

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 9, 2017

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20050

Dear Mr. President:

We write to ask you to pursue a results-oriented, but tough-minded and principled policy toward the Russian Federation. Russia's cooperation is desirable, and in some cases essential, to global initiatives such as nuclear arms control, counter-terrorism, drug trafficking, or promoting global health. We should maintain active and ongoing dialogue with Russia on these and others areas of mutual interests, as every U.S. President has done since the end of the Cold War. However, while we should seek common ground with Russia in the areas of mutual interest, we must never pursue cooperation with Russia at the expense of our fundamental interests of defending our allies and promoting our values.

The United States should unequivocally condemn – and take proactive steps to stem – the continued Russian aggression in Ukraine. Russia has invaded Ukraine and illegally annexed the Crimean peninsula, in violation of international law, and has directly abetted the so-called “separatist rebels” in eastern Ukraine. Since 2014, over 10,000 Ukrainians have died in this tragic conflict, and there are as many as 1.5 million internally displaced persons because of the violence. The most recent escalation of fighting along the “line of contact” in eastern Ukraine should serve as a reminder of Russia's nefarious intentions.

The Administration should maintain the current U.S. sanctions regime against Russia and Russian entities – and to impose new sanctions as necessary and merited by Russian behavior – unless Ukraine's control over Crimea is restored, Russia fully respects the Minsk agreements, and ceases all efforts to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty. Furthermore, we ask you to expedite the provision of defensive lethal weapons to Ukraine, and we were encouraged that Secretary of State Tillerson supported this position during his confirmation hearing.

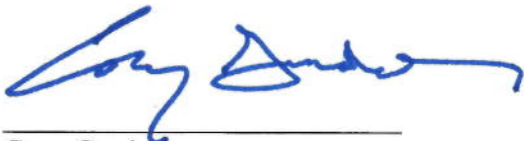
The United States should not enter into any military or diplomatic agreement with Russia regarding Syria's future until Moscow halts its military operations that have caused immense damage and human suffering and ceases support for the murderous regime of Bashar al-Assad. It is plainly evident that despite Russian claims to the contrary, Moscow's main goal is not the defeat of the Islamic State, but the preservation of the Assad regime at any cost. According to the Pentagon's spokesman, as of February 3, 2016, only 10 percent of Russian airstrikes were against Islamic State targets. However, according to an estimate released by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights on December 31, 2016, at least 4,700 civilians died in Syria due to Russian shelling, including the targeting of schools and hospitals. The U.S. must condemn these Russian atrocities and condition any future negotiations regarding Syria's future on Russian compliance with international norms and basic human rights.

Furthermore, we must recognize and counter the active cyber and information warfare Russia is conducting against the United States and Western democracies, including attempted interference in our democratic elections process. According to the 2016 Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community: "Russian cyber operations are likely to target US interests to support several strategic objectives: intelligence gathering to support Russian decision-making in the Ukraine and Syrian crises, influence operations to support military and political objectives, and continuing preparation of the cyber environment for future contingencies." The U.S. must have a firm response to this belligerent behavior from Moscow, which should include diplomatic actions, economic consequences, as well as a strengthened military posture in Europe.

Most importantly, we urge you to relay to Moscow that the values of democracy, human rights, transparency, and accountability are central to U.S. foreign policy, that these values are non-negotiable, and that the United States will continue to advance these values globally, including with regard to Russia. President Putin must know that the United States remains a beacon of hope and democracy around the world, and will stand up for what is right.

Mr. President, we look forward to your reply and maintaining an open, ongoing, and respectful dialogue with you regarding U.S.-Russia relations.

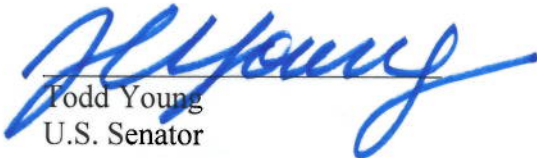
Sincerely,



Cory Gardner
U.S. Senator



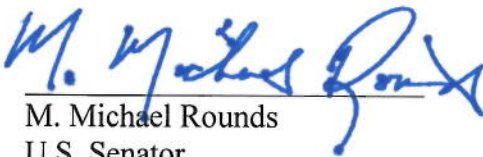
James M. Inhofe
U.S. Senator



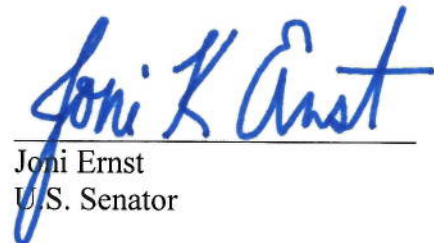
Todd Young
U.S. Senator



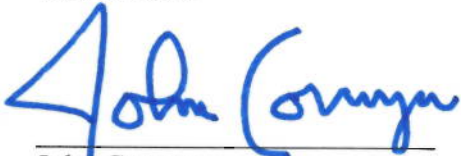
Rob Portman
U.S. Senator



M. Michael Rounds
U.S. Senator



Joni Ernst
U.S. Senator



John Cornyn
U.S. Senator



Susan Collins
U.S. Senator



Lindsey Graham
U.S. Senator