

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 30, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

The barbaric October 7, 2023, attack on Israel was a stark wake-up call about the threats Iranian-backed terrorist groups pose to both Israelis and Americans, as well as the dangers inherent to appeasing the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran directly enabled the October 7th attacks by funding, training, and equipping Hamas, Palestine Islamic Jihad, and other terrorist proxies such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthi organization Ansar Allah in Yemen. In addition, Iran provides the revolutionary ideology that inculcates in its proxies the determination to kill innocents in the name of the Islamic revolution. In response to the October 7th attacks and Iran's subsequent mobilization of its terrorist proxy forces across the region, we urge the administration to take immediate action to deny the Islamic Republic additional financial resources that it can use to continue supporting terrorism. These efforts should start by immediately cracking down on Iran's expanding and lucrative illicit oil trade, which has surged in recent years despite international sanctions on Iran remaining in place.

Iran now exports more than 1.4 million barrels of crude oil daily, over 80% of which goes to China.¹ From February 2021 to October 2023, the regime has taken at least \$88 billion from these illicit oil exports.² Iran is deriving significant economic benefits from pervasive sanctions evasion, with Iran's annual economic growth increasing by more than four percent and net foreign currency reserves up by 45 percent.³ It was reported earlier this year that the administration scaled back enforcement efforts against Iranian oil shipments as part of negotiations with Iran.⁴ We believe this policy must be reversed.

Surging oil exports enable the Islamic Republic to increase its financial and material support for Hamas and other terrorist proxies, including Hezbollah, who threaten Israel. Reuters reports that Iran's support for Hamas' military wing has grown from \$100 million to \$350 million per year.⁵ Israeli officials have said that Iran sponsors over 93 percent of Hamas' budget.⁶ Additionally, Iran has both proliferated and supported local production of projectiles like rockets for Hamas. Iran transfers rockets and other weapons to Hamas.⁷

¹ Claire Jungman and Daniel Roth, "December 2023 Iran Tanker Tracking and Year Review," United Against Nuclear Iran, January 2, 2024, <https://www.unitedagainstinucleariran.com/index.php/blog/december-2023-iran-tanker-tracking-and-year-review>.

² Saeed Ghasseminejad, "How the U.S. Can Slash Tehran's Oil Revenue," Foundation for Defense of Democracies, November 7, 2023, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/11/07/how-the-u-s-can-slash-tehrans-oil-revenue/>.

³ Saeed Ghasseminejad and Behnam Ben Taleblu, "Lax Sanctions Enforcement Has Yielded a Windfall for Iran," *The Dispatch*, October 13, 2023, <https://thedispatch.com/article/lax-sanctions-enforcement-has-yielded-a-windfall-for-iran/>.

⁴ Ian Talley and Costas Paris, "Iran's Oil Exports Have Soared During Quiet Diplomacy With U.S.," *Wall Street Journal*, September 20, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/irans-oil-exports-have-soared-during-quiet-diplomacy-with-u-s-7a430a60>.

⁵ Samia Nakhoul, "How Hamas secretly built a 'mini-army' to fight Israel," *Reuters*, October 16, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/how-hamas-secretly-built-mini-army-fight-israel-2023-10-13>.

⁶ Felice Friedson and Debbie Mohnblatt, "Israeli PM's Office on Hamas: 'It's ISIS on Steroids, It Has a State Behind It: Iran'," *The Media Line*, October 11, 2023, <https://themedialine.org/by-region/israeli-pms-office-on-hamas-its-isis-on-steroids-it-has-a-state-behind-it-iran/>.

There is well-documented evidence that Hamas fighters used Iranian weapons in the October 7th attack.⁸ Meanwhile, the State Department assesses that Iran also provides Hezbollah with hundreds of millions of dollars each year, with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant estimating that annual Iranian support for Hezbollah exceeds \$700 million. This has helped the terrorist group field more than 150,000 rockets pointed at Israeli cities from Lebanon.⁹ Since the attacks of October 7th, Hezbollah has been responsible for indiscriminate rocket and missile fire into Israel.

