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March 6, 2018

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on National Security, I am writing to urge you to utilize the full authority and resources that Congress has specifically allocated to the Global Engagement Center within the U.S. Department of State to counter foreign efforts to interfere in U.S. elections.

More than one year ago, our national Intelligence Community released a “high confidence” assessment that Russian President Vladimir Putin “ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election.”¹ This influence campaign sought to undermine public faith in our most fundamental democratic process through covert intelligence operations, including cyber activity, as well as explicit efforts by Russian Government agencies, state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users to widely disseminate Kremlin-desired messaging.² The massive breadth of such operations was recently detailed in a February 16, 2018 federal indictment returned against 13 Russian nationals and three Russian entities in relation to a widespread campaign to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential election that involved identity theft, bank and wire fraud, the creation of fake social media accounts, illegal political advertisement purchases, and other activities.³ The Intelligence Community assessment also underscored that “Moscow will apply lessons learned from its Putin-ordered campaign aimed at the US presidential election to future influence efforts worldwide...”⁴

In order to combat Russian and other foreign interference in future U.S. elections, Congress in December of 2016 expanded the mission and mandate of the Global Engagement Center (GEC) within the State Department to “counter foreign state and non-state propaganda and disinformation efforts” that threaten our national security as well as the national security interests of U.S. allies and partners.⁵ While

¹ *Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections*, Intelligence Community Assessment (January 6, 2017) (online at https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf).

² *Id.*

³ *U.S. v. Internet Research Agency, et al (1:18-cr-32, District of Columbia)*, Indictment (February 16, 2018) (online at <https://www.justice.gov/file/1035477/download>).

⁴ *Assessing Russian Activities*, Intelligence Community Assessment.

⁵ Pub. L. No. 114-328 (2016).

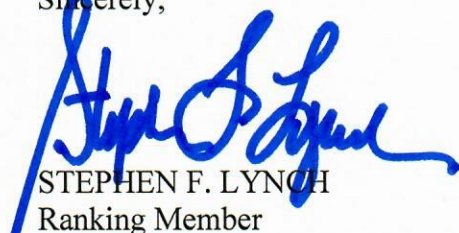
previous iterations of the GEC faced dedicated funding challenges, GEC funding recently increased from approximately \$16 million in Fiscal Year 2016 to an estimated \$32 million in Fiscal Year 2017.⁶ Moreover, the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017* authorized the Secretary of Defense to transfer up to \$60 million annually for Fiscal Year 2017 and 2018 to the GEC.⁷

Regrettably, the State Department has failed to maximize its use of these critical resources. As reported by *The New York Times* on March 4, 2018, the State Department “has yet to spend any of the \$120 million it has been allocated since late 2016 to counter foreign efforts to meddle in elections or sow distrust in democracy.”⁸ *The New York Times* additionally reported that “not one of the 23 analysts working in the department’s Global Engagement Center – which has been tasked with countering Moscow’s disinformation campaign – speaks Russian” and that a continued State Department-wide hiring freeze has compromised the recruitment of computer experts needed to track and mitigate Russian interference campaigns.⁹ It is my understanding that the majority of GEC contract analysts are currently working on temporary assignments.¹⁰

During a February 6, 2018 interview with *Fox News*, you cautioned that Russia is already undertaking attempts to interfere in the upcoming 2018 U.S. federal elections.¹¹ You also stated, “I don’t know that I would say we are better prepared, because the Russians will adapt as well.”¹² The full use of the authority and resources at the disposal of the State Department for the purpose of countering foreign interference in our elections would significantly enhance our ability to address this continuing national security threat.¹³

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this letter.

Sincerely,



STEPHEN F. LYNCH
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security

⁶ *Fiscal Year 2018 Congressional Budget Justification, Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs* (May 23, 2017) (online at <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/271013.pdf>).

⁷ Pub. L. No. 114-328 (2016).

⁸ *State Dept. Was Granted \$120 Million to Fight Russian Meddling. It Has Spent \$0.*, *The New York Times* (March 4, 2018) (online at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/04/world/europe/state-department-russia-global-engagement-center.html>).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Russians Already Meddling in US Midterms, Tillerson Says*, *Fox News* (February 6, 2018) (online at <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2018/02/06/russians-already-meddling-in-us-midterms-tillerson-says.html>).

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*