

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 3, 2015

The Honorable Ashton Carter
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary of Homeland Security
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Carter, Secretary Kerry, and Secretary Johnson:

We write to you today regarding the security of U.S. global communication undersea fiber optic cables. As you may know, Russian naval vessels have been publically reported operating along the cables' known routes from the North Sea to Northeast Asia and waters close to the United States.

As widely cited in reports, undersea communication cables are responsible for moving trillions of dollars in global business, more than 95 percent of daily communications, and matters extremely significant to our national security. While we respect that the location, security protocols and conditions of many cables are classified for national security, we are increasingly concerned about cables whose locations are well known, yet still carry data important to our economic and military functions. While fiber optic cables have revolutionized global communications, they make the U.S. incredibly vulnerable to attack in U.S. and in international waters.

Usually only one to two inches thick, these cables are often said to be easy to find due to the limited amount of routes available, or marked to ensure they are not accidentally interfered with. In 2006, an undersea earthquake near Taiwan snapped nine cables. It took 11 ships 49 days to repair communications for Japan, China, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam and Taiwan, who all suffered disruptions to their economic and military functions that relied on them. Due to

increased Russian aggression and their presence in waters these cables rest in, we are increasingly concerned with what a targeted attack on the cables the U.S. depends on could result in.¹

Similarly, reports have circulated in regards to our nation's deep-water drilling infrastructure. Like our underwater cables, this infrastructure faces similar risks due to their remoteness and isolation in the deepest part of our oceans. A coordinated attack could cause repercussions ranging from widespread environmental damage to major effects on global oil production and energy supplies.²

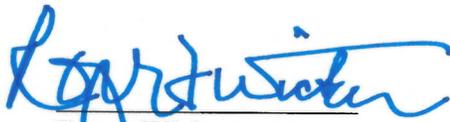
With all due consideration to the classified nature of the cables and deep water drilling infrastructure, because of their significance to national security and energy supplies, we request information on what steps are being taken, and what steps need to be taken, in order to enhance the security of the undersea network on which the United States depends. Given the significant impact an attack could have on our economic stability, and cyber, energy, and national security, we write to ensure there is an effective effort between the Department of Defense and other U.S. government agencies to secure our nation.

Developing a national security strategy that incorporates the vulnerability of our undersea network is of the utmost importance and we wish to discuss this matter further with you in a classified setting, while doing everything possible to allow the public to know we are taking every step to maintain their security.

Sincerely,



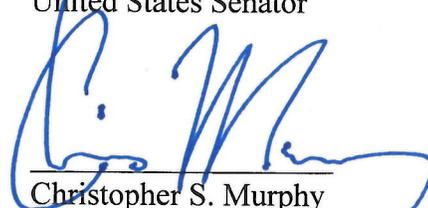
Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator



Roger Wicker
United States Senator



James M. Inhofe
United States Senator



Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator

¹ Martinage, Robert. *Under the Sea: The Vulnerability of the Commons*. Foreign Affairs (January/February 2015)

² Martinage, Robert. *Under the Sea: The Vulnerability of the Commons*. Foreign Affairs (January/February 2015)