

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 5, 2018

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Tillerson,

We write with great concern regarding recent reports that the Department of State has not spent any funds that Congress has authorized to counter foreign propaganda efforts to meddle in elections and undermine democracies—including countering Russia’s propaganda efforts. We request an immediate explanation for why the Department has disregarded the law and Congress’ bipartisan directive to address foreign disinformation campaigns.


As you know, Section 1287 of the Fiscal Year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act authorized the Global Engagement Center (GEC) at the Department of State to lead the U.S. government’s efforts to identify, expose and counter foreign state disinformation efforts aimed at undermining U.S. national security interests. Congress also authorized the transfer of \$120 million from the Department of Defense to support the GEC’s work. The NDAA provision grew out of bipartisan, bicameral legislation introduced by members of the House Foreign Affairs and Senate Foreign Relations Committees that specifically highlighted the threat of Russia.

According to the *New York Times*, the Department under your leadership has failed to spend a single dollar towards this effort. These reports also indicate that the Department has chosen not to adequately staff the center. Alarming, not one of the 23 analysts working in the center speaks Russian, the language of one of the top sponsors of disinformation campaigns in the world. Following the Intelligence Community’s assessment that the Russian government engaged in a coordinated campaign to interfere and undermine U.S. elections in 2016, it is simply a dereliction of duty to ignore this threat.

From Russia’s actions in Ukraine to its interference in the United States’ elections and those of our allies, foreign disinformation campaigns do more than simply spread anti-Western sentiment. Such campaigns manipulate public perception to change the facts on the ground, subvert democracy and undermine U.S. interests. The Department’s lack of spending for the GEC is yet another example of the Trump administration’s failure to use the tools Congress provides to adequately respond to Russia’s 2016 election interference and counter its efforts to subvert our upcoming elections in November.

We therefore request an immediate explanation from the State Department as to why the agency has failed to fully implement the law and spend authorized funding for the GEC.

Sincerely,

  
Ted W. Lieu  
Member of Congress

  
Joaquin Castro  
Member of Congress