Memorandum from

The White House

Washington

SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY (NOT REALLY) May 3, 2017

To: Secretary of State

Secretary of Defense

Secretary of Energy

Attorney General

Secretary of the Treasury

Secretary of Homeland Security

White House Chief of Staff

Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs

CC: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Director of National Intelligence

Subject: Minutes of National Security Council Meeting May 2, 2017

The Meeting began with reports from each PCC.

The Counterterrorism PCC reported the following:

* Agreement not to introduce ground troops
* Agreement on the continued use of sanctions against Iran
* Agreement that regime change should not be a goal of the US
* No Agreement on whether the US should support rebels in Syria
* No agreement on how US counterterrorism activities at home should be modified to deal with the current situation

The Middle East PCC reported the following:

* Agreement that regime change should be a goal of US policy in Syria
* No agreement on how to achieve that goal
* Agreement not to introduce ground troops
* No Agreement on whether the US should support rebels in Syria

The Proliferation PCC reported the following:

* Agreement not to introduce ground troops
* Agreement to keep the JCPOA alive
* No agreement on regime change
* No agreement on how to adjust sanctions

The Global Strategic Affairs PCC reported the following:

* Agreement that the overall goal of the US is to convince Iran to withdraw from Syria
* Agreement that regime change in Syria is a goal, but a long term goal that can be addressed after Iran has withdrawn
* Agreement that the US should give Iran a six-month deadline to withdraw
* Agreement that during that six-month period the US should lay the diplomatic groundwork in the region for a multilateral approach to the problem where US allies will lead the response to Syria and Iran
* Agreement not to introduce a no-fly zone
* Agreement that the US should not give money to Kurdish forces in the region

The Deputies Committee reported the following

* Agreement on the continued use of sanctions against Iran
* Agreement to continue arms embargoes against Syria and Iran
* Agreement not to introduce ground troops
* Agreement not to introduce a no-fly zone
* Agreement that regime change should not be an active part of US policy; if the Assad regime does start to collapse, however, the US should help it fall
* Agreement that the US should impose sanctions on Iran and impose a six-month deadline for Iranian withdrawal from Syria
* Agreement that during the six-month period the US should lay the diplomatic groundwork for gaining regional support for a US military intervention
* Disagreement on whether the US should aid rebel groups in the Syrian Civil War

The NSC debated and agreed/disagreed upon these points:

* NSC members agreed that the US should not introduce ground troops into the region as a response to possible Iranian intervention in Syria. NSC members noted that Congress would not be supportive of a direct US intervention that included ground troops
* NSC members agreed that sanctions should be used to compel Iran to withdraw and possibly to compel Russia to end its support for the Assad government, but members could not reach an agreement on what type of sanctions might be used or what the impact of those sanctions might be on Iran or Russia
* NSC members agreed that the US should act in multilateral fashion with its Middle Eastern allies
* NSC members agreed that the US should continue its current level of military action in the region
* NSC members agreed that any Iranian engaged in military activities against US allies, but not dressed in an Iranian military uniform might be a target of US military operations
* NSC members disagreed about whether regime change should be a goal of US policy
* NSC members debated the possibility of issuing a six-month deadline for Iran to withdraw from Syria. During the six-months, the US would organize a sanctions regime along with its allies
* NSC members debated whether the US should withdraw from the JCPOA if Iran intervenes in Syria
* NSC members agreed that the US should consider sanctions against Russia
* NSC members debated whether it should increase US aid to the Free Syrian Army and to its allies in the GCC and to Saudi Arabia
* NSC members debated the reflagging of allied shipping in the Gulf Region in order to protect it from potential Iranian attack
* NSC members agreed that the administration should ask Congress for a new resolution on sanctions and a resolution authorizing the use of force against Iran as preparation for potential intervention and as a form of deterrence against Iran
* NSC members debated the issue of what to do at the end of the six-month deadline. The NSC seemed to be leaning toward a consensus on the need for the use of force to remove Iran from Syria. This intervention might include attacks on Iranian forces in Syria, Iran-based infrastructure, and Iranian oil facilities
* NSC members considered regime change in Syria to be a long-term goal of the US, but not a policy that the US should attempt to implement immediately