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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0918

October 25, 2024

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

Dear Secretary Austin,

I write with grave national security concerns over your promotion of Ariane Tabatabai to deputy assistant secretary of defense for force education and training. Tabatabai is alleged to have been part of a long-running covert Iranian influence campaign within the United States. Promoting her to a position that oversees the education and training of America's elite warriors is the equivalent of draping the American flag over the Ayatollah's propaganda and serving it straight to our troops.

In 2023, *Semafor* [reported](#) that Tabatabai was a key member of the Iran Experts Initiative. This covert network was reportedly inaugurated in 2014 by "senior Iranian Foreign Ministry officials initiated [in] a quiet effort to bolster Tehran's image and positions on global security issues - particularly its nuclear program." According to internal communications, Tabatabai and other individuals part of this long-running influence coordinated with Iran's Foreign Ministry the dissemination of pro-Tehran propaganda at congressional briefings, on social media, within television and press interviews, and policy conferences.

Despite Iranian dissidents noting Tabatabai's history of parroting Iranian talking points, the Biden administration appointed her to work under Special Envoy for Iran Robert Malley. As you know, Malley has since had his security clearance revoked and is under investigation for leaking classified information to Tehran. Tabatabai, herself, has been investigated by the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency for her ties to Iran. The results of that investigation have not been made fully clear.

Tabatabai's tenure in the Pentagon has coincided with the leak of U.S. intelligence and other security documents relating to Israel's defense capabilities. In particular, U.S. intelligence about Israeli retaliatory strike plans on Iranian nuclear facilities were leaked on Telegram channels connected to Tehran. Given the timing and severity of this security breach, I urge you to open investigations into every individual employed by the Pentagon and other federal agencies that have ties to Iran — including Tabatabai.

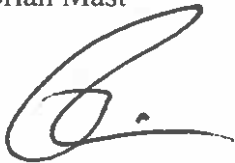
Not doing so is undermining America's national security interests, especially as the Islamic Republic of Iran has sought to assassinate President Donald Trump and interfered in the 2024 elections to benefit President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris.

With these concerns, I request answers to the following questions:

- On September 28th, 2023, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low-Intensity Conflict Christopher Maier testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee that the DOD had opened an investigation into Tabatabai. What were the findings of that investigation?
- Force Education and Training is a highly specialized department that is critical to our warfighting capability, what qualifications does Tabatabai have to be assistant secretary of such a division?
- Were there any other candidates for the assistant secretary position who have the same qualifications as Tabatabai but have not been accused of being part of a foreign influence campaign by a state sponsor of terrorism currently attacking U.S. forces and U.S. allies?
- Did Tabatabai list her ties to the Iran Experts Initiative on Standard Form 86, the official U.S. government questionnaire individuals have to fill out to be vetted for national security positions?
- Did Tabatabai note relationships with any foreign individuals, including those linked to Iran, on her Standard Form 86?
- How, if at all, was Tabatabai's work with the Iran Experts Initiative disclosed to security investigators?

Thank you for taking the time to review my questions, and I look forward to a prompt response.

Brian Mast

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'B. Mast', written in a cursive style.

U.S. Congressman