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Engel Blasts State Department Decision to Sideline Anti-Propaganda Efforts (/press-releases?ID=1D2A0E5E-7FF3-4B92-977C-2436EF041714)

August 7, 2017

WASHINGTON—Representative Eliot L. Engel, Ranking Member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, today decried the decision of Secretary of State Tillerson to sideline American anti-propaganda efforts by rejecting \$80 million designated for efforts to combat Russian and ISIS propaganda. In a letter to Secretary Tillerson (<https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/sites/democrats.foreignaffairs.house.gov/files/8.4.14.%20Rep.%20Engel%20Letter%20to%20Tillerson%208.4.14.pdf>), Rep. Engel underscored the risks to American security this decision poses, and called on the Secretary to reverse course or present a new strategy for dealing with this challenge.

“It is unacceptable to members of Congress that information warfare from Russia and ISIS will go unanswered. Doing nothing is not an option,” wrote Rep. Engel. “I urge you to come up with a strategy and work with Congress to implement it at once. Otherwise, the House and Senate will look for legislative alternatives to direct the Administration to treat the threats of Russia and ISIS with the seriousness they deserve.”

Full text of the letter follows and can be found here

(<https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/sites/democrats.foreignaffairs.house.gov/files/8.4.14.%20Rep.%20Engel%20Letter%20to%20Tillerson%208.4.14.pdf>)

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I'm seriously concerned by reports (<https://www.politico.com/story/2017/08/02/tillerson-isis-russia-propaganda-241218>) that you have decided not to use resources Congress provided to combat the propaganda campaigns of Russia and ISIS. The threats we face from these adversaries are clear, and I am troubled that you do not appear committed to the efforts needed to address them.

It seems again that this Administration just isn't getting the message about Russia, so let me put it plainly: Russia is not America's friend. President Putin attacked American democracy. He wants to splinter Western unity and undermine our alliances. His actions merit a tough response, not the coddling that President Trump seems determined to offer him.

To compound matters, ISIS has employed propaganda as a key tool for recruitment and disseminating its violent anti-American message. They show no sign of backing down from their online efforts. Failing to come up with an effective strategy to combat that threat could seriously reverse the gains we've made and embolden ISIS and other terrorist groups to expand their propaganda

campaigns.

Furthermore, since you've been Secretary, the State Department has struggled to understand Congress's intentions on these issues. While we, too, would ultimately like to see better relations with Russia, the Kremlin's actions simply do not permit such improvement. Despite what the President tweets (<https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/893083735633129472>), Putin—not Congress—is responsible for the tensions between the United States and Russia. And despite the baffling statement (<https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2017/07/272938.htm>) from your spokesperson, our bipartisan legislation, passed by overwhelming majorities in the House and Senate, was designed to protect the United States from Vladimir Putin's aggression and punish Moscow for interfering with American democracy, invading Ukraine, and other malign actions. As such, when Congress allocated nearly \$80 million for anti-propaganda efforts, the signal should have been clear that Congress wants this issue addressed.

It is unacceptable to members of Congress that information warfare from Russia and ISIS will go unanswered. Doing nothing is not an option. I urge you to come up with a strategy and work with Congress to implement it at once. Otherwise, the House and Senate will look for legislative alternatives to direct the Administration to treat the threats of Russia and ISIS with the seriousness they deserve.

I look forward to your reply on this matter.

Sincerely,

ELIOT L. ENGEL

Ranking Member

Committee on Foreign Affairs

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