

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

March 9, 2022

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Austin,

We are writing today concerning U.S. security assistance to Cameroon. As you know, Members of Congress have been greatly alarmed at the ongoing campaign of state-sponsored violence in the Anglophone region. We are particularly concerned about whether U.S. security assistance may be contributing to serious human rights abuses.

We are particularly concerned in U.S. support for the Rapid Intervention Battalion (BIR), some elements of which have been accused by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, among others, as having been directly implicated in atrocities in the Anglophone region. As you are aware, the State Department has reprogrammed some security assistance since 2019, but our understanding is that other assistance – including to the BIR – continues.

We also have serious questions about the efficacy of existing laws in preventing U.S. security assistance from reaching human rights violators. In 2020, the State Department Inspector General found that nearly 80% of Leahy vetting requests submitted by Embassy Yaoundé between late 2018 and late 2019 “were submitted to Washington too late to allow for sufficient processing time” and that “as a result, Washington had an average of 4 days to process the requests, instead of the 10 working days stipulated in the Department’s 2017 Leahy Vetting Guide.”

We share the Administration’s stated desire to put human rights at the center of our foreign policy. We also recognize the need for a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to combating transnational terrorist threats that includes a security component. Our concern in Cameroon and elsewhere is with the potential diversion of U.S. security assistance and, more broadly, that support for security forces that commit human rights violations—apart from being incompatible with American values and illegal under U.S. law—is counterproductive to the very aims of counterterrorism.

The United Nations Development Program found in a [2017 report](#) that 71% of people who joined extremist groups in Africa, including Boko Haram, were triggered to join by state violence and human rights violations. It follows that support for human rights violating security forces in the name of fighting terrorism, then, runs the real risk of creating more terrorists than it neutralizes.

We request detailed answers to the following questions:

- What are the amounts of State Department- and Department of Defense-administered security assistance provided to Cameroon in FY21 and FY22 to date, broken down by account and Cameroonian recipient unit?
- With what level of certainty can the State Department and Department of Defense affirm that U.S. assistance has not been provided to Cameroonian security force personnel subsequently implicated in human rights abuses?
- To what extent did the delays in Leahy vetting requests enumerated in the 2020 OIG report impede rigorous investigations into evidence of past commission of gross human rights violations by recipient security force units?
- Has the [reported](#) redeployment of some security force personnel from the Far North to the western Anglophone regions raised challenges for Leahy vetting and U.S. security

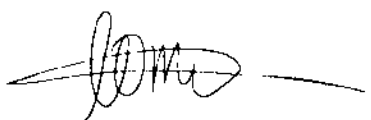


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assistance focused on the Far North and, if so, what is the Administration's strategy to overcome those challenges?

- Is the State Department currently able to conduct Leahy vetting in a timely manner in Cameroon?
- Does the U.S.-Cameroon 505 agreement or any related MOUs concluded with the Government of Cameroon explicitly prohibit the use of U.S.-provided equipment outside of Boko Haram- and Islamic State-West Africa Province-affected areas?
- How does security assistance fit into a larger strategy for our bilateral relationship with Cameroon? What is the State Department doing to address root causes of violence, including addressing the risk factors for extremist recruitment enumerated in the 2017 UNDP report?

Sincerely,



Ilhan Omar  
Member of Congress



Karen Bass  
Member of Congress



Sara Jacobs  
Member of Congress