

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 19, 2020

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to express concern with recent media reports that Saudi Arabia is building secret nuclear facilities, evidence that its nuclear program is rapidly progressing in the absence of strong international safeguards. Riyadh's apparent lack of transparency regarding its nuclear efforts coupled with a growing ballistic missile program poses a serious threat to the international nonproliferation regime and United States objectives in the Middle East.

According to an August 4, 2020 report by the Wall Street Journal, Saudi Arabia recently constructed a publicly undisclosed uranium milling plant with help from China.<sup>1</sup> Given plans to extract uranium domestically and a desire to possess enrichment capabilities, Saudi Arabia is positioning itself to develop the front-end of the fuel cycle. These technologies, if unchecked, would give Riyadh a latent capacity to produce fissile material for nuclear weapons. At the same time, Saudi officials have resisted signing and implementing an Additional Protocol with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), a safeguards arrangement that covers the full nuclear fuel cycle and would subject Saudi Arabia's nuclear program to a higher standard of transparency. After the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman publicly vowed that Saudi Arabia would seek to acquire nuclear weapons if Iran developed a nuclear bomb, these developments throw into question the peaceful intentions of Riyadh's nuclear program and its commitment to its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).<sup>2</sup>

Running parallel to its growing nuclear infrastructure, Saudi Arabia has reportedly made significant strides in its ballistic missile program with Chinese assistance, developing testing and production infrastructure as well as propellants for more advanced missile systems.<sup>3</sup> Such efforts not only undermine the U.S. goal of curbing the proliferation of ballistic missile capabilities in the Middle East and strengthening the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). They would also advance Saudi Arabia's capacity to deliver nuclear weapons should it pursue them.

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<sup>1</sup> William P. Strobel, Michael R. Gordon and Felicia Schwartz, "Saudi Arabia, With China's Help, Expands Its Nuclear Program," *Wall Street Journal* (August 4, 2020), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/saudi-arabia-with-chinas-help-expands-its-nuclear-program-11596575671>

<sup>2</sup> Vivian Salama, "Saudi crown prince: If Iran makes a nuclear bomb, so will we," *NBC News* (Mar. 19, 2018), <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/saudi-crown-prince-if-iran-makes-nuclear-bomb-so-will-n857921>

<sup>3</sup> Phil Mattingly, Zachary Cohen and Jeremy Herb, "Exclusive: US intel shows Saudi Arabia escalated its missile program with help from China," *CNN* (June 5, 2019), <https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/05/politics/us-intelligence-saudi-arabia-ballistic-missile-china/index.html>

Stemming the spread of sensitive nuclear and ballistic missile technologies has been longstanding U.S. policy. So too has universalizing the Additional Protocol as the international safeguards standard and establishing it as the condition of supply for nuclear commerce. On a bipartisan basis, Congress has also pushed to restrict Saudi Arabia's nuclear program, including a provision in last year's appropriations legislation that requires Saudi Arabia to conclude an Additional Protocol with the IAEA and forgo enrichment and reprocessing as a condition for U.S. Export-Import Bank financing for nuclear projects. Saudi Arabia's reported ongoing efforts directly challenge these goals and thus demand a strong U.S. response and diplomatic leadership to ensure Saudi Arabia's nuclear program remains peaceful and subject to the strongest international safeguards.

We therefore respectfully request a briefing on the following topics by September 15, 2020:

1. The state of Saudi Arabia's ballistic missile program and efforts to develop nuclear fuel cycle technologies, including assistance from other countries.
2. The state of U.S.-Saudi civil nuclear cooperation negotiations.
3. The status of Saudi Arabia's Small Quantities Protocol with the IAEA and whether it has indicated if it will rescind it and fully implement its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement.
4. The state of U.S. bilateral and multilateral diplomatic efforts to encourage Saudi Arabia to sign and implement an Additional Protocol with the IAEA.
5. The state of U.S. discussions with China, as well as other foreign countries pursuing nuclear cooperation and security agreements with Saudi Arabia, regarding Saudi Arabia's nuclear and ballistic missile programs.
6. The state of U.S. discussions in multilateral fora, including the IAEA, the NPT, the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and the MTCR, regarding Saudi Arabia's nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Rand Paul, M.D.  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator

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Tim Kaine  
United States Senator

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Jerry Moran  
United States Senator