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**United States House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs**  
**Hearing: “Confronting the Full Range of Iranian Threats**  
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Good morning.

Chairman Royce, Ranking Member Engel, and distinguished members of the committee: Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss U.S. policy toward Iran. I am pleased to join a panel with General Wald, Ambassador Jeffrey, and David Albright. I have had the privilege of learning from each of them over the years, and while we do not agree on everything, I have the deepest respect for their intellect and their service to this country. Likewise, I have the utmost respect for the bipartisan work this committee has done to help build the global campaign of economic pressure that brought Iran to the negotiating table and paved the way for a negotiated solution on the nuclear issue.

The subject of today’s hearing is “confronting the full range of Iranian threats.” Over the course of this hearing, I expect we will touch on Iran’s sponsorship of terrorism, its destabilizing regional activities, its ballistic missile program, and its human rights abuses at home, including the unjustified and inhumane detention of American citizens. We will also cover the Iranian nuclear program, a subject that President Trump will address in a speech this week and on which he has an important decision to make by October 15.

There are a great many things to say on each of these subjects, and on the ways in which they interact to make Iran the complex, continuing threat to regional peace and security we confront today. To help frame the discussion, I would like to make four points at the outset.

**First, the Iran nuclear deal is working as intended.** It is blocking Iran’s pathways to a bomb, and it has put the Iranian nuclear program in a box. Of course, it is not a perfect agreement. Diplomacy requires compromise, and compromise means giving up more than you would like and getting less than you would like. The key question is, did we get what we need? And the answer, I believe, is yes.

Thousands of centrifuges have been dismantled. So even if the Iranians walked away from the deal today, their breakout time has been extended to the point where it would take them more than a year to produce one weapon’s worth of weapons grade uranium. Without the deal, it would have been a matter of weeks. Iran’s plutonium reactor at Arak has been neutralized. Without the deal, that reactor could have become a bomb factory, producing enough weapons-grade plutonium for one to two bombs per year. Ninety-eight percent of Iran’s enriched uranium has been shipped out of the country. Without the deal, they would have enough low enriched uranium to make a dozen bombs. International inspectors have unprecedented access to verify Iran’s compliance. Without the deal, we would have had very limited insight into the program.

Diplomacy backed by pressure achieved all of this, without the United States have to fire a single shot.

Today, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the U.S. intelligence community, and the Israeli security establishment have all assessed that Iran is currently complying with its obligations under the JCPOA. Israel's national security leaders have reported that the threat of a nuclear Iran has abated to the point where it is no longer Israel's primary security concern. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis has testified that the deal is in America's national security interest. So it makes no sense for President Trump to decline to make the certification called for in the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act.

**Second, the nuclear deal does not preclude the United States from taking decisive steps to confront and counter Iran's malign activities in the region.** The fact that the JCPOA does not address Iran's sponsorship of terrorism, its support for Hizbollah, or its regional aggression is no concession to Iran. The deal offers no quarter on these issues. Indeed, we specifically designed the deal to preserve our right and our capacity to counter Iran on all of these fronts. The Congress understands this: thanks to the work of this committee, you passed sanctions this year aimed at Iran's non-nuclear activities that were fully consistent with the JCPOA. Now it is incumbent on the administration to enforce them, and I am at a loss as to why they have been slow in doing so.

There are also further steps the United States can take, including additional sanctions measures, intelligence-led operations, interdictions, law-enforcement and military cooperation with our allies, and further diplomatic pressure. I hope we will hear a more specific set of proposals from the administration in each of these areas.

Critics warned that the nuclear deal would give a massive financial windfall to Iran, allowing it to fund its regional ambitions. But the Treasury Department's former top sanctions official, Adam Szubin, has written persuasively that sanctions relief has *not* transformed Iran into a far more dangerous threat. Contrary to the rhetoric of some critics, we did not "pay" Iran for the nuclear deal; we merely permitted Iran to recover its own assets that were frozen overseas. And the Trump administration's own Defense Intelligence Agency chief has said the lion's share of those recovered assets went to domestic, not military, budget items.

This is not to deny the reality that Iran has been aggressive across the region, it is only to underscore that they were aggressive before nuclear sanctions, during sanctions, and now after the deal. Money has never been the limiting factor. A key reason they are on the march now is their ability to cheaply exploit regional chaos — in the absence of clear pushback in Iraq, Syria, and elsewhere.

The bottom line is that we maintain the means to pursue a multi-dimensional, whole-of-government strategy to counter Iran's malign activities across the board. We can impose costs for the continued pursuit of ballistic missiles, deter and disrupt their financing of terrorism, and work with our allies and partners to curb their regional aggression. We can also bring considerable pressure to bear on their continued detention of American citizens. All of this is consistent with continuing to enforce the Iran nuclear deal. Which brings me to my third point.

**Third, the best strategy to counter the full range of Iranian threats is to commit to the deal and enforce it relentlessly, not cast it into doubt and raise questions about America's credibility.** We want our European partners and others to join us in increasing the pressure on Iran for its revisionism and expansionism. That including convincing Europe to stop making the artificial distinction between Hizbollah's political and military wings. But it is a lot harder to get them to focus on these broader Iranian threats when their attention is on the nuclear deal and its uncertain future. It is a lot harder to induce their cooperation when they are thinking more about the risk Washington poses than they are about the risk Tehran poses.

Instead of asking, "what can we do together to address Iran's ballistic missile program and its sponsorship of terrorism," our partners are asking, "will the United States keep its word on the deal or not?" The ambassadors of Germany, France, and the United Kingdom were recently making the rounds on the Hill to argue for staying in the deal. Even former Israeli security officials have come to Washington to underscore that it would be "folly" to walk away. If they had confidence in the deal's future, our partners could have used that time to work with American officials on a coordinated strategy to deal with the broader range of Iranian threats.

