

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 4, 2020

Glenn A. Fine
Acting Inspector General
Office of the Inspector General
U.S. Department of Defense
4800 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22350-1500

Dear Inspector General Fine,

Following the January 8, 2020 Iranian attack on Al-Asad airbase in Iraq, President Trump made statements minimizing the seriousness of brain injuries sustained by US personnel in the attack. Traumatic brain injury (TBI) has been recognized as the signature injury of the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to the Department of Defense, 383,000 men and women deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan sustained a brain injury while in the line of duty between 2000 and 2018. Effects of traumatic brain injury can be short-term or long-term, and include impaired thinking or memory, movement, vision or hearing, or emotional functioning, such as personality changes or depression.

As you know, the number of U.S. servicemembers who sustained traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) or mild traumatic brain injuries (mTBIs) has increased multiple times since January 9. The public timeline shows:

- On January 8, President Trump claimed “no Americans were harmed.”
- On January 17, CENTCOM confirmed that 11 U.S. servicemembers sustained injuries and were flown to Germany and Kuwait.¹
- On January 21, CENTCOM confirmed that additional U.S. servicemembers were evacuated for treatment.
- On January 24, the DoD confirmed that 34 U.S. servicemembers were being treated for concussion or TBI.²
- On January 29, the Pentagon said that 50 U.S. servicemembers had been diagnosed with a TBI.³
- On January 30, this number was updated to 64 U.S. servicemembers with TBI, which the Pentagon has characterized as mTBI.⁴

Congress and the American public must know if the Department of Defense has been accurate and fully transparent in its reporting. Additionally, we must ensure that our servicemembers are properly screening for blast injuries and concussions.

In light of President Trump’s comments and those of Pentagon spokespeople, we request responses to the questions below:

1. Thousands of troops were at Al-Asad airbase when the ballistic missile attack occurred. How many U.S. servicemembers were screened for blast injury or concussion? What was

the screening procedure? What treatment protocols were used to determine evacuation or return to duty determinations? Of those service members evacuated, what is the severity of individual TBI diagnoses and what treatments have been prescribed? Of those returned to duty, what steps are being taken to monitor delayed onset of TBI symptoms?

2. To your knowledge, has there been an effort to minimize or delay the information provided to the American public regarding brain injuries sustained at Al-Asad airbase?
3. The threat from Iranian missile systems was well-established prior to the attack. How does DoD evaluate TBI blast protection of attack shelters against expected threats? Do attack shelters in Iraq provide sufficient blast protection against known threats?

Brain injuries are serious and can often be life-altering. Working in concert with the Congress, the Department of Defense has been right to change its policies and make the investments treat concussions and traumatic brain injuries with the gravity warranted. We cannot and must not go backwards. It is critical that the Department of Defense treat brain injury with the commitment it deserves while being truthful to Congress and to the American public about injuries sustained in attacks on U.S. servicemembers.

Sincerely,



Bill Pascrell, Jr.
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Brain Injury Task Force



Don Bacon
Member of Congress
Co-Chair, Brain Injury Task Force

¹ Cillizza, C. (2020). Donald trump dismisses injuries of US military troops, proves (again) there is no bottom. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/22/politics/donald-trump-iran-attack-headaches/index.html>

² Lamothe, D. (2020). Pentagon says 34 U.S. troops were diagnosed with brain injuries after iranian missile attack. Retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/01/24/pentagon-says-34-us-troops-were-diagnosed-with-brain-injuries-after-iranian-missile-attack/>

³ Dwyer, C. (2020b). Pentagon now says 50 troops — not 34 — suffered brain injuries in iran strike. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/29/800770355/pentagon-now-says-50-troops-not-34-suffered-brain-injuries-in-iran-strike>

⁴ Dwyer, C. (2020a). Pentagon increases U.S. injury toll from iranian attack yet again — to 64. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/31/801535693/pentagon-increases-u-s-injury-toll-from-iranian-attack-yet-again-to-64>