

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 18, 2026

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

Dear Secretary Rubio:

In your Senate career, you were among the most consistent voices warning about the dangers of giving Saudi Arabia, a nation that has repeatedly expressed an interest in acquiring nuclear weapons, access to sensitive nuclear technology. And yet recent reports indicate that the Trump administration is on the verge of allowing Riyadh to acquire the means to produce weapons-grade uranium and plutonium, the key pathways to nuclear bombs, while rejecting the strongest non-proliferation protections. Such a move could destabilize the Middle East and potentially ignite a devastating new nuclear arms race in the region. We urge you to immediately reconsider these plans and seek an agreement that meets the “gold standard,” consistent with the longstanding bipartisan consensus on this issue.

As a U.S. Senator during the first Trump administration, you said that the United States “should suspend all talks” on a nuclear cooperation agreement “until the Saudi government agrees to the ‘gold standard’ requirements.”<sup>1</sup> You and Senator Markey then introduced legislation that would require any nuclear agreement with Saudi Arabia to meet the “gold standard” — a blanket prohibition on enrichment and reprocessing of nuclear material and a requirement to adopt the International Atomic Energy Agency’s (IAEA) Additional Protocol,<sup>2</sup> which you and the international community have rightly recognized as an essential nonproliferation tool.<sup>3</sup>

Regrettably, it appears that the Administration is on track to give up on the “gold standard,” rejecting the strongest nuclear non-proliferation measures, and capitulating to Saudi Arabia’s desire to acquire the most sensitive nuclear technology.<sup>4</sup>

The Administration’s recent report to Congress on its proposed U.S.-Saudi nuclear cooperation agreement, commonly referred to as a “123 agreement,” states that “Saudi

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<sup>1</sup> Press Release, Office of Senator Edward J. Markey, Senators Markey and Rubio, and Reps. Sherman and Yoho Reintroduce Bipartisan, Bicameral Legislation to Block Saudi Arabia’s Nuclear Weapons Ambitions (Feb. 28, 2019), <https://www.markey.senate.gov/news/press-releases/senators-markey-and-rubio-and-reps-sherman-and-yoho-reintroduce-bipartisan-bicameral-legislation-to-block-saudi-arabias-nuclear-weapons-ambitions>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> The International Atomic Energy Agency, U.S. Dept of State, <https://www.state.gov/iaea/>.

<sup>4</sup> Timothy Gardner and Jonathan Landay, *US removing guardrails from proposed Saudi nuclear deal, document says*, Reuters (Feb. 19, 2026), <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-removing-guardrails-proposed-saudi-nuclear-deal-document-says-2026-02-19/>.

sovereignty concerns . . . inform its position on the Additional Protocol.” To address this, the proposed agreement instead requires a new Bilateral Safeguards Agreement that would cover the most “proliferation-sensitive areas” such as “enrichment, conversion, fuel fabrication and reprocessing.”<sup>5</sup>

In other words, the proposed U.S.-Saudi 123 agreement will not require Riyadh to accept the Additional Protocol. Further, the agreement would appear to allow Saudi Arabia to acquire both enrichment and reprocessing technologies, which could enable Riyadh to produce weapons-grade uranium and plutonium, the essential ingredients for nuclear weapons, if they chose to do so.

Such an agreement with a nation that has previously suggested its interest in acquiring nuclear weapons is an irresponsible proliferation risk without the proper safeguards. Saudi leaders have in the past indicated their interest in acquiring nuclear weapons.<sup>6</sup> Giving Riyadh permission to acquire the most sensitive nuclear technology, particularly without the strongest non-proliferation protections, would be highly destabilizing for the Middle East and could lead other states to reconsider their nuclear options.

Additionally, U.S. support for this deal sets a concerning precedent: other states may also seek tailored verification deals rather than negotiating an Additional Protocol with the IAEA. This could reverse nearly two decades of efforts to universalize the Additional Protocol and could be overly burdensome for an agency that is already financially constrained. Moreover, other states may insist on access to enrichment and reprocessing in future deals with the United States, increasing proliferation dangers around the world.

