

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen  
MENA Subcommittee Hearing entitled:  
The Iran-Syria Nexus and its Implications for the Region  
Wednesday, July 31, 2013**

As the conflict in Syria continues, the numbers become even more staggering every day:

- Over 100,000 killed;
- 1.85 million refugees have fled the country, with over 500,000 going to our friend and ally, Jordan - placing an extreme burden on our ally as it struggles to cope with the pressure of this mass influx and as the conflict threatens to cross its borders; and
- An additional 4.5 million Syrians have been internally displaced

Assad remains defiant, and in fact, his intransigence has become further entrenched thanks to the support from its allies such as Iran and Russia. Iran, along with North Korea, has been cooperating with Syria and the Assad family for decades now, aiding Syria with its nuclear and chemical weapons programs, as well as its ballistic missile program.

Damascus is Iran's linchpin into the Middle East. Tehran reportedly helped finance Syria's secret nuclear plant – designed and built by North Korea and destroyed thankfully by the Israelis in 2007 - and has also been linked with helping Assad expand his chemical weapons stockpile.

According to assessments by the U.S. intelligence community, it judged with high confidence that chemical weapons were used by Assad on numerous occasions against the opposition, further amplifying the threat to the region and our national security interests. Tehran has provided Assad billions of dollars in direct funds, and recently extended an additional four billion dollar line of credit to help fund his brutal campaign against the opposition. Iran has sent military advisers and personnel to help Assad. Members of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards have been sent to advise and fight alongside Assad's forces, as well as to help recruit external forces to come to the aid of the regime – including a large number of Iraqi Shiite militants, and of course, its proxy, Hezbollah.

The Obama administration continues to take the misguided approach that negotiating with Tehran will bear fruit but the actions of the regime say otherwise. Due to the lack of urgency on this Administration's part to prevent Iran from becoming nuclear capable, I am also concerned that it is not giving the Iranian threat the priority and the immediate attention it requires.

Last Congress I authored, and the President signed into law, the toughest sanctions yet on record against the regime in Iran. Later this afternoon the House will vote on, and we hope today or tomorrow pass, Chairman Royce and Mr. Engel's Nuclear Iran Prevention Act, which will further strengthen sanctions against Iran and send the Supreme Leader a message that a nuclear Iran is not an option. So it is perhaps fitting that we are here today discussing this subject today, especially with our distinguished panel of experts.

But as we all know, Iran, along with Russia, has been a key arms supplier for Assad's forces. There are daily flights from Iran to Syria filled with arms and supplies for the regime. These flights continue to fly over Iraq with near impunity and the United States must do more to urge al-Maliki and the Iraqis to interdict and prevent these arms deliveries from reaching Syria.

The Iran-Syria nexus has very serious complications and consequences for our friend and ally, the democratic Jewish State of Israel. The conflict is threatening to spread to Israel's borders and the fear of Assad's chemical weapons being moved and falling into the wrong hands is very real. Yet the Obama administration, prodded by some in Congress, has decided to send small arms and ammunition into the warzone. I have always been opposed to arming any rebels in Syria and I remain opposed to doing so. Instead of sending more arms, we should be looking at ways to stop the arms flowing into Syria from Iran and Russia, and we should be looking at breaking the Iran-Syria nexus. We must keep up the pressure and increase sanctions on Iran and Syria.

In the wake of last month's election in Iran, I must continue to caution the Administration on offering more concessions to a state sponsor of terrorism that continues to undermine the stability in the region. No concessions and no waivers should be issued by the Obama administration until we see concrete and verifiable proof that Iran has begun to dismantle its nuclear program. I must reiterate that this new leader is not the moderate many have been so eager to believe. It is the Supreme Leader that still calls the shots, and his nefarious ambitions have not been altered.