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Negotiations with Iran: Blocking or Paving Tehran's Path to Nuclear Weapons?

Opening Statement – Chairman Ed Royce

March 19, 2015

This hearing will come to order. The Committee continues to evaluate the Administration's nuclear diplomacy with Iran. Negotiators face a high-stakes deadline next week.

We'll hear the Administration's case today. But it's critical that the Administration hears our bipartisan concerns. Deputy Secretary Blinken, this is your first appearance before this Committee. I congratulate you on your position, and wish you well. After the hearing, I trust you will be in touch with Secretary Kerry, Under Secretary Sherman, and the others at the negotiating table to report the Committee's views. This is important.

This Committee has been at the forefront of examining the threat of a nuclear Iran. Much of the pressure that brought Tehran to the table was put in place by Congress *over the objections* of the Executive Branch – whether Republican or Democrat. And we'd have more pressure on Iran today if the Administration hadn't pressured the Senate to sit on the Royce-Engel sanctions bill this Committee produced and passed in 2013.

Congress is proud of this role. And we want to see the Administration get a lasting and meaningful agreement. But unfortunately, the Administration's negotiating strategy has been more about *managing* proliferation than *preventing* it.

Case in point: Iran's uranium enrichment program, the key technology needed to developing a nuclear bomb. Reportedly, the Administration would be agreeable to leaving much of Iran's enrichment capacity in place for a decade. If Congress will be asked to "roll-back" its sanctions on Iran – which will certainly fund its terrorist activities - there must be a substantial "roll-back" of Iran's nuclear program.

And consider that international inspectors report that Iran has still not revealed its past bomb work - despite its commitment to do so. The IAEA is still concerned about signs of Iran's military-related activities; including designing a nuclear payload for a missile. Iran hasn't even begun to address these concerns. Last fall, over 350 Members wrote to the Secretary of State expressing deep concerns about this lack of cooperation. How can we expect Iran to uphold an agreement when they are not meeting their current commitments?

Indeed, we were not surprised to see Iran continue to illicitly procure nuclear technology during these negotiations. Or that Tehran was caught testing a more advanced centrifuge that would help produce bomb material quicker. This was certainly a violation of the spirit, if not the letter, of the interim agreement. Iran's deception is all the more reason that the Administration should obtain zero-notice, anywhere, anytime inspections on Iran's declared and undeclared facilities.

There is also the fact that limits placed on Iran's nuclear program as part of the final agreement now being negotiated *will expire*. That means, the "final" agreement is just another interim step, with the real final step being Iran treated as "any other" non-nuclear weapon state under the Non-Proliferation Treaty - licensing it to pursue industrial scale enrichment.

With a deep history of deception, covert procurement, and clandestine facilities, Iran is not “any other” country, to be conceded an industrial scale nuclear program. Any meaningful agreement must keep restrictions in place for *decades* – as over 360 Members of Congress – including *every* Member of this Committee - are demanding in a letter to the President.

Meanwhile, Iran is intensifying its destructive role in the region. Tehran is propping up Assad in Syria, while its proxy Hezbollah threatens Israel. Iranian-backed Shia militia are killing hopes for a unified, stable Iraq. And last month, an Iranian-backed militia displaced the government in Yemen, a key counterterrorism partner. Many of our allies and partners see Iran pocketing an advantageous nuclear agreement and ramping up its aggression in the region.

This Committee is prepared to evaluate any agreement to determine if it is in the long-term national security interests of the United States and our allies. Indeed, as Secretary Kerry testified not long ago, any agreement will have to “pass muster with Congress.” Yet that commitment has been muddied by the Administration’s insistence in recent weeks that Congress not play a role.

That’s not right. Congress built the sanctions structure that brought Iran to the table. And if the President moves to dismantle it, we will have a say.

I now turn to the Ranking Member.