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December 9, 2019

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W. Washington, D.C. 20500

Mr. President:

I would like to thank you for your leadership in withdrawing the United States from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty earlier this year. This decision was a bold step to hold the Russian Federation accountable for its violations of the agreement. I appreciate the efforts of your administration to restore American leadership, enhance our national security, and advance American interests abroad.

I am writing to urge you to consider what I believe is the appropriate next step: withdrawing our nation from the Treaty on Open Skies. As you know, the Treaty on Open Skies was first proposed by President Bush in 1991 with the intent of moving forward from the Cold War and establishing friendly transparency in the open skies. The goal was to uphold and verify compliance with arms control agreements such as the INF by facilitating friendly flyover missions by member states. There are currently 36 signatories, including Russia.

Since 2014, Russia has violated the terms of the Treaty with increasing regularity. For example, Russia has denied repeated requests by party states for flyover missions over Kaliningrad, where Russia has bolstered the number of S-400s on its western front. As recently as September, Russia denied requests from the U.S. and Canada for flights over its airspace. Since no territory in a member state can be declared off-limits for friendly flights under the Treaty, these repeated denials are a direct and intentional violation of its terms.

In addition to denying requests from signatories of the Treaty, Russia has also violated the airspace of other nations who are parties to the agreement without going through the formal process of requesting to conduct a friendly flyover mission. In October, a Russian Tu-154 aircraft briefly entered Estonian airspace without any communication with or permission from the Estonian Air Traffic Service. This act of aggression by Russia is subtle, but significant. It is clear that Russia views the Treaty on Open Skies as a mechanism to assert aggression against its neighbors, not to build stronger ties or promote a safer world.

Russia has also announced its intention to add a digital electro-optical sensor to its Tupolev Tu-154 aircraft, which will enhance its surveillance capacity when flying over American airspace by exceeding the 30-centimeter resolution cap on permitted sensor technology. This technological upgrade is an attempt to utilize the friendly flyover missions for sinister intelligence gathering, which is thoroughly inconsistent with the spirit of the pact. The purpose of these flyover missions is to promote transparency and trust,

not to invite high-caliber surveillance of our most secure areas by a nation that denies reciprocal access to us.

Withdrawing from the Treaty would not have an adverse effect on our national security due to changes in our technology. When the Treaty first came into effect decades ago, our satellite images were less precise, and the reconnaissance flights were a valuable tool to attain new information. However, our current technology is far more advanced, making the Treaty unnecessary to track developments on the ground.

The intention of the Treaty was to establish friendly transparency -- not take advantage of it. The United States has recently withdrawn from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty due to Russia violating treaty terms. That is why I am asking that the United States withdraw from The Treaty on Open Skies.

Like the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Open Skies Treaty is out of date and disadvantages nations like ours who abide by the rules. It is in the best interest of the United States to withdraw at this time. I welcome the opportunity for our country to renegotiate its arms control agreements with Russia in a manner that restricts the use of intermediate range missiles and also facilitates friendly flyover missions -- noble goals that are out of reach while this outdated deal remains in place.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to this important national security issue.

In God We Trust,



James Lankford