

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 23, 2022

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Blinken,

We write to express our deep concern about the potential re-designation of the Houthi movement in Yemen (“Ansar Allah”) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO). Applying this designation would precipitate an economic collapse, dramatically deepen the country’s severe humanitarian crisis, and could undermine the prospects for peace in Yemen.

We recognize the destabilizing role of the Houthis in the conflict in Yemen, including the obstruction of humanitarian assistance, the use of child soldiers, and cross-border attacks on civilian targets in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. This behavior is abhorrent and prolongs the suffering of the Yemeni people. However, designating the Houthis as an FTO would not force the Houthis to stop these behaviors, but instead risk adverse effects that would only increase the suffering of the millions of Yemenis who live in territory under Houthi control.

Yemen relies on commercial imports for 90% of its food, fuel, and medicine. If the Houthis are re-designated as an FTO, commercial suppliers and shippers have indicated they will immediately cease bringing goods into any part of Yemen – regardless of any system of licenses or exemptions. This would cause an immediate and widespread crisis at a time when, already, more than 15 million Yemenis suffer from acute hunger and five million are one step away from famine. Furthermore, international banks facilitating remittances – which millions of Yemenis depend on for their survival – would likely sever relationships with Yemeni financial institutions. The issuance of humanitarian licenses by the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) would not mitigate these consequences, in part because the material support statutes that are triggered by the use of the FTO designation cannot be waived.

If Yemen’s economy fully collapses, humanitarian assistance alone could not possibly meet the escalating needs in the country. The additional risks created by an FTO designation would likely discourage donors from maintaining current levels of humanitarian assistance – let alone increasing such funding to address a cratering economy. Already, the World Food Program announced last month that it was forced to scale back food rations for 8 million Yemenis because of a lack of funding. Combined with the obstacles that international agencies would face from the disengagement of banks, the result of a designation would be a humanitarian response unable to help more than a small percentage of Yemenis in acute crisis.

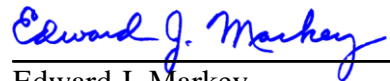
A designation would also hamstring diplomatic efforts to bring the war to an end. We have supported the work of UN Special Envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg and U.S. Special Envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking to negotiate a political settlement to the conflict. An FTO designation could put those working to negotiate an end to the war at the risk of legal consequences for interactions with Houthi leaders. The United States must preserve, not close off, diplomatic channels that could bring this dreadful war to an end.

We urge you not to pursue a designation that would have little practical impact on the Houthi leadership but would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences. Millions of Yemeni lives hang in the balance, and the United States should remain focused on alleviating the human suffering and ending this war.

Sincerely,



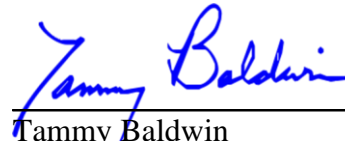
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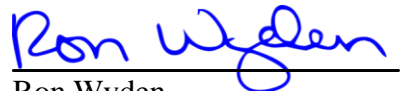
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