

United States Senate

February 16, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write concerning the safety of Americans currently located in Ukraine. In December 2021, U.S. State Department officials reported that as many as 23,000 Americans now living in Ukraine required assistance and evacuation. Conflict is impending; President Biden's National Security Advisor detailed as much from the White House on February 11, 2022, stating "signs of Russian escalation, including new forces arriving at the Ukrainian border... We are in the window when an invasion could begin at any time." Americans in Ukraine today are at grave risk of injury and death from aerial bombardment, missile attacks, and the looming threat of Russian ground forces advancing into populated areas.

On February 11, 2022, the State Department failed to provide a reasonable or informed accounting of how many Americans remain in Ukraine now, estimating between 6,000 and 16,000 Americans. The President's National Security Advisor also clarified a predetermined posture of desertion of Americans in Ukraine in the event of a Russian invasion. The U.S. State Department webpage on Ukraine posted the following advisory on February 12, 2022, "U.S. citizens in Ukraine should be aware that the U.S. government will not be able to evacuate U.S. citizens in the event of Russian military action anywhere in Ukraine." While Americans remain spread across a country roughly the size of Texas, the State Department announced their decision to evacuate the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv and suspend consular services on February 13, 2022, leaving behind an online link to a "Crisis Intake" form.

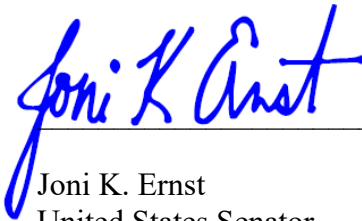
This response is wholly inadequate; the Department of State must do more to uphold its lawful responsibilities to protect and evacuate American citizens from Ukraine in the event of a Russian invasion. This response is a failure of the Commander-in-Chief to keep his law-bound requirements to safeguard American citizens traveling and living abroad and a failure of the Department of State's leadership to de-escalate conflict or plan and execute a coordinated evacuation effectively.

Americans have lived and traveled abroad with an expectation of U.S. government protection for decades and have done so with assurances the United States would come to their aid in the event of civil conflict. The U.S. government outlines their commitments to Americans traveling abroad in a Memorandum of Agreement between the Department of State and the Department of Defense on the protection and evacuation of U.S. Citizens, nationals, and designated other persons from threatened areas overseas. The Memorandum states, **"Ensuring protection of United States nationals in foreign countries is a fundamental obligation of the United States government. When U.S. citizens are in danger and the host nation is unable or unwilling to protect them, the U.S. Government must be prepared to protect and/or evacuate its citizens."** The Memorandum also outlines the Secretary of State's obligation to **maintain the capability to shelter and shield Americans in place during overseas emergencies.** Closure of the U.S. embassy and pointing Americans toward flights or overland evacuations falls far short of this government's obligations to its citizens – protection from foreign adversaries and assistance in fleeing sites of conflict.

Our immediate priority is the safety and well-being of American citizens currently in Ukraine. We stand by ready to authorize resources needed to evacuate Americans to safety as required. Furthermore, we request a written response from you no later than February 21, 2022, detailing the following:

1. The U.S. government's plan to protect U.S. citizens and facilitate the evacuation of U.S. citizens from Ukraine before, during, and after a Russian invasion.
2. The U.S. government's evacuation and protection capabilities in Ukraine, transportation and lift capacity out of Ukraine, and the availability of safe holding and survival areas for staging evacuees.
3. The U.S. government's intent to maintain a U.S. Embassy presence both in Kiev and a relocated embassy in Lviv before, during, and after a Russian invasion.

Sincerely,



Joni K. Ernst
United States Senator



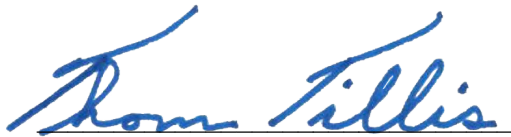
James M. Inhofe
United States Senator



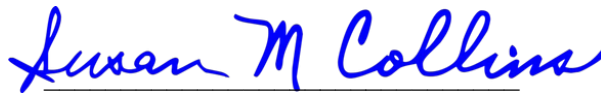
Kevin Cramer
United States Senator



Cynthia M. Lummis
United States Senator



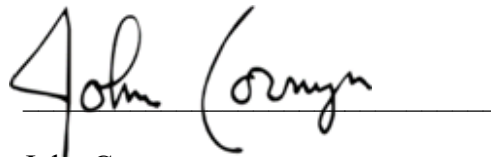
Tom Tillis
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins
United States Senator



John Hoeven
United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator



Cindy Hyde-Smith
United States Senator



Marco Rubio
United States Senator