

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 6, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write to express our deep concerns with allegations surrounding Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley and an alleged Iranian regime-sponsored influence campaign in the United States.

Communication from the State Department on the suspension of Mr. Malley's security clearance has been woefully inadequate. The Department has failed to adequately respond to repeated formal requests for additional information. We continue to have significant concerns regarding the circumstances surrounding the suspension of Mr. Malley's clearance, and the degree to which Mr. Malley and the Department adhered to official guidelines and standards regarding access to classified information and suspensions of security clearances. Further, we seek immediate clarity on whether, and the extent to which, Mr. Malley's actions and the actions of his team have impacted or otherwise influenced U.S.-Iran policy, including reported proximity talks with the Iranian regime in Oman, or the conduct of the Department during negotiations for the United States to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Our concerns over the potential national security implications of Mr. Malley's activities and those of his associates continue to grow. Recent press reports revealed that the Iranian regime initiated the "Iran Experts Initiative" (IEI) in 2014 as part of an influence operation aimed at U.S. and European policymakers and expert communities. According to this same reporting, the regime tasked the IEI and its members to cultivate a network of organizations and individuals to help advance Tehran's agenda.

Several of those allegedly involved in the IEI had direct, and in some cases continuing, communications with members of the Iranian regime. This includes at least three current or former associates of Mr. Malley. One associate, Ariane Tabatabai, was recruited to the State Department, where she served as a senior advisor supporting Mr. Malley's negotiating team. She has since left the State Department and, we are troubled to note, she currently serves in the Department of Defense with access to special operations programs. The Department of Defense is now investigating whether all law and policy was followed in granting Ms. Tabatabai a security clearance.

The Intelligence Community has consistently identified Iranian malign influence operations as a major threat to U.S. national security interests. Like China and Russia, Iran pursues long-term malign influence campaigns through loosely-affiliated networks of individuals and organizations.

On its own, the discovery of the IEI would represent an important step in unraveling a broader Iranian malign influence network. However, the involvement of the IEI in influencing Mr.

Malley's confidants, when Mr. Malley himself is the subject of an ongoing security clearance investigation, raises serious questions about whether this Iranian influence operation succeeded in penetrating the U.S. government and influenced the policies of this administration. The State Department's continued obstruction and ongoing refusal to provide the basic information that we have requested substantially increases these concerns, and effectively blocks congressional oversight over the State Department and U.S.-Iran policy.

Specifically, we request immediate answers to the following questions:

- (1) Was the suspension of Mr. Malley's security clearance related to the IEI or any other Iranian malign influence operations or activities? Was it related to the passing of sensitive or classified information to members of the IEI network, such as Ali Vaez?
- (2) Was Diplomatic Security, or any other entity within the Department or broader inter-agency, aware of Ms. Tabatabai's alleged affiliation with IEI, or past contact with members of the Iranian regime?
- (3) Did Diplomatic Security conduct Ms. Tabatabai's background investigation? If so, did Ms. Tabatabai disclose her alleged involvement in IEI or any known members of IEI?
- (4) Is Diplomatic Security conducting an investigation into whether all law and policy were followed in granting Ms. Tabatabai a security clearance while she was at the State Department? If not, why not?
- (5) Does Diplomatic Security have any counter-intelligence concerns regarding IEI or any other Iranian regime influence operations? If so, are changes to any of State Department's operating guidelines or security procedures being considered?
- (6) When did the State Department become aware of Mr. Malley's connections to individuals with direct contact with the Iranian regime? Can you confirm whether a Department-wide investigation is actively being pursued to ensure the circumstances that led to the suspension of Mr. Malley's clearance do not involve any other current or former U.S. government employees?
- (7) Was Mr. Malley read into any covert action programs or DoD special access programs (SAPs)?
 - (a) If so, which departments or agencies and who at those departments or agencies sponsored his request?
 - (b) If so, were there any objections from the relevant departments or agencies?
 - (c) Were standard vetting procedures governing these programs followed, or did Mr. Malley receive any waivers? If so, from whom did he receive waivers?

- (8) Did the actions that resulted in the suspension of Mr. Malley's clearance:
- (a) Impact the conduct of U.S.-Iran policy;
 - (b) Unduly influence, inform, or otherwise impact reported proximity talks with the Iranian regime; or
 - (c) Influence, inform, or otherwise impact the conduct of the Department during negotiations related to Iran's nuclear program, potential sanctions relief, or the release of Americans wrongfully detained by the regime?
- (9) On August 27, 2023, the *Tehran Times* released an allegedly authentic "sensitive but unclassified" memorandum dated April 21, 2023, informing Mr. Malley of his suspended security clearance because of serious concerns regarding personal conduct, handling protected information, and use of information technology. Is this memorandum authentic?¹
- (10) Has the Department performed, begun to perform, or is it intending to perform a top-to-bottom security review following these troubling developments and the release of allegedly authentic sensitive government documents?

We hope you appreciate the seriousness of these concerns and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



JAMES E. RISCH
Ranking Member
Senate Foreign Relations Committee



MICHAEL MCCAUL
Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee



BILL HAGERTY
United States Senator



BRIAN MAST
United States Representative

¹ <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/488429/Final-Say>