

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 28, 2023

## VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III  
Secretary of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Austin:

I am writing to express my concern over the actions taken by Ariane Tabatabai, the current Chief of Staff for Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD/SOLIC). Iran is an evil, violent regime that supports terrorism and seeks to annihilate freedom loving countries across the globe. Under the Obama-Biden administration, your boss helped make it easier for Iran to develop a nuclear weapon – showing regimes across the world that the United States will reward them for abusing human rights. Last year, the Iranian government murdered a woman for not wearing a head scarf. There is no other way to put it: Iran is a barbaric country.

This administration has gone to great lengths to appease Iran – taking the Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen off the Foreign Terrorist Organization list and ending U.S. support for Saudi Arabia and the UAE’s war against the group. And just this month, on the anniversary of 9/11, President Biden incentivized Iran’s terrorist activities and conceded our nation’s future security as he handed over a \$6 billion payout to Iran.

Given your administration’s intentional appeasement of the Iranian regime, it is unfortunately not surprising that you are allowing those with close ties to Iran to serve in a senior role. It is vital to the security of our nation to thoroughly evaluate all individuals with links to the regime that wish to operate within the Department of Defense. It is imperative that no one with direct affiliations to the Iranian regime have access to sensitive information or influence over United States foreign policy.

According to a report, on June 27, 2014, Ms. Tabatabai consulted with an individual within Iran’s Foreign Ministry over attending a workshop regarding the Iran’s nuclear program at Ben-Gurion University in Israel. To quote Ms. Tabatabai, “I am not interested in going, but then I thought maybe it would be better that I go and talk, rather than an Israeli like Emily Landau who goes and disseminates disinformation. I would like to ask your opinion too and see if you think I should accept the invitation and go.” She also wrote to that same individual that she was to give testimony before the U.S. Congress on the nuclear deal.

Ms. Tabatabai's relationship with Iranian government representatives, along with her malicious comments regarding our ally, Israel, as a representative of the U.S. Department of Defense is undeniably unacceptable. Ms. Tabatabai's ties to the Iranian regime are dangerous and raise questions about potential foreign adversarial influence within the Department of Defense. Additionally, these reports call into question whether Ms. Tabatabai should be permitted to a security clearance with access to classified materials.

I ask a response to the following questions no later than October 6th, 2023:

1. What level clearance does Ms. Tabatabai currently possess?
2. How long has she held this clearance level?
3. Was her affiliation with the Iran Experts Initiative (IEI) discussed during the processing of her security clearance?
4. Has the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency (DCSA) reviewed Ms. Tabatabai SF-86 for consistency since the release of this information?
5. Is it a standard Department of Defense policy to clear speaking engagements with foreign leader prior to finalizing the decision?
6. Does the Department of Defense plan to question Ms. Tabatabai on if there is additional information she has leaked to foreign governments?
7. Has Ms. Tabatabai ever been in the position to make impacts that directly impact the country of Israel?
8. Did Ms. Tabatabai have access to classified documents related to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action?

Sincerely,



Marsha Blackburn  
United States Senator