

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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Opening Statement Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

Hearing on “White House Narratives on the Iran Nuclear Deal” May 17, 2016

Mr. Chairman, sitting here today, I am extremely surprised that you would invite John Hannah to testify before our Committee as an expert witness, particularly on the subject of false White House narratives.

Mr. Hannah was Vice President Dick Cheney’s top national security adviser in the White House. He personally helped prepare Secretary of State Colin Powell’s infamous speech to the United Nations in the run-up to the Iraq war—a speech that Secretary Powell has called a permanent blot on his record.

Mr. Hannah was identified by the Iraqi National Congress (INC) as its “principal point of contact” in the Vice President’s office. The INC was an organization that supplied our nation with reams of false information about weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Hannah worked directly for Scooter Libby, who was convicted after the Bush Administration leaked the identity of a covert CIA agent, Valerie Plame. Her husband, Ambassador Joe Wilson, had publicly debunked the Administration’s false claims about the Iraqi nuclear program.

This was the same Scooter Libby who told FBI agents it was “possible” that Vice President Cheney actually directed him to leak information about Ms. Plame’s covert status.

Now, I don’t know Mr. Hannah. I don’t believe I have ever met him before today. But based on the public record alone, let me say this.

If our goal is to hear from an expert who actually *promoted* false White House narratives, then I think you picked the right person.

But if our goal is to hear from someone who was *not involved* in one of the biggest misrepresentations in our nation’s history, then you picked the wrong person.

Listening to John Hannah criticize anyone else for pushing a false White House narrative is beyond ironic. He and Dick Cheney and their colleagues in the White House wrote the “how-to” manual on this.

The profound tragedy here is that thousands of U.S. service-members were killed in Iraq, and thousands more sustained terrible injuries. The American taxpayers have now spent hundreds of billions of dollars, even by the most conservative estimates.

Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, you rushed to invite Mr. Hannah without consulting anyone. In fact, this entire panel has been stacked with hand-picked witnesses who all oppose the Iran agreement.

You did not invite prominent Republicans like Brent Scowcroft or Richard Lugar, let alone one of the dozens of generals or admirals or other military experts, who support this agreement.

Other committees have held dozens of substantive hearings on the Iran agreement. But do you know how many this Committee has held? Zero. The subcommittee on national security held one last November, but that was it. Nothing at the Committee level.

Yet, all of a sudden, now our Committee is rushing to hold today's hearing without even the one-week notice required by House rules, according to the Parliamentarian. These experts here are all repeating the same talking points for the same Republican political narrative.

This Committee has basically created its own Republican echo chamber.

With respect to Ben Rhodes, I am struggling to understand the allegation against him. If I understand it correctly, Republicans accuse him of misleading the American people by claiming that nothing happened with Iran before 2013—when they elected a so-called moderate president. Republicans claim that if Americans just knew the President was working towards an agreement *before 2013*, they would have rejected this deal.

Of course, this is absurd. There are dozens of public press reports from every single year of the Obama Administration documenting how they were working to reach out to Iran, with varying degrees of success.

All you have to do is Google them. From the time Barack Obama was a candidate for President until today, press reports are full of accounts of how letters were being exchanged, meetings were being held, and negotiations were being launched.

The Republicans rushed to hold this hearing not as a way to obtain substantive information about the merits of the Iran agreement, or even to investigate a legitimate allegation.

Instead, this hearing is exactly what it purports to condemn—a partisan narrative designed to mislead the American people. That is not just ironic—it is hypocritical.

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