

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 30, 2015

COMMITTEES:  
ARMED SERVICES  
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
INTELLIGENCE  
JOINT ECONOMIC

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to express my serious concerns regarding the deployment of Special Operations forces on the ground in Syria. As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and Select Committee on Intelligence, I take each and every military escalation seriously, and this announcement deserves careful examination on both policy and legal grounds.

The rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has undoubtedly created a chaotic situation in the region. The ethnic, sectarian, and religious conflicts in Iraq and Syria require conviction and coordination from our coalition – but the United States cannot and should not be on the front lines in Syria.

Since June 16, 2014, 15 significant military policy decisions have been made that have increased our nation's role in the fight against ISIL. What began with the deployment of 275 military personnel "to provide support and security for U.S. personnel and the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad," has resulted in a total of over 3,400 military personnel in Iraq and over 7,000 airstrikes to date. The announcement today would be an expansion that reaches not only toward the front lines of a military conflict that has yet to be explicitly authorized by Congress, but also extends into the sovereign territory of another country. This series of escalations is the classic example of "mission creep."

Imagine the scenario in which American forces are deployed alongside Syrian opposition forces and come into combat with ISIL, who are also being targeted by Russian and Syrian military forces via land and air. The margin for error diminishes considerably, and the consequences of either accidental or intentional fire on our ground forces— or Russian and Syrian forces— expand greatly. The resulting desire or need to retaliate against the other would be inevitable. The "fog of war" in this situation appears too great and the risks significantly outweigh the potential benefits.

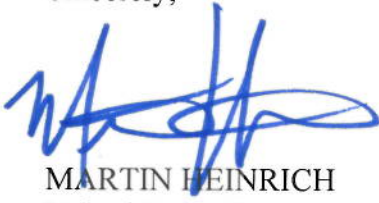
While it is critical to degrade and destroy ISIL, the 2001 and 2002 Authorizations for Use of Military Force (AUMF) provide, at best, shaky legal grounds for armed conflict against this terrorist organization in Syria. Even more problematic, the complete lack of an AUMF presents major questions for the deployment of American troops there who may encounter the Syrian or Russian standing militaries. Our troops must protect themselves at all costs, but the legal limbo of who they can engage creates more ambiguity than certainty. Our commanders and armed forces should never have such a high level of uncertainty in a time of war.

I realize this legal dilemma is partly due to Congress' own failure. The lack of will from Congress to vote on a new AUMF amounts to a total dereliction of its duties and responsibilities. I remain committed to supporting an updated AUMF that is narrow in scope and duration and we will continue to insist on its consideration.

ISIL has barbarically killed and tortured many innocent civilians. We must work with our coalition allies to eliminate ISIL, but we should learn from the mistakes of the past and avoid taking actions where the risks and costs far outweigh the benefits. I firmly believe that the deployment of American ground forces in Syria is not the solution.

Thank you for your continued leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. Heinrich', is written over the typed name.

MARTIN HEINRICH  
United States Senator