



One Hundred Sixteenth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
2170 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
www.foreignaffairs.house.gov

October 7, 2019

Robert C. O'Brien
National Security Advisor
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. O'Brien:

I am deeply concerned by reports that the Trump Administration is considering withdrawing from the Open Skies Treaty and strongly urge you against such a reckless action. This treaty has provided important military transparency for its 34 signatory countries since it entered into force in 2002. American withdrawal would only benefit Russia and be harmful to our allies' and partners' national security interests.

The Open Skies Treaty allows the United States and our allies and partners in Europe to monitor Russian military deployments. Observation flights under the Treaty have generated additional information regarding Russian military action in Ukraine and provided a check on further Russian aggression there. NATO allies and partners, and Ukraine in particular, have repeatedly stressed the importance of the Open Skies Treaty for their efforts to monitor Russia's military.

Withdrawal risks dividing the transatlantic alliance and would further undermine America's reliability as a stable and predictable partner when it comes to European security. If the Administration is indeed considering a change of status on the Treaty, it must be part of a transparent process that includes a thorough interagency review and consultation with Congress, and that provides other signatories a clear understanding of your intentions. To my knowledge, the Administration has not held significant consultations with our allies and partners on this matter. Such consultations are a prerequisite to successfully navigate any major policy shift with the Treaty.

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Make no mistake, Congress is aware of some treaty implementation concerns regarding Russia. Russia continues to operate in unexpected ways. Therefore, I support the Administration's efforts to ensure full applicability of the Treaty to Kaliningrad and to the Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and I support the restrictions put in place on Russian flights over the United States in response. But it is clear that these implementation concerns do not rise to the level of material breach of the Treaty, an excuse that is being peddled as the potential reason for withdrawal.

U.S. relations with Russia have become more acrimonious and complicated in the last decade. Dialogue and interaction with Russia is important during this time of heightened tension and increased potential for miscalculation. The United States should prepare for the challenge that Russia presents – not abandon mechanisms that provide the United States with an important tool in maintaining surveillance on Russia.

I request your personal engagement on this matter to ensure that the United States does not unwisely and rashly withdraw from the Open Skies Treaty, which continues to serve American national security interests and is particularly important as a check against further Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Sincerely,



ELIOT L. ENGEL
Chairman