

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1604

December 22, 2015

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
United States Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Secretary Kerry:

Waiving restrictions on the visa waiver program for persons who have traveled to Iran or who hold Iranian citizenship would put U.S. citizens at risk. Your recent comments regarding waiving requirements for these individuals are deeply concerning and should be clarified.

Last week, the House and Senate passed, and President Obama signed into law, important updates to the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). The U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act now requires citizens of the 38 countries in the VWP who have visited Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Iran or other high risk countries since 2011, or who are also citizens of these countries, to apply for a visa in order to visit the U.S. These changes are particularly vital after the recent carnage in Paris and San Bernadino.

Iran's Foreign Minister Zarif said that the American visa law is "absurd" and questioned, "Has anybody in the West been targeted by any Iranian national?" As you are aware, the answer is resoundingly yes, as this limited list demonstrates:

- Over 500 American troops were killed by Iranian-supplied explosively formed projectiles (EFPs) and other means in Iraq from 2005-2011.
- Five Americans are currently being held hostage in Iran: Businessman Siamak Namazi, Pastor Saeed Abedini, journalist Jason Rezaian, Marine Amir Hekmati, and missing former FBI agent Robert Levinson.
- 19 American servicemen were murdered and hundreds others injured in a terrorist attack at the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996, which succeeded thanks to significant Iranian support.
- The Saudi Ambassador to the U.S. was targeted by the Iranians in an assassination plot at a Washington, D.C. restaurant in 2011.
- 52 Americans were held hostage by Iranians in Tehran for 444 days from 1979-1981.

Despite these facts, you were quick to assuage Mr. Zarif's concerns by assuring him that U.S. law would "not interfere with legitimate business interests of Iran." In light of this, please provide written responses to the following questions:

1. Does the administration intend to use a national security waiver in reference to visas for citizens of VWP countries who have traveled to Iran or hold Iranian citizenship?
2. If yes, please explain how this action would be consistent with the "law enforcement or national security interests of the United States."
3. Do Iran's business interests rank higher than the safety of the American people in the mind of the administration?
4. Why does the administration seem to think there is a connection between the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the VWP, given that the VWP deals with relations between the U.S. and 38 other countries, but not Iran?

The United States remains a welcoming country, bolstered by visitors from around the world, but we must not be willfully blind about whom we let cross our borders. In fact, citizens of many other countries are required to complete visa procedures similar to these in order to enter Iran.

Secretary Kerry, it seems obvious to me, and the people I represent, that waiving these visa requirements is not in our country's national security interests. The administration cannot allow individuals who are not American citizens, and who have connections to, or have traveled to designated state sponsors of terrorism, such as Iran, come to our country without doing something as simple as applying for a visa. To do so would be in direct opposition to both the law and the government's core responsibility to keep Americans safe.

Sincerely,


Mike Pompeo
Member of Congress