

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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January 26, 2018

The Honorable Rex W. Tillerson
Secretary of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The Committee has been conducting oversight of U.S. policy toward Iran for more than two years, including the implementation of U.S. sanctions on Iran. In December 2017 anti-government protests spread throughout Iran, described as “the largest protests since the country’s disputed 2009 presidential election.”¹ The President publicly supported the fundamental rights of the protesters, stating that the Iranian government “should respect their people’s rights, including [the] right to express themselves.”²

The Iranian government, however, has maneuvered to undermine its citizens’ right to free expression. The Iranian government’s broadcasting agency, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), helped disseminate propaganda and distorted coverage of the protests against the Iranian government. As a result, Iranian social media users have called on the United States to reinstate sanctions on IRIB, popularizing the hashtag #banIRIB.³

The Iran Threat Reduction and Syria Human Rights Act of 2012 (TRA) required the imposition of sanctions upon persons that engage in censorship and other activities restricting free expression and limiting “access to print or broadcast media, including the facilitation or support of international frequency manipulation by the Government of Iran or an entity owned or controlled by that Government that would jam or restrict an international signal.”⁴

¹ Ali Arouzi and Alexander Smith, *Iran Protesters Stage Biggest Demonstrations Since “Green Movement,”* NBC News (Jan. 2, 2018), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/iran-protesters-stage-biggest-demonstrations-green-movement-n833816>.

² President Donald J. Trump, Twitter (Dec. 29, 2017, 10:42 PM EST), <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/946949708915924994>.

³ See Frud Bezhan, *Mixed Messages? Iran’s State Broadcaster Uses Telegram – To Hail a Ban on Telegram,* RADIO FREE EUROPE RADIO LIBERTY (Jan. 5, 2018), <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-irib-uses-telegram-to-hail-ban-on-telegram/28957148.html>.

⁴ 22 U.S.C § 94 (2012).

In February 2013, the Department of the Treasury announced sanctions against IRIB under TRA's provisions. The announcement noted that "[a]ccording to human rights groups, Iran is using state-media transmissions to trample dissent" and that "Iran is engaged in a campaign to filter out unwanted TV content and broadcast its own propaganda," including jamming foreign channels such as the BBC and Voice of America to "prevent Iranian audiences from seeing foreign broadcasts that the Iranian government found objectionable."⁵

The Obama Administration subsequently waived these sanctions on IRIB one year later "to allow for a discrete range of transactions related to the provision of satellite connectivity services to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting."⁶ The waiver notice cited "Iran's commitment to ensure that harmful satellite interference does not emanate from its territory, and verification by the [U.S. government]" of said commitment as the basis.⁷ This waiver has since been renewed.⁸ It is unclear what discussions led to the waiver of the sanctions on IRIB, and whether this decision was related to the nuclear agreement with Iran.

Please provide a briefing for Committee staff on these matters no later than January 31, 2018.

Please contact Ari Wisch of the Majority staff at (202) 225-5074 if you have any questions. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Ron DeSantis
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Security

cc: The Honorable Stephen F. Lynch

⁵ U.S. Department of Treasury, Press Center, Treasury Announces Sanctions Against Iran (Feb. 2, 2013), <https://www.treasury.gov/press-center/press-releases/Pages/tg1847.aspx>.

⁶ U.S. Department of State, Provisions of Certain Temporary Sanctions Relief, 79 Fed. Reg. 9030 (Feb. 14, 2014).

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ U.S. Department of State, Provisions of Certain Temporary Sanctions Relief, 80 Fed. Reg. 22,762 (Apr. 23, 2015).