

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 12, 2012

The Honorable Leon E. Panetta
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Panetta:

We write to express our grave concern regarding the Department of Defense's ongoing business dealings with Rosoboronexport, the same Russian state-controlled arms export firm that continues to provide the Syrian government with the means to perpetrate widespread and systematic attacks on its own people. According to the United Nations, over 7,500 Syrian civilians have reportedly been killed in the attacks by the desperate regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and we continue to receive grisly accounts that his government forces are summarily executing, imprisoning, and torturing demonstrators and innocent by-standers.

Russia remains the top supplier of weapons to Syria, selling reportedly \$1 billion or more worth of arms to Syria in 2011 alone. Its arms shipments to Syria have continued unabated during the ongoing popular uprising there. According to Thomson Reuters shipping data, since December 2011, at least four cargo ships have travelled from the Russian port used by Rosoboronexport to the Syrian port of Tartus. Another Russian ship that was reportedly carrying ammunition and sniper rifles, weapons which Syrian forces have used to kill and injure demonstrators, reportedly docked in Cyprus in January and then went on to deliver its cargo directly to Syria. In addition, recent reports from human rights monitoring organizations confirm that Russian weapons such as 240mm F-864 high explosive mortars have been found at the site of ongoing atrocities committed against civilians in Homs, Syria. In January of this year, Rosoboronexport reportedly signed a new deal with the Syrian government for 36 combat jets.

Even in the face of crimes against humanity committed by the Syrian government during the past year, enabled no doubt by the regular flow of weapons from Russia, the United States Government has unfortunately continued to procure from Rosoboronexport. It is our understanding that the DoD, through an initiative led by the U.S. Army, is currently buying approximately 21 dual-use Mi-17 helicopters for the Afghan military from Rosoboronexport. This includes the signing of a no-bid contract worth \$375 million for the purchase of aircraft and spare parts, to be completed by 2016. Media reports indicate that the contract included an option for \$550 million in additional purchases, raising the contract's potential total to nearly \$1 billion.

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While it is certainly frustrating that U.S. taxpayer funding is used to buy Russian-made helicopters instead of world-class U.S.-made helicopters for the Afghan military, our specific concern at this time is that the Department is procuring these assets from an organization that had for years been on a U.S. sanctions list for illicit nuclear assistance to Iran and in the face of the international community's concern is continuing to enable the Assad regime with the arms it needs to slaughter innocent men, women, and children in Syria. Other options are very likely available as demonstrated by the fact that the first four Mi-17 helicopters that the U.S. Navy purchased for Afghanistan came through a different firm. We ask that the DoD immediately review all potential options to procure helicopters legally through other means.

U.S. taxpayers should not be put in a position where they are indirectly subsidizing the mass murder of Syrian civilians. The sizeable proceeds of these DoD contracts are helping to finance a firm that is essentially complicit in mass atrocities in Syria, especially in light of Russia's history of forgiving huge amounts of Syria's debt on arms sales, as occurred in 2005 during President Assad's state visit to Moscow.

President Obama has called on President Assad to step down, and he has declared that "Preventing mass atrocities and genocide is a core national security interest and a core moral responsibility of the United States." As such, we urge you to use all available leverage to press Russia and Russian entities to end their support of the Assad regime, and that includes ending all DoD business dealings with Rosoboronexport, which is within your authority as Secretary of Defense. Continuing this robust business relationship with Rosoboronexport would undermine U.S. policy on Syria and undermine U.S. efforts to stand with the Syrian people.

This is a serious policy problem, and we ask for your personal attention to help solve it. Thank you for your service to our nation and your dedication to the members of our Armed Forces.

Sincerely,



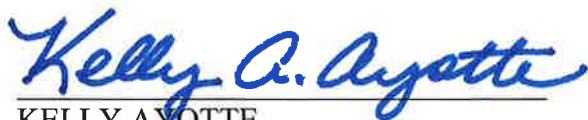
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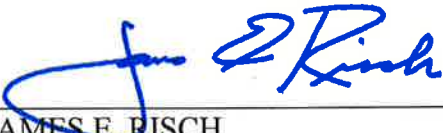
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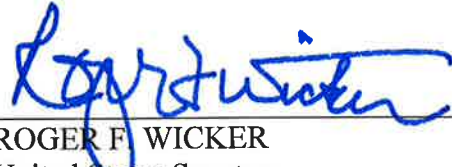
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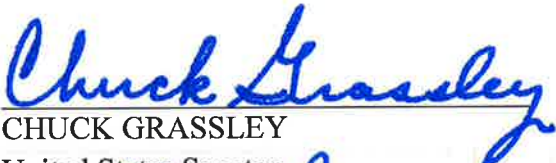
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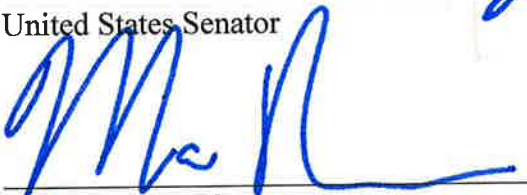
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CC: The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
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