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House of Representatives

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Subcommittee on National Security, the Border, and Foreign Affairs

Hearing on “A Dangerous Strategy: Examining the Biden Administration’s Failures on Iran”

September 13, 2023

Let’s be clear, the autocratic regime running Iran is oppressive and dangerous—to their own people and to peace in the region and the world.

The regime threatens our allies, including the democratic State of Israel, and destabilizes the region by funding terrorist groups including Hizballah, Palestinian terrorist groups in Gaza, and terrorist and militant groups in Iraq, Syria, Bahrain, and elsewhere throughout the Middle East.

The regime is fueling Russia’s illegal war with Ukraine—sending mortars, bullets and Iranian-made drones which are targeting and killing innocent Ukrainian civilians.

And the Iranian regime commits terrible crimes against their own people. They ruthlessly crack down on any dissent and sow fear among the population. They oppress, imprison, and kill women who are brave enough to stand up for their human rights, and fail to even protect young schoolgirls who are deliberately poisoned.

The Iranian regime deserves to be confronted and called out at every turn. And members of both parties can agree: above all, the Iranian regime cannot access a nuclear weapon.

The best way to guarantee Iran cannot obtain a nuclear weapon is through international negotiations, careful diplomacy, and a negotiated solution. Not another Middle East war.

And we know this because history and precedent show that the only time we’ve been able to affect the Iranian regime’s actions is with diplomacy.

Donald Trump’s reckless so-called “maximum pressure strategy” failed and made us less safe than ever.

Rather than slowing Iran’s march towards a nuke, Iran responded to Trump’s decision to abandon President Obama’s multilateral Iran nuclear deal by getting closer to a nuclear weapon.

When President Biden took office, Iran’s enriched uranium stockpile was more than 10 times higher than the limit set by the Iran deal. Under Trump, Iran had more highly enriched uranium, more enrichment sights, and had ended inspection protocols.

Mr. Chairman, I consider myself to be a strong supporter of the State Israel—particularly as a LGBTQ person, they are a bastion of tolerance in a very dangerous region.

So I'd like to cite some prominent Israeli voices who testify that Trump made us and our ally Israel less safe. The former Israeli Defense Force Chief of Staff, General Gadi Eisenkot, said: "The fact that the US withdrew in 2018 released Iran from all restrictions and inspections in the deal, even if there were holes, and brought Iran to the most advanced position today with regard to its nuclear program."

Raz Zimmt, an Israeli military expert on Iran stated in 2021, "Today, it's clear that maximum pressure did not yield its political objectives. It doesn't matter how much pressure you put on them, the Iranians see their nuclear program as an insurance for the regime."

And under President Trump, as Iran got closer to a nuclear weapon, our nation crept far too close to dangerous conflict with our adversary Iran. In 2020, under President Trump, U.S. forces in Iraq were struck by more than a dozen ballistic missiles launched by Iran, escalating threats to near war.

I know some voices would like to see us launch a destructive forever war with Iran, but our allies and partners should understand that the American people are done sending our soldiers to fight and die in forever wars.

We must be focused on our greatest security threats: Russia and China. We can't afford more Middle East conflicts.

The only logical alternative is smart diplomacy. President Biden has pursued this strategy, I believe, appropriately.

I believe negotiations have reduced tensions and reduced the risk of a serious escalation of conflict in the region, which is appropriate.

Last month, the Wall Street Journal reported that Iran has, and I quote, "significantly slowed the pace at which it is accumulating near-weapons-grade enriched uranium and has diluted some of its stockpile."

I am concerned that many voices in Congress are irresponsibly trying to block or pre-judge diplomacy, regardless of the merits, to score political points.

President Biden is securing the release of captured Americans—which should be a bipartisan priority for any Administration.

In exchange, South Korea is releasing Iranian funds, which can only be spent on humanitarian goods—food and medicine for the Iranian people—under then close supervision of the U.S. Treasury. These outcomes would not have occurred, had the Biden administration not intervened.

But I would like to note the timing of this hearing, as the Americans being released from Iran are not yet free. They are in a precarious situation, and I hope that this hearing does not undermine the efforts to secure the release of these Americans.

Diplomacy is hard. We need to be able to build systems to ensure compliance, and to deter bad behavior. We need to uphold our agreements, too.

I urge both sides of this Committee to evaluate our diplomacy by following the facts, not by trying to score points. I yield back.

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