

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

May 18, 2017

The Honorable Mr. Donald J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

Your upcoming trip to Saudi Arabia, Israel, Italy, and Belgium is an important milestone in your presidency, and an important moment for United States foreign policy. Your trip offers an opportunity for you to demonstrate that, as National Security Advisor General H.R. McMaster recently noted, “America first does not mean America alone.” I write to urge you to demonstrate through your actions, and your words, that you are committed to United States leadership in the global community, to human rights, and to strong, sustained partnerships with our global allies. A world that respects human rights, and abides by the rule of law strengthens the security, stability, and prosperity of America and its allies.

Your visit to Riyadh and meetings with the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is an opportunity to reaffirm that the United States rejects intolerance and is not at war with Islam or Muslims, remains committed to partnering with the Gulf countries in addressing their legitimate defense needs, and will continue to raise concerns regarding human rights, civil liberties, and human trafficking. Your Administration has inherited a sound strategic foundation of security cooperation with the GCC countries, reinforced by the Obama Administration’s Presidential Summits and Strategic Cooperation Forums. This critical work should continue with an eye toward increasing collaboration to confront 21st century threats such as cyberattacks, asymmetric warfare, and terror financing. I also hope that you and the leaders of the GCC will affirm the primacy of diplomacy and negotiated political settlements as the only viable path toward restoring regional stability and unlocking the potential of the region’s people. There are no military solutions to the conflicts roiling the Middle East. We should be extremely cautious in contemplating or committing to the increased use of military force whether in Yemen, Syria, Libya, or Iraq. Sustainable, inclusive political settlements are the best antidote to countering violent extremism, pushing back on Iranian aggression, and offering citizens of the region economic opportunity and dignity. The U.S. and the GCC must work together with like-minded organizations and governments to move forward with political processes that are representative, inclusive, and transparent.

During your stop in Israel, you should reaffirm that the United States will always ensure that Israel is able to defend herself and will continue to combat actions that unfairly target, isolate, or seek to delegitimize Israel. Whether in the halls of the United Nations, trade negotiations with the European Union, or governments in the Middle East, the United States will not tolerate anti-Israel rhetoric, policies, or aggression. Standing with Israel also means protecting its qualitative military edge and ensuring that U.S. security assistance continues reliably and efficiently. Your visit is also an opportunity to make clear that there is no outcome acceptable to both Israel and the Palestinians other than a two-state solution, and the United States remains committed to facilitating direct negotiations for two states living side by side with security and dignity. I hope that your discussions with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas will reaffirm America's commitment to Palestinian economic growth and development, but Palestinian leaders must understand unequivocally that the U.S. opposes rhetoric inciting, encouraging, or condoning violence as well as continued payments to the families of terrorists.

According to General McMaster, you will raise the humanitarian crises afflicting many regions of the world in your audience with Pope Francis at Vatican City. As you know, 20 million people are at risk of starving to death in northeastern Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, and Yemen. This crisis is "one of the most critical issues to face mankind since the end of the Second World War," according to the International Committee for the Red Cross. Before you depart, I urge you to move swiftly to release the \$990 million Congress recently appropriated to address famine and growing food insecurity in these regions. Many are concerned that your Administration is playing games with this money to set the stage for deeper cuts in the FY18 budget. But the food security of 20 million people cannot be held hostage to budgetary maneuvering. I urge you to put these concerns to rest by calling on the Office of Management and Budget to immediately release the famine funds to U.S. Agency for International Development in order that they may be used to alleviate vast and unimaginable human suffering in these countries.

Pope Francis reminds us, "We have a duty towards our brothers and sisters who for various reasons, have been forced to leave their homelands: a duty of justice, a duty of civility and of solidarity." We have that duty whether the person be a victim of human trafficking or a refugee. War, conflict, and persecution have forced people from their homes, creating more refugees and displaced persons than any other time in history. In advance of your trip, I urge you to demonstrate moral leadership and affirm your support for the protection of refugees, and the resettlement of refugees from all over the world to the United States. Refugees are an asset to our country. They are powerful ambassadors of the American Dream, and of the American values of hard work, equal opportunity, and religious freedom.

Your attendance at the NATO Summit in Brussels will send an important message of solidarity with our NATO allies and commitment to transatlantic principles. NATO members are looking to the United States to provide leadership against the growing threat of Russian military aggression and interference in all of its forms. After Russia attacked our democracy last year, countries across Europe are increasingly concerned about similar cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns in advance of their own elections. NATO should continue to assist member states in working to confront this urgent threat. NATO members are also very concerned about the physical security of their countries. I urge you to send a strong message of solidarity to our NATO allies to include support for member state deployments of troops to

vulnerable countries as well as investment in enhanced military capabilities. Each country should dedicate two percent of GDP to their respective defense budgets, but I hope you will acknowledge and express gratitude for contributions that countries have made outside the two percent commitment -- including the deployment of troops in support of U.S. goals in places like Afghanistan.

The NATO alliance also provides a basis for confronting terrorism. As you know, the only time that Article 5 of the NATO Charter was invoked was to confront terrorism in Afghanistan after the attacks of September 11, 2001. I encourage you to acknowledge NATO's longstanding leadership in the fight against terrorist groups, especially given the persistent threat posed by ISIS, Al Qaeda, and other terrorist organizations. Our friends in Europe recognize that their security is anchored to the durability of the NATO alliance, one that is led by the United States. Your messages will have a direct bearing on how they view the alliance and could significantly bolster their confidence in facing our common threats.

Finally, the G7 meetings in Sicily offer you an important opportunity to build on a long history of close security, diplomatic, and economic ties with some of our strongest partners. The United States has been the leader in this forum since its inception, based on our dependable, predictable, and principled engagement. That reputation is the result of decades of bipartisan investment in multilateral groups like the G7. As this will be your first G7 Summit, I hope you will assure these key allies that the United States is still prepared to perform that essential role. The summit will focus on our shared interests in the global economy, the challenge of continuing Russian provocations, the ongoing refugee crisis and the conflicts that drive it, and the pressing challenge of climate change. Our G7 partners are among our strongest friends and allies, with whom we share core interests and values. I urge you to reassure our allies that the United States will stand with them to seek cooperative progress on our shared challenges.

I wish you a successful inaugural trip abroad as President.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Ben Cardin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and "C".

Benjamin L. Cardin
Ranking Member