

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

President-Elect Donald J. Trump
The Office of the President-Elect
1717 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20006

January 17, 2017

President-Elect Trump,

As you are undoubtedly aware, you will be stepping into the role of America's Commander in Chief this week at a time when many of our fellow citizens are anxious about the United States' security and concerned about our nation's role in world affairs. This has been a constant refrain that we have heard from our constituents as we travelled our states in recent months, and it was a central theme of the presidential campaign. As you begin your administration, we hope that you will work closely with Congress to determine and implement foreign-policy and security strategies that have broad support from the American people.

While members of Congress have disagreements on many domestic and foreign policies, we all agree that the most fundamental duty of the federal government is to protect the safety, security, and freedoms of the American people. The constitutional powers to carry out this duty are shared between the President and Congress so that our military and diplomatic policies are informed by a long-term vision of American interests – forged through the kind of open debate and patient deliberation that is the province of Congress – while remaining flexible enough to respond to threats as they appear.

The foreign policy agenda of your predecessor was shaped by titanic shifts away from the post-Cold War status quo that existed for nearly two decades, including the violent fallout from the “Arab Spring” and other disturbances to the fragile balances of power in the Muslim world, the attempted resurgence of Russian influence in Europe and the Middle East, and increased military and political aggressiveness from China towards its neighbors.

As you prepare to enter office, you are already being asked about what the United States should do to address these and other issues. Answering these questions will obviously be a top priority of your administration, but history has shown that building consensus within Congress – and, by extension, among the American people – around our nation's foreign-policy strategy is the only way to ensure its success and stability.

Specifically, we believe that any increase in U.S. military involvement in the conflicts engulfing the Middle East and North Africa should be initiated only after formal authorization by Congress. The list of military activities that should be debated and authorized by Congress includes, but is not limited to: any manifestation of a no-fly, no-drive, or humanitarian zone that involves the participation of U.S. military personnel or assets; and any military action against an individual, organization, or state that does not fall under a reasonable interpretation of the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) or does not pose an imminent threat to American national security. We further believe that you should work closely with Congress to review, reform, or repeal the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs.

This is not to say that we believe the United States should ignore or condone the ongoing violence and humanitarian disaster in the Middle East or anywhere else in the world. But decisions about how to define, defend, and pursue our national interests cannot be made by a single person or a single branch of the government. Instead, they must be made through debate, discussion, and collaboration, via the processes outlined in the Constitution that were designed specifically to reflect the will of the American people.

The complexity of the security questions we face as a nation calls for robust debate, prudence, and cooperation. The challenges are too great and the risks too high to simply defer to yesterday's status quo. Now is the time for bold leadership and sober judgment. You have an opportunity at the beginning of your presidency to help recommit the Executive Branch to preserving this constitutional balance that has always defined our government at its best, and we stand ready to work with your administration toward that end.

Respectfully,



Mike Lee
United States Senate



Rand Paul, MD
United States Senate