Iranian-backed groups have also launched attacks on U.S. forces across the Middle East. According to the Department of Defense, there have been more than 150 attacks on U.S. troops in the region since October 17, 2023, resulting in scores of injuries to U.S. servicemembers. And on January 28, a drone strike killed three servicemembers.¹⁰ These attacks are directly enabled by the financial and military support Iran provides to militias and other groups in Iraq and Syria. Additionally, since October 7th, Iranian-backed Houthis – Ansar Allah – has launched missiles and suicide drones at Israeli civilians from Yemen, shot down a U.S. MQ-9 Reaper surveillance drone over international waters, and hijacked cargo ships.¹¹ On November 27, 2023, the Houthis targeted the USS Mason with two ballistic missiles when it responded to a distress call from a commercial tanker under attack from armed pirates in the Gulf of Aden.¹² On December 3, 2023, the Houthis attacked three different commercial vessels sailing in the Red Sea with ballistic missiles.¹³ When the USS Carney responded to distress calls from the ship, it came under threat from drones and shot them down.¹⁴ On January 2, 2024, CENTCOM said that day’s Houthi launch of anti-ship ballistic missiles into the Southern Red Sea was the “24th attack against merchant shipping in the Southern Red Sea since November 19.”¹⁵

In the wake of the October 7th terror attacks and subsequent attacks by Iran-backed proxies on U.S. forces in the Middle East, the administration must adopt a zero-tolerance policy regarding Iran’s lucrative oil exports. These exports provide a crucial lifeline to sustain and expand Tehran’s sponsorship of terrorist groups that seek the destruction of Israel. They must be stopped.

As Iran continues to fundraise and financially support terror proxies, funding from these oil sales is also enabling Iran’s illegal nuclear program. The IAEA in December of 2023 reported that Iran now has

⁷ “10 Things to Know About Hamas,” Foundation for Defense of Democracies, October 16, 2023, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/10/16/10-things-to-know-about-hamas/>.

⁸ Ryan Brobst, Bradley Bowman, and Mike Daum, “Hamas used Iranian-produced weapons in October 7 terror attack in Israel,” Foundation for Defense of Democracies, October 19, 2023, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/10/19/hamas-used-iranian-produced-weapons-in-october-7-terror-attack-in-israel/>.

⁹ U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2021*, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/>; “10 Things to Know About Hezbollah,” Foundation for Defense of Democracies, November 3, 2023, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/11/03/10-things-to-know-about-hezbollah/>.

¹⁰ Atlantic Council Experts, “Experts react: Three US servicemembers were killed in Jordan. Will the US strike back at Iran?,” Atlantic Council, January 28, 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/experts-react/experts-react-three-us-servicemembers-were-killed-in-jordan-will-the-us-strike-back-at-iran/>.

¹¹ “U.S. Weighs Re-Designating Yemen’s Houthis as Terrorist Group,” Foundation for Defense of Democracies, November 22, 2023, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2023/11/22/u-s-weighs-re-designating-yemens-houthis-as-terrorist-group/>.

¹² U.S. Department of Defense, “Pentagon Press Secretary Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder Holds an Off-Camera, On-the-Record Press Briefing,” November 27, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/3598749/pentagon-press-secretary-brig-gen-pat-ryder-holds-an-off-camera-on-the-record-p/>.

¹³ Nancy Youssef and Saleh al-Batati, “U.S. Destroyer, Commercial Vessels Attacked by Drones, Missiles in Red Sea,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 3, 2023, https://www.wsj.com/world/middle-east/u-s-destroyer-commercial-vessels-attacked-by-drones-missiles-in-red-sea-f03531af?mod=world_lead_pos5.

