

November 10, 2014

Dear Mr. Danilow,

Thank you for taking the time to contact me regarding United States foreign policy in the Middle East. I appreciate hearing from you on this important topic.

We have seen chaos and upheaval across the Middle East. Whether from attacks on American diplomats in Libya or the rapid expansion of the terrorist organization calling itself the Islamic State (IS, also known as ISIS or ISIL), the region has seen increasing conflict of one form or another for more than a decade. The masses of displaced people and widespread persecution of minorities, especially Christians, only compounds the suffering and instability in the region. Unfortunately, history has shown that U.S. involvement and intervention in the region in many cases made matters worse, and we have seen secular despots overthrown and replaced by more radical Islamists.

I believe we must take a fresh look at U.S. policy in the Middle East and consider a new approach. The approach I advocate is not to simply disengage from the region, as we still have strategic interests there, but rather, a focused, limited engagement based on clear principles. The first principle is one that I am very familiar with as a medical doctor: “First, do no harm.” We must be certain that our attempts to solve today’s problems will not lead to even greater problems tomorrow. We must also insist on accountability from foreign leaders receiving assistance from the U.S. taxpayer. For example, we cannot properly promote human rights and religious liberty abroad while at the same time sending money to foreign governments that endorse death penalties for religious crimes such as apostasy or blasphemy – laws most often used as weapons of persecution against Christians in the region. Our policy should also make it clear that any country actively working to undermine our interests is not to receive assistance from the American taxpayers.

The second principle is that the U.S. should only intervene when there is a clear threat to American lives, our national interest, or our allies, and always with the authorization of Congress as the Constitution requires. Our primary strategic interest is to ensure America is safe and prosperous. To be sure, we must always be prepared should our security be threatened, but we should engage militarily only when Congress authorizes the use of such force or there is an immediate threat.

President Obama announced in September 2014 that the United States would begin airstrikes to “degrade and destroy” ISIS. Currently, that military action against the terrorist organization is focused in Iraq and Syria, but the President left room in his remarks for expanding these efforts. I am disappointed the President took these actions without specific Congressional consent and, therefore, unconstitutionally. Even if it is the correct policy and one I would have supported, it is dangerous to go around Congress because it erodes the rule of law. The President unwisely also insists on arming so-called moderate rebels in Syria, yet these are the same rebels that often change sides and have sometimes been allies of al-Qaeda and other radical Islamists.

I have continually said it is the height of imprudence to send American weapons to those who may very well end up using them against our troops, or against allies in the region such as Israel. Such an important decision should be debated and voted on by

Congress. Unfortunately this latest military aid package was included with a last minute budget resolution to fund the federal government through December 2014. I sought a separate vote on the Senate floor and will continue to do so because I am committed to ensuring such weighty decisions for military engagement and foreign aid are thoroughly debated and authorized by Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rand Paul". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Rand Paul, MD
United States Senator