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United States Senate

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September 25, 2018

The Honorable James Mattis
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Secretary Mattis,

I write regarding recent news reports and statements from administration officials and military leaders that the U.S. has prepared military options to respond to any further use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Like yourself, I find President Bashar al Assad's use of chemical weapons, especially against his own civilian population, to be abhorrent and a violation of international law. As the world's most powerful nation, I believe the U.S. must take a strong stance against such egregious actions, and I commend you for your efforts to deter the use of chemical weapons by the Syrian government.

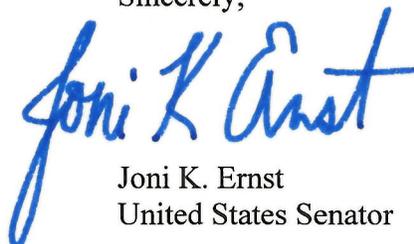
As a member of the United States Senate and the Senate Armed Services Committee, it is my duty to ensure that U.S. military action is within the legal authorities provided to the Commander-in-Chief under the Constitution of the United States. While I have supported previous uses of military force against the Syrian government, I am increasingly concerned about U.S. military action not authorized by the 2001 and 2003 Authorizations for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) or the War Powers Resolution.

The War Powers Resolution states that the President's commitment of the Armed Forces into hostilities must be pursuant to a declaration of war, specific statutory authorization, or a national emergency created by attack upon the U.S., its territories or possessions, or its armed forces. The resolution also requires the President to consult Congress prior to introducing Armed Forces into hostilities.

I respectfully request additional communication by the Department of Defense (DoD) regarding its decision-making and congressional notification processes when considering military action outside of an existing AUMF. I also request additional information to ascertain the DoD's views regarding the necessity for congressional approval in such cases.

Thank you for your commitment to our military and national security, and I look forward to working with you on this matter.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator

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