



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1403

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St NW,
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

I write to express my grave concern regarding your department's egregious handling of the security clearance suspension of Rob Malley, the Biden-Harris administration's special envoy to Iran. This failure fits with a shameful pattern of behavior by your administration to appease the Iranian regime and to hire, promote, and protect those in your administration with dangerous ties to the Islamic Republic.

As you are aware, in April 2023, the State Department Bureau of Diplomatic Security suspended Malley's top secret security clearance, due to allegations that he mishandled classified information. According to the Wall Street Journal, an FBI investigation revealed that Malley may have had classified information on his personal email account and that that information may have been compromised by a foreign actor.

However, instead of immediately putting Malley on leave or relieving him of his position, the State Department tried to keep Malley's suspension quiet and allowed him to continue his work as if nothing had changed, likely in violation of the law. According to a recent State Department Office of Inspector General ("State IG") report, this decision to spare Malley of "potential embarrassment" came from top department officials at State. The allegations of Malley's mishandling of classified information were not reported to the State IG's office, violating the *Department of State Authorities Act*.

This cover-up led Malley to have access to classified information despite having just had his clearance suspended for mishandling classified information. Officials waited a day to notify Malley of the suspension, during which time he is believed to have joined a classified White House conference call on sensitive matters. Many of Malley's colleagues were not aware of the suspension and may have continued to share classified information with him. Malley's deputy was instructed not to tell anyone about the suspension and was given no guidance on when to include or exclude Malley from sensitive matters. State continued to employ Malley full-time through June 2023 and, while officially barred from accessing classified information, he had constant access to highly sensitive unclassified information. To this day, the department has not

fired Malley, and he remains on unpaid leave. At every stage of this embarrassing saga, the State Department has bent the rules and prioritized Rob Malley's comfort over transparency and America's national security.

It is even more scandalous that Malley was treated with such leniency for his alleged mishandling of classified information, given that it fits with his longstanding affinity for the Islamic Republic of Iran. As you know, Malley previously served as President of the International Crisis Group, a think tank that during his entire tenure as president, maintained an undisclosed agreement with the Foreign Ministry of Iran. While Malley led the Crisis Group, he worked closely with multiple participants of an Iranian regime influence network, the "Iran Experts Initiative." This includes Ali Vaez, who once said it was his "patriotic duty" to oppose an American negotiating position that was detrimental to Iran, and Ariane Tabatabai, who would go on to be a member of Malley's Iran deal negotiating team at State.

Sadly, your State Department's mishandling of the situation is what I have come to expect of the Biden-Harris administration in all its dealings with Iran. Like the Obama-Biden administration, they have responded to the challenge from the world's largest state sponsor of terror not with strength, but appeasement. Given this administration's incompetence and sympathy for Iran, it is no wonder that the regime has attempted to interfere in the 2024 presidential election in favor of Vice President Harris. It is also perhaps not a coincidence that the Biden-Harris campaign failed to inform law enforcement of leaked Trump campaign documents that they received from Iran. The Iranian regime understands that a second Trump term would mean an end to the concessions and compromised officials that precipitated this scandal and a return to tough American leadership that gives terrorists their due.

With these concerns in mind, I am calling for a thorough investigation into the State Department's handling of Rob Malley's clearance and to Malley's tenure as special envoy for Iran. As such, I request answers to the following questions no later than October 10, 2024:

1. Is it standard practice for the State Department to let officials continue their official duties if their security clearance is suspended?
 - a. Is it standard practice for the State Department to allow officials under investigation for mishandling classified information to continue accessing classified or sensitive unclassified information?
2. Did President Biden or senior State Department officials know of Malley's or the Crisis Group's close connections to Iran and to Iranian sympathizers when he was selected as Iran Envoy? Did they find out at any future point?
 - a. If so, how was Malley allowed to have such a leadership role and influence over our diplomacy with the Iranian regime?
 - b. Did any State Department officials express concerns to you, then-Deputy Secretary Sherman, or to any of your subordinates about Malley's affinity for Iran, proximity to Iranian sympathizers, or willingness to provide undue concessions to the Iranian regime?

3. Why has the State Department not formally removed Malley from his position, nearly 15 months after he was placed on leave and 17 months after his clearance was suspended?
 - a. When or under what circumstances will he be removed?
 - b. What value does the State Department receive from keeping Malley as the formal Special Envoy for Iran and preventing Malley's deputy from taking this position?
 - c. Does Deputy Envoy Paley currently exercise "significant authority" in his position?
4. How did officials in the State Department, like then-Under Secretary for Management John Bass, conclude Malley's misconduct was not "serious", given his many relationships with Iranian regime sympathizers?
5. Can you confirm that the fact that Malley was your childhood friend played no role in your or your subordinates' lenient and improper handling of his clearance suspension?
6. Which officials bear responsibility for enabling Malley to continue accessing sensitive information after his suspension?
 - a. Have they been removed or disciplined in any way? If no, why not?
 - b. Is it standard State Department practice to not discipline employees if they allow unauthorized access to classified information to take place?
7. Which officials bear responsibility for not properly informing the State Inspector General's office of the allegations against Rob Malley?
 - a. Do you agree with the State Inspector General's report that failing to inform the State IG's office of the allegations against Malley violated United States law?
 - b. Has any employee of your department been disciplined for violating U.S. law by not reporting the allegations against Malley?
8. Does State have any plans to institute new rules to prevent classified information from being accessed from officials whose clearances are suspended?
 - a. Does State have any plans to institute new rules regarding disciplinary action against Special Envoys and any other State Department officials that are not civil servants or Foreign Service Officers?
9. Knowing what you know today, do you believe it was an error for the Biden-Harris administration to hire Rob Malley?

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Jim Banks
Member of Congress