

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 30, 2023

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

The Honorable Janet Yellen
Secretary of the Treasury
U.S. Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20220

The Honorable Lloyd Austin
Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20310

Dear Secretaries Blinken, Yellen, and Austin:

On August 18, 2023, we wrote to express our concern over the administration's decision to release \$6 billion worth of frozen Iranian assets in exchange for the return of American detainees. This decision reinforced an incredibly dangerous precedent of providing ransom payments to the world's greatest state sponsor of terrorism and put a price on the life of every American overseas. Understanding the grave error of the unfreezing of Iranian assets and the danger this action poses to U.S. lives and interests, it is therefore alarming to hear that the administration is doubling down on its appeasement strategy by actively working to provide Iran with access to billions more in funding.

On October 7, 2023, Iranian-backed Hamas terrorists attacked Israel, brutally killing an estimated 1,200 civilians and taking over 200 hostages. In response, the administration reached an agreement with Qatar on October 12 to *temporarily* prevent the unfrozen assets—now held at Qatari financial institutions—from being expended. Based on information from your administration, it is our belief that with the current lack of safeguards, Iran will soon access this \$6 billion and use the funds to continue to expand its malign proxy activities.

Since October 7, Hamas and fellow Iranian proxy, Hezbollah, have continued to launch attacks against Israel as it fights to defend its sovereignty and protect its people. As we continue to stand with our greatest ally in the Middle East, other Iranian proxies have increased their attacks against U.S. personnel in the region. According to the U.S. Department of Defense, Iranian-backed militias in Iraq and Syria have conducted over seventy attacks against U.S. personnel since October 7. United States forces have responded only three times. However, at the same time, your administration has inadvisably taken steps to unlock tens of billions of dollars for Iran to fund additional terrorist activities that directly threaten American lives.

On November 13, 2023, the U.S. Department of State extended a sanctions waiver pursuant to Section 1245(d)(5) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 and Section 1244(i) and 1247(f) of the Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act of 2012, finding that a sanctions waiver to allow Iraq to pay Iran for electricity was in the national security interest of the United States. Public reports have held that there is

roughly \$10 billion in Iraqi payments for Iranian electricity currently being held in escrow accounts in Iraq.¹ The decision to extend this waiver and allow Iran to convert Iraqi Dinars to Euros was signed the day after U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) carried out its latest strike against facilities used by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and other Iranian proxy groups in Eastern Syria, in response to their attacks against U.S. personnel. Such timing signals to Iran that despite attacks on U.S. service members and our allies, it is business as normal on the economic front.

As we said in August, money is fungible. Combined with the \$10 billion waiver extension, the administration has provided Iran with access to roughly \$16 billion in assets over the past four months; assets that can be used—now or in the future—to offset the cost of the Iranian regime's increase in destabilizing activities across the region.


A strong signal of deterrence—utilizing military, economic, and diplomatic tools—is needed if we want to stop the attacks against U.S. personnel and prevent the war in Gaza from expanding into a protracted regional conflict. Unfortunately, the administration's military and economic responses to Iran and its proxies have not only been disproportionate, they appear to be completely disjointed.

We therefore request that your departments provide us with a classified assessment on the administration's plan to deter Iranian aggression and prevent the escalation of conflict in the Middle East. This assessment should include an estimation of how Iran has already leveraged—and could in the future leverage—against U.S. persons and interests the tens of billions in assets it now has access to due to your administration's use of U.S. sanctions waivers and is to be provided in a member or staff-level briefing no later than December 7, 2023.

Sincerely,



Tim Scott
United States Senator



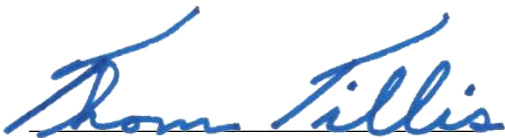
Roger F. Wicker
United States Senator



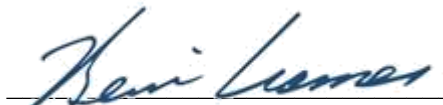
Charles E. Grassley
United States Senator



Mike Crapo
United States Senator



Thom Tillis
United States Senator



Kevin Cramer
United States Senator

¹ <https://apnews.com/article/iran-iraq-sanctions-waiver-816c2ba3f8eae10553ed07304c02db0f>



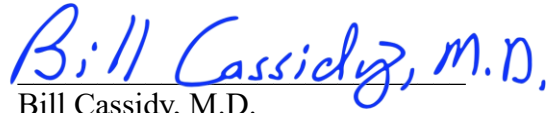
Mike Braun
United States Senator



Ted Budd
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J.D. Vance
United States Senator



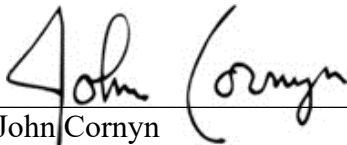
Bill Cassidy, M.D.
United States Senator



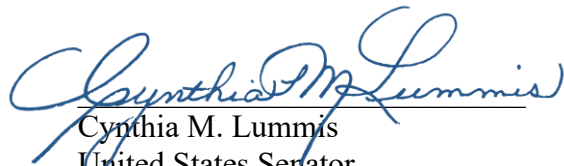
Pete Ricketts
United States Senator



Shelley Moore Capito
United States Senator



John Cornyn
United States Senator



Cynthia M. Lummis
United States Senator



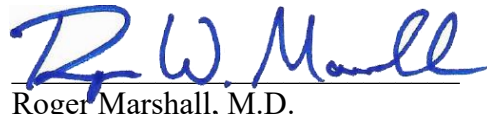
Bill Hagerty
United States Senator



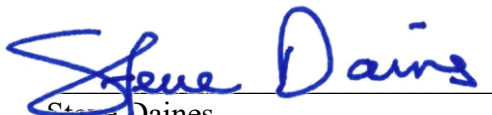
Marco Rubio
United States Senator



John Hoeven
United States Senator



Roger Marshall, M.D.
United States Senator



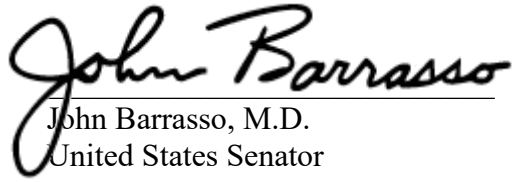
Steve Daines
United States Senator



Ted Cruz
United States Senator



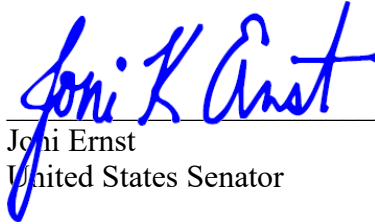
Tom Cotton
United States Senator



John Barrasso, M.D.
United States Senator



Katie Britt
United States Senator



Joni Ernst
United States Senator



Deb Fischer
United States Senator