

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 18, 2017

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
Senate Committee on Armed Services
Russell Senate Office Building, 228
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Armed Services
Russell Senate Office Building, 228
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairman McCain and Ranking Member Reed,

As the situation in Syria intensifies, Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee are committed to holding the administration accountable for a serious, long-term strategy. Given the stakes for the U.S. and our allies, we believe that if the White House does not provide a strategy by the time the Fiscal Year 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) comes to the Senate floor, Congress must act.

The Syrian civil war is not only displacing millions of people at a scale not seen since World War II, but it serves as a continuing call to arms for terrorist groups and criminals around the world. The United States has focused its mission on defeating terrorist groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), but an increasingly complex battlefield environment threatens progress made by the Counter-ISIS Coalition and complicates a future political settlement to the Syria crisis. In fact, in recent weeks, U.S. forces have come into direct, lethal contact with Russia-backed Syrian regime troops and Iranian Hezbollah forces, potentially placing U.S. troops in harm's way.

Accordingly, we respectfully request that you support amending the NDAA to create a study group on Syria policy, consistent with your pledge during the Senate Armed Services Committee NDAA markup, if the White House does not provide its strategy by the time this bill comes to the Senate Floor.

The proposed Syria Study Group would, we believe, allow Congress to support a policy approach that closes the current gap between U.S. goals and concrete U.S. commitments while ensuring that any escalation of U.S. involvement in Syria is not undertaken for tactical gains alone but is part of a strategy to achieve critical U.S. objectives. The Study's Group's members would reflect bipartisan viewpoints and be appointed by the Chairs and Ranking Members of the Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees in both the House and in the Senate.

We look forward to working with you to determine how we might move this proposal to fruition, and appreciate your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Ben Sasse
United States Senator