September 21, 2023

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As a bipartisan group of Middle East regional and nuclear nonproliferation experts, many of whom have served in both Democratic and Republican administrations, we urge you to reject the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’s request for uranium enrichment as part of or separate from a normalization agreement between Saudi Arabia and Israel. Such an agreement could bring much needed stability to the region, building upon certain positive Saudi policies and encouraging further progress. However, Riyadh does not need uranium enrichment to produce peaceful nuclear energy. Enrichment could bring Saudi Arabia to the brink of acquiring nuclear arms, and U.S. policy should prohibit it.

Since the dawn of the atomic age, it has been a core U.S. national security priority to prevent the spread of uranium enrichment and plutonium reprocessing technologies, which could be used to make fuel for atomic weapons. America has pursued this policy even with potential nuclear cooperation partners that are close U.S. allies. Public reports indicate Riyadh has requested an enrichment facility operated by Americans inside Saudi Arabia, but this poses an unacceptable proliferation risk, particularly given Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s public comments on nuclear weapons.

Riyadh’s threats to choose China as a nuclear supplier are hardly reason to change this critical U.S. policy. Indeed, acquiescing to such threats amounts to a sign of weakness and could encourage similar efforts by other countries. The United States has multiple tools of leverage to persuade Riyadh not to choose China as a nuclear supplier and to disrupt cooperation on uranium enrichment.

At the same time, the United States should significantly intensify its efforts to roll back Iran’s uranium enrichment activities. Providing Saudi Arabia with the same latent capability would be counter-productive and could trigger a regional arms race.

Any nuclear cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabia must meet the highest nonproliferation standards, including the commitment made by the United Arab Emirates in 2009 to forgo enrichment and reprocessing technologies (also known as the “gold standard” of nonproliferation), and enhanced inspection and transparency measures through a strong Additional Protocol with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

We are confident you share our goal of preventing the spread of atomic weapons and the means to acquire them and urge you to uphold longstanding U.S. nonproliferation policy.

Sincerely,

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