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Member: Adam B. Schiff (D -28<sup>th</sup>/CA)

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Lowey, Members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. Having served on this subcommittee for 8 years, though I am now on leave, I know the importance of your work. Now more than ever, American interests are at stake as we confront unprecedented instability and growing humanitarian crises around the world. Congress must invest in our national security, which includes development and diplomacy programs, alongside a strong defense.

While I will extend and expand on my requests to the subcommittee in written form, today I want to highlight two matters I hope the subcommittee will prioritize in the FY18 bill - support for **Armenia and the people of Nagorno Karabakh**; and the **Broadcasting Board of Governors**, the civilian arm of U.S. international media.

### Nagorno Karabakh

I have always been a strong proponent of support for Armenia. I have also been unwavering in my support for the right of self-determination of the people of Nagorno-Karabakh or Artsakh.

I was deeply disturbed by the escalation of violence in the last year and the major military assault by Azerbaijani forces against the people of Artsakh. I remain deeply concerned too by the strong evidence of human rights abuses on the part of Azeri troops, and the appalling desecration of the bodies of Armenian and Artsakh citizens. There needs to be specific steps to defuse tension and violence along the border, such as independent monitors on the Line of Contact, and the use of technologies that can detect sniper fire from Azerbaijan's territory. The true victims of this escalated violence are the people of Artsakh who simply want to live free of fear and violence, and exercise their right of self-determination.

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In light of the escalating violence and aggression, I urge the Subcommittee to:

- Support implementation of the Royce-Engel peace proposals, prioritizing the placement of independent monitors and equipment to determine the source of attacks along the line of contact.
- Suspend U.S. military aid to Azerbaijan until its government ceases its attacks against Armenia and Nagorno Karabakh, and agrees to the peaceful resolution of regional conflicts.
- Continue and expand on the humanitarian assistance provided to Artsakh's civilians, including the continuation of de-mining programs as well as support for development, assistance to people living with disabilities, and water supply systems.

### Support for Armenia's Independence

The U.S.-Armenia relationship is founded upon a shared commitment to freedom and democratic values. Armenia provides a safe haven for refugees, participates in U.S. led peacekeeping deployments, and supports the peaceful resolution of regional disputes. Blockaded by Azerbaijan and Turkey, Armenia confronts serious challenges to its security and its sovereignty. U.S. economic and military assistance plays a vital role in strengthening Armenia's independence. Military aid enables Armenia's membership in NATO's Partnership for Peace, and supports Armenia's participation in peacekeeping operations.

I urge the Subcommittee to support Armenia by:

- Support FMF aid for projects that develop Armenia's capability to undertake peacekeeping missions.
- Increase IMET funding to expand U.S. training opportunities for Armenian officers.

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- Include language ensuring that not less than \$40 million in economic aid is appropriated to Armenia.

### Regional Safe Haven for Middle East Refugees

More than 20,000 individuals from Syria have sought safety in Armenia, a state which despite being one of the poorest nations to accept Syrian refugees has received only modest levels of U.S. and international relief and resettlement assistance. Areas of greatest need include short-term housing and support for social and economic integration.

I request the Subcommittee:

- Include language recognizing Armenia's efforts to serve as a regional safe haven for Christians and other at-risk populations fleeing violence in the Middle East, and supporting these efforts through aid and international organizations.

### Broadcasting Board of Governors (BBG)

Russia is waging a disinformation campaign to undermine Western democratic states and values and subvert the NATO alliance. In addition to invading Georgia and Ukraine, and bombing civilians in Syria, Russia has pumped tens of millions into disinformation and propaganda targeting the U.S. and Europe. Russia seeks to create chaos and division in the U.S. and EU through disinformation campaigns to distract us, divide us, and ultimately paralyze us, so Russia can achieve its foreign policy goals of fracturing the US-led security order.

Russia seeks to destroy confidence in pro-Western political parties and values through targeted information wars that range from pushing fake news stories and conspiracy theories, to inflaming

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existing tensions on issues such as immigration. Russia has been developing and implementing this disinformation effort for a number of years, which worked to influence the U.S. election, Brexit referendum and numerous interventions in Eastern and Western Europe. For too long, the U.S. response to Russian aggression has been weak and ineffective. We need to better counter Russia's information war and combat its coordinated propaganda and disinformation. The best way to respond is through truthful, independent journalism, as well as having a positive narrative about western values and democracies.

The BBG provides programming in 61 languages to over 100 countries around the world. By providing an alternative to disinformation and extremist propaganda, the BBG is at the forefront of combatting the weaponization of information and disinformation that we see on a global stage. Under the leadership of CEO John Lansing, BBG entities VOA and RFE/RL recently jointly launched Current Time, a 24-7 Russian language digital television network. Current Time is designed to connect Russian speakers around the world and provide audiences with real-time fact-checking of false narratives.

Current Time is pulling strong audiences in social networks. In 2016, its videos were viewed more than 160 million times on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and Russian social networks. The content that Current Time broadcasts is a mixture of hard and soft programming – it reports local and regional news that is not available in the Russian-language market, or which is misrepresented. Programs also cover business and entrepreneurship, civil society, culture, travel and corruption.

As many observers have noted, good quality entertainment programming can be a key to drawing in larger audiences, and Current Time is no exception. It underscores not only that the BBG cannot sustain further cuts at this time, but we should support increased funding to allow

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BBG to continue to pursue innovative ways to reach important global audiences, and serve as a resilient front against disinformation wars that threaten our democratic governance systems and the values that underlie them.

I recommend the Subcommittee:

- Appropriate no less than \$777.8 million for the BBG – an increase of 4% over the FY2016 enacted level of \$749 million.

I appreciate your consideration of these requests.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Adam B. Schiff".