

April 13, 2018

The Honorable John J. Sullivan
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Steven T. Mnuchin
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20220

Dear Secretary Mnuchin and Deputy Secretary Sullivan,

We write to you to express our deep concern regarding a recent United Nations Panel of Experts report that connects North Korea to the Syrian government's use of chemical weapons against its own people, and exposes North Korean sanctions evasion involving Russia and China.

According to the report, North Korea supplied Syrian President Assad with acid-resistant tiles, valves and thermometers, all of which are known elements used in construction of chemical weapons factories. It also uncovered that North Korean technicians have been working at known chemical weapons and missile facilities inside Syria. These findings demonstrate an elaborate and alarming military-venture between rogue, tyrannical states to avoid United States and international sanctions and inflict terror and death upon thousands of innocent people.

The report details the total scale of just one of many North Korean sanctions-evasion operations. U.N. investigators identified chemical weapon components that were part of at least 40 previously unreported shipments by North Korea to Syria between 2012 and 2017 of prohibited ballistic missile parts and materials that could be used for both military and civilian purposes. These shipments are part of a steady stream of weapons-related sales by North Korea to Syria, and by proxy, Iran, estimated to be worth several billion dollars a year. This illicit funding has allowed North Korea to continue its intercontinental ballistic missile testing and nuclear program development, directly thwarting international efforts to rein in increasing North Korean aggression. It also clearly illustrates the complete disregard and lack of meaningful enforcement of sanctions by the international community as a whole, but in particular, by Russia and China.

This decadeslong military partnership between Syria and North Korea has enabled President Assad to continue his reign of terror with chemical weapons that includes the use of mustard gas, blister agents, and nerve agents such as sarin and VX, resulting in the deaths of thousands of his own people, including innocent children. Disturbingly, the report uncovers that these heinous actions were exacerbated by North Korean technicians with specialized knowledge of chemical and ballistic missile technology, who have repeatedly visited Syria over the last two years in Barzeh, Adra and Hama. Their presence has allowed this terror to continue to this day. According to the Syrian American Medical Society, in 2018 alone, several chlorine gas attacks have occurred in rebel-held areas, including a recent, suspected-chemical weapons attack in Duomo that killed at least 42 people and sickened hundreds more.

It is imperative that the United States provides a swift and appropriate response to the continued use of chemical weapons used by President Assad and his forces, and works to address the shortcomings in sanctions enforcement. We have seen firsthand the utter failure of tough talk, followed by hollow action, which the Obama Administration employed to combat the Assad regime. As you know, in 2012, President Obama warned that the use of chemical weapons by President Assad against rebels contesting his regime was a “red line” that would “change my calculus,” about U.S. policy towards the conflict. However, a year later, faced with indisputable evidence that President Assad had used sarin gas against his own people, President Obama chose not to order military action. Instead, the U.S. and Russia jointly agreed to destroy President Assad’s chemical weapons stockpile, which Secretary Kerry claimed “got 100 percent of the chemical weapons out.” As relief organizations, UN investigators and media reports continue to expose the suffering and death of the Syrian people from chemical attacks, it is clear this agreement failed.

In light of the report’s findings, we respectfully request a response to the following questions:

- How do you plan to raise the issue of Syrian chemical weapons use and North Korean and Syrian sanctions-evasion compliance at the United Nations or other international fora?
- What steps does the Department of State plan to take, along with the international community and the Treasury Department, to prevent Syria and North Korea from continuing to circumvent the current sanctions regime?
- What further U.S. sanctions against North Korea or Syria are being considered to increase pressure and halt the use of chemical weapons?
- Are sanctions being considered against countries that have acted as accomplices in North Korean and Syrian sanctions evasion?

We applaud your efforts thus far to increase U.S. and international pressure on the rogue regimes of North Korea and Syria. It is vital that we do everything possible – with proper consultation with Congress when required – to prevent North Korea from proliferating this deadly technology and stop President Assad from perpetrating further crimes against humanity. We look forward to your prompt and thorough response to these inquiries, as well as any actions you plan to take as a result of these report findings. We appreciate your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

David A. Perdue
United States Senator

Orrin G. Hatch
United States Senator

John Cornyn
United States Senator

Pat Toomey
United States Senator

Ted Cruz
United States Senator

Cory Gardner
United States Senator

Michael S. Lee
United States Senator

John Kennedy
United States Senator

Cc: Ambassador Nikki Haley
United States Mission to the United Nations