

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 17, 2021

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to express concern about the Iranian regime's increasing aggression against the United States and our allies, including Israel and our Gulf partners, and to ask three crucial questions about your Administration's apparent intention to participate again in the Iran nuclear agreement (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action or JCPOA) while lifting the most far-reaching and effective sanctions against the Iranian regime.

As your Administration contemplates its policy on the vexing question of the Iranian nuclear program, we cannot ignore the equally dangerous problem of Iranian regime aggression throughout the Middle East. During the first two months of your Administration, we have witnessed an alarming number of Iranian-backed attacks and provocations against the United States and our allies, including:

- On January 23, Iranian-backed Houthi militants conducted a drone attack against the Saudi capital of Riyadh, an attack that U.S. State Department spokesman Ned Price said "appears to have been an attempt to target civilians." This Houthi attack against our Saudi partners came twelve days before your Administration announced its intention to de-list the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).
- On January 29, a previously unknown militant group exploded a bomb near the Israeli Embassy in the Indian capital of New Delhi, claiming to avenge the deaths of Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani and Iranian chief nuclear researcher Mohsen Fakhrizadeh. Indian investigators recently concluded the IRGC Quds Force was behind the attack.
- On February 1, the Iranian regime tested a satellite launcher, raising concerns that Iran is continuing to try to develop a nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).
- On February 2, after having seized a South Korean oil tanker in January, the Iranian regime released the crew but kept the captain and the ship itself hostage while demanding that South Korea hand over billions of dollars in frozen Iranian funds.

- On February 10, Iranian-backed Houthi militants attacked Abha International Airport, a Saudi Arabian civilian airport, six days after the Biden Administration's announcement that it would revoke the U.S. Government's designation of the Houthis as an FTO.
- On February 15, an Iranian-backed militia launched missile attacks in Erbil, Iraq, killing one Coalition contractor and wounding several Americans.
- On February 18, the United States joined France, Germany, and the United Kingdom in a joint statement offering the lifting of sanctions against Iran if the Iranian regime takes modest steps to return to compliance with the Iran nuclear agreement. This joint statement came just five days before U.N. nuclear inspectors revealed on February 23 that they had collected new evidence of undeclared Iranian regime nuclear sites.
- On February 25, your Administration conducted airstrikes against Iranian-backed militia sites in Syria in response to the Iranian-backed attack against Americans in Erbil, Iraq. The following day, the Iranian regime conducted a missile attack on an Israeli-owned commercial ship in the Gulf of Oman.
- On February 27, Iranian-backed Houthi militants conducted another missile and drone attack against the Saudi capital of Riyadh.
- On March 3, militants launched a rocket attack against Al Asad airbase in western Iraq, resulting in the death of one American. The attack bore the hallmarks of an Iranian-backed operation and targeted the same base that the Iranian regime attacked with ballistic missiles in January 2020. The following day, on March 4, reporters and other observers challenged U.S. Department of Defense Spokesman John Kirby when he insisted on describing Iranian-backed militias as "Shia-backed militias." Kirby backtracked from using this poorly chosen sectarian phrase just two days later and clarified that "Iranian-backed militias" was indeed the appropriate term.
- On March 7, Iranian-backed Houthi militants used armed drones to attack an ARAMCO site at Ras Tanura, Saudi Arabia, one of the largest oil facilities in the world. A Saudi official announced that "all indications point to Iran" being behind the attack. The following day, Iranian-backed Houthi militants carried out another ballistic missile attack against southern Saudi Arabia.

This growing record of Iranian-backed attacks and aggression since January 2021 clearly indicates that the Iranian regime is testing your Administration's resolve on defending U.S. national security interests and our allies in the Middle East. It also reminds us how important it is for the United States to maintain—and expand—maximum pressure against the terror-sponsoring Iranian regime precisely to deny it the resources that it needs to fund its regional war machine.

As your Administration weighs and considers options to increase Iran sanctions relief and even to rejoin the JCPOA, I write to ask you three questions crucial to the security of the United States and our allies in the Middle East:

- (1) **Mr. President, will you commit to submitting to Congress any decision to participate again in the JCPOA, including any related effort to provide sanctions relief to the Iranian regime, for congressional review under the bipartisan *Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act of 2015* (Public Law 114-17)?** It is disappointing that your Administration, including your Senate-confirmed officials and nominees, have declined so far to make this commitment under repeated questioning. That is why I recently introduced the *Iran Sanction Relief Review Act of 2021* (S. 488). This new legislation builds on the precedent in the bipartisan *Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act of 2017* (Public Law 115-44) authorizing Congress to vote on supporting or blocking U.S. sanctions relief to Russia, and applies identical procedures for congressional approval or disapproval to any future U.S. sanctions relief to the Iranian regime. If the Executive Branch wants a trajectory for U.S. policy in the Middle East that can endure over multiple presidential administrations, it should not roll back sanctions against the Iranian regime in exchange for advancing negotiations or reentering the nuclear deal without first securing strong bipartisan congressional support in the form of a vote.

- (2) **On what basis would your Administration consider it in the U.S. national security interest to offer the Iranian regime sanctions relief at this time, particularly given the strong likelihood that Tehran will use increased revenue to boost funding for its military, militant proxies, and terrorist proxies?** This question is all the more important in light of the Iranian regime's significant record of attacks and aggression against the United States and our allies during your Administration's time in office so far.

- (3) **Finally, what steps is your Administration taking or planning to take to help our allies in the Middle East defend themselves against the Iranian regime's increasing military aggression against them?** It is again essential for your Administration to immediately work with Congress to address these grave and growing threats to the security and interests of the United States and our allies in a manner that is truly bipartisan and can be sustained over successive presidential administrations, regardless of political party.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters. Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance.

Sincerely,



Bill Hagerty
United States Senator