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United States Senate

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HOMELAND SECURITY
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SMALL BUSINESS
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President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

President Obama:

I write to you today regarding your upcoming trip to Peru and the increasing presence of Islamic extremist groups operating in Latin America. As you know from my recent letter to you pertaining to the rise of terrorism in the Asia-Pacific region, I remain very concerned about ISIS's ability to spread and adapt to new environments across the globe.

ISIS and its sympathizers are growing more overt in Latin America. Their increased use of messaging in Spanish and Portuguese, coupled with calls for terror in the region, exemplify ISIS's unwavering determination to change and imbed in new surroundings. A Brazilian extremist group pledging allegiance to ISIS, Ansar al-Khilafa Brazil, will likely not be the last, and the increasing rise of ISIS fighters leaving the Caribbean should indicate to you that this is not a narrowly focused problem. I echo the message from your SOUTHCOM Commander, and his predecessor, who have raised concerns about the growth of extremism in Latin America and urge you to make this issue a top priority for your travel this month.

With decades of violence and illicit activity throughout Latin America, it remains fertile ground for extremist groups, like ISIS, to prosper. Indeed, we have failed to assist our allies in addressing places like the tri-border region of Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay, which was cited by your own State Department in 2014 for "*remaining an important regional nexus of arms, narcotics, and human smuggling, counterfeiting, pirated goods; and money laundering—all potential funding sources for terrorist organizations.*" With ISIS setting its sights on global expansion, and a history of Islamic extremism in the region, we cannot afford to continue turning a blind eye to these threats emerging right here in our own hemisphere.

It should be clear to you by now that I do not support your measuring of our success against ISIS by the land they lose in the Middle East, as it is not an accurate representation of the progress we are making against Islamic extremist groups that wish to do us harm. For this reason, in your upcoming meetings with Latin American officials, I ask that you discuss ways to address the growing fight against ISIS and consider the following:

- 1) Panama, who lacks a standard military, is the only country in the region to join the U.S.-led Coalition to Counter ISIS. How can you encourage more Latin American countries to join the coalition?
- 2) SOUTHCOM has, and is able to, conduct counter terrorism. What U.S. missions in Latin America can you increase or refocus to ensure we are interrupting and halting any growth of ISIS?
- 3) New anti-terrorism laws were cited as being a key component for stopping terrorist attacks from being carried out at the Olympic Games in Brazil. What steps are you taking to urge more anti-terrorism cooperation and expand existing U.S. counter crime and security assistance to incorporate counter terrorism efforts?

I remain firm in my belief that your administration must broaden its horizons to effectively combat the spread of radical Islamic terrorism and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator

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