

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 24, 2019

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
U.S. Secretary of State
2201 C. St NW
Washington D.C. 20520

Mr. Secretary,

We write to express deep concern about reports that the Trump Administration is actively considering a decision to withdraw the United States from the Treaty on Open Skies. Rather than casting aside a key transparency and confidence-building measure that benefits the United States, we urge the Trump Administration to continue to press Russia to fully implement its treaty obligations without taking a drastic step that would undermine the security of U.S. allies and partners.

The Treaty on Open Skies was first conceived by President Eisenhower in 1955 as a means to permit reciprocal overflights with the former Soviet Union to reduce mistrust and the threat of war on the continent. The Treaty would enter into force nearly fifty years later – in the George W. Bush Administration – making reality President Eisenhower’s vision permitting the Treaty’s 34 signatories the ability to overfly the territory of one another armed only with film cameras and more recently digital sensors. Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea, military intervention into Eastern Ukraine, and attack of Ukrainian naval vessels in the Black Sea reinforce the value of the Treaty on Open Skies. In addition to the regular 42 annual overflights of Russia territory by the Treaty’s signatories, the Treaty also allows for “extraordinary observation flights,” one of which the United States, with other countries, conducted in 2018 over Russian-occupied Eastern Ukraine.

A unilateral withdrawal from the Treaty would amount to an unforced error as the United States has flown nearly three times as many flights annually over Russia as Russia flew over the United States. The Open Skies Treaty flight plans from 2002 to 2016 show 196 bids by the United States over Russia versus just 71 bids by Russia over the United States. Withdrawing from the Treaty would further erode the confidence of U.S. allies and partners seeking a resolute posture toward the threats Russia poses against its neighbors.

A U.S. exit from the Treaty would deny Ukraine and other countries imagery of broad swaths of Russian territory and detract from the U.S. commitment to Ukraine’s security. In addition to leaving Ukraine in the lurch, such a move would undermine transatlantic unity as North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies value the transparency and stability provided by the Treaty.

Finally, the Open Skies Consultative Commission (OSCC) is one of few remaining multilateral forums at which the United States can engage diplomatically with Russia. That is why we urge you to work directly through the OSCC to draw attention to Russia’s selective implementation of Open Skies. As the 2019 Compliance Report notes, Russia’s restriction of overflights over the Kaliningrad Oblast and in the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia violate the Treaty. We agree with the commitment in the 2019 Compliance Report that the “the United States will continue to work closely with Allies and Partners at the OSCC...to address Russia’s violations and improve the overall operation of the Treaty.”

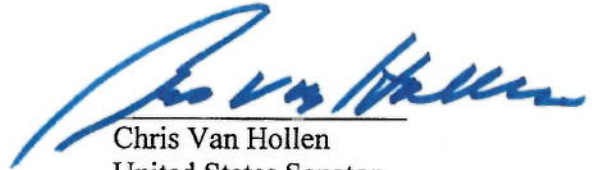
Despite our compliance concerns with Russia, the Treaty on Open Skies continues to give the United States, along with our allies and partners, a key tool to observe Russian military activities and actions while also

keeping a key military-to-military channel at a time we need it the most. As such, we call upon you to work with U.S. partners to strengthen rather than ground the Treaty on Open Skies.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



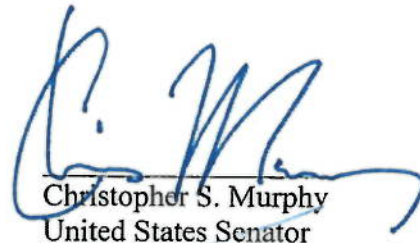
Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



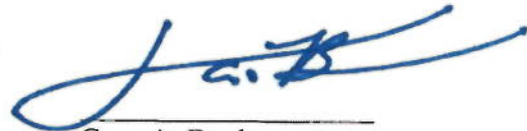
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