

## Coffman Urges Panetta to Put Troops First in Pakistan Investigation

**(WASHINGTON)** - Today U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman, R-CO, a Marine Corps combat veteran of the first Gulf War and the Iraq War, called on Defense Secretary Leon Panetta not to compromise the safety of U.S. forces serving in Afghanistan by attempting to appease Pakistan as the Pentagon investigates the circumstances surrounding a NATO airstrike that left 24 Pakistani soldiers dead on Saturday, November 26.

“If our troops stationed along the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan come under attack, then it should come as no surprise that they defend themselves with military force, as their Rules of Engagement guarantee,” Coffman said in the letter. “As you oversee this important investigation, I urge you to consider the perspective of our troops on the border who cannot shield themselves with the type of political or diplomatic maneuvering employed in Washington and Islamabad. For these Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines, the cost of failure or indecision is paid for with their lives.”

The November 26 NATO air attack on two strategic checkpoints on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border has put added strain on the already shaky relationship between the United States and Pakistan. Coffman said before the U.S. tries to assuage the anger of Pakistani government officials with an apology, a thorough investigation must first be undertaken to determine the exact cause of the incident.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the secretary general of NATO, has already called the strike in the tribal agency of Mohmand a “tragic unintended incident.” However, there is a question about whether alliance forces were provoked or not.

“The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, appropriately and respectfully acknowledged this loss of life, but did not offer an apology on behalf of the U.S. government before a full investigation into this matter is conducted,” Coffman said in the letter. “In the course of this investigation, I urge you to continue this approach and support a thorough and impartial examination into the circumstances that precipitated this event and the risk that our military service members face in their duty in this volatile region.”

Coffman said that while our relationship with Pakistan is definitely important to our security goals in the region, stating that there are numerous examples of successful coordination with Pakistani authorities in the War on Terror, he also pointed out that “many in Congress are concerned that our security efforts and those of the Government of Pakistan are often divergent at best.” Coffman cited the apparent sanctuary Osama bin Laden had in Abbottabad and alleged instances of Pakistani complicity in attacks on U.S. and Afghan security forces by the Haqqani Network and support of the Taliban as examples of conflicting efforts by the Pakistani government.

November 26 is not the first time a Pakistani outpost in Mohmand is alleged to have fired into Afghan territory. According to media outlets, Pakistani military forces in the Mohmand area allegedly shelled Afghan territory over one thousand times between April and October, 2011. Afghan government officials in Kunar Province claim that over 20 civilians were killed during this period by indiscriminate Pakistani fire.

“The investigation into events on November 26, 2011 should acknowledge our important relationship with Pakistan, but it must also not turn a blind eye towards actions of the Pakistani military that may have triggered or contributed to the incident,” Coffman said in the letter.

Coffman recently introduced legislation, HR 3115, that would end all U.S. economic aid to Pakistan and suspend all U.S. military aid until the Obama administration can certify to Congress that the Government of Pakistan is effectively using the aid against the Taliban and other al Qaeda affiliates that are planning and executing attacks on U.S. targets.

See below for a full text of the letter or [click here for a PDF](#) .

November 30, 2011

Dear Secretary Panetta:

I am writing with concern regarding the politics surrounding our strained national security relationship with Pakistan, and to assure you that I support your Department’s impartial and apolitical investigation into the events of November 26, 2011.

Media reports highlight a coalition strike on the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan that allegedly left 24 Pakistani soldiers dead. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, appropriately and respectfully acknowledged this loss of life, but did not offer an apology on behalf of the U.S. government before a full investigation into this matter is conducted. In the course of this investigation, I urge you to continue this approach and support a thorough and impartial examination into the circumstances that precipitated this event and the risk that our military service members face in their duty in this volatile region.

Our relationship with Pakistan is of strategic importance to our national security. There are many examples of successful coordination with Pakistani authorities during the Global War on Terror when our counter terror efforts were greatly bolstered by their assistance.

Notwithstanding, many in Congress are concerned that our security efforts and those of the Government of Pakistan are often divergent at best. This is evident in the apparent sanctuary that Osama bin Laden had in Abbottabad, Pakistan before U.S. Special Operations Forces brought him to justice this May, as well as numerous other instances of possible Pakistani complicity in the operations of the Haqqani Network and other associated enemy forces. The investigation into events on November 26, 2011 should acknowledge our important relationship with Pakistan, but it must also not turn a blind eye towards actions of the Pakistani military that may have triggered or contributed to the incident.

When our nation sends young men and women to war, these brave service members must

have the highest assurances that they will be adequately supported in their mission. The Rules of Engagement that our military forces are subject to while conducting operations in Afghanistan clearly state that our personnel have an “inherent right to self-defense.” If our troops stationed along the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan come under attack, then it should come as no surprise that they defend themselves with military force, as their Rules of Engagement guarantee. As you oversee this important investigation, I urge you to consider the perspective of our troops on the border who cannot shield themselves with the type of political or diplomatic maneuvering employed in Washington and Islamabad. For these Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines, the cost of failure or indecision is their lives.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,  
Mike Coffman  
Member of Congress