



Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

February 7, 2024

The Honorable Antony Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken:

As Members concerned with global trade routes and the effectiveness of deterrence in the Middle East, we write to you regarding your recent decision to designate Ansarallah in Yemen, commonly known as the Houthis, as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) group. We find it deeply concerning that the Administration once again opted to not designate the Houthis as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO).

As the State Department rightly noted in its press release, “[s]ince November, the Houthis have launched unprecedented attacks against international maritime vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, as well as military forces positioned in the area to defend the safety and security of commercial shipping.”¹ These attacks have escalated over the past several months to the point that the U.S. Navy has been forced to defend against near daily drone swarms or anti-ship ballistic missile attacks.

As has been widely reported, these attacks threaten the free flow of commerce, endanger innocent mariners, and violate international law. The Bab el-Mandeb Strait accommodates 12 percent of global trade flows, including 30 percent of global container traffic. Predictably, the threat of Houthi bombardment has rerouted much international shipping away from the Red Sea, dramatically slowing the movement of goods that must now be shipped around Africa and impacting transnational supply chains. Sometimes, the impact is far more tangible as in the case of strikes on U.S.-owned ships.

The Houthis’ campaign against international shipping extends their longstanding record of terror attacks in the Arabian Peninsula. Despite this history, the Biden Administration decided to remove the Houthis from the list of U.S.-designated FTOs on February 4, 2021, without a

¹ United States Department of State, “Press Release: Terrorist Designation of the Houthis”, January 17, 2024, <https://www.state.gov/terrorist-designation-of-the-houthis/>, accessed January 19, 2024.

marked change in behavior to warrant this shift in policy. The Administration has consistently justified this decision by claiming that such a designation could have an undue impact on innocent Yemenis. Yet this argument is spurious as relevant statutes have sufficient mechanisms to allow sanctions to be tailored to avoid this result.

Furthermore, behind Houthi attacks and the failure of deterrence lies Iran and its regional strategy to support Hamas. A policy of rapprochement with Iran, even if temporarily on hold, cannot be allowed to tie the Administration's hands in protecting a vital international waterway. Likewise, such a policy must not prevent the Administration from holding Iran accountable for Houthi attacks which Tehran has made possible through its substantial and ongoing support for the group, highlighted by the seizure off Somalia of Iranian-origin ballistic missile parts bound for Yemen, a mission that tragically resulted in the loss of two Navy SEALs.

While the Administration has taken several steps to respond to the Houthis recent attacks, including the launch of Operation Prosperity Guardian and kinetic strikes, such steps come too late, do not weaken Iran, and have failed to reestablish deterrence, as the President himself has admitted.²

It is time for a significantly stronger response. An SDGT designation that includes broad exemptions for petroleum,³ port, and airport-related⁴ transactions and that will not come into effect for a month – despite the immediacy of the threat and significant congressional interest in redesignation of the Houthis as an FTO⁵ at the outset of their campaign – is wholly inadequate and unacceptable. An FTO designation is substantially preferable to a stand-alone SDGT designation. Listing the Houthis as an FTO would provide a right of action to victims of Houthi terrorism, impose visa bans, and apply sanctions widely to non-U.S. persons, while your SDGT designation would not.⁶ Likewise, when compared with an SDGT listing, an FTO designation would also reduce the legal threshold for penalizing violators of the resultant sanctions.⁷

The Administration must do more to restore deterrence, including a stronger SDGT designation, an FTO designation and measures that directly penalize Iran. An FTO listing would help disrupt illicit financial and weapons networks that supply the Houthis malign activity in the region,

² Oren Lieberman and Nikki Carvajal, “Biden concedes Houthis haven’t been deterred from carrying out attacks as US launches further strikes,” CNN, January 18, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/18/politics/biden-houthi-strikes/index.html>, accessed January 19, 2024.

³ United States Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Asset Control, “General License No. 25: Authorizing Transactions Related to Refined Petroleum Products in Yemen Involving Ansarallah,” January 17, 2024 <https://ofac.treasury.gov/media/932531/download?inline>, accessed January 19, 2024.

⁴ United States Department of the Treasury, Office of Foreign Asset Control, “General License No. 26: Authorizing Certain Transactions Necessary to Port and Airport Operations Involving Ansarallah,” January 17, 2024 <https://ofac.treasury.gov/media/932536/download?inline>, accessed January 19, 2024.

