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October 11, 2024

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin,

I am writing regarding concerning reports of Iran brokering discussions to send highly sophisticated Russian missiles to the Houthi Rebels in Yemen. The principal asset within these discussions includes the Yakhont supersonic anti-ship missile, which is considered one of the most advanced of its kind in the world. Under no circumstances should a deal to supply the Houthis with these advanced missiles be allowed to take place, period.

Prior to Houthi attacks against vessels in the Red Sea, approximately 15% of global maritime trade passed through the Suez Canal.[1] However, as of February 2024, the number of container ships traveling in this region have dropped by 90%. Most of these vessels are now rerouted around Africa's Cape of Good Hope, adding about 11,000 nautical miles, 1-2 weeks of transit time, and approximately $1 million in fuel costs for each expedition. The Houthi movement has already disrupted global trade with smaller projectiles relative to the Yakhont missile. Should this Foreign Terrorist Organization upgrade their capabilities, they undoubtedly will do much greater harm to global trade and US interests.

The Yakhont missile, also known as P-800 Oniks, would be a game-changing upgrade for Houthi terrorists and their perpetual assault against U.S. warships, civilian targets, and allied partners. These projectiles can travel at twice the speed of sound, while hovering slightly above the surface of the ocean to remain undetected.[2] This is gravely concerning especially as US and allied forces have failed to prevent Houthi attacks, in spite of successfully targeting Houthi positions. This most recently includes the strike against the USNS Big Horn, which supplies fuel and resources to the USS Abraham Lincoln, that was attacked on September 24, 2024. Additionally, these missiles can also be fired on land at a range of over 180 miles, which could pose a threat to various targets in Saudi Arabia and further destabilize the Arabian Peninsula.

The Houthi Rebels are not the only adversarial force in the region with possession of these deadly weapons. Hezbollah used the Yakhont extensively in its 2006 war against Israel where approximately 160 Israelis were killed, including more than 40 civilians.[3] These rockets were also

[1] https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2024/03/07/Red-Sea-Attacks-Disrupt-Global-Trade
[2] https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-brokering-talks-send-advanced-russian-missiles-yemens-houthis-sources-say-2024-09-24/
[3] https://www.britannica.com/event/2006-Lebanon-War

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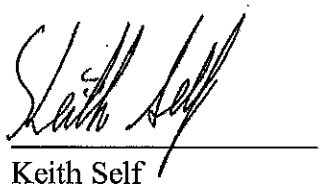
used by Hezbollah in the Syrian Civil War and are believed to have directed the momentum in favor of President Bashar al-Assad's regime. Hezbollah's prior success with these weapons is especially troubling as tensions on Lebanon's border with Israel have reached an all-time high since Hezbollah began firing at Israel on October 8, 2023.

As previously iterated by U.S. Defense Department officials, any developments that bolster the Houthi Rebels' capabilities would increasingly threaten the global freedom of navigation and stability in the Middle East region. To this end, I request specific answers to the following questions within 30 days:

1. What actions has the Department of Defense taken to discourage the Russian sale of Yakhont missiles to the Houthi Rebels in Yemen?
2. What will the Department of Defense do to prevent further proliferation of the Yakhont missile to other adversaries in the Middle East and beyond?
3. Does the Department of Defense have the necessary resources and technology to detect and thwart any attempts to ship these weapons? Is the US committed to preventing the shipment of Yakhont missiles to the Houthi Rebels?

I appreciate your attention to this important matter and look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,



Keith Self
Member of Congress