

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 4, 2021

## VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Antony Blinken  
Secretary  
Department of State

Dear Secretary Blinken:

On April 25, 2021, the New York Times reported on an audiotape recording of Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in which he talked about his interactions with former Secretary of State John Kerry. According to the report, Zarif said that Secretary Kerry told him, to Zarif's "astonishment," that Israel "had attacked Iranian interests in Syria at least 200 times."<sup>1</sup> Secretary Kerry's role at the State Department came to an end in January of 2017 with the transition to the Trump administration; however, Secretary Kerry, during an appearance on the Hugh Hewitt radio show in September of 2018, admitted to meeting with Zarif "three or four times" since leaving office, and admitted to discussing the scrapped nuclear deal and other issues.<sup>2</sup> It is unclear exactly when Secretary Kerry allegedly told Zarif of these military attacks, the nuclear deal, and other issues and whether these topics were a matter of public record at the time of discussion.

On April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2021, I joined eighteen of my Republican colleagues in a letter to President Biden conveying to him our grave concern over the allegations that Secretary Kerry potentially revealed sensitive information to Zarif. We asked the president to investigate these allegations and to remove Secretary Kerry from his national security team if these allegations were found to be true.

President Biden has the power to act and so do you. According to the State Department, pursuant to Section 4.4 of Executive Order 13526, it is standard practice for Secretaries of State to retain their clearances to access classified records from their tenure in office.<sup>3</sup> As a holder of a security clearance, Secretary Kerry would be subject to serious obligations and restrictions to ensure that classified and otherwise sensitive information is not shared with foreign adversaries. Those obligations clearly extend to his interactions with Zarif and other foreign officials, whether in office or not.

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<sup>1</sup> Farnaz Fassihi, *Iran's Foreign Minister, in Leaked Tape, Says Revolutionary Guards Set Policies*, The New York Times (April 25, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> Alex Pappas, *John Kerry slammed for 'shameful' shadow diplomacy after admitting to meetings with Iran*, FoxNews (Sept. 13, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> Julia Friefield, Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs, State Department to Senator Grassley, Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary (Sept. 22, 2015).

According to the State Department, it's "Security Incident Program is one of the most robust in the federal government" and is designed to "enhance the protection of classified information by identifying, evaluating, and assigning responsibility for breaches of security."<sup>4</sup> In order to better understand Secretary Kerry's obligations and responsibilities as a former Secretary of State with respect to information sharing about the military attacks, nuclear deal and other issues and to better understand if he violated any of those obligations, please answer the following no later than May 18, 2021:

1. Did Secretary Kerry retain his security clearance after leaving office? If so, at what level was he cleared?
2. Did Secretary Kerry ever use his security clearance to access sensitive and classified information, whether in written or verbal form, after he left office? If so, when, where, for what purpose and what was the topic at issue? Please provide all records relating to those requests for information.
3. As a condition of his security clearance, was Secretary Kerry required to disclose his meetings with Zarif and other foreign officials to the U.S. Government? If so, did he make such disclosures and, if so, please provide all records relating to those disclosures.
4. With respect to the "three or four meetings" Secretary Kerry had with Zarif, when and where were those meetings held and what was discussed? When and how did the State Department become aware of those meetings?
5. In light of the recent reporting, have you begun a security inquiry and review into Secretary Kerry's potential mishandling and improper disclosure of sensitive and classified information? If not, why not? If so, when did you begin?

Please send all unclassified material directly to the committee. In keeping with the requirements of Executive Order 13526, if any of the responsive documents do contain classified information, please segregate all unclassified material within the classified documents, provide all unclassified information directly to the committee, and provide a classified addendum to the Office of Senate Security. Although the committee complies with all laws and regulations governing the handling of classified information, it is not bound, absent its prior agreement, by any handling restrictions.

Should you have questions, please contact Josh Flynn-Brown of my committee staff at 202-224-5225. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from Mary Elizabeth Taylor, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Legislative Affairs to Senator Grassley, Chairman, Committee on Finance (Nov. 29, 2019).