

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 22, 2014

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Mr. President:

We write to express our outrage over the wanton destruction of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, and to ask that you consider imposing significant additional sanctions to penalize the Russian Federation for its material support of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, as well as to deter further hostile and destabilizing actions against Ukraine.

As your Administration has declared, Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 was shot down by a surface-to-air missile, killing all 298 innocent people aboard. Evidence compiled since the crash, along with efforts to hide evidence and block international investigators, indicates the culpability of Russia and the separatist militants it supports in Ukraine. The attack on the Malaysia Airlines jet follows the downing of a Ukrainian AN-26 transport plane three days earlier, as well as the shooting down of a Ukrainian SU-25 attack jet and the downing of several Ukrainian government helicopters – the Donetsk People's Republic has claimed responsibility for each of these acts.

Russia has incited, supported, and recruited bands of irregular soldiers within and outside of Ukraine who have attacked Ukrainian security forces. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has protested that separatists have limited access to the crash site; separatists have seized the bodies of Flight MH17 victims at gunpoint; and evidence has come to light indicating that the rebels had, on orders from the Russian government, initially seized the flight recorders to prevent OSCE investigators from finding them. The separatists have even gone so far as to declare that they will only guarantee the safety of international experts investigating the crash if the Ukrainian government agrees to a truce. President Putin may have publicly stated that all sides should allow an investigation into the downed airliner, but Russia's actions belie his words.

These contemptible actions cannot go unanswered. We strongly urge you to aggressively exercise your authorities under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act and other relevant statutes to impose immediate broad sanctions against Russia's defense sector, including state-owned Rosboronexport, in order to prevent Russia from providing weaponry, equipment, or assistance and training to separatists in Ukraine.

We also urge you to give additional consideration to imposing broader sanctions on Russia's energy and financial industries, as well as other sectors of the Russian economy as appropriate.


We further urge you to explore the possibility of designating the Donetsk People's Republic as a foreign terrorist organization. Increasing evidence of their human rights violations in Eastern Ukraine – including abductions and torture – demonstrates that their actions have threatened the lives of innocent Ukrainians, not to mention those unfortunate innocents merely traveling in civilian airspace over Ukraine.

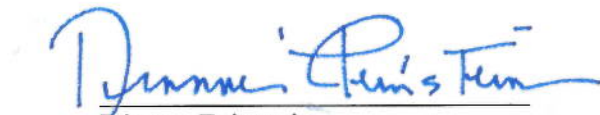
We understand and strongly support your efforts to coordinate the imposition of sanctions with our key European allies in order to ensure their maximum intended effect, and we encourage further cooperation in pursuit of this goal. However, the United States must not limit its own national security strategy when swift action will help fulfill our strategic objectives, support an independent Ukraine, and counter malignant Russian interference.

We urge you to pursue these actions in order to punish Russia's reckless behavior and stabilize the situation in Eastern Ukraine so that this conflict can be de-escalated without further loss of innocent life.

Sincerely,


Robert Menendez
United States Senator


Carl Levin
United States Senator


Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator