

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 24, 2021

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
10000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Blinken and Secretary Austin:

We are deeply troubled to learn from press reports that your administration is in discussions with the Russian Federation to secure access to Russian military installations in Central Asian countries and potentially engage in some form of military cooperation on counterterrorism with the Russians. Inviting Russia into discussions will not further vital U.S. counterterrorism goals, nor is it the path to the “stable and predictable” relationship with Russia the Biden Administration claims it wants.

To the contrary, as we learned from the Obama Administration’s efforts to work with Russia on counterterrorism issues as part of its failed “reset” policy, Russia is more concerned with collecting intelligence on the U.S. and our allies than it is sharing information on terrorist threats. In Syria, Russia is not, as it claims, waging a war on ISIS and international terrorism, but rather propping up the brutal Assad regime in partnership with Iran and its terrorist proxies. Prior to our chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan, Russia had long provided support, including weapons, to enable the Taliban in their campaign against the United States and our NATO allies and partners. At home, the Kremlin has pointed to counterterrorism cooperation with the West to legitimize its scorched-earth operations in Chechnya. Moreover, as the Putin regime continues to misuse its domestic laws on “extremist organizations” to crackdown on its opponents, a U.S. policy to work with Moscow on combatting terrorism would send an unfortunate signal to the brave Russian activists fighting for democratic values and human rights at home.

Any attempt to coordinate military basing access or operations with the Russian Federation risks violating the legal prohibition on U.S.-Russian military cooperation. Specifically, Section 1232 of the FY2017 National Defense Authorization Act (Public Law 114-328), as amended by Section 1231 of the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act (Public Law 116-283), prohibits the use of funds to support U.S.-Russian military-to-military cooperation unless Russia has ended its aggression and occupation of Ukrainian territory and is abiding by the terms of the Minsk Protocols regarding the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine. Given Russia has clearly not met these conditions, our efforts should remain focused on effective de-confliction, and not extend to military-to-military cooperation on counterterrorism.

In order to ensure the administration is both adequately addressing the threats emanating from Afghanistan that may endanger the homeland in reportedly as little as one year and is compliant

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with the laws governing U.S.-Russian military cooperation, we respectfully request an immediate briefing on:

- 1) Any negotiations, agreements, arrangements, proposals or other coordination on counterterrorism in South and Central Asia involving the Biden Administration as well as Russian government and military.
- 2) Gen. Mark Milley's meeting with Chief of Russian General Staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov on September 22, 2021.
- 3) The Biden Administration's revised counterterrorism plan, including efforts to secure third country agreements with Afghanistan's neighbors for basing, ISR and strike capabilities.
- 4) The Biden Administration's diplomatic and military engagement with Afghanistan's neighbors regarding U.S. counterterrorism goals.

As the United States and our NATO Allies have repeatedly asserted since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014, until Russia demonstrates compliance with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities, there can be no return to "business as usual."

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



JAMES E. RISCH
Ranking Member
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



JAMES M. INHOFE
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee



MICHAEL T. McCAUL
Ranking Member
House Foreign Affairs Committee



MIKE D. ROGERS
Ranking Member
House Armed Services Committee