Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHINA

April 13, 2026

Pete Hegseth
Secretary of War
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Hegseth,

I write to seek your assurance that Airbus Space and Defense Systems (Airbus Space) has ceased providing satellite imagery in ways that could further endanger American troops and assets in the Middle East involved in Operation Epic Fury. A recent analysis indicates a high likelihood that, in the days before the Iran conflict, Airbus Space provided imagery of U.S. military assets in the Middle East to a People's Republic of China (PRC) entity, Mi Entropy Technology Co., Ltd. (MizarVision). Since the conflict began, leading space imagery companies such as Planet Labs have confirmed publicly that they are voluntarily withholding imagery from the region in response to a request from the U.S. Government.[1] Given the extraordinary circumstances and risk to American service members, Airbus Space – a company holding active contracts with the Department of War – should follow suit.

1. **Airbus' Practice Is to Share Close-in-Time Satellite Photos for Public Consumption**

Since Operation Epic Fury commenced, analysis indicates that Airbus Space likely shared close-in-time satellite imagery, including images showing destruction of U.S. military positions.[2] While commercial satellite imagery may serve public interest purposes in some cases, unconstrained imagery provision exposing U.S. forces to heightened risk crosses a dangerous threshold. Near-real-time publication of precise, annotated imagery identifying the exact type, number, and location of specific high-value military assets at an active forward operating base—while those assets are actively engaged in combat operations—is targeting data for enemy forces.

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[1] Ismail Shakil, *Satellite Firm Planet Labs to Indefinitely Withhold Iran War Images*, Reuters (Apr. 4, 2026), https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/satellite-firm-planet-labs-indefinitely-withhold-iran-war-images-2026-04-05/.
[2] Bora Erden & Leanne Abraham, *At Least 17 U.S. Sites Damaged in War with Iran*, N.Y. Times (Mar. 11, 2026), https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2026/03/11/world/middleeast/iran-us-military-bases-strikes-map.html.

2. **<u>One Simulation Concludes Airbus' Satellites Likely Published U.S. Asset Locations</u>**

The Select Committee worked with a Ph.D. researcher and expert in satellite systems to develop a simulation to determine whether Airbus Space's satellites were responsible for the photos taken before the conflict began and then posted by MizarVision (included as Attachment A).[3] The simulation, based on an image published and annotated by MizarVision, showed that Airbus Space satellites were positioned and had ample opportunity to take photos of U.S. troop positions. MizarVision is a Hangzhou, China-based company that makes AI software to analyze satellite photos. MizarVision does not indicate which company provided each individual satellite photo. Beginning before Operation Epic Fury, MizarVision began publishing real-time, high-quality satellite imagery of U.S. military positions throughout the Middle East region.[4] These publications included the below photo.[5]

