

April 22, 2020

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
Washington, DC

Dear President Trump:

We write to express our strong opposition to providing sanctions relief to the Islamic Republic of Iran, until and unless the regime ceases its sponsorship of terrorism, dismantles its nuclear and missile programs, releases all American hostages, removes its forces from other countries in the Middle East, and ends its relentless abuse of the Iranian people.

President Hassan Rouhani recently [revealed](#) that the Islamic Republic is waging a global influence campaign to use the spread of COVID-19 as a pretext for obtaining sanctions relief – money the regime wants to help subsidize its malign activities. Since Iran has not suspended its engagement in these activities amidst the outbreak of COVID-19, U.S. sanctions – which do not impede the flow of humanitarian goods to Iran – should not be suspended either.

As you know, U.S. sanctions neither target nor prevent the supply of food, medicine, or medical devices to Iran. Even so, knowing that the regime’s track record of diverting humanitarian products has made outside firms wary of selling Iran such goods, your administration established a dedicated humanitarian financial channel and issued a general license to help companies and banks reduce their risk. These steps, which mirror recommendations made by former Vice President Joe Biden and leading House and Senate Democrats, have given Iran unimpeded access to humanitarian goods – a fact confirmed in recent days by senior Iranian officials.

While your maximum pressure campaign has seriously weakened the Islamic Republic’s ability to generate revenue to support its malign activities, the clerical regime is still able to draw on billions of escrowed oil dollars to fund the importation of humanitarian goods. Moreover, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has access to billions of dollars in his own business empire – money stolen from the Iranian people. Billions more are available in Iran’s sovereign wealth fund, which Khamenei has tapped in recent months to fund the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, nuclear expansion, and human rights abuses.

Our hearts go out to the people of Iran as they suffer under their regime’s incompetence and mismanagement in response to the novel coronavirus. The scale of the crisis in Iran has nothing to do with U.S. sanctions; rather, it has been exacerbated by the regime’s mendacity in addressing the pandemic. Notably, Iran has rejected multiple offers of assistance from your administration. The regime’s Foreign Ministry spokesman said this week: “Iran has never asked and will not ask America to help Tehran in its fight against the outbreak... But America should lift all its illegal unilateral sanctions on Iran.” The regime has rejected offers of assistance from independent organizations such as Doctors Without Borders, making clear that its complete control of Iranian society outweighs any concern the regime has about COVID-19 running rampant.

With reports that Tehran continues to plot attacks targeting U.S. forces, now is the time to double down on the maximum pressure campaign to force the mullahs to spend their money on the Iranian people, not their nuclear ambitions, imperialism, and internal oppression.

Sincerely,

**David Adesnik**, Senior Fellow and Director of Research, Foundation for Defense of Democracies

**David Asher**, former Special Coordinator, Office of the Secretary of State

**Sen. Kelly A. Ayotte**, former U.S. Senator

**Ilan Berman**, Senior Vice President, American Foreign Policy Council

**Bradley Bowman**, Senior Director, Center on Military and Political Power, Foundation for Defense of Democracies

**Toby Dershowitz**, Senior Vice President for Government Relations and Strategy, Foundation for Defense of Democracies

**Amb. Joseph DeTrani**, former Senior Advisor to the Director of National Intelligence

**Michael Doran**, former Senior Director for Near East and North African Affairs, White House National Security Council

**Mark Dubowitz**, Chief Executive Officer, Foundation for Defense of Democracies

**Amb. Eric Edelman**, former U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey and Under Secretary of Defense for Policy (2005-2009)

**Fred Fleitz**, President, Center for Security Policy and former Deputy Assistant to President Trump

**Reuel Marc Gerecht**, former Middle East specialist, CIA's Directorate of Operations

**Saeed Ghasseminejad**, Senior Iran and Financial Economics Advisor, Foundation for Defense of Democracies

**Hon. Newt Gingrich**, former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives

**Richard Goldberg**, former Director for Countering Iranian Weapons of Mass Destruction, White House National Security Council

**Lawrence J. Haas**, Senior Fellow, American Foreign Policy Council

**John Hannah**, former National Security Advisor to the Vice President of the United States

**Rebecca Heinrichs**, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute

**Amb. Robert Joseph**, former Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security

**Sen. Mark Kirk**, former U.S. Senator

**Orde Kittrie**, former lead attorney for nuclear affairs, Office of the Legal Adviser, U.S. Department of State

**Matthew Kroenig**, former Special Adviser, Office of the Secretary of Defense

**Robert Lieber**, Professor of Government and International Affairs, Georgetown University

**Sen. Joseph Lieberman**, former U.S. Senator; Chairman, United Against Nuclear Iran (UANI)

**Hon. Mary Beth Long**, former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs

**Eric B. Lorber**, former Senior Advisor, U.S. Department of the Treasury

**Michael Makovsky**, former Special Assistant, Office of the Secretary of Defense

*Affiliations listed for identification only. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of any institutions with which signatories are affiliated.*

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**Mariam Memarsadeghi**, democracy activist

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**Rep. Robert Pittenger**, former Member of Congress; Chairman, Parliamentary Intelligence-Security Forum

**Michael Pregent**, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute

**James Rickards**, Editor, Strategic Intelligence

**David Rivkin**, former U.S. Department of Justice and White House Counsel official; Constitutional lawyer in private practice

**Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen**, former Member of Congress

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**Hon. Dov S. Zakheim**, former Under Secretary of Defense and Chief Financial Officer, U.S. Department of Defense

\*Additional experts signed the letter after it was sent to President Trump. This reflects the updated list of signatories.

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