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UNITED STATES CONGRESS

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The Honorable Michael Pompeo
United States Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C. Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

RE: Saudi Arabia Nuclear Program and Chinese Cooperation

Dear Secretary Pompeo,

We should be deeply concerned regarding the recent report in the Wall Street Journal that Saudi Arabia has secretly constructed, with the assistance of China, a facility for extracting uranium yellowcake from uranium ore.

As you are well aware, for years I have been trying to raise the alarm regarding the issue of Saudi Arabia's nuclear program, and the possibility that the Kingdom could use civilian nuclear power as an aid and disguise for a covert weapons program. I have successfully included language in the House's National Defense Authorization Act requiring countries that want to sign a 123 Agreement, like Saudi Arabia, to agree, at the very least, to sign the Additional Protocol with the International Atomic Energy Agency.

That Saudi Arabia refuses to take this basic step speaks volumes.

In 2018, while visiting the U.S., Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman stated: "...if Iran developed a nuclear bomb, we will follow suit as soon as possible." The discovery of the construction of a plant to process uranium ore, with Chinese assistance, in and of itself is certainly not a smoking gun. However, when considered together with this statement from the Crown Prince, in addition to other Saudi actions, we should be concerned. It is not outlandish to think that in other parts of the kingdom, there are, in various stages of development, additional facilities for the purpose of conversion and the enrichment of uranium.

In addition to refusing to sign the additional protocol, Saudi Arabia has refused to renounce enrichment. In fact, Saudi officials have stated that the Kingdom would pursue enrichment of uranium. In addition, early last year Chinese-Saudi cooperation on ballistic missile production came to light.

Although Saudi Arabia is not obligated to disclose the uranium ore facility to the International Atomic Energy Agency under existing safeguard agreements, it is concerning that until the Wall Street Journal asked the Saudis for comment, Riyadh had not acknowledged the existence of the plant.

In light of the previously stated concerns, I ask that you provide me with answers to the following questions, in a classified setting if necessary:

- Has the State Department engaged with Saudi Arabia on the issue of partnering with China's civilian nuclear establishment?
- If so, what has the State Department done to clarify that partnerships between Riyadh and Beijing, for the purposes of uranium exploration, are consistent with the 2012 pact announced between the two countries to cooperate on peaceful uses of nuclear energy?
- When the construction of the plant became known, what did the State Department do to clarify the purpose of the plant's construction?

While Saudi Arabia's known actions to date do not lead to the conclusion that the Kingdom will be able to develop a nuclear weapons capability in the near term, now is already past the time for us to take diplomatic action to discourage the Saudis from conducting fuel cycle activities and to be transparent with respect to their existing nuclear facilities and plans. Therefore, most importantly, I ask you to provide information about the U.S. government's efforts to prevent Saudi Arabia's nuclear program from conducting activities, such as uranium enrichment, that could lead to a weapons capability.

I look forward to receiving your responses promptly.

Sincerely,



BRAD SHERMAN
Member of Congress