

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 15, 2016

The Honorable Jacob J. Lew  
Secretary of the Treasury  
U.S. Department of the Treasury  
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20220

Dear Secretary Lew,

There continues to be debate among the global community about the use of coercive economic action against the government of Russian President Vladimir Putin as a result of its illegal invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, its killing of opponents like Alexander Litvinenko, and its actions to support Hezbollah terrorists and genocidal dictators like Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

In January, U.S. Ambassador to Russia John Tefft claimed that sanctions on Russia could be lifted if the Minsk peace agreement pertaining to Ukraine was implemented. However, we believe that rewarding President Putin and his allies with sanctions relief based on their withdrawal of aggressive actions and subsequent meddling will do nothing to deter Russia from continuing its destabilizing activities in Eastern Europe, Syria and the wider Middle East. Clearly, there should be a price to pay when Russia is openly violating the airspace of a NATO ally like Turkey or is allegedly providing heavy weaponry to terrorist organizations like Hezbollah. In addition, we should not stand idly by while Russia supports Assad as he continues to starve his citizens in places like Aleppo and Madaya while Russian jets indiscriminately bomb Syrian hospitals and moderate opposition leaders; killing the very people that are the future of a free Syria.

In order to deter Russia from taking further destabilizing actions there needs to be a plan in place that utilizes an array of effective tools that will unleash further pressure on President Putin and Russian oligarchs. We recognize that our transatlantic relationships are important and that a united effort is preferable, but believe we should be ready and able to take action to defend our interests in a timely manner. An effective strategy to employ all tools of statecraft including diplomacy, economic power, and kinetic options could have a significant impact in stopping further Russian agitation and aggression.

Economic warfare has become the tool of choice when it comes to coercive statecraft to confront global challenges. Congress has played an integral role in giving your department the needed tools to devise our offensive capabilities, which you have done with many successes. As such, we would like to discuss further with you how Congress can play an integral role in putting additional pressure on the Putin regime that utilizes all our tools of national power to stop further Russian aggression.

Congress and the administration should work together to create a clearly delineated strategy to ensure that the United States regains and retains escalatory dominance at all stages in competition or conflict with Russia. Utilizing our financial tools could continue to send a strong message to Putin that his aggressive actions to dominate Europe and the Middle East can no longer be tolerated.

There are a number of options that should be explored, particularly issuing a finding under Section 311 of the USA PATRIOT Act to identify Russian banks that are “primary money-laundering concerns” and involved in the financing of pro-Russian forces in Ukraine, Iran’s ballistic missile program, and involved in propping up the Assad regime and assisting Hezbollah or other Iranian proxies. Such an action would send a strong message to Putin and his allies that the global community can no longer tolerate Russia’s aggressive actions in Europe and the Middle East. Moreover, this action could serve as a warning to the Russians and prevent them from acting against additional U.S. interests, particularly NATO members and other areas of Eastern Europe.

It is imperative to hold Russia accountable for its actions. That is why we would like you to explain your strategy regarding potential economic sanctions against Russian banks and entities in light of Putin’s ongoing aggression. We would be particularly interested to know if Treasury is investigating support by Russian banks for these illicit activities and if such a finding under Section 311 of the USA PATRIOT Act has been explored in order to employ additional pressure.

Please respond in writing 60 days after receipt of this letter. We look forward to working with you on this in the near future.

Sincerely,



ADAM KINZINGER  
Member of Congress



MICHAEL G. FITZPATRICK  
Member of Congress



TODD YOUNG  
Member of Congress



GUS M. BILIRAKIS  
Member of Congress



BILL JOHNSON  
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RALPH ABRAHAM, M.D.  
Member of Congress