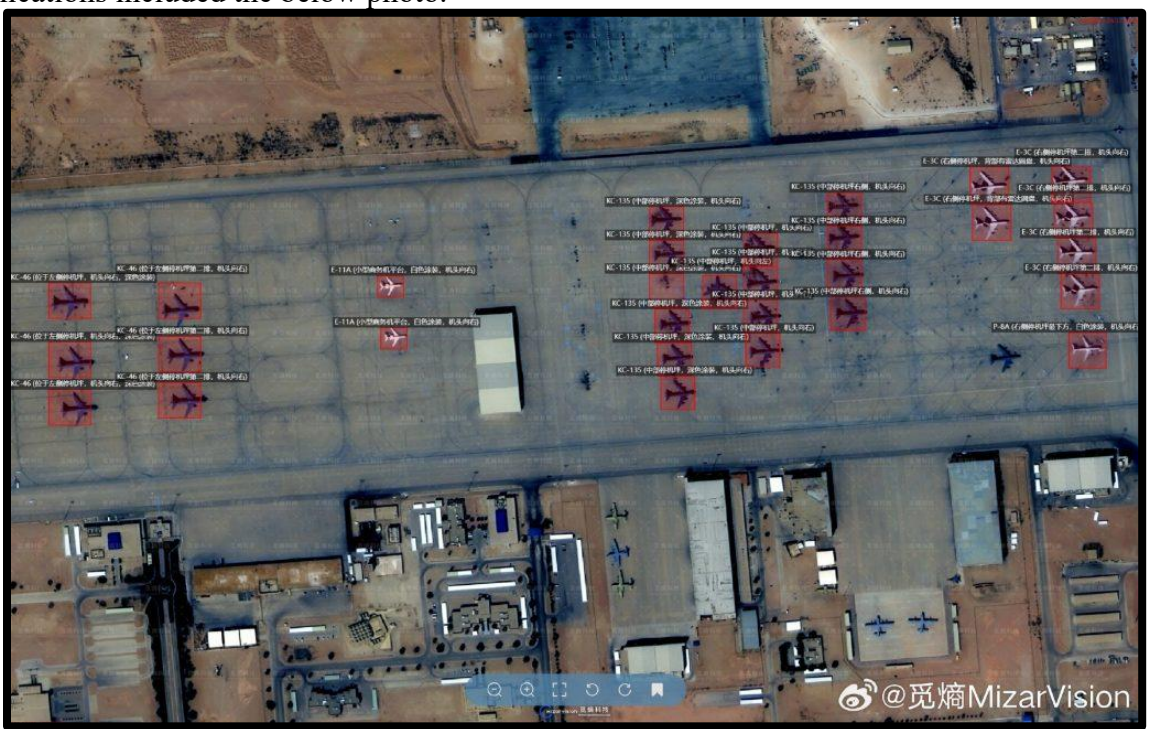

Figure 1 – MizarVision Image Showing the Prince Sultan Air Base with American military aircraft identified in red highlights.

[3] The orbital parameters of every active satellite—known as ephemeris data, or Two Line Element sets—are published and freely accessible. Ephemeris data describes a satellites precision position, velocity, and trajectory at any given moment, allowing anyone with the right tools to reconstruct exactly where a satellite was in the sky and what it could have seen at any point in time.

[4] Yuanye Dang & Amber Wang, *Is China Flexing Its Intelligence Muscle by Tracking U.S. Military Moves Near Iran*, S. China Morn. Post (Feb. 27, 2026), https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3344638/china-flexing-its-intelligence-muscle-tracking-us-military-moves-near-iran.

[5] Ryan Finnerty, *Chinese Intelligence Company Tracking U.S. Military Assets During Iran Operations,* FlightGlobal (Mar. 2, 2026), https://www.flightglobal.com/fixed-wing/2026/03/chinese-intelligence-company-tracking-us-military-assets-during-iran-operations/.

Publishing such high-quality images in near real-time provides direct intelligence to Iranian military forces, enabling them to target, launch, and strike American positions throughout the Middle East. Hu Bo, Director of the South China Sea Probing Initiative at Peking University, and one of China's foremost satellite imagery analysts, stated publicly that he is "100% sure" the MizarVision imagery of U.S. military assets did not originate from Chinese satellites.[6] Given the information available about the optics on Chinese satellites, it is unlikely that they are capable of generating imagery with the resolution that was present in the image published by MizarVision.[7] According to Planet Labs, MizarVision is not a client and the images posted by the firm during the Iran conflict were not sourced from its satellites.[8] The further narrowing of imagery providers, based on technical analysis in consultation with a satellite imagery expert, leads to Airbus Space.

MizarVision published the photo depicted above of American aircraft positioned at Prince Sultan Air Base, which was analyzed using modeling and simulation techniques to determine the position of the satellite that took the image. The analysis tracked the positions and flight paths of four Airbus satellites over the area of interest across a 48-hour window. For each moment in that window, three conditions had to be met for collection to be considered feasible: (1) the satellite had to be in the right position to see the area, (2) its camera had to be capable of pointing in the right direction, and (3) there had to be enough daylight to take an optical photograph. Moments that passed all three tests were flagged as plausible collection opportunities.

The results identified two daily windows—each roughly 10 hours long—during which at least one of the four Airbus commercial satellites met all criteria, and at certain moments as many as three could simultaneously have captured the image of Prince Sultan Air Base. The full results of the simulation are detailed in Attachment A.

