

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

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March 30, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
2201 C St. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

We are conducting oversight of the Biden Administration's attempt to restore the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Media reports indicate Department of State staff are concerned that the Administration will provide Iran with an even more generous deal than the Obama Administration did in the initial JCPOA. The reports of ongoing negotiations with Iran raise serious concerns about why the Administration is willing to engage and provide U.S. taxpayer dollars to a country adverse to America's interest. Iran is a state sponsor of terror, and once in the possession of a nuclear capability, could weaponize it against our nation and our allies. The U.S. should not engage in negotiations with such a barbaric regime. President Biden's refusal to allow ample access to domestic oil and gas resources calls into question his motives for cutting a deal that might allow Iran to export oil.

Both career and political staff have raised concerns about the proposal's shortcomings. According to *Politico*, "[s]ome career staffers at the State Department and others who work on Iran issues – including those who supported the original deal when it was struck in 2015 – are wary of restoring it now"¹ because "it is weaker today"² and "reviving it could involve giving Iran undeserved sanctions relief."³ To make matters worse, "[a]t least two members of the U.S. negotiating team have left in recent months over concerns about the talks' direction...[because]...they thought the United States was leaning toward giving up too much in sanctions relief and that a restored deal would not be strong enough."⁴ These reports are troubling.

Under President Trump's leadership the U.S. reinstated sanctions against Iran that were waived by President Obama's JCPOA. Last year President Biden took the misguided step to

¹ Nahal Toosie and Stephanie Liechtenstein, *Russia May Do Biden a Favor by Killing the Iran Deal*, POLITICO (March 14, 2022), [Russia may do Biden a favor by killing the Iran deal - POLITICO](#).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

overturn President Trump's restoration of U.N. sanctions on Iran.⁵ In July 2015, Iran, the U.N. Security Council's five permanent members (United States, United Kingdom, France, China, and Russia), and Germany, (the P5+1) signed the JCPOA.⁶ Under the JCPOA, Iran agreed to reduce its nuclear centrifuges by two-thirds and its stockpile of enriched uranium by 98 percent, limit uranium enrichment to 3.67 percent, and permit inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to access its nuclear facilities.⁷ In exchange, the P5+1 agreed to lift numerous nuclear-related sanctions on Iran, enabled the country to resume selling oil on international markets, provided Iran access to the global financial system for trade, and freed-up over \$100 billion of assets frozen overseas.⁸ The JCPOA ignored all other malignant Iranian activity including funding international terror organizations and ballistic missile development. Many believed the JCPOA did not sufficiently restrict Iran's ability to develop nuclear weapons. As current Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Robert Menendez said in 2015, the JCPOA "failed to achieve the one thing it set out to achieve...[i]t failed to stop Iran from becoming a nuclear weapons state at a time of its choosing."⁹

The Biden Administration's current talks to revive the JCPOA are being led by Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley, a "serial appeaser who was kicked off the Obama campaign in 2008 for meeting with [the terrorist group] Hamas."¹⁰ Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's lead negotiator in the Iran nuclear talks, has bragged, "Iran got much more than it could expect. Much more. Realistically speaking Iran got more than, frankly I expected, others expected. This is a matter of fact. Our Chinese friends were also very efficient. And useful as co negotiators."¹¹ This is a negotiation set up to fail.

Further, recent news reports about Iran's hostile actions against American officials and assets raise serious questions about the Biden Administration's continued willingness to cooperate with Iran in any formal capacity. The Department is paying to provide 24-hour security to former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and a former top aide, both of whom face "serious and credible" threats from Iran.¹² Additionally, on March 13, 2022, Iran claimed responsibility for a missile barrage that struck near a sprawling U.S. consulate complex in

⁵ Edith Lederer, *Biden Withdraws Trump's Restoration of UN Sanctions on Iran*, FEDERAL NEWS NETWORK (Feb. 18, 2021), [Biden withdraws Trump's restoration of UN sanctions on Iran | Federal News Network](#).

⁶ John Haltiwanger, *Here's What's in the 2015 Nuclear Deal With Iran that Trump Abandoned and Biden is Vying to Restore*, BUSINESS INSIDER (Apr. 9, 2021), <https://www.businessinsider.com/iran-nuclear-deal-explained>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Iran Nuclear Deal: What it all Means*, BBC NEWS (Nov. 23, 2021), [Iran nuclear deal: What it all means - BBC News](#).

⁹ Burgess Everett, *Menendez: Iran Deal Based on 'Hope'*, POLITICO (Aug. 18, 2015), [Menendez: Iran deal based on 'hope'- POLITICO](#).

¹⁰ Joel Pollak, *Report: Biden's Iran Deal Gives Regime Access to \$90 Billion, \$7 Billion for Ransom, Sanctions Relief to Terrorists*, BREITBART (March 8, 2022), [Report: Biden's Iran Deal Gives Regime Access to \\$90 Billion, \\$7 Billion for Ransom, Sanctions Relief to Terrorists \(breitbart.com\)](#).

