Congress of the United States Washington, DC 20515

May 20, 2019

President Donald J. Trump The White House 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W. Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

At a time of grave insecurity in the Middle East, we are deeply concerned about the role that terrorist and extremist groups and U.S. adversaries continue to play, particularly in Syria. As some of our closest allies in the region are being threatened, American leadership and support are as crucial as ever. To this end, we recommend several specific steps to advance our regional security priorities, including assisting our ally, Israel, in defending itself in the face of growing threats, including on its northern border.

Pockets of ungoverned space have allowed terrorist groups, such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and their affiliates, to keep parts of Syria in their stranglehold. These groups' ability to recruit, propagandize, and grow is alarming. Though their main purpose now may be to fight inside Syria, they retain the ability and will to plan and implement attacks against Western targets, our allies and partners, and the U.S. homeland. The United States has an interest in preventing these terrorist organizations from solidifying their foothold in the Middle East, which they would undoubtedly use to further destabilize the region, thereby undermining American interests.

The region has also been destabilized by the Iranian regime's threatening behavior. In Syria, Iran is working to establish a permanent military presence that can threaten our allies. In the past year alone, an Iranian-armed drone infiltrated Israeli airspace and the IRGC fired dozens of missiles toward Israel from Syria. Additionally, Iran continues its program to pursue a direct overland route from Iran to Lebanon. That connection would better facilitate Iran's supplying of Hezbollah terrorists and other Iranian-backed militias with deadly weapons. While our nation has encouraged more stable and inclusive political systems in the Middle East, the regime in Tehran has spread its influence and destabilized its neighbors for its own gain.

Like Iran, Russia is also working to secure a permanent presence in Syria, beyond its naval facility at Tartus. Russia has changed the arc of Syria's civil war at the expense of Syria's people by employing Russian troops, aircraft, and diplomatic protection to ensure the survival of the Assad regime. Furthermore, in providing Damascus with advanced weapons like the S-300 anti-aircraft system, Moscow is complicating Israel's ability to defend itself from hostile action

emanating from Syria. Russia's destabilizing role only complements that of Iran – since Russia shows no willingness to expel Iranian forces from Syria.

Hezbollah now poses a more potent threat to Israel as well. From Lebanon, Hezbollah has aimed more than 100,000 rockets and missiles at Israel that are increasingly more precise and of longer-range, giving the terrorist group the capability to strike anywhere in Israel. Just a few weeks ago, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that a Hezbollah operative who is accused of killing five American soldiers in Iraq may now be setting up a terror network on the border between Israel and Syria. Israel also recently discovered and destroyed six Hezbollah tunnels that made their way into Israel from Lebanon, all while Hezbollah has increased its rhetoric about its intentions of kidnapping Israeli soldiers and civilians.

In order to limit the presence of terrorists and extremists, counter the activities of our adversaries, and strengthen Israel's security we urge you to advance our regional interests by implementing a strategy including the following elements:

- Underscore Israel's right to self-defense. It is longstanding U.S. policy to support Israel's ability to defend itself by itself and support its qualitative military edge. With the region in flux, it remains critical that we reiterate to both friend and foe in the region that we continue to support Israel's right to defend itself. We must also look for ways to augment our support in the context of the current 10-year Memorandum of Understanding between the United States and Israel and to ensure that Israel has access to the resources and materiel it needs to defend itself against the threats it faces on its northern border. The U.S. should continue to oppose international efforts to isolate and weaken Israel.
- Increase pressure on Iran and Russia with respect to activities in Syria. Working with our allies and partners, we urge you to maintain and increase pressure on Iran and Russia to constrain their destabilizing activities. America must continue economic and diplomatic efforts to counter Iran's support for Hezbollah and other terrorist groups as well as Russia's support for the brutal Assad regime. We encourage full implementation of sanctions authorized in the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), a broadly supported bipartisan bill that you signed into law. Clear and sustained American action and close coordination with our allies and partners can send an important message of resolve to malign actors in the region.
- Increase pressure on Hezbollah. By forcefully and fully implementing the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Act of 2015, the Hizballah International Financing Prevention Amendments Act of 2018, and other sanctions aimed at Hezbollah and those who fund it, America can reduce their ability to threaten and challenge Israel. Additionally, we must continue to press UNIFIL to carry out its U.N. Security Council mandate, including investigating and reporting the presence of arms and tunnels on Israel's border.

The conflict in Syria is complicated, and the potential solutions are not perfect, but our only choice is to advance policies that can stop the growing threats to U.S. interests, Israel, and regional security and stability. This strategy requires American leadership. We thank you for your consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

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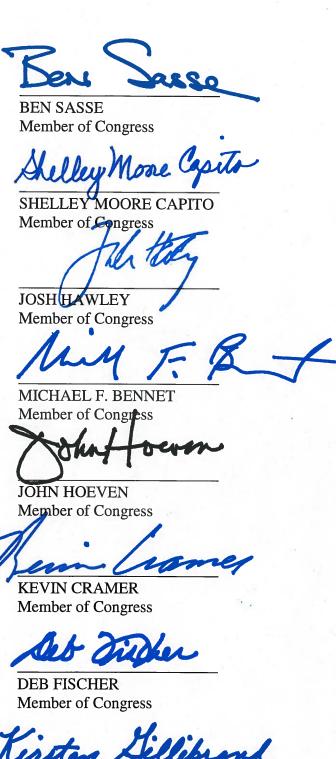
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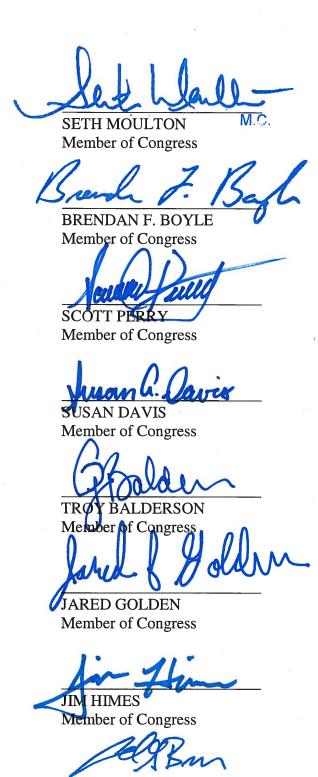
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