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The United States, Israel, and the Iranian Threat: A View from Congress

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- The best way to stop Iran from obtaining nuclear capabilities is to impose a cost so high that it threatens the Iranian regime's survival unless that regime changes course. U.S. sanctions have hindered Iran's ability to attract capital, materials, and technical support, and have created extensive and growing financial difficulties for the regime. Yet although Congress has repeatedly passed sanctions legislation which has been signed into law, its implementation has been watered down or ignored by successive administrations.
- The latest U.S. response has been to join the European Union's efforts to bribe the mullahs into suspending uranium enrichment, while failing to apply U.S. sanctions aimed at denying the Iranian regime the political legitimacy and economic resources that it needs to continue engaging in its destructive policies.
- We must impose immediate, comprehensive, tough economic sanctions, along with every other source of pressure that we can muster, in coordination with as many countries as we can persuade to do so. We should engage officials in friendly nations, international organizations, and financial institutions, and work to persuade them to cooperate with the United States in targeting the Iranian regime.
- The United States should make a moral statement that we will not deal with pariah states and will not help such states to fortify themselves and thereby endanger our own national interests and the interests of our allies, such as Israel.
- The Iranian regime's expanding political and military involvement across the Middle East and South Asia is a force to be reckoned with. We need to wake up and understand the implications of this matter, not just for Israel but for the United States as well. History has taught us that failing to act when threatened by a deadly foe like Iran usually ends in an avoidable tragedy. We ignore Iran's growing hegemony at our own peril.

In analyzing and addressing the threat posed by Iran, it is vital to act on the basis of facts, not myths.

Many tend to look upon the Middle East conflict as an Israeli-Palestinian dispute, even though the evidence indicates that the conflict is largely a symptom of Iran's race for global supremacy. Many also believe that the principle of "land for peace" has been successful, no matter what the realities on the

ground tell us. As a result, they think that if Israel can continue to be pushed to give up land, then all will be well. In reality, a mishandled Israeli-Palestinian channel could encourage and facilitate the expansionist aims of Iran and its proxies.

Yet another myth under which many operate is that even though the United Nations has been proven time and time again to be a failure at its mission, we should still unquestioningly rely on the UN to solve growing threats to our security, including the Iranian nuclear crisis.

But in reality, the best way to stop Iran from obtaining nuclear capabilities is to impose strong sanctions on the regime and to do so now.

Congress Enacts Sanctions on Iran's Energy Infrastructure

The United States Congress has taken strong, pro-active steps regarding sanctions because many of us in the House and Senate recognize the threat posed by the Iranian regime, and we understand the consequences of doing little or nothing to stop it.

Congress passed the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act in 1996, imposing sanctions on foreign companies investing in Iran's energy infrastructure, in an effort to undermine the strategic threat posed by the regime. That legislation, which Congress has since strengthened and re-titled as the Iran Sanctions Act, aims to cut off foreign investment in Iran's petroleum sector, denying the regime the economic lifeline that it needs to pursue its nuclear ambitions and sponsor violent Islamist groups.

Congress has also placed sanctions on the regime in Tehran because of Iran's designation as a state sponsor of terrorism. We have passed prohibitions on the export of items to Iran that have dual civilian and military use. And we have required the Executive Branch to implement the Atomic Energy Act and thereby forbid the export of nuclear materials or sensitive nuclear technology to any country that is a state sponsor of terrorism.

The combined impact of all of this sanctions legislation has hindered Iran's ability to attract capital, materials, and technical support, and has created extensive and growing financial difficulties for the regime. Congress's response to the Iranian threat has spanned the political spectrum and grown over the years, as more and more legislators have recognized the severe and escalating nature of the Iranian threat.

Congress also knows that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN's nuclear watchdog, has not done its job. The IAEA is giving legitimacy to the Iranian regime's false claims that they are using their nuclear program for solely peaceful purposes. While I still believe the IAEA, in spite of all its failures, is a useful organization, it doesn't presently have the manpower - or the willpower - to conduct full, unannounced inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities. The IAEA is dealing with an extraordinarily skillful and deceptive regime and has too much faith in them.

Therefore, despite the Administration's efforts to counter Iran's strategy in the region, the scope of Tehran's plans and actions continues to grow. I believe that we have failed to adequately recognize or address the regime's aim to use its violent Islamist proxies to threaten and attack the U.S., Israel and others - not only throughout the region but also in Latin America, our own backyard. The 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, Argentina, is just one of many examples of Iran's use of proxy warfare to advance the regime's hegemony and undermine the U.S. and our allies.

The failure of the U.S. to properly recognize and confront the Iranian threat spans several administrations. We know all too well what the U.S. response was when militants seized the U.S. embassy in Tehran in 1979, holding 52 Americans hostage for over a year, and when they attacked the marine barracks in [Lebanon](#) in 1983, killing 241 American servicemen.

There have been so many legislative measures, but so little real action on the part of the U.S. in response to the Iranian regime's dangerous deeds. The door has remained open for foreign investment in Iran - no matter what destabilizing actions Iran has taken - and the U.S. has done little, if anything, to stop such

investment. The U.S. was by no means alone in this failure; many other countries such as Russia and China joined in, and blocked or severely weakened UN Security Council sanctions resolutions that could have had a real impact.

Yet all of the countries making economic agreements with Iran should know they won't be worth the paper on which they're printed. The Iranian regime is only after its own political, military, and ideological domination, will exploit supposed allies for its own ends, and will never give a second thought to ripping up any agreements that are no longer in the mullahs' interests.

