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,

ELIOT L. ENGEL
Chairman
House Committee on Foreign Affairs

JAMES RISCH
Chairman
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

MICHAEL T. McCaul
Ranking Member
House Committee on Foreign Affairs

ROBERT MENENDEZ
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

TED DEUTCH
Chairman
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism

JOE WILSON
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on the Middle East, North Africa, and International Terrorism
ABIGAIL D. SPANBERGER
Member of Congress

CHRISSY HOULAHAN
Member of Congress

TOM MALINOWSKI
Member of Congress

DAVID TRONE
Member of Congress

JIM COSTA
Member of Congress

JUAN VARGAS
Member of Congress

VICENTE GONZALEZ
Member of Congress

TIM BURCHETT
Member of Congress
RON WYDEN  
Member of Congress

MARSHA BLACKBURN  
Member of Congress

LAMAR ALEXANDER  
Member of Congress

ROGER F. WICKER  
Member of Congress

JOHN BOOZMAN  
Member of Congress

JON TESTER  
Member of Congress

KRYSTEN SINEMA  
Member of Congress

MARGARET WOOD HASSAN  
Member of Congress

MIRE CRAPO  
Member of Congress

SUSAN M. COLLINS  
Member of Congress

JERRY MORAN  
Member of Congress

KAMALA D. HARRIS  
Member of Congress

DAN SULLIVAN  
Member of Congress

JAMES LANKFORD  
Member of Congress

STEVE DAILES  
Member of Congress

DOUG JONES  
Member of Congress
MARTHA McSALLY
Member of Congress

JACKY ROSEN
Member of Congress

JAMES M. INHOFE
Member of Congress

PATRICK J. TOOMEY
Member of Congress

TOM COTTON
Member of Congress

ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.
Member of Congress

JOHN KENNEDY
Member of Congress

DAVID PERDUE
Member of Congress

BEN SASSE
Member of Congress

SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO
Member of Congress

JOSH HAWLEY
Member of Congress

MICHAEL F. BENNET
Member of Congress

JOHN HOEVEN
Member of Congress

KEVIN CRAMER
Member of Congress

DEB FISCHER
Member of Congress

KIRSTEN E. GILLIBRAND
Member of Congress
MICHAEL B. ENZI
Member of Congress
JOSH GOTTHEIMER  
Member of Congress

CHARLIE CRIST  
Member of Congress

VAL BUTLER DEMINGS  
Member of Congress

HALEY STEVENS  
Member of Congress

PETER KING  
Member of Congress

MICHAEL DOYLE  
Member of Congress

ROGER MARSHALL  
Member of Congress

A. DONALD MCEACHIN  
Member of Congress

THOMAS SUOZZI  
Member of Congress

SCOTT R. TIPTON  
Member of Congress

DAVID SCOTT  
Member of Congress

JOHN LEWIS  
Member of Congress

JOSEPH P. KENNEDY, III  
Member of Congress

ANN KIRKPATRICK  
Member of Congress

WILLIAM TIMMONS  
Member of Congress

TOM EMMER  
Member of Congress
PATRICK T. McHENRY  
Member of Congress

JIM LANGEVIN  
Member of Congress

TOM GRAVES  
Member of Congress

MICHAEL R. TURNER  
Member of Congress

STEVE COHEN  
Member of Congress

DAVID E. PRICE  
Member of Congress

DIANA DEGETTE  
Member of Congress

JERROLD L. NADLER  
Member of Congress

JIM JORDAN  
Member of Congress

SHEILA JACKSON LEE  
Member of Congress

G.R. BUTTERFIELD  
Member of Congress

LUCILLE ROYBAL-ALLARD  
Member of Congress

FRANK PALLONE, JR.  
Member of Congress

STEPHEN F. LYNCH  
Member of Congress

RICHARD HUDSON  
Member of Congress

SEAN PATRICK MALONEY  
Member of Congress
STEVE STIVERS
Member of Congress

VICKY HARTZLER
Member of Congress

CHRISS STEWART
Member of Congress

MO BROOKS
Member of Congress

TIM WALBERG
Member of Congress

HARLEY ROUDA
Member of Congress

LOIS FRANKEL
Member of Congress

DORIS MATSUI
Member of Congress

BRIAN BABIN
Member of Congress

DAVID B. MCKINLEY, P.E.
Member of Congress

CHRIS COLLINS
Member of Congress

JULIA BROWNLEY
Member of Congress

ADAM B. SCHIFF
Member of Congress

SCOTT DESJARLAIS
Member of Congress

CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress

SUZAN DELBENE
Member of Congress
ED CASE
Member of Congress

BOB GIBBS
Member of Congress

BILLY LONG
Member of Congress

MIKE QUIGLEY
Member of Congress

VIRGINIA FOXX
Member of Congress

NORMA J. TORRES
Member of Congress

DENNY HECK
Member of Congress

JOHN KATKO
Member of Congress

BRIAN HIGGINS
Member of Congress
KENNY MARCHANT
Member of Congress

MIKE ROGERS
Member of Congress

RICHARD NEAL
Member of Congress

AUSTIN SCOTT
Member of Congress

FREDERICA S. WILSON
Member of Congress

FRANK LUCAS
Member of Congress

TOM REED
Member of Congress

EMANUEL CLEAVER, II
Member of Congress

MARKWAYNE MULLIN
Member of Congress
VAN TAYLOR  
Member of Congress

DEREK KILMER  
Member of Congress

GLEN GROTHMAN  
Member of Congress

SALUD CARBAJAL  
Member of Congress

MIKE BOST  
Member of Congress

RON KIND  
Member of Congress

DARREN SOTO  
Member of Congress

ANDY KIM  
Member of Congress

AL LAWSON JR.  
Member of Congress

DARIN LAHOOD  
Member of Congress

LIZZIE FLETCHER  
Member of Congress

BRADLEY S. SCHNEIDER  
Member of Congress

JOHN B. LARSON  
Member of Congress

DOUG COLLINS  
Member of Congress

DUSTY JOHNSON  
Member of Congress

RUSS FULCHER  
Member of Congress
ANTONIO DELGADO
Member of Congress