

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 12, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Following US airstrikes in Syria last week, senior officials in your Administration have rightly faced questions about whether it is now the policy of the United States government to seek the ouster of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Unfortunately, even with regard to this most central of issues in the Syrian civil war, the answers provided by your advisors have been confusing and contradictory. Given America's escalating involvement in this conflict, we write to request clarification of this fundamental aspect of American strategy – moving forward, will your Administration actively pursue the removal from power of President Assad?

On Sunday, in multiple interviews, high-ranking officials in your Administration appeared to argue both for and against the ouster of Assad. Secretary Tillerson told ABC News that, "We've seen what that looks like when you undertake a violent regime change in Libya.... So I think we have to learn the lessons of the past and learn the lessons of what went wrong in Libya when you choose that pathway of regime change." Tillerson's statement was in keeping with his previous insistence that "the longer term status of President Assad will be decided by the Syrian people" and UN Ambassador Nikki Haley's statement on March 30th that "our priority is no longer to sit and focus on getting Assad out."

In sharp contrast, your National Security Advisor, H.R. McMaster, argued in an appearance on Fox News this weekend that Assad's removal from power would be beneficial, saying, "It's very hard to understand how a political solution could result from the continuation of the Assad regime." Similarly, and in an abrupt departure from her previous remarks, Ambassador Haley stated on CNN that, "We don't see a peaceful Syria with Assad in there," and that, "We know there's not any sort of option where a political solution is going to happen with Assad at the head of the regime."

The fact that key figures in your Administration have publically articulated contradictory positions on this crucial question is confounding. It suggests the absence of an overarching strategy for accomplishing US objectives in Syria, or even a clear understanding of what those goals might be. Moreover, this confusion among your top advisors on such a basic aspect of US policy is compelling evidence of a lack of thorough planning in advance of the airstrikes you ordered and of a troubling failure to consider their potential ramifications.

Consistent with our obligations under the Constitution, Congress has a responsibility to weigh whether our nation's military should engage in further attacks on the Syrian regime. Such deliberations will be severely undermined without a clear understanding of whether your Administration intends to actively pursue the removal of President Assad from power. Again, we urgently request clarification of this critical aspect of American strategy in Syria.

Sincerely,



Ruben Gallego  
Member of Congress



Brendan F. Boyle  
Member of Congress