Attempting to Bribe the Mullahs

Given that the Iranian threat continues to grow, while our efforts to address it have not been sufficient, what do we do now? The American response has been to join the European Union in its efforts to bribe the mullahs into suspending uranium enrichment, while failing to implement U.S. sanctions aimed at denying the Iranian regime the political legitimacy and economic resources that it needs to continue to engage in its destructive policies.

We have already made many concessions to Iran, and the State Department appears ever ready to seek additional waivers on a wide range of legislative restrictions that Congress has passed regarding Iran. For more than ten years, by the time Congress gets to the point of passing legislation, it is substantially watered down. It always has to include a presidential waiver, allowing the president to waive implementation for national security reasons that are never spelled out. That is why the legislation that we pass in one form or another never has the teeth that we want it to have, and even then it is hardly put into full force. So we are left with half-baked legislation, but the little bit that has been put into effect has had great effect.

Great damage has been done to the credibility of our policies toward Iran because we have passed legislation but did not put it into practice. It is long past time for a better approach, one based on the true nature of the Iranian regime and the threat it poses to all of us.

Needed: Immediate, Comprehensive, Tough Economic Sanctions

My perspective, and one shared by many of my colleagues in Congress, is to impose a cost so high that it threatens the Iranian regime's survival unless it changes course. This approach will require applying immediate, comprehensive, tough economic sanctions, along with every other source of pressure that we can muster, in coordination with as many countries as we can persuade to do so.

Congress can demonstrate our commitment to increased pressure on Iran by passing tougher measures targeting the regime. One piece of new legislation is the Iran Counter-Proliferation Act, which passed the House last year by a vote of 397 to 16, but still has not received consideration by the Senate. Another is the Security through Termination of Proliferation Act, which I introduced this past June. It seeks to prevent countries, companies, and other entities from transshipping illegal goods to Iran through poorly-monitored ports, such as Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. It further specifies that U.S. sanctions will remain in effect until the president certifies that Iran or [Syria](#) have verifiably dismantled their nuclear, biological, chemical, and missile programs.

In addition to passing stepped-up sanctions bills, Members of Congress should engage officials in friendly nations, international organizations, and financial institutions, and work to encourage them to cooperate with the U.S. in targeting the Iranian regime. We can also impose pressure through such measures as publicly investigating financial institutions operating in the United States that are reported to be in violation of U.S. laws or UN Security Council regulations regarding Iran. Members can also help ensure that those institutions act to curtail their dealings with the Iranian regime, including refusing to issue new letters of credit to Iranian businesses. And we should reward these initiatives.

What else can Congress do? We can support the growing effort to persuade pension funds and other investment vehicles to divest from companies that invest in Iran. Florida, my home state, was the first state to divest its pension funds, and now more states are doing so. We want to persuade companies

operating in Iran to rethink the wisdom of doing business with one of our nation's most dangerous enemies.

Sanctions are the most effective source of pressure that we have, but we have not used them to their full potential. We in Congress are going to continue to press the State Department to fully implement these sanctions. While Secretary of State Rice has repeatedly stated that she's not hesitant to sanction, the reality is that the United States has not once sanctioned even one foreign company in violation of the Iran Sanctions Act, although such firms have invested more than \$20 billion in Iran's energy sector over the past decade.

Indeed, more companies and individuals have been sanctioned for making and selling pirated products such as CDs, DVDs, and television sets than have been sanctioned for investing in Iran's energy sector, or worse, for providing technology and other material to support Iran's weapons of mass destruction or missile capabilities. To the contrary, we are rewarding countries such as Russia, which directly contributes to Iran's missile program, with nuclear cooperation agreements with the U.S.

If sanctions are to be used effectively, they should be applied across the board in order to put maximum pressure on a regime that, to quote Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, is hell-bent on trying to develop nuclear capabilities. If leading officials are willing to state, over and over again, that the Iranian regime must not be allowed to develop nuclear capabilities, then the Administration must finally follow through with measures that can actually stop the regime in its tracks.

Implementation Is the Key

The real problem is putting existing sanctions laws into effect. We have seen administration after administration implement parts of existing law but not follow through with the rest. The few provisions that the Executive Branch did apply have caused real economic harm to the Iranian regime, particularly in the petroleum sector. Financing in general has become more difficult for the Iranian regime because of these sanctions. The cost of money has gone up significantly as Iran's credit rating has fallen. Obtaining letters of credit and other financial instruments that Iran needs for international trade has become more problematic. As a result of these efforts, investors have pulled out of a number of oil and gas deals. So the sanctions are absolutely having an effect at present, but much more can be done. I am optimistic that if we can remain vigilant, we will prevail and protect the security of America and her allies - no matter who is the president, and no matter which party controls the Congress.

If the U.S. is the only one implementing economic sanctions on Iran, without the support of other countries and financial institutions and the mechanism that it takes to put sanctions in place, our efforts will not be as effective as they should be. So acting alone is not as good as acting internationally. But it is important for the United States to make a moral statement that we will not deal with pariah states and will not help such states to fortify themselves and thereby endanger our own national interests and the interests of our allies, such as Israel.

History has taught us that failing to act, and relying on hope, when threatened by a deadly foe like Iran, usually ends in an avoidable tragedy. Iran's political and military involvement across the Middle East and South Asia is a force to be reckoned with and we need to wake up and understand the implications of that, not just for Israel but for the United States as well. We ignore Iran's growing hegemony at our own peril.

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