In addition to these satellite collection results, there are business relationships linking Airbus Space to MizarVision. Airbus Space supports China's satellite program through its joint venture with the Chinese Academy of Sciences called Beijing Spot Image Co. Ltd., which has supplied

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[6] Hu Bo's determination rested on two independent lines of analysis. First, using available satellite ephemeris data—the same orbital parameters used in the simulation described earlier—he cross referenced the image's time stamp and ground geometry against the satellite positions to determine the Chinese satellites were incapable of capturing the image. Second, the image resolution itself is telling: the sub-meter detail visible in the MizarVision publication does not match the resolution specifications of China's imaging constellation. Zichen Wang, *Viral Satellite Imagery of U.S. Military Assets Around Iran NOT Taken by Chinese Satellites: Hu Bo*, Pekingology (Feb. 27, 2026), https://www.pekingnology.com/p/viral-satellite-imagery-of-us-military.

[7] There are visual cues that help determine the resolution of an image. Sub-meter imagery allows you to see distinct features such as individual vehicles, individual trees, and strong crisp shadows made cast by buildings and other features. These visual cues are apparent in the photo published by MizarVision. However, Chinese satellites are currently incapable of such detail. *See e.g.* Tinghao Liu, et al., *Optimal Design of Flexible Imaging Modes for Agile Optical Remote Sensing Satellites*, XLVIII-3-2024 Int'l Arch. Photogramm. Remote Sens. Spatial Info. Sci. 305 (2024), https://isprs-archives.copernicus.org/articles/XLVIII-3-2024/305/2024/isprs-archives-XLVIII-3-2024-305-2024.pdf.

[8] Cate Cadell & Lyric Li, *Chinee Firms Market Iran War Intelligence 'Exposing' U.S. Forces*, Wash. Post (Apr. 4, 2026), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2026/04/04/china-ai-military-intelligence-iran-war/.

satellite imagery to Chinese government agencies for over two decades.[9] Beijing Spot Image Company operates as a joint venture between Airbus Space and the Chinese Aerospace Information Research Institute within the Chinese Academy of Sciences (Chinese Aerospace Research Institute).[10] In 2025, the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security blacklisted the Chinese Aerospace Research Institute for its links to China's High-Altitude Balloon program.[11]

Research by Kharon shows the Chinese Aerospace Research Institute has ties to MizarVision through a company called Chang Guang Satellite Technology Company (Chang Guang Satellite). Chang Guang Satellite is a Chinese company focused on space-based imaging and remote sensing.[12] It has been noted that Chang Guang Satellite supplies MizarVision with imagery.[13] Chang Guang Satellite's business includes the development of satellites and satellite components, ultimately building towards a 300-satellite constellation in orbit.[14] According to Chang Guang Satellite's public filings, it purchased data-related services from the Chinese Aerospace Research Institute in 2021.[15] That financial relationship demonstrates an operational link between a Commerce Department-blacklisted entity and the satellite company whose imagery chain reaches MizarVision.

The national security implications of these connections are compounded by Chang Guang Satellite's status as a designated entity on the U.S. Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) Specially Designated Nationals and Blocked Persons (SDN) List. Chang Guang Satellite was sanctioned by the U.S. Government in 2023 for providing satellite imagery support to the Russian mercenary organization PMC Wagner.[16] Therefore, Airbus Space —a company that holds active contracts with the U.S. Department of War — sits in the same corporate network as a U.S.-designated entity whose business model centers on sharing satellite intelligence with adversarial armed groups.

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[9] Gang Xu, *CEO of Airbus China: Airbus: A Solid, Reliable and Trustworthy Long-Term Partner for China,* Center for China and Globalization (Feb. 2022), http://en.ccg.org.cn/archives/76246 (https://archive.ph/xiEQv); *Airbus in China*, AIRBUS https://www.airbus.com/en/our-worldwide-presence/airbus-in-asia-pacific/airbus-in-china (https://archive.ph/FXw89) (last accessed July 11, 2025).

[10] Document on file with the Committee.

[11] *Additions and Revisions to the Entity List*, 90 Fed. Reg. 44496 (Sept. 16, 2025), https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/09/16/2025-17893/additions-and-revisions-to-the-entity-list.

[12] Matthew Bruzzese, *Chang Guang Satellite Technology*, China Aerospace Studies Inst. (Mar. 2024), https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Research/Space/2024-04-01%20Chang%20Guang%20Satellite%20Company%20overview.pdf.

[13] China Satellite Communications, Caifuhao (Feb. 28, 2026), https://archive.ph/Ztyeu.

[14] Matthew Bruzzese, Chang Guang Satellite Technology (2024), https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Research/Space/2024-04-01%20Chang%20Guang%20Satellite%20Company%20overview.pdf.

