

Chairman John McCain
Opening Statement on JCPOA and the Military Balance in the Middle East
August 5, 2015

The Committee meets today for our third oversight hearing on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which the United States and other major powers have signed with Iran. We welcome our distinguished witnesses and thank them for joining us today:

- Professor Walter Russell Mead, Distinguished Scholar in American Strategy at the Hudson Institute and Professor of Foreign Affairs at Bard College;
- Michael Singh, Senior Fellow and Managing Director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy;
- Dr. Ray Takeyh, Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations;
- Dr. Philip Gordon, Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations; and
- Richard Nephew, Fellow at the Center for Global Energy Policy at Columbia University.

This Committee's oversight is focused on the strategic and military implications of the nuclear deal with Iran. Among other things, we want to know how this agreement will affect regional security, proliferation, and the balance of power in the Middle East; what impact it may have on Iran's malign activities and ambitions to dominate the region; what it means for perceptions of American credibility among our allies and partners; and what the consequences are for U.S. defense policy, military planning, and force posture.

From this broader strategic perspective, and following the testimony given in our two previous hearings on this topic, this bad deal only looks that much worse.

The Committee is eager to hear from our witnesses on whether this deal is the best we can do – and what realistic alternatives exist. And given that even the Administration acknowledges Iranian aggression, support for terrorism and rogue regimes, and destabilizing behavior are likely to continue, what should U.S. strategy toward Iran look like?

The Administration suggests that any criticism of this deal is tantamount to a call to war. Such scare tactics are to be expected from this Administration, but they have no place in a debate of this magnitude. Our military leaders have also rejected the Administration's false choice. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Dempsey, told this Committee last week, "We have a range of options." Likewise, the President's nominee to be the next Chief of Naval Operations testified that "there are other options besides going to war." We ask our witnesses to provide their candid assessments of what realistic alternatives to this deal might be.

The strategic and military implications of this agreement are perhaps even more troubling than the terms themselves. Iran is more than an arms control challenge. It is a geopolitical challenge that demands a

comprehensive strategy. For years, many of us have urged the Administration to adopt a regional strategy to counter Iran's malign activities in the Middle East. Unfortunately, if such a strategy exists, there is no evidence of it.

President Obama likes to say that this deal is built on verification rather than trust. But consider what we have already verified about Iran's activities and intentions, and contrast that to our own strategic drift:

We know that over the past decade Iran's military and intelligence operatives have stepped up their destabilizing activities in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, Gaza, and elsewhere. Iran did this despite the full pressure of sanctions. Imagine what it could do with even a small portion of the windfall of sanctions relief, estimated at roughly \$60 billion or possibly much more. It is reasonable to assume that billions of additional dollars will soon flow to Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps and Qods Force—money that will likely be used to boost arms supplies to Iran's terrorist proxies and double down on Bashar Assad right when he needs it most.

We know that Iran intends to become the dominant military power in the Middle East. Yet despite repeated assurances that negotiations were strictly limited to the nuclear program, the Administration made major concessions related to conventional weapons and ballistic missiles – concessions that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned before the agreement should occur “under no circumstances.” In five years, this agreement would lift the international arms embargo against Iran, freeing up the regime to acquire advanced conventional military capabilities from eager sellers such as Russia and China. In eight years, it would lift restrictions on ballistic missiles, whose only conceivable military purpose would be to deliver nuclear weapons against America and its allies.

We know that these concessions have dangerous implications for the men and women serving in our military. This agreement would enable Iran to construct the kind of advanced military arsenal—the anti-access and area-denial capabilities—that could raise the cost of employing our military option should Iran violate its obligations. In short, if this agreement fails, the lives of U.S. service members could be at greater risk.

We know that our allies and partners in the Middle East have increasingly come to believe that America is withdrawing from the region, and is doing so at a time when Iran is aggressively seeking to advance its ambitions. Now we have reached an agreement that will not only legitimize the Islamic Republic as a threshold nuclear state with an industrial enrichment capability, but will also unshackle this regime in its long-held pursuit of conventional military power, and may actually consolidate the current regime's control in Iran for years to come.

And that is perhaps most troubling of all about this agreement—what it means for America's credibility in the Middle East. For decades, the United States has sought to suppress security competition in the region between states with long histories of hostility toward one another and to prevent war. I fear this agreement could further undermine our ability and willingness to play that vital stabilizing role. For the sake of our own security, as well as that of our allies, I believe we cannot afford to let that happen.

Once again, I thank the witnesses for appearing before us today, and I look forward to their testimony.
Senator Reed.