

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 15, 2024

Honorable Frank Kendall  
Secretary, United States Air Force  
1670 Air Force Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20330

Dear Secretary Kendall:

We write with serious concern regarding open source reporting detailing conversations between Russian officials and the CEO of SpaceX, Elon Musk. On October 25, the Wall Street Journal reported that Mr. Musk had multiple, high level conversations with Russian President Vladimir Putin as early as 2022 and sustained contact with high-level Russian officials, including Putin's deputy chief of staff, Sergei Kiriyenko.<sup>1</sup> These reportedly frequent conversations between a well-known U.S. adversary and Mr. Musk, a beneficiary of billions of dollars of U.S. government funding, bring into question the Department of Defense (DoD) and Intelligence Community's (IC) use of SpaceX's satellites for our most sensitive military operations. It also underscores the importance of encouraging competition in the commercial space industry to avoid overreliance on a single provider for national security purposes.

As you know, space equipment is at the crux of the communications that underpin our most sensitive military and intelligence operations, and Russia's ambitions in the space domain pose a direct threat to U.S. national security interests. In May of this year, the Pentagon confirmed Russia's deployment of a counter-space weapon, "presumably capable of attacking other satellites in low-earth orbit."<sup>2</sup> This is in addition to the sensitive communications and intelligence collection that are enabled by space-based assets – and could put U.S. national security in grave danger if exploited.

Communications between Russian government officials and any individual with a security clearance have the potential to put our security at risk. SpaceX is deeply integrated into our defense and intelligence space programming. SpaceX holds over \$700 million in contracts on the Space Force's National Security Space Launch (NSSL) program, is building a government-exclusive Starshield satellite network for the Space Force, and holds a \$1.8 billion dollar classified contract with the National Reconnaissance Agency (NRO). While commercial integration in space is key to our ability to innovate, it relies on contractors to exhibit responsible behavior in dealing with some of our most sensitive capabilities.

We are also concerned that SpaceX's Starlink is the only commercial service available to offer global broadband connectivity in low-Earth orbit. Additionally, SpaceX's Starshield system is specifically designed to provide military space capabilities to the U.S. and allied governments. Overreliance on one provider to facilitate space communications limits our options should the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/world/russia/musk-putin-secret-conversations-37e1c187>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-assesses-russia-launched-space-weapon-near-american-satellite-last-week-2024-05-21/>

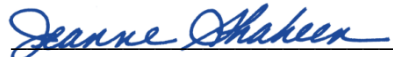
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behavior of the provider run contrary to U.S. national security interests – as may well be the case with Mr. Musk’s reported ties to Russian officials. A robust and competitive space industrial base with multiple providers is the only way the Department can ensure there are options to maintain access to this critical capability in the event of a crisis or conflict.

Mr. Musk’s reported behavior could pose serious risks to national security, and as CEO of a company with billions of dollars in sensitive defense and intelligence contracts, warrant reconsideration of SpaceX’s outsized role in DoD’s commercial space integration. We respectfully request a response to this letter and a briefing from the Department on your findings in this specific case and on your efforts to increase competition among commercial space capability providers no later than December 1, 2024. Thank you for your prompt response and for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Jeanne Shaheen  
United States Senator



Jack Reed  
United States Senator

CC: Honorable Frank Cavelli, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Space Acquisition