

Opinion Editorial

DOD Breaking Sacred Promise with POW/MIA Families

WASHINGTON (July 13, 2011) — President Obama is a strong supporter of our nation’s veterans, military and their families, as well as the families of almost 88,000 missing servicemen and civilians, yet some within his Administration do not share that same level of commitment.

They would instead disregard White House guidance and abandon a Presidential Commission that was created in 1992 by President George H.W. Bush and Russian President Boris Yeltsin — and supported by every American president since — to help determine the fates of Americans who disappeared behind the Iron Curtain. They would also recall a multiyear budget submission for the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), whose worldwide mission to recover and identify America’s fallen is stretched thin by manning constraints and laboratory space.

After nine months of broken promises, we cannot sit quietly and allow senior officials in the Department of Defense to redirect funding, transfer researchers and linguists, and jeopardize any possibility of mission success for the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission on POW/MIAs. The Defense Department had previously agreed to reinstate by the end of June what it had taken from the Joint Commission, but to date, DOD has chosen to ignore the policy and funding recommendations made by the White House Office of Management and Budget and the National Security Council.

Such actions will negate 19 years of slow but increasingly steady progress that has permitted U.S. investigators to access Russia’s central military archives and to interview potential eyewitnesses. Such actions will also contradict a show of support by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who last month appointed a new co-chairman and more than 30 commissioners to their side of the Joint Commission.

Ongoing DOD actions will make it nearly impossible for our government to locate information and/or remains to help determine the fates of hundreds, if not thousands, of Americans who may have perished in the former Soviet Union or in the lands of their allies during World War II, Korea, Vietnam and the Cold War. The Defense Department’s actions will help ensure mission failure, which will render the Joint Commission expendable, all because DOD wants to control a Presidential Commission instead of strongly supporting it.

We also cannot acquiesce to a relook of JPAC’s budget, which in these austere fiscal times means reduced funding. Congress has mandated that JPAC begin recovering and identifying 200 or more MIAs annually by 2015. This is more than double their current success rate, and without increased funding, it will be an impossible goal to reach.

When President Obama spoke at Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day, he reminded us of the debt America and the entire world owes to our military — for their

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American Veterans



Disabled American Veterans



Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A.



Marine Corps League



National League of POW/MIA Families



The American Legion



Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States




Vietnam Veterans of America

benevolence as well as their resolve. He honored the memory, service and sacrifice of those men and women who gave their all, and he offered assurances to thousands of Americans who continue to seek answers — the families of almost 78,000 missing and unaccounted-for from World War II, 8,000 from Korea, 1,680 from Vietnam, and one each from Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the countless veterans who served by their side.

Our nation's fullest possible accounting mission is a national priority that the president is committed to, a mission that other nations wish they could emulate, and a mission in which success can only be measured by recovering, identifying, and returning those we send to war back to their families and to their country.

On behalf of millions of members of our nation's largest, oldest, and most influential veterans and POW/MIA family organizations, we call upon President Obama to immediately direct DOD to restore funding and personnel to the U.S.-Russia Joint Commission, and to protect JPAC's proposed budgets. We also urge our fellow veterans and their families, as well as all Americans, to contact the president and their members of Congress to urge them to live up to our nation's sacred obligation to never leave a service member behind.



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