¹¹ TWITTER.COM (March 6, 2022), [POLARIS on Twitter: "Shocking video: This is the lead Russian negotiator for the Iran nuclear talks. Mikhail Ulyanov. He's bragging about how Russia, Iran, and China teamed up to deliver huge wins for Iran's nuclear program in Vienna negotiations. https://t.co/oiTOgfh99i" / Twitter](#).

¹² Matthew Lee, *US Pays \$2M a Month to Protect Pompeo, Aide from Iran Threat*, AP (March 12, 2022), [US pays \\$2M a month to protect Pompeo, aide from Iran threat | AP News](#).

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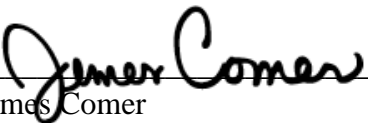
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northern Iraq.¹³ Meanwhile, instead of encouraging domestic energy production, the Administration appears to be bending over backwards to enable Iran’s re-entry into international oil markets in the coming months.¹⁴ We find it alarming that even as Department officials condemned the missile strikes,¹⁵ President Biden hasn’t pulled out of the nuclear negotiations with Iran—negotiations that would yield a significant monetary benefit to a rogue nation.

We are very concerned that these new Iran nuclear negotiations by the Biden Administration will put Americans and the rest of the world at risk. While the President is already required to keep Congress “fully and currently informed of any initiative or negotiations with Iran relating to Iran’s nuclear program, including any new or amended agreement,”¹⁶ we have questions about key staff leaving the Department because of the Administration’s negotiation strategy. We therefore request a staff-level briefing on President Biden’s pursuit to revive the JCPOA and the current nuclear non-proliferation strategy as soon as possible but no later than April 6, 2022.

The Committee on Oversight and Reform is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate “any matter” at “any time” under House Rule X. Thank you for your attention to this important inquiry.

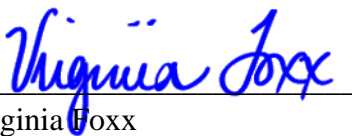
Sincerely,



James Comer
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Committee on Oversight and Reform



Glenn Grothman
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on National Security



Virginia Foxx
Member of Congress



Jody Hice
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on
Government Operations

¹³ Qassim Abdul-Zahra, *Iran Claims Missile Barrage Near US Consulate in Iraq*, ABC NEWS (March 13, 2022), [Iran claims missile barrage near US consulate in Iraq - ABC News \(go.com\)](https://www.abcnews.com/news/2022/03/13/iran-claims-missile-barrage-near-us-consulate-in-iraq/).

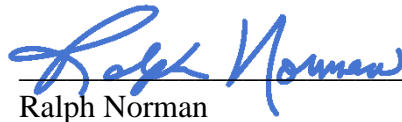
¹⁴ Timothy Puko, Alex Leary, and Vipal Monga, *Ukraine War Pushes Biden Toward Venezuela, Iran, and Saudi Arabia in Oil Hunt*, THE WALL STREET JOURNAL (March 10, 2022), [Ukraine War Pushes Biden Toward Venezuela, Iran and Saudi Arabia in Oil Hunt - WSJ](https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-war-pushes-biden-toward-venezuela-iran-and-saudi-arabia-in-oil-hunt-2022-03-10).

¹⁵ Ned Price, U.S. State Department Spokesperson, *Iran’s Missile Strikes on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq* (March 13, 2022), [Iran’s Missile Strikes on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq - United States Department of State](https://www.state.gov/record/2022/03/13/iran-missile-strikes-on-the-kurdistan-region-of-iraq/).

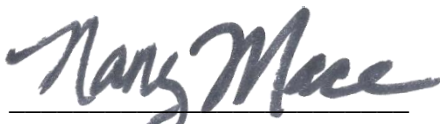
¹⁶ Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act, Pub. L. No. 114-17 §(d)(5)(B) (2015).



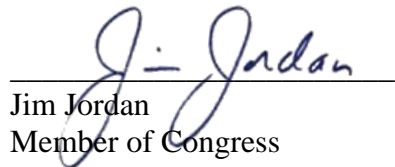
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Ralph Norman
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Subcommittee on Environment



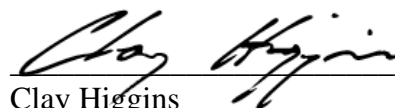
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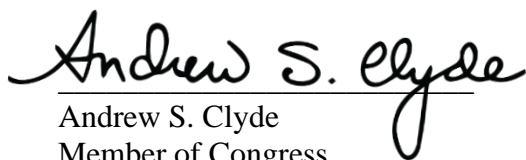
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Member of Congress



Byron Donalds
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Carolyn Maloney, Chairwoman
Committee on Oversight and Reform

The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly, Chairman
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