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**Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing:
Strengthening U.S. Leadership in a Turbulent World: The FY 2017
Foreign Affairs Budget**

February 25, 2016

(As prepared for delivery)

This morning the Committee once again welcomes Secretary of State John Kerry to consider the Department's budget request.

When Secretary Kerry last appeared before us, he was presenting the Obama Administration's nuclear agreement with Iran. In the seven months since, the Administration got its agreement and the Middle East has been transformed, and not for the better. Now, with access to \$100 billion in unfrozen assets and sanctions wiped away, Iran has instantly become the dominant country in the region. The Revolutionary Guards – already Iran's "most powerful economic actor," in the words of the Treasury Department – will only grow more powerful with international investment.

The Committee has deep concerns about the way the Obama Administration – in apparent deference to Tehran - has chosen to ignore portions of a new bipartisan law ending visa waiver travel for those who have visited Iran. And Mr. Secretary, the Committee still awaits a detailed response to its many questions about a surprise \$1.7 billion payment to Tehran that coincided with the release of several Americans.

Look no further than Syria for the horrible consequences of an emboldened Iran. The slaughter continues. While the Secretary does his best to broker some sort of ceasefire, the fact remains that with Russia, Iran and Assad are calling the shots. The Administration says that there is no military solution to the conflict in Syria – yet as far as Putin and Assad see it, there very much is.

Of course, Russia's backing of Assad means that ISIS only grows elsewhere. The ISIS "JV team" has gone global, capable of striking in Europe, Asia, Africa – and here at home. Some 50 ISIS-linked groups have carried out attacks in over 20 countries. In the failed state of Libya – ISIS has doubled in size, now with some 6,000 fighters. Every day that ISIS advances, it draws recruits to plot new attacks abroad. The Committee hopes to understand just what is the Department's strategy to "counter violent extremism"?

Looking toward Asia, the Committee met yesterday with the Chinese Foreign Minister and reminded him that the South China Sea must remain open to international shipping and that any disputes should be resolved peacefully. Even after the latest North Korean nuclear test, Chinese pressure on Pyongyang is weak. Fortunately, the President just signed into law this Committee's North Korea Sanctions and

Policy Enhancement Act. It is now up to the President to enforce this law aggressively to cut off the funds now flowing to the Kim regime.

After years of Congressional pressing, this budget does acknowledge the need to respond to Russia's "weaponization of information" and ISIS propaganda. But the Broadcasting Board of Governors – the international broadcasting agency that your predecessor called "defunct" – remains in desperate need of an overhaul. Mr. Secretary, working together, we can, we must, fix this.

Facing a chronic budget deficit, even good programs may not be supportable at the levels we'd like. That's why I'm proud that this Committee's scrutiny of the Department's new Diplomatic Security training facility helped to save the taxpayer over \$500 million.