⁵ Letter by Senator Bill Hagerty et al., November 1, 2023, <https://www.hagerty.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Final-Letter.pdf>, accessed January 19, 2024; Rep. Mike Waltz and Rep. Jared Moskowitz et al. November 8, 2023, <https://waltz.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=771>, accessed January 19, 2024.

⁶ Matthew Zweig, “Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) Designation and Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT) Designation”, FDD Visuals, April 21, 2022, <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2022/04/21/foreign-terrorist-organization-fto-designation-and-specially-designated-global-terrorist-sdgt-designation/>, accessed January 19, 2024.

⁷ Ibid.

complement our military response, and create additional leverage. The Houthis unquestionably meet the threshold for FTO designation, and so, given the forgoing, we believe you should redesignate them as an FTO immediately. We look forward to your timely reply to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Darrell Issa, written in a cursive style.

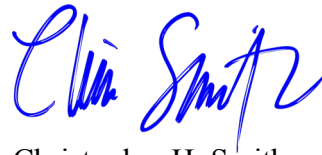
Darrell Issa
Member of Congress

A blue ink signature of Michael T. McCaul, written in a cursive style.

Michael T. McCaul
Member of Congress

A blue ink signature of Michael Waltz, written in a cursive style.

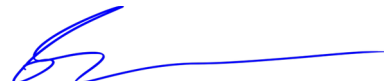
Michael Waltz
Member of Congress

A blue ink signature of Christopher H. Smith, written in a cursive style.

Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress

A blue ink signature of Joe Wilson, written in a cursive style.

Joe Wilson
Member of Congress

A blue ink signature of Brian J. Mast, written in a cursive style.

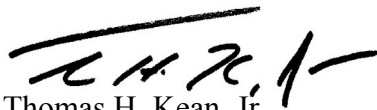
Brian J. Mast
Member of Congress

A blue ink signature of Young Kim, written in a cursive style.

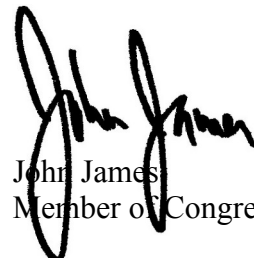
Young Kim
Member of Congress

A blue ink signature of Maria Elvira Salazar, written in a cursive style.

Maria Elvira Salazar
Member of Congress

A black ink signature of Thomas H. Kean, Jr., written in a cursive style.

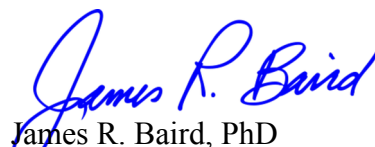
Thomas H. Kean, Jr.
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A black ink signature of John James, written in a cursive style.

John James
Member of Congress



Keith Self
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James R. Baird, PhD
Member of Congress



Nathaniel Moran
Member of Congress



Bill Huizenga
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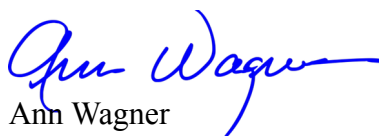
French Hill
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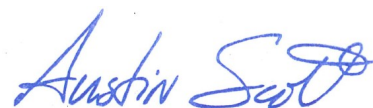
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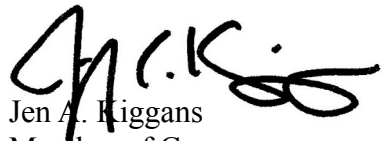
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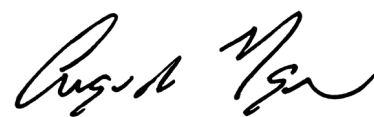
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August Pfluger
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Dusty Johnson
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Andrew Ogles
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Ralph Norman
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Aumua Amata Coleman
Radewagen
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Rich McCormick, MD, MBA
Member of Congress



Lance Gooden
Member of Congress



Barry Loudermilk
Member of Congress



Darin LaHood
Member of Congress



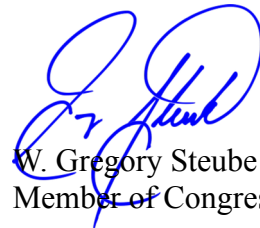
Michelle Steel
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Cory Mills
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Mariannette Miller-Meeks,
M.D.
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W. Gregory Steube
Member of Congress