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## US Lawmakers Demand Answers Over Pentagon Official's Role in Iranian Influence Operation



by Andrew Bernard ✉



USA and Iranian flags are seen in this illustration taken Sept. 8, 2022. Photo: REUTERS/Dado Ruvic

Lawmakers in the US Congress on Tuesday demanded answers over a pair of bombshell reports alleging that a Biden administration official was part of an Iranian influence operation to shape public opinion about the regime in Tehran and its nuclear program.

The chairmen of the House Armed Services Committee, Rep. Mike Rogers (R-AL), and its intelligence subcommittee, Rep. Jack Bergman (R-MI), wrote to Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to ask about Pentagon official Ariane Tabatabai's alleged involvement in the Iranian Experts Initiative, which according to emails first reported by Semafor and Iran International was at the center of a regime-organized public relations effort during the 2014-15 nuclear negotiations with Iran.

"Ms. Tabatabai's past employment history and close ties to the Iranian regime are alarming and should be disqualifying for anyone seeking such a sensitive position of trust within the United States Department of Defense," the letter says. "It is the adamant position of the House Committee on Armed Services

that no person who aligns themselves with an adversary such as Iran, or who acts as a foreign agent of influence, wittingly or unwittingly, should wield any such influence over United States policy, or have access to such sensitive information.”

In their letter, the Republican lawmakers demand a response by Oct. 3 from Austin to questions regarding how Tabatabai obtained her security clearance, whether her department was aware of her involvement in the Iranian influence network, and whether she has had any further communications with members of the regime either professionally or personally.

Tabatabai is currently chief of staff for the the assistant secretary of defense for special operations, and she was previously a senior adviser in the State Department’s Office of the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, which is responsible for nonproliferation and closely involved in the Iran nuclear file. From 2021 to 2022, Tabatabai was an adviser to the US special envoy for Iran, Rob Malley, who is currently [under FBI investigation and suspended](#) without pay from the State Department for potentially mishandling classified information.

The reporting on the Iran Experts Initiative is based on thousands of emails from Iranian officials detailing how the Iranian government in 2014 recruited a network of think tank experts of Iranian descent in Europe and the United States who would promote Iran’s views in exchange for “political support.”

According to the emails, Tabatabai, who at the time was an academic at Harvard’s Belfer Center, was a member of the “core group” of the initiative, and on at least two occasions in 2014 she conferred with Iranian Foreign Ministry officials about whether she should attend policy events in Saudi Arabia and Israel.

“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,” Tabatabai wrote Mostafa Zahrani, the head of the Iranian Foreign Ministry’s internal think tank. “I would like to ask your opinion too and see if you think I should accept the invitation and go.”

Zahrani wrote back saying that she should avoid the conference in Israel, and there are no indications that she ultimately attended.

*The Algemeiner* has not independently verified the emails.

Responding to a question about the emails on Tuesday, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller cited articles by Tabatabai that have been critical of Iran and her passing a background investigation. However, he did not deny the substance of the reports.

“I read that story, and from my read of it, it looked like an account of things that happened almost a decade ago, most of which involve people that do not currently work for the government,” Miller said. “The one US government official I did see mentioned in that story has written critically of Iran on a number of occasions before joining the government and underwent a thorough background investigation to obtain a security clearance before joining the State Department. She now works at the Defense Department — I’ll refer to them for any specific comment about her status.”

The Pentagon told *The Algemeiner* in a statement that Tabatabai “was thoroughly and properly vetted as a condition of her employment with the Department of Defense. We are honored to have her serve.”

At least one participant in the Iranian Experts Initiative (IEI), Ali Vaez, director

of the Iran project at the International Crisis Group, [denied the reporting on Tuesday](#), calling it “straight up hatchet journalism.”

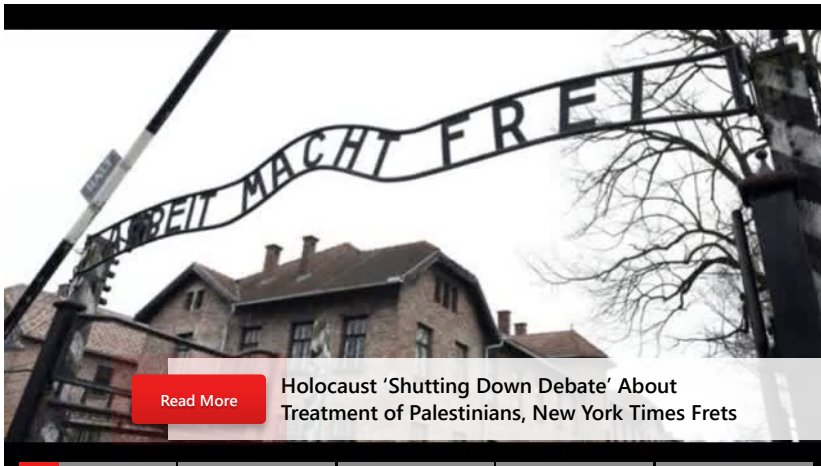
“The Iranian correspondence on the IEI is a one-sided and self-congratulatory load of nonsense,” Vaez posted on X/Twitter. “They either did not know, or were spinning beyond recognition, an initiative by European think-tankers, with support by a major European govt, to hold occasional policy discussions. The reporters, who often dismiss what Iran says as propaganda, have then doubled the [Islamic Republic of Iran’s] exaggerations with their own characterization of this being some orchestrated network, operating in the shadows, at Tehran’s behest — because the regime said so!”

The International Crisis Group did not immediately respond to a request for comment on whether they or Vaez could clarify which European government had in fact supported the initiative.

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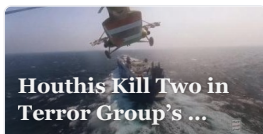
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The plot continues to thicken.

The Biden Administration is heck-bent on getting rid of any and all obstacles that might get in the way of the Obama II State Department and National Security Council’s busy-bee plans to advance their Iran/Arab appeasement/Anti-Zionist agenda. That includes Bob Menendez who is being considered "Guilty until proven Innocent" by both Democrats and Republicans currently in power. Menendez, not so coincidentally, has refused to unquestioningly toe the line for the Biden Administration in his position on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. It also explains why the Biden/Obama contingent are, by contrast, seemingly intent on shielding Robert Malley, who is knee-deep in the middle of the above mentioned scandal. The US State Deoartment has, so far, literally lied about the nature of Malley’s "suspension" to his benefit and refused to provide Congress with any information at all about the ongoing investigation into Malley’s alleged Mishandling of Classified Information with Iranian Forces.

Barack Obama "fake-fired" Malley as far back as 2008 for holding under-the-table talks with Hamas when those secret negotiations became public. Obama then waited a bit before rehiring and expanding Malley’s role in US Foreign policy affairs by making Malley his "Middle East Terrorism Tsar" and chief JCPOA architect. Some things never change.

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