

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 16, 2019

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

Dear Mr. President:

We are deeply concerned by your administration's growing confrontation with Iran. The blunt use of sanctions and military posturing following the United States' unilateral withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) risks unwinding all constraints on Iran's nuclear program, putting it once again on the path towards a nuclear weapons capability.

At the same time, the United States has grown increasingly isolated from its allies and international partners, while raising the specter of another military conflict in the Middle East. Designating the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, boosting the deployment of military assets to the Persian Gulf, and mischaracterizing the Iranian threat have escalated tensions to a dangerous level.

Since your administration's abrogation of the JCPOA and establishment of a 12-point Iran policy more than a year ago, Iran's destabilizing activities in the region have continued unabated while the limits on its nuclear program have weakened. Iran's recent decision to stop complying with certain JCPOA restrictions raises serious proliferation concerns. However, these actions are a predictable response to the United States' withdrawal from the agreement and ongoing efforts to impede its full implementation.

The administration's actions on Iran have thus become increasingly inconsistent and counterproductive. Denying Iran the ability to voluntarily transfer abroad sensitive nuclear-related materials, such as enriched uranium and heavy water, runs counter to basic nonproliferation principles. Furthermore, in November 2018, the Department of State granted six-month sanctions waivers to certain nonproliferation projects in Iran on the basis that they "impede Iran's ability to reconstitute its weapons program."^[1] Specifically, redesigning the Arak heavy water reactor, converting the Fordow enrichment facility into a nuclear physics center, and other nonproliferation activities that are tightly monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) barricade Iran's path to a nuclear weapon capability. Nevertheless, despite this earlier acknowledgement and the clear value of these projects to our national security objectives, your administration has sanctioned some while shortening the waiver renewal period for others. Allowing these key projects to advance, unencumbered by sanctions or the threat of sanctions, remains the most sensible and feasible nonproliferation policy as long as Iran exercises restraint.

Recent threat assessments of Iran's nuclear activities and intentions have become equally inconsistent and have undermined the administration's public rationale for increased pressure on Iran. In congressional testimony on January 29, 2019, Director of National Intelligence Dan

^[1] "Constraining Iran's Nuclear Program," U.S. Department of State, November 5, 2018.

Coats stated that “we do not believe Iran is currently undertaking the key nuclear weapons-development activities we judge necessary to produce a nuclear device.”^[2] The IAEA, in its most recent JCPOA verification report, reaffirmed this assessment and verified Iran’s “non-diversion of declared nuclear material” to a weapons program.^[3]

Your administration, however, is making assertions that are at odds with these findings. The Department of State’s 2019 arms control and nonproliferation compliance report alleged possible Iranian non-compliance with its nonproliferation obligations, while Secretary of State Pompeo and other top U.S. government officials have accused Iran of “nuclear blackmail.”^[4] We are concerned, above all, that these assessments fit into a larger pattern of inflating threats and bending intelligence to justify dangerous, predetermined policies.

Finally, your administration’s actions on Iran have severely strained relations with key European allies and international partners. It has forced the United Kingdom, France, and Germany to choose between a policy that bears no sign of success and a multilateral agreement that, enshrined in a United Nations Security Council Resolution, verifiably constrains Iran’s nuclear program. Meanwhile, Russia and China have displayed no willingness to align themselves with your administration’s position, but rather have strengthened diplomatic ties with Iran. In sum, we fear that your administration is leading the United States down the path to another war in the Middle East, while spurning our allies and misleading the United States public. Given these concerns, we ask that you provide answers to the following questions by June 15, 2019:

1. How will sanctioning nonproliferation projects in Iran that are under close monitoring by the IAEA enable the administration to fulfill its nonproliferation objectives?
2. What is the administration’s plan to constrain Iran’s nuclear program if the limits under the JCPOA are terminated?
3. What progress has the administration made on each of the 12 objectives Secretary of State Pompeo announced for the administration’s “New Iran Strategy” on May 21, 2018?

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

^[2] “DNI Coats Opening Statement on the 2019 Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community,” Office of the Director of National Intelligence, January 29, 2019.

^[3] “Verification and monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in light of United Nations Security Council resolution 2231 (2015),” IAEA Board of Governors, February 22, 2019.

^[4] “First Anniversary of President Trump’s New Iran Strategy,” U.S. Department of State, May 8, 2019.

Edward J. Markey

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Jeffrey A. Merkley

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