one was harmed in this incident, but I believe it demonstrates that the specter of violent radical Islam within the Department of Defense is still an unresolved issue.

When I enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1972, I can clearly remember being ordered to affirm, under oath, whether I was or had ever been a member of the Communist Party and whether I had any associations or sympathies with other related organizations that might call into question my allegiance to the United States government. I was assigned to an armored division in Europe where an active counterintelligence operation ensured this enemy ideology never penetrated our ranks.

The United States, once again, finds itself in an ideological struggle – more challenging than the last. This time a political ideology has emerged that is fraudulently camouflaged within a religious tradition and is so twisted in its beliefs that it values death over life and uses terrorism as its only tactic. Just as the United States had previously recognized that it was in an ideological war with Marxist Communism, now it must come to terms with accurately describing the current threat to our national security: radical Islam.

I strongly believe that the failure to classify radical Islam as an ideological threat to the United States led to the loss of 13 U.S. Army personnel at Fort Hood in 2009 and likely would have led to a similar attack by Private First Class Abdo, had he not been reported to the local authorities by an attentive store clerk. If we continue down the path of political correctness, we will fail to develop the counterintelligence capability necessary to prevent future incidents from occurring. How many more lives must be lost before the military changes course and confronts the problem of Islamic radicalization within its ranks?

I request your response to this matter. I further request a copy of the complete service records of Private First Class Naser Abdo and records of the proceedings granting him status as a conscientious objector be promptly made available to me for review.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent and highest priority matter. I stand willing to discuss this with you at any time.

Sincerely,

Mike Coffman

United States Congress

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