¹⁴ U.S. Central Command, “Houthi Attacks on Commercial Shipping in International Water Continue,” December 3, 2023, <https://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/PRESS-RELEASES/Press-Release-View/Article/3605010/houthi-attacks-on-commercial-shipping-in-international-water-continue/>.

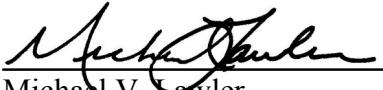
¹⁵ Iran Deploys Warship to Red Sea As Houthis Continue Attacks,” Foundation for Defense of Democracies, January 3, 2024, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2024/01/03/iran-deploys-warship-to-red-sea-as-houthis-continue-attacks/>

enough fissile material for three nuclear bombs. Iran has also reversed course and increased its enrichment of 60% uranium in recent weeks as it believes it is isolated from Western sanctions pressure.¹⁶

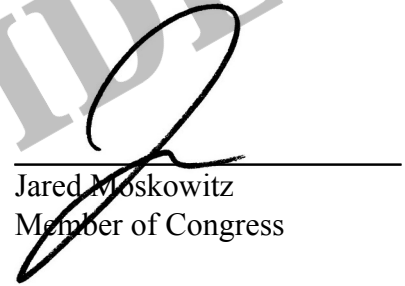
We support bipartisan, bicameral efforts in Congress to address Iran’s expanding oil trade. We, therefore, call on the administration to take immediate action to stop Iran’s illicit oil trade and sanction entities transporting Iranian petroleum products and the foreign ports and refineries that knowingly accept those products, along with any financial institutions facilitating these transactions.

Thank you for the administration’s efforts to support Israel as it exercises its right to self-defense, which is in the national security of the United States and our allies. We hope you will take swift action and look forward to your response.


Sincerely,



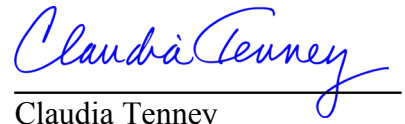
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¹⁶ Francois Murphy, “Iran undoes slowdown in enrichment of uranium to near weapons-grade -IAEA,” *Reuters*, December 26, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-undoes-slowdown-enrichment-uranium-near-weapons-grade-iaea-2023-12-26/>.