Our past success in rallying the international community against Iran rested on our partners' view that Tehran was the problem, not Washington. We need to get back to that as we work to confront Iran across the region.

The dance around decertification has not just distracted our allies, it has also distracted the American national security community. Because this administration has spent so much time focused on the "will-he-or-won't-he-certify" debate, they appear to have taken their eye off the ball of the broader Iranian threat. Consider Syria, for example. It is a central theater in Iran's expanding regional ambitions. The administration's current ISIS-only strategy has created open running room for Iran, its client Assad, and its proxy Hizbollah to assert greater control over Syria, including areas adjacent to the border with Israel. Current policy has been casual about allowing Iran and Hizbollah to exploit de-escalation zones to their advantage, creating the very real risk that Iran and its proxies set up a permanent presence on Israel's border with Syria. This committee should be pressing the administration for a Syria strategy that goes beyond ISIS and addressing these emerging threats.

Committing to the deal, rather than playing games with it, will not only help us marshal pressure on Iran for its regional activities — it will help us more effectively implement the deal itself. If our partners trust in our good faith and our good word, they will be more likely to adopt a more assertive approach to enforcement.

The issue of inspections at military sites is a case in point. The JCPOA provides for IAEA access to any site in Iran, including military sites, where there is a bona fide reason to believe Iran may be pursuing illicit nuclear activities. As long as the United States is publicly signaling that we intend to use this issue as an excuse to pull out of the deal, it is no wonder that the IAEA and our European allies resist our efforts to gain access to military sites. They see it as a ruse, not as a legitimate concern. If we commit to the deal, I believe that we would have a much better

chance of getting the Europeans and the IAEA to join us in an even more robust set of inspections that go beyond the declared facilities.

The same goes for the provisions of the JCPOA that expire in 10 to 25 years. Contrary to what critics have suggested, the JCPOA does not permit Iran to get a nuclear weapon after some of the nuclear restraints come off in the out years. Under the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, which Iran reaffirmed in the JCPOA, it is forever forbidden from acquiring a nuclear weapon. Similarly, there is no “sunset” in the deal on the restrictions on weapons-related nuclear activities; Iran is permanently barred from pursuing those activities. And there is no “sunset” in the deal on Iran’s obligation to permit reasonable access to its nuclear facilities; Iran is permanently required to abide by the Additional Protocol. Moreover, if the United States believes in good faith that Iran is trying to advance its program in threatening ways in the years ahead, nothing prevents us from taking action — diplomatic, economic, or otherwise — to prevent that from occurring. And a future president — as a result of the agreement and its transparency requirements — will have greater insight than we have ever had into the people, places, and technology involved in Iran’s nuclear program, as well as the benefit of more than a decade to further perfect our means of disrupting it if necessary.

Even so, we will want to work with our partners on a long-term strategy to manage the Iranian nuclear threat after some of the JCPOA’s provisions expire. The best way to maintain international unity and to hold Iran accountable down the road is not to threaten to crater the deal today; it is to keep the burden of proof on Iran, rather than on the United States. The president’s impending decision to decertify the deal may actually take some of the pressure off of Iran with respect to its long-term compliance, by making them seem like the more responsible party in the eyes of the international community.

All of this raises the question, why would the administration insist on decertification when it comes with a number of significant risks and no obvious benefits? The administration seems to be arguing that in declining to certify the deal, they can set up an effective renegotiation with Iran. But a closer look at their concept of renegotiation reveals that it is a fantasy in which Iran gives up everything and we give nothing. In order to buy into this logic, you would have to believe that we could fully restore the global sanctions we had in place from 2011 to 2015, which we could not do because our partners have made clear they would not go along with it. You would also have to believe that Iran would capitulate to a series of demands they steadfastly rejected before, which they would not do because there are certain lines they are simply unwilling to cross.

All of this raises the risk that the purported search for a “better deal” is really a predicate for abandoning the deal at some point down the road — which leads me to my final point.

**Fourth, walking away from the nuclear deal would be a disaster for the United States.**

Whether we left by design or by accident, because this decertification gambit set off a chain of events that led to the collapse of the deal, we would be strategically worse off. Iran would return to racing forward on its nuclear capability and we would not be able to rally the international community to stop them through sanctions. Some critics of the deal argue that Iran would not dare to move forward because of the credible threat of military force. But if all that is required to

keep Iran in check is the credible threat of military force, then why are the deal's opponents worried about the precise provisions of the JCPOA? It's because they know that severe nuclear restraints and verification measures are a much better and more stable solution than relying on the military option.

As more Iranian centrifuges spin, with fewer or no inspectors on the ground, we would quickly be faced with the same painful choices we are facing with North Korea, choices we do not currently have to confront with respect to Iran — precisely because this deal is in place. We already have to grapple with one nuclear crisis. Why would the administration want to create a second one? This defies not only sound strategic thinking, but also simple common sense.

Ambassador Bill Burns and I recently wrote an op-ed piece laying out what we thought was the smart way to get tough with Iran. I would like to close by quoting the key section here:

“The smart way to proceed would be to keep the world's powers united and the burden of proof on Iran. That means working with partners on relentless enforcement; enhancing sanctions that punish Iran's non-nuclear misbehavior, including its missile program and sponsorship of terrorism; working closely with Arab partners to deter Iran's meddling in their internal affairs; and making plain our concerns with Iran's domestic human rights abuses. It means using the diplomatic channel we opened with Iran, after 35 years without such contact, to avoid inadvertent escalation. And it means making it clear that after some restrictions in the deal expire, the United States and the world will still not allow Iran to advance its nuclear program in threatening ways.”

Thank you again for inviting me here today, and I look forward to answering your questions.