[15] Chang Guang Satellite Technology Co., Ltd., *Initial Public Offering Prospectus (Draft)*, Shanghai Stock Exchange STAR Market (Dec. 23, 2022), https://file.finance.sina.com.cn/211.154.219.97:9494/MRGG/CNSESH_STOCK/2022/2022-12/2022-12-23/8747346.PDF.

[16] Matthew Bruzzese, *Chang Guang Satellite Technology* at 1, China Aerospace Studies Inst. (Mar. 2024) ("The U.S. Government sanctioned CGST in 2023 for its support of Russian mercenary group PMC Wagner."), https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Research/Space/2024-04-01%20Chang%20Guang%20Satellite%20Company%20overview.pdf.

3. **The March 27 Attack on Prince Sultan Air Base Raises Serious Questions About the Role of Commercial Satellite Imagery**

According to public reports, on March 27, 2026, Iran launched a coordinated ballistic missile and drone strike on Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia, wounding at least twelve U.S. service members—two critically—and damaging multiple high-value U.S. aircraft, including at least five KC-135 Stratotanker refueling aircraft and a U.S. Air Force E-3G Sentry Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft.[17] The destruction of the E-3G Sentry marks the first combat loss of that aircraft type in its 47-year operational history and removes an irreplaceable asset from a fleet of only 15 remaining aircraft.[18]

Beginning in late February 2026—the same period studied in the simulation detailed in Section 2 of this letter—MizarVision publicly posted high-resolution satellite imagery of Prince Sultan Air Base identifying by type and location specific U.S. aircraft, including seven E-3G Sentry AWACS aircraft and over a dozen KC-135 tankers.[19] That imagery was published publicly on social media, where it was accessible to any actor, including Iran and its proxies. Operation Epic Fury commenced approximately 24 hours after MizarVision's initial publications identifying U.S. assets at the base.[20] In subsequent weeks, MizarVision continued to publish updated imagery of the base.[21] Prince Sultan Air Base was then struck with precision on March 27, with Iran targeting the same aircraft types—the E-3 AWACS and KC-135 tankers—that had been identified and annotated in MizarVision's public posts.

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[17] Stephen Losey, *US Forces at Saudi Air Base Suffer Iranian Attack*, Air & Space Forces Mag. (Mar. 27, 2026), https://www.airandspaceforces.com/us-forces-saudi-arabia-iran-attack/; Tyler Rogoway, *E-3 Sentry AWACS Destroyed at Prince Sultan Air Base*, The War Zone (Mar. 28, 2026), https://www.twz.com/air/images-purportedly-show-e-3-sentry-totally-destroyed-from-iranian-strike.

[18] *Id.*

[19] Ryan Finnerty, *Chinese Intelligence Company Tracking U.S. Military Assets During Iran Operations*, FlightGlobal (Mar. 2, 2026), https://www.flightglobal.com/fixed-wing/chinese-intelligence-company-tracking-us-military-assets-during-iran-operations/166498.article.

[20] *Id.* (noting that MizarVision posted imagery of F-22s at Ovda Air Base on February 27, 2026, and that "Operation Epic Fury launched roughly 24h after that observation . . . was posted to X").

[21] Henry Zwartz & Kathleen Calderwood, *Chinese Satellite Imagery of Middle East Bases Is Helping Iran, US Intelligence Says*, Aust. Broadcasting Corp. News (Apr. 6, 2026), https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-04-06/us-intelligence-chinese-satellite-imagery-middle-east/106508322.

These documented facts present a troubling scenario:

1. A Chinese firm with undisclosed satellite sourcing published precise, annotated imagery of U.S. military assets at a specific base.

2. That imagery identified the exact aircraft types that were subsequently destroyed in a precise Iranian strike.

3. A technical analysis suggests Airbus Space satellites were the most plausible sources for that imagery.

I appreciate your steadfast dedication to and support for our troops. The potential of commercial satellite imagery exploited by China to enable the targeting of U.S. forces and the loss of American lives is an urgent threat. Securing voluntary limitations from Airbus Space to deny Chinese entities imagery that puts our forces at risk is critical. I stand ready to support the Administration in protecting our service members in combat.

Sincerely,

John Moolenaar
Chairman

Enclosure: Attachment A - Airbus Satellite Image Generation Feasibility Analysis