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Dear Senator,

On behalf of the nationwide membership of the American Hellenic Institute (AHI), I write to convey our appreciation for your sponsorship of S.2781, "A bill to limit the transfer of F-35 aircraft to Turkey." AHI strongly supports the legislation.

The transfer of such sensitive technology to the Erdogan regime, which has purchased the S-400 missile system from Russia despite U.S. and NATO objections, is a threat to U.S. interests and security. Moreover, it can possibly trigger U.S. sanctions under the recently enacted Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).

I echo your sentiment that President Erdogan has embarked on a "path of reckless governance and a disregard for the rule of law." Turkey continues to demonstrate that it is not a true and dependable U.S. and NATO ally. President Erdogan threatened United State military forces with an "Ottoman slap" if they continued to partner with Syrian Kurds. In addition to threatening U.S. forces, Turkey has wrongfully imprisoned Pastor Andrew Brunson for more than a year and continues to harass Turkish nationals who work at or with the U.S. Embassy in Turkey.

In addition to the case of Pastor Brunson, the Turkish government has tolerated assaults against its Greek Orthodox Christian religious minority, the Ecumenical Patriarchate (the spiritual home of the world's oldest and second largest Christian Church) and continues the illegal closure of the Greek Orthodox Halki Patriarchal School of Theology in Istanbul. These actions violate U.S. principles and law on freedom of religion as expressed in Section 2804 of the FY98 Omnibus Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act (PL 105-277). This law calls for the Turkish government to safeguard the Ecumenical Patriarchate, its personnel, and its property, and to reopen the Halki Patriarchal School of Theology.

In Cyprus, Turkey's illegal invasion of the Republic of Cyprus in 1974, and ongoing 44-year illegal occupation of the Republic of Cyprus by Turkey's 40,000 troops, has made it one of the most heavily militarized areas in the world. Turkey's occupation of the island is enforced using U.S. made

weapons, yet another violation of U.S. law. Recently, Turkey's threats toward the Republic of Cyprus have been directed toward the latter's sovereign right to explore for energy reserves within its exclusive economic zone (EEZ). In February, Turkey dispatched warships to Cyprus' EEZ to prevent an Italian multinational oil company's (Eni's) vessel from rightfully exploring for natural gas there. This egregious violation of Cyprus' sovereignty unnecessarily escalates tensions and has the potential to endanger U.S. companies such as ExxonMobil and Noble Energy who have been, or will be, working to explore for energy reserves in Cyprus' EEZ.

Furthermore, Turkey's ongoing violations of Greece's territorial water and national airspace in the Aegean are violations of U.S. and International law. These provocative actions taken against a fellow NATO ally place an unnecessary burden on Greece's financial situation and risks lives. On one day alone in 2017, Greece's Ministry of Defense recorded 138 violations of Greek airspace over islands in the Aegean Sea, which had to be intercepted. In the first quarter of 2018, 351 violations of Greece's sovereignty on the sea and 920 violations of Greece's national airspace were recorded. Just this month, Turkey endangered the safety of Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras when it dispatched F-16s to harass the Prime Minister's helicopter over the Aegean. Providing Turkey with F-35s will only enable Turkey to more effectively threaten Greece, a faithful U.S. and NATO ally, and its sovereignty.

For these reasons, the American Hellenic Institute thanks you for leading the effort to introduce this timely and significant piece of legislation. Turkey has a long history of disregarding the rule of law. President Erdogan's provocations against Greece, Cyprus and the United States only add to the turbulence and instability in the region. Time and time again, Turkey has demonstrated that it has no respect for U.S. law, international law, or rule of law within its own borders. As Turkey continues to devolve into an authoritarian state, and as Turkey continues to threaten its neighbors at an alarming rate, it is imperative for the United States to send a strong signal that Turkey's behavior is unacceptable. As the removal of German troops from Incirlik Air Force base demonstrated, Turkey only responds to these types of signals.

S.2781 will ensure that Turkey understands its actions have consequences. Thank you for introducing this important piece of legislation. Please consider AHI a resource regarding the eastern Mediterranean and as you work with your colleagues to advance this legislation.

Sincerely,



Nick Larigakis