

United States Senate

September 2, 2025

The Honorable Kashyap Patel
Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
935 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20535

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Director Patel and Secretary Hegseth:

I write to reiterate my concern that Iranian government-linked affiliates have influenced and may be still influencing U.S. government operations. Specifically, Ariane Tabatabai, a founding member of the so-called "Iranian Experts Initiatives" (IEI), is still working with the U.S. intelligence community.

Affiliates of IEI gained prominent positions both in and outside government during the Biden administration, posing significant danger to national security. Iranian officials in 2014 coordinated to form IEI with a group of well-placed Iranian-Americans who could promote Tehran's positions in the United States and the West. Extensive public reporting shows that several Obama and Biden appointees had unreported recurring contact for years with Iranian officials such as then-Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. These appointees sought guidance from Tehran on where to travel, shared op-eds ahead of publication with Tehran, and sought help in crafting testimony to Congress.*

These actions are especially concerning given that Ariane Tabatabai served in a Department of State senior role and then as Chief of Staff to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict during this timeframe. Tabatabai and other IEI affiliates should not have been in a position to influence U.S. policy decisions and access our nation's most sensitive intelligence. While the Biden administration ignored repeated calls from Republicans to remove officials affiliated with IEI and the Iranian government, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Department of Defense (DoD) should now correct this mistake.

I urge the FBI and DoD to review this matter thoroughly for counterintelligence concerns and potential criminality, given that national security information may have been provided to a foreign government or American citizens potentially attempted to influence other Americans on behalf of a hostile foreign power. I also request you to investigate all current and former government officials affiliated with IEI and take appropriate actions to ensure such officials are no longer able to assist Tehran in damaging U.S. national security.

Sincerely,



Tom Cotton,
United States Senator

* Solomon, Jay "Inside Iran's Influence Operation" SEMAFOR Updated Sep 29, 2023 <https://www.semafor.com/article/09/25/2023/inside-irans-influence-operation>