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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

KOLAN L. DAVIS, *Chief Counsel and Staff Director*
JENNIFER DUCK, *Democratic Chief Counsel and Staff Director*

January 19, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

The Honorable Jefferson B. Sessions III
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

Mr. Robert W. Patterson
Acting Administrator
Drug Enforcement Administration
800 K Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Attorney General Sessions and Acting Administrator Patterson:

Recent reports allege, in alarming detail, that the Obama Administration actively undermined a multinational Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) law enforcement effort known as Project Cassandra, to secure a nuclear deal with Iran.¹ Reportedly, Project Cassandra was initiated to investigate an arm of the Lebanese foreign terrorist organization, Hezbollah, which operatives expanded into a transnational criminal syndicate involved in smuggling billions of dollars of cocaine, weapons trafficking, and money laundering.²

According to reports, over an eight year span, DEA officials collected evidence linking Hezbollah to a criminal scheme where billions of dollars were laundered world-wide through the Lebanese Canadian Bank and other exchange houses with the help of dozens of U.S.-based used car dealers. Yet, despite apparent ample evidence of criminal activity, when officials sought

¹ Josh Meyer, *The Secret Backstory of How Obama Let Hezbollah Off the Hook*, POLITICO, available at <https://www.politico.com/interactives/2017/obama-hezbollah-drug-trafficking-investigation/>

² *Id.*

approval for prosecutions, arrests, or financial sanctions senior Department management allegedly refused:

The Justice Department declined requests by Project Cassandra and other authorities to file criminal charges against major players such as Hezbollah's high-profile envoy to Iran, a Lebanese bank that allegedly laundered billions in alleged drug profits, and a central player in a U.S.-based cell of the Iranian paramilitary Quds force. And the State Department rejected requests to lure high-value targets to countries where they could be arrested.³

Reportedly, David Asher, a Defense Department illicit finance analyst and an individual responsible for creating Project Cassandra, called the decision to disengage a "policy decision" made from the top down.⁴ Another agent overseeing Hezbollah cases for DEA's Special Operations Division claimed the U.S. government's inaction allowed Hezbollah to become one of the largest transnational organized crime groups in the world.⁵

One former senior national security official explained that the Obama Administration was hesitant to go after Hezbollah not to protect ongoing nuclear negotiations but "for fear of reprisal" and out of concern for maintaining peace and stability in the Middle East.⁶ But, I struggle to see how ignoring the actions of a flourishing criminal syndicate financed with billions from illicit merchandise, human slavery, and narcotics trafficking aids in promoting peace and security goals. Further, as one official noted, the Obama Administration was simultaneously pursuing action against ISIS and Al Qaeda, which seems to undercut the senior security official's explanation.⁷

The allegations present serious national security concerns. While I applaud the recent Justice Department decision to evaluate these allegations, the apparent effort by the previous administration to undermine U.S. law enforcement investigations necessitates a comprehensive, independent review.⁸ Therefore, please provide a briefing and the following materials no later than February 2, 2018:

³ *Id.*

⁴ Alex Pappas, *Republicans Demand Answers Over Claims Obama Gave Hezbollah a Pass*, Fox News, (Dec. 21, 2017), available at <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2017/12/21/republicans-demand-answers-over-claims-obama-gave-hezbollah-pass.html>

⁵ Josh Meyer, *The Secret Backstory of How Obama Let Hezbollah Off the Hook*, POLITICO, available at <https://www.politico.com/interactives/2017/obama-hezbollah-drug-trafficking-investigation/>

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Alex Pappas, Jake Gibson, *Sessions Orders DOJ Review After Report Obama Administration Gave Hezbollah a Pass*, Fox News, (Dec. 22, 2017), available at <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2017/12/22/sessions-orders-doj-review-after-report-obama-administration-gave-hezbollah-pass.html>, see also Press Release, Department of Justice, Attorney General Sessions Announces Hezbollah Financing and Narcoterrorism Team, (Jan. 11, 2018) available at <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-sessions-announces-hezbollah-financing-and-narcoterrorism-team>

1. All documents and communications, including reports of investigation, draft indictments, arrest warrants, and prosecution memoranda, referring or relating to Project Cassandra, the Iran-Hezbollah Super Facilitator Initiative, Abdallah Safieddine, Ayman Saied Joumaa, Walid Makled, Hugo Carvajal, Ali Fayad, the transnational crime working group, and the Lebanese Canadian Bank;
2. All documents and communications relating to the May 2014 summit meeting of Obama Administration national security officials at Special Operations Command headquarters in Tampa, Florida;
3. All documents and communications relating to the inclusion of Project Cassandra's information memorandum on the Hezbollah drug threat in the Presidential Daily Briefing in 2014, including all memoranda on the Hezbollah drug threat;
4. All documents and communications, including DEA assessments, relating to designating Hezbollah as a Transnational Criminal Organization;
5. All documents and communications relating to DOJ's alleged decision not to bring narcoterrorism charges against Chekry Harb, a/k/a El Taliban;
6. All documents and communications relating to DOJ's decision not to indict "'an entire Quds force network' in the U.S. laundering money, moving drugs and illegally smuggling Bell helicopters, night-vision goggles and other items for Iran."⁹

I anticipate that your written response and the responsive documents will be unclassified. 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. The Committee complies with all laws and regulations governing the handling of classified information. The Committee is not bound, absent its prior agreement, by any handling restrictions or instructions on unclassified information unilaterally asserted by the Executive Branch.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Should you have any questions, please contact Katherine Nikas of my Judiciary Committee staff at (202) 224-5225.

⁹ Josh Meyer, *The Secret Backstory of How Obama Let Hezbollah Off the Hook*, POLITICO, available at <https://www.politico.com/interactives/2017/obama-hezbollah-drug-trafficking-investigation/>

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary

cc:

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on the Judiciary

The Honorable Michael E. Horowitz
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20530

The Honorable Daniel R. Coats
Director
Office of the Director of National Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20511

The Honorable Rex Tillerson
Secretary
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Steve Mnuchin
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Treasury
Washington, D.C. 20220