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House of Representatives

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Opening Statement Rep. Peter Welch

Hearing on “Protecting America From A Bad Deal: Ending U.S. Participation In The Nuclear Agreement With Iran”

June 6, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing to examine President Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – otherwise known as the Iran nuclear agreement. I’d also like to thank today’s witnesses for helping this Subcommittee with its work.

President Trump’s decision to withdraw from the Iran nuclear agreement – painstakingly negotiated over two years with the United Kingdom, France, Germany, China, and Russia—undermines America’s national security, inflames tensions in war zones like Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen, and discredits the United States’ ability to achieve meaningful nuclear arms control in other regions, such as North Korea.

While the Iran nuclear agreement did not address every conceivable form of bad behavior by the Iranian regime, it did address one; it required Iran to cease and desist from active development of nuclear weapons.

Within the four corners of that document its sole purpose was to ensure that quote, “under no circumstances will Iran ever seek, develop, or acquire any nuclear weapons.” It also set forth a system of third party verification and monitoring in order to enforce compliance. Based on the robust, on-the-ground inspections and verification regime mandated by the agreement, the International Atomic Energy Agency has continually reported that Iran has abided by the significant constraints on its nuclear program.

According to the I.A.E.A.’s most recent monitoring report, Iran has refrained from producing or retaining uranium enriched at a level greater than 3.67% -- far less than the approximately 90% enrichment level of weapons-grade uranium and the 20% level of the uranium that Iran had previously stockpiled.

The I.A.E.A. has also verified that in compliance with the agreement, there are no more than 5,060 centrifuges at the Natanz fuel enrichment plant. That's in accordance with Iran's commitment to dismantle two-thirds of its centrifuges to enrich uranium for 10 years.

Moreover, Iran had no longer pursued its original construction design of the heavy water reactor at its water plant in Arak – with all existing uranium pellets, fuel pins, and fuel assemblies related to this design in storage under continuous I.A.E.A. supervision. That indicates that Iran has abided by its commitment to dismantle the Arak reactor and can no longer produce weapons-grade plutonium.

As Defense Secretary James Mattis testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee in April of this year, the Iran nuclear agreement and I quote, *“is written almost with an assumption that Iran would try to cheat”* and *“so the verification, what is in there, is actually pretty robust . . .”*

If President Trump were to get a similar agreement and similar results in his meeting with North Korea's Kim Jong Un later this month, it would make the world safer. But based on his public position and statements, President Trump would likely walk away from such a deal.

The U.S. withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal has made the world less safe, and has probably increased the likelihood of military conflict with Iran.

Iran has indicated that it will enhance its uranium enrichment capacity. Just yesterday, Iran's Atomic Energy Organization announced that Iran has completed a new centrifuge assembly center at the Natanz plant and would increase its capacity to produce uranium hexafluoride to supply its centrifuges.

Our allies -- France, Germany, and the United Kingdom -- are trying to uphold the Iran nuclear agreement without us, but the potential of U.S. sanctions against European companies will likely undercut that resolve.

In the meantime, the President has not provided the American public with any information suggesting that he has a realistic plan to replace the Iran nuclear agreement that he just ripped up. However, the words and actions of his closest advisors give us a clue as to the President's ultimate goal: regime change. In January 2018, prior to becoming the President's National Security Advisor, Mr. Bolton, during an interview on Fox News, said that quote *“our goal should be regime change in Iran.”* On May 5, 2018, just three days before the United States withdrew from the Iran nuclear deal, Rudy Giuliani, the President's lawyer, confirmed that the President is quote *“as committed to regime change as we are.”*

If regime change is the intended goal of the Trump Administration, would the Iranian government voluntarily and completely surrender at the negotiating table? The answer is 'No.' So what's next? The only option, as I see it, is the Trump administration is preparing to initiate a military strike. This gives the appearance of a definitive action but leaves us less safe and more uncertain as to what's next.

It is imperative that the Administration change its direction and work with Congress in a bipartisan manner, along with our European partners, to mitigate the destabilizing consequences of our withdrawal from the Iran nuclear agreement. I look forward to hearing our witnesses' perspectives on this issue.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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