

Chairman John McCain
Opening Statement on JCPOA and the Military Balance in the Middle East

The Committee meets today for our second 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:

- General Michael Hayden, Principal at The Chertoff Group and former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency;
- Ambassador Nicholas Burns, Goodman Professor of Diplomacy and International Relations at the Harvard Kennedy School, and former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs;
- Ambassador Eric Edelman, Distinguished Fellow at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments and former Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; and
- Dr. Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations and former Director of Policy Planning at the State Department.

This Committee's oversight is primarily focused on the strategic and military implications of the agreement. 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 hegemonic ambitions in the region; what it means for perceptions of American credibility and resolve 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, this bad deal only looks that much worse.

The Committee is eager to hear our witnesses' assessments of the vital details of this agreement, especially the verification and monitoring mechanisms, which include two side agreements between the IAEA and Iran – neither of which the Administration or the Congress have seen.

At the same time, what is even more troubling are the military implications of this agreement. Iran is not just an arms control challenge. It is a geopolitical challenge. 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. Instead, we have watched with alarm as Iran's military and intelligence operatives have stepped up their destabilizing activities in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Bahrain, Gaza, and elsewhere.

Iran did all of this under the full pressure of sanctions. Now, Iran will receive a windfall of sanctions relief, estimated at roughly \$60 billion or possibly much more. It is only fair 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, to sew chaos and instability across the region, and to double down on Bashar Assad right when he needs it most. This will present a host of new challenges for the Department of Defense.

This agreement will not only strengthen Iran's malign activities in the region. It will also further Iran's emergence as a dominant military power in the Middle East. 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 eight years, this agreement would lift restrictions on ballistic missiles, whose only conceivable military purpose would be to deliver nuclear weapons against the United States and its allies. In five years, this agreement would lift the international arms embargo against Iran, freeing up the regime to acquire advanced conventional military capabilities. With billions of dollars in sanctions relief, Iran is sure to find plenty of states that are eager to sell those weapons, especially Russia and China.

These concessions have direct and dangerous implications for the U.S. military. The Administration says that the military option will remain on the table if Iran violates the agreement, and that is true. Yet the agreement itself would enable Iran to construct the very kind of advanced military arsenal—the anti-access and area-denial capabilities—that could raise the cost of employing our military option. In short, if this agreement fails, and U.S. service members are called upon to take action against Iran, their lives could be at greater risk because of this agreement.

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.

Our allies and partners in the Middle East have increasingly come to believe that America is withdrawing from the region, and doing so at a time when Iran is aggressively seeking to advance its hegemonic 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.

The President and his advisors are fond of saying that the only alternative to this deal is war. This kind of false choice is all too familiar from this Administration. And these cheap scare tactics have no place in a national security debate of this magnitude. And our military leaders know better. 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."

In addition to your analysis of the agreement and its consequences, all of us are eager to hear from each of you today what realistic alternatives there to this agreement, and what role the Congress should now play.