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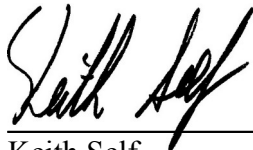
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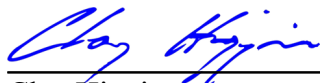
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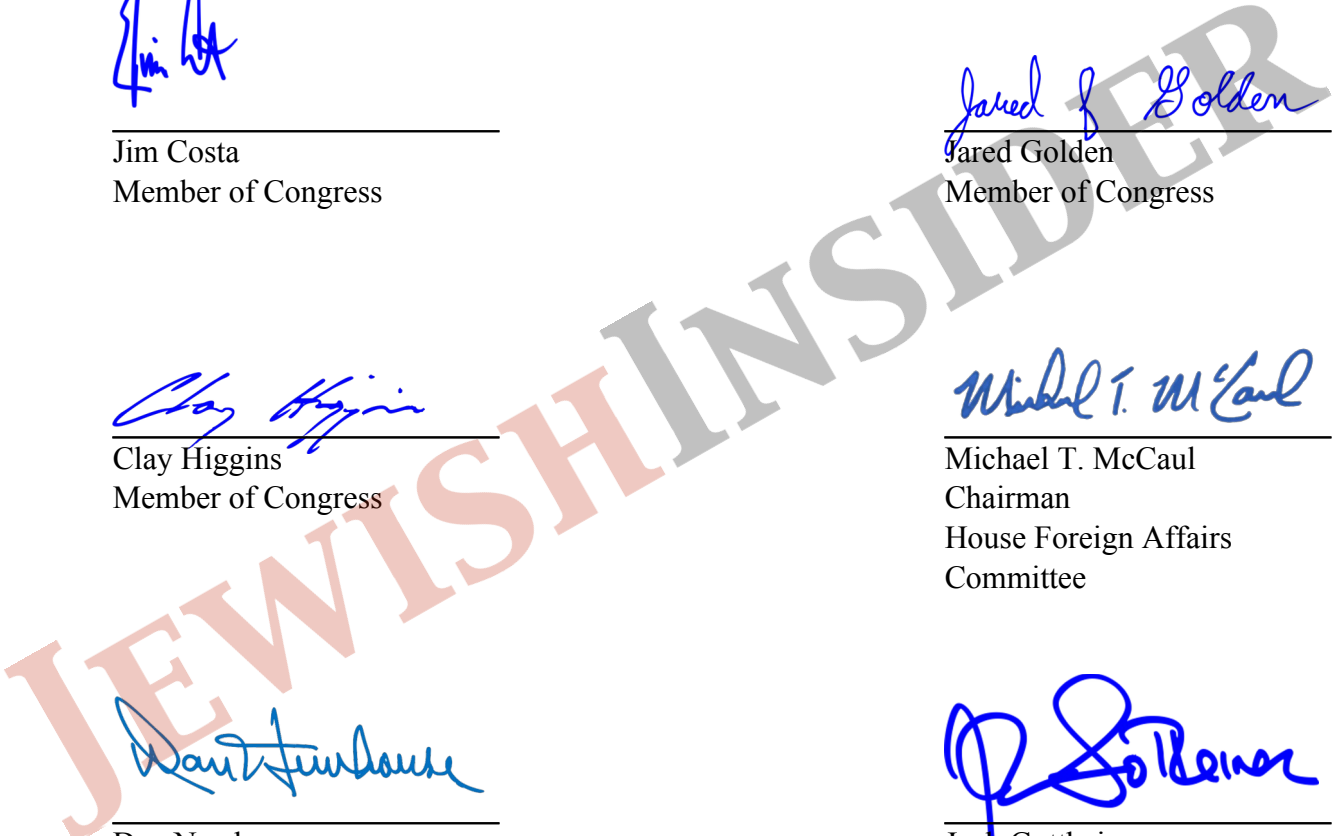
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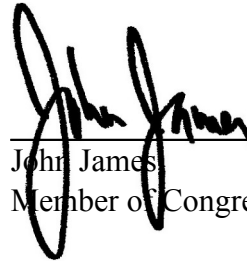


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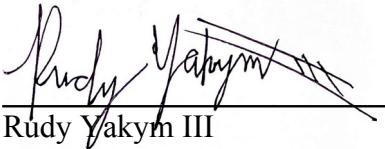




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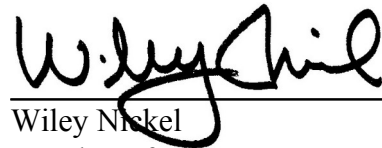
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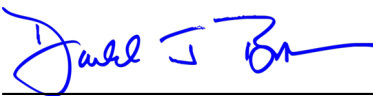
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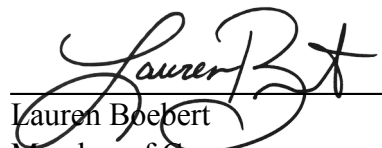
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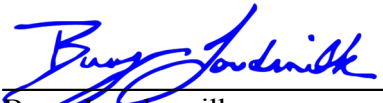
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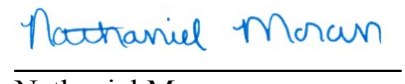



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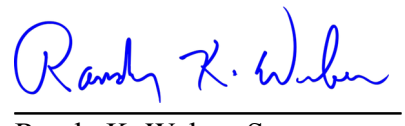

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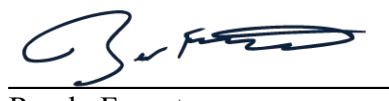

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cc: The Honorable Antony Blinken, Secretary of State
The Honorable Janet Yellen, Secretary of the Treasury

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