

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Hearing: Iran Nuclear Negotiations After the Second Extension: Where Are They
Going?
January 27, 2015**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

This morning we're looking at the prospects for reaching a viable nuclear agreement with Iran; one that increases our national security. This has been, and will continue to be, the Committee's top priority.

We have had a decade of diplomatic negotiations over Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology in violation of U.N. Security Council Resolutions. These have reached their height over the past year, as the Obama Administration – along with the UK, France, Russia, China, and Germany—have been seeking to negotiate a “long-term comprehensive solution” to Iran's illicit nuclear program. During these talks, Iran has agreed to limit its nuclear program temporarily in return for some sanctions relief.

A final agreement would free Iran of sanctions - which has driven it to the negotiating table - while allowing it to maintain a “mutually defined enrichment program,” to be treated like any other “non-nuclear weapon state party to the [Nonproliferation Treaty].” That best case would leave Iran as a threshold nuclear state. But worse, any limits placed on Iran's nuclear program as part of the “comprehensive solution” *would expire*. Maybe in ten years, maybe sooner.

Negotiations – now into their second extension – appear to be stalemated. That's even after U.S. negotiators move closer and closer to Iranian positions. According to the Administration, “big gaps” remain, and a senior official hinted last week that talks may extend *again* come June's deadline.

Meanwhile, Tehran has been advancing its nuclear program: pursuing new reactors; testing a new generation of centrifuges and operating its illicit procurement networks. These actions clearly violate the spirit of the interim agreement. Yet, the Administration appears more concerned that sanctions – designed to strengthen its negotiating hand and which would have *no* impact unless Iran walks away from negotiations – could sink an agreement. Let's be clear: if an agreement is sunk, it is because Iran has no interest in abandoning its drive to nuclear weapons, which is what many of us believe.

Of course, Iran's nuclear work isn't Tehran's only provocation. While Iranian diplomats put on a good face in a European negotiating room, its IRGC, Quds Force and other proxies have been busy working to influence and ultimately dominate the region. Iran is boosting Assad in Syria, Hezbollah continues to threaten Israel and hopes for a unified and stable Iraq are being undercut by Iran. Last summer, Iranian-supplied rockets to Hamas rained down on Israel. And last week, an Iranian-backed militia displaced the government in Yemen, a key counterterrorism partner of ours. Most in the region see Iran pocketing a nuclear deal and continuing with its domination – certainly no winning game plan to stabilize the Middle East.

Not to mention that Iran's horrendous repression at home continues. This isn't a negotiating partner that gives much confidence.

If we are going to have any chance of a deal that advances U.S. national security interests, Iran's leaders have to feel that their only choice is a verifiable and meaningful agreement. We are far

from it. Worse, many in the region feel Iran is on the rise. Falling oil prices should strengthen our hand, but the Obama Administration has yet to explain a single change as to how it will negotiate differently with Iran over the coming months.

While the Administration reaches for a deal, it should do so understanding the regime's duplicity and militancy. In addition to more economic pressure, we should have an Iran policy with thought-provoking broadcasting to inspire Iranian dissent, a focus on its horrendous human rights abuses and illicit procurement networks, as well as bolstering allies in the region that face Iranian aggression.

As one former intelligence official told the Committee last year, "Iran's nuclear program is just the tip of a revolutionary spear that extends across the world and threatens key U.S. interests." This is a regime that is playing for keeps. Yet sometimes it seems the Administration is more concerned about Congress moving on sanctions than pressuring its treacherous and deadly negotiating partner.

We look forward to hearing from our witnesses today on the future of these discussions and options we can pursue that would truly end the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran.