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U.S. House of Representatives
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BRIAN GARRETT, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

September 26, 2023

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

Dear Secretary Austin:

I write to you to express our deep concern with the Department's hiring of Ariane Tabatabai as the Chief of Staff for Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict (ASD/SOLIC). 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 Iranian regime is a clear adversary of the United States, and as the world's largest state sponsor of terrorism poses a direct national security threat to United States citizens and interests at home, in the region, and around the globe.

The Office of ASD SO/LIC oversees many of the Department's most sensitive operations and programs, to include those to counter Iran's malign activities throughout the world. 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.

We ask for a response to the following questions no later than October 3, 2023:

1. How long has Ms. Tabatabai worked as chief of staff to Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict?
2. When did Ms. Tabatabai receive her security clearance?
3. Was she required to go through the Department's Continuous Vetting Process as part of her application process?

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4. Are you aware of any instances of Ms. Tabatabai communicating with the Iranian regime, either in her official capacity or unofficially? Are you aware of any communications Ms. Tabatabai had with the Iranian regime prior to her employment?
5. Was the Department aware of Ms. Tabatabai's participation in Iranian government-sponsored influence networks, such as the Iran Experts Initiative?
6. Was Ms. Tabatabai hired as a political appointee, a highly qualified expert, or as a GS employee?
7. What were her unique qualifications with respect to ASD/SOLIC that led to her hiring?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request. The Committee on Armed Services, under Rule X, clause 1 of the Rules of the House of Representatives (House Rules), maintains oversight jurisdiction over the Department of Defense generally. Moreover, under the House Rules, the Committee on Armed Services derives its authority to conduct oversight from, among other things, clause 2(b)(1) of Rule X (relating to general oversight responsibilities), clause 3(b) of Rule X (relating to special oversight functions), and clause 1(b) of rule XI (relating to investigations and studies).

Sincerely,



Mike Rogers
Chairman
House Committee on Armed Services



Jack Bergman
Chairman
Subcommittee on Intelligence and Special
Operations