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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

November 12, 2019

The Honorable John P. Abizaid
Ambassador to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
U.S. Embassy Riyadh
P.O. Box 94309
Riyadh 11693
Saudi Arabia

The Honorable Mike Pompeo
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Ambassador Abizaid and Secretary Pompeo:

I am deeply disturbed by recent reports of Twitter employees allegedly spying for Saudi Arabia by using the company's private information on particular dissidents about whom the Kingdom was interested. The recent charges by the U.S. Justice Department are troubling, and demonstrate that more needs to be done to guard against exploitation of social media and private data to further oppressive monitoring and surveilling of dissidents. I therefore seek clarity regarding your efforts in this vein and our diplomatic efforts with the Kingdom.

In countries like Saudi Arabia where fundamental freedoms including speech, assembly, and press are outlawed, the internet and social media are often the only means of public fora where citizens can access and exchange information.

As we know from the brutal murder of Jamal Khashoggi, Saudi officials carefully surveil social media for any critical voices. However, these public charges reveal the extent to which Saudi Arabia is exploiting American companies for its oppressive tactics in the United States.

This is unacceptable.

This Administration has been disappointingly silent in the face of gross human rights abuses across the world. It is even more important we raise these issues with countries with whom we have strategic partnerships. I was sorely disappointed to see high level U.S. officials travel to "Davos in the desert" last month and fail to publicly raise ongoing concerns about Saudi human rights abuses.

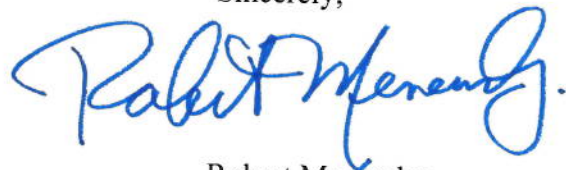
It is in our long-term national security interests to partner with countries who respect the rights of their citizens and fundamental values. This case highlights how these regimes will not stop at their own borders to pursue their repressive tactics.

While this spying was going on, and as Saudi Arabia claims to be making progress on human rights, many of the women authorities arrested in June 2018, who reported being tortured and sexually abused, remain in prison. Indeed, American citizens remain unjustly detained in Saudi Arabia. And Saudi Arabia has still not fully accounted for the murder of Jamal Khashoggi.

To that end, I request that you respond to the following by November 26, 2019:

1. What steps are you taking, specifically, to raise concerns with Saudi officials about using U.S. technology companies to monitor and gather information on dissidents and those critical of the Kingdom?
2. How are you working with technology companies to ensure they are not being exploited by foreign countries, including Saudi Arabia, for surveillance of dissidents?
3. What efforts you are taking to secure the release of Americans in prison in Saudi Arabia?
4. Please detail the U.S. embassy presence at the Saudi trials of those it says it is holding responsible for the death of Jamal Khashoggi.

Sincerely,



Robert Menendez
Ranking Member