To help us and the public better understand how the Administration intends to prevent Saudi Arabia from pursuing nuclear weapons capability through a U.S. nuclear cooperation agreement, please respond to the following questions in writing by April 1, 2026:

1. What are the “Saudi sovereignty concerns” that are informing “its position on the Additional Protocol”? What is Saudi Arabia’s position on the Additional Protocol?
2. What is the new Bilateral Safeguards Agreement that would cover the most “proliferation-sensitive areas” such as “enrichment, conversion, fuel fabrication and reprocessing”? How does this agreement compare to the Additional Protocol that it would supplant? How will the IAEA be involved?
3. Has the Administration considered the consequences if other states move away from the Additional Protocol and seek tailored safeguards agreements? Is the Administration

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<sup>5</sup> Kelsey Davenport, *Is Trump Jeopardizing Nonproliferation Efforts to Get a Nuclear Cooperation Deal with Saudi Arabia? A Report to Congress Suggests He Is*, Arms Control Association (Feb. 19, 2026), <https://www.armscontrol.org/issue-briefs/2026-02/trump-jeopardizing-nonproliferation-efforts-get-nuclear-cooperation-deal-saudi>.

<sup>6</sup> Warren P. Strobel et. al., *Saudi Arabia, With China’s Help, Expand Its Nuclear Program*, Wall St. J. (Aug. 4, 2020), [https://www.wsj.com/articles/saudi-arabia-with-chinas-help-expands-its-nuclear-program-11596575671?gaa\\_at=eafs&gaa\\_n=AWetsqcamIfb-MEFFr7c9G0ncUe4wGOxOtEQnqX1Yki2mY\\_6HVFkNN5-ek4mmWXdGhM%3D&gaa\\_ts=699f7246&gaa\\_sig=5-eUux6zA94rAFjrqlmh-ti3PtfpMoBzZYJGq4EeciGE9ezw2PoCWmQ79gNGHVeWzpxBanNM7\\_xll0\\_TLm\\_1fg%3D%3D](https://www.wsj.com/articles/saudi-arabia-with-chinas-help-expands-its-nuclear-program-11596575671?gaa_at=eafs&gaa_n=AWetsqcamIfb-MEFFr7c9G0ncUe4wGOxOtEQnqX1Yki2mY_6HVFkNN5-ek4mmWXdGhM%3D&gaa_ts=699f7246&gaa_sig=5-eUux6zA94rAFjrqlmh-ti3PtfpMoBzZYJGq4EeciGE9ezw2PoCWmQ79gNGHVeWzpxBanNM7_xll0_TLm_1fg%3D%3D).

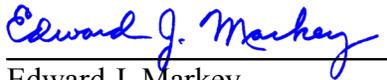
concerned that the Saudi agreement would push other states to insist on enrichment and reprocessing in future nuclear cooperation deals with the United States?

4. Does the proposed agreement allow Saudi Arabia to acquire both enrichment and reprocessing technologies?
5. What nuclear technology is the Administration planning to provide to Saudi Arabia, who will provide it, when will it be transferred, and under what terms? Who will pay for the technology and how much will it cost?
6. Is the United States considering constructing and operating a uranium-enrichment facility on Saudi soil?

If the Administration fails to include the strongest possible “gold standard” non-proliferation measures in any nuclear cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabia, the security of the United States and our allies in the Middle East could suffer. We will work to ensure that Congress uses all available means to review and, if necessary, reject such an agreement.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



Ron Wyden  
United States Senator



Peter Welch  
United States Senator



Joaquin Castro  
Member of Congress



Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



Jimmy Gomez  
Member of Congress



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Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



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Pramila Jayapal  
Member of Congress



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Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



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Andy Kim  
United States Senator