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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6225

February 22, 2019

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

Dear Secretary Pompeo:

On February 4, 2019, I received a congressional notification from the Department for a proposal to transfer responsibility for the export control of firearms and ammunition from the United States Munitions list (USML) to the Commerce Control List (CCL). I write to inform you that I am placing a hold on the congressional notification, pursuant to the authority of Section 38(f) of the Arms Export Control Act (AECA).

I am deeply concerned about this proposed transfer. As you no doubt are aware, firearms and ammunition – especially those derived from military models and widely used by military and security services – are uniquely dangerous. They are easily modified, diverted, and proliferated, and are the primary means of injury, death, and destruction in civil and military conflicts throughout the world. As such, they should be subject to more, not less, rigorous export controls and oversight.

Combat rifles, including those commonly known as “sniper rifles,” should not be removed from the USML, nor should rifles of any type that are U.S. military-standard 5.56 (and especially .50 caliber). Semi-automatic firearms should also not be removed, and neither should related equipment, ammunition, or associated manufacturing equipment, technology, or technical data.

Consequently, my hold will remain in place until such time as the issues identified below are sufficiently addressed.

1) Removal of Firearms Exports from Congressional Information and Review

The AECA enables congressional review of exports of lethal weapons to ensure that they comport with U.S. foreign policy interests. Congress took action in 2002 to ensure that the sale and export of these weapons would receive stringent oversight, including by amending the AECA to set a lower reporting threshold (from \$14 million to \$1 million) specifically for firearms on the USML. Moving such firearms from the USML to the CCL would directly

contradict congressional intent and effectively eliminate congressional oversight and potential disapproval of exports of these weapons. Congressional oversight must be retained.

2) Proliferation of 3D Gun Printing Technical Information

There is a serious risk that this transfer will open the floodgates of information for the 3D printing of nearly-undetectable firearms and components by foreign persons and terrorists that intend to harm U.S. citizens and interests. The Department of Commerce claims that it cannot, by its own regulations, prevent the publication, including on the Internet for global consumption, of technical information and blueprint files that would enable this 3D production, if such information has once been published, even illegally. This is outrageous and simply unacceptable given the dangers it poses to U.S. citizens and interests.

Moreover, it may also be at variance with recent law. Section 1758 of the Export Control Reform Act of 2018 authorizes the Secretary of Commerce to control “emerging and foundational technologies” that (A) are essential to the national security of the United States; and (B) are not critical technologies described in clauses (i) through (v) of section 721(a)(6)(A) of the Defense Production Act of 1950. 3D printing has been identified by this Administration as an emerging technology of concern, and the Department of Commerce itself used 3D printing as an example of “emerging technology” in its November 19, 2018 Federal Register notice seeking public comment on what constitutes emerging technologies pursuant to this new statutory charge. Then-Secretary of Defense Mattis twice mentioned the challenges of 3D printing in congressional testimony, and Director of National Intelligence Coats, in his 2018 Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, stated that, “[a]dvances in manufacturing, particularly the development of 3D printing, almost certainly will become even more accessible to a variety of state and non-state actors and be used in ways contrary to our interests.”

It would seem axiomatic that the capability to 3D-print lethal weaponry that cannot easily or reliably be detected by metal detectors at airports, schools, governmental or other facilities (including the U.S. Capitol and the Department of State) would qualify as an emerging technology in need of regulatory control. Yet, the Commerce Department has told my staff that the interagency process to identify emerging and foundational technologies to be controlled has not been completed, and is unlikely to be completed for months. By proceeding with the transfer of firearms, including 3D printing technical information, to Commerce, the Administration is acting recklessly and endangering innocent lives. It should go without saying that we collectively need to understand the threat and have a plan to address this issue before making the regulatory change.

Moreover, the Department of Commerce would seem to have adequate additional regulatory authority to control 3D gun printing information, at least temporarily. Commerce can control any item for foreign policy reasons under the miscellaneous category of 0Y521, according to a final rule issued by Commerce in 2012. Preventing foreign terrorists and thugs from acquiring

the means to print undetectable guns to use against U.S. citizens is a sufficient foreign policy justification to control this technology from public release.

Ultimately, the specific provision of the Export Administration Regulations is cited as preventing Commerce from controlling the publication of 3D Printed guns in the longer term needs to be rewritten to permit this control. Until that occurs, or until Commerce determines that such technical information can and will be controlled, this technical information cannot and should not be transferred from USML to the CCL.

I look forward to your prompt response to my concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "R" and a long, sweeping underline.

Robert Menendez
Ranking Member

CC: The Honorable Wilbur Ross, U.S. Secretary of Commerce