



IRAN: BEYOND THE NUCLEAR THREAT

House Foreign Affairs Committee Oversight

When it comes to Iran, attention has rightly been focused on efforts to stop its nuclear program. But as one witness will explain this morning, “Iran’s nuclear program is just the tip of a revolutionary spear that extends across the world and threatens key U.S. interests.” Tehran’s foreign policy – he goes on to say – “is subversive, sectarian, and set on goals that would come at the expense of U.S. interests in the region.” He is right. – Chairman Royce

Iran’s threat to U.S. interests extends beyond its nuclear program. A key danger of the ongoing nuclear negotiations with Iran is that a resulting agreement will allow Iran to possess key nuclear-bomb making technology without any change in the regime’s hostile behavior. As part of its ongoing oversight of these negotiations, the Committee has held hearings to examine Iran’s destructive policies throughout the region, including its threat to U.S. allies such as Israel, use of terrorist proxies, support for the Assad regime in Syria, and efforts to undermine the development of a stable, inclusive Iraq.

U.S. law has long recognized the danger that Iran’s support for terrorism presents. In July, **342 House Members** joined Chairman Royce and Ranking Member Engel in urging President Obama to consult with Congress before offering Iran sanctions relief. They wrote:

Almost all sanctions related to Iran’s nuclear program are also related to Tehran’s advancing ballistic missile program, intensifying support for international terrorism, and other unconventional weapons programs. Iran’s permanent and verifiable termination of all of these activities - not just some - is a prerequisite for permanently lifting most congressionally-mandated sanctions.”

Iran Uses Terrorist Groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas To Threaten U.S. Interests and Allies

Iran has long used terrorist proxies—including providing funding and weapons—to advance its goals in the region and beyond.

As Brookings’ Nathan Sachs told the Committee in July:

The strongest and most significant of the Iran-sponsored groups is Hizballah, the “Party of God,” established in 1982. As a Shi’a militia, Hizballah focused both on a fight against Israel...[and] was also directly involved in the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983...At Tehran’s behest, Hizballah has become involved heavily in the sectarian Syrian civil war on the side of the Assad regime, sustaining significant casualties...This sacrifice by Hizballah provides strong evidence of its deference toward Tehran.

Sachs also described how a mutual animosity for Israel leads Shi'a Iran to support Sunni Hamas:

The shared animosity toward Israel allows for strange alliances. Iran and Syria have been important suppliers of weapons for militants in the Gaza Strip, including Hamas. Syrian-produced M-302 rockets, for example, have been used against Israeli civilians in the current round of fighting. The same type of rockets were found on the KLOS C arms ship, which the Israeli navy intercepted before it could reach Gaza. The KLOS C originated in the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas.

Iran's Policies Have Prolonged the Conflict in Syria and Facilitated ISIL's Rise

Iran has long treated Syria's Assad regime as its closest ally in the region. In addition to supporting Assad through its proxy Hezbollah, Iran has provided direct support to the regime, even deploying its elite Quds force to Syria. Such strong Iranian support has helped Assad cling to power and helped bring about the conditions in eastern Syria that have given both ISIL and al-Qaeda's Khorasan group safe havens.

Ray Takeyh of the Council on Foreign Relations testified to the central role that support for Assad plays in Iran's foreign policy and its efforts to drive U.S. influence from the region:

The key actors defining Iran's regional policy are not its urbane diplomats mingling with their Western counterparts in Europe, but the Revolutionary Guards, particularly the famed Quds Brigade. For the commander of the Quds Brigade, General Qassim Soleimani the struggle to evict America from the region began in Iraq...today "Syria is the front-line of resistance." ... The survival and success of the Assad dynasty is now a central element of Iran's foreign policy.

As Scott Modell of CSIS explained:

Iran's military intervention in Syria turned the tide of the war and prevented the collapse of the Assad Regime. By siding with Assad, Iran has inflamed sectarian divisions across the region, leading to an unprecedented flow of Sunni foreign fighters into Syria and surrounding countries.

Iran Opposes the U.S. Goal of a Stable, Inclusive Iraq

In his recent appearance in front of the Committee, Secretary Kerry emphasized that central to the Administration's efforts to combat ISIL is the creation of an inclusive Iraqi government—in order to deprive the terrorist group of the support of disillusioned Iraqi Sunnis.

However, as Takeyh told the Committee, Iran has the opposite goal:

Iran's fundamental interest in Iraq tends to diverge from those of the United States. We ostensibly seek an inclusive Iraq with greater participation of Sunni forces in the Shi'i government. Iran desires a Shi'i hegemony with the veneer of Sunni participation. Iran essentially desires an Iraq that is estranged from the Arab Councils and at odds with the United States.

Iran's Iraq policy, in other words, drives the political sectarianism in which ISIL thrives.



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