

Opening Statement of Chairman John McCain
SASC Hearing on the Military Implications of the Iran Nuclear Agreement

The Committee meets today to begin a series of oversight hearings 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. We also appreciate Secretary Kerry, Secretary Carter, Secretary Moniz, and General Dempsey being willing to forego their opening statements so as to save more time for questions.

This hearing is part of a broader oversight effort of the Iran agreement that numerous committees of jurisdiction are conducting. Most of those hearings are focused on the precise details of the agreement, and those details are vital. However, our focus here today is on the strategic and military implications of the agreement, as befits the role of this committee. What we want to know, among other things, is 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.

When we consider these broader strategic consequences of the agreement—the second order effects—what is already a bad deal only looks that much worse.

Perhaps of most concern to this Committee about the agreement itself pertains to the verification and monitoring mechanisms. As has been publicly reported, the inspections of Iran's facilities will be conducted by the International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA. There will be no Americans allowed on the ground, and the details of how these monitoring activities will occur are contained in a side agreement between the IAEA and Iran, which the U.S. government has not seen.

Furthermore, the mechanism to resolve longstanding international concerns about the possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear program is contained in another side agreement between Iran and the IAEA, which the U.S. government also has not seen. To be sure, much about Iran's weaponization activities is not a mystery, but we can never know what we do not know. Which is why the Director of the IAEA has said that effective verification depends on resolution of the PMD issue.

This presents a major problem: We in Congress will soon vote on the JCPOA, and the merits of this agreement depend entirely on its verifiability, but we cannot even

read the foundational documents of how that verification will occur, and our own government is not even a party to those agreements. I find that deeply troubling.

What is even more troubling are the broader 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 soon receive a windfall of sanctions relief, estimated at roughly \$60 billion or possibly as much as twice that. Yes, a good amount of that money will surely go to Iran's domestic priorities. But it is only fair to assume that billions and billions of dollars will flow to Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corp 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.

What's worse, not only could this agreement strengthen Iran's malign activities in the region; it is also likely to enhance Iran's acquisition of conventional military capabilities. For nearly a decade, an international arms embargo has significantly hurt Iran's ability to build up and modernize its aging military. Throughout the nuclear negotiations, the Administration insisted that its diplomacy was limited exclusively to the nuclear file. Indeed, just a few weeks ago, General Dempsey told this Committee that, quote, "under no circumstances should we relieve pressure on Iran relative to ballistic missile capabilities and arms trafficking."

And yet, thanks to last minute concessions by the Administration, that is exactly what this agreement would do. At year five, the international arms embargo will disappear, and Iran will be free to acquire advanced military capabilities, such as fighter aircraft, air defense systems, and anti-ship missiles. At year eight, all international restrictions on Iran's ballistic missile programs will disappear, and Iran will be free to acquire, through entirely licit means, the necessary technology and material for ever more sophisticated ballistic missiles, including ICBMs. And in all of this, Iran will not only have billions of dollars with which to go on a shopping spree in the international arms market, but it is also sure to find plenty of states that are eager to sell those weapons, especially Russia and China.

In this way, the JCPOA not only paves Iran's path to a nuclear capability; it is also likely to further Iran's emergence as a dominant military power in the Middle East. This has direct and dangerous implications for the United States, especially our armed forces. After all, the ultimate guarantee that Iran will not get a nuclear weapon is not a 109-page document. It is the capability of the U.S. military to do what is necessary, if all else fails. And yet, this agreement would enable Iran to construct the very advanced military arsenal—the anti-access and area denial capabilities—to deter and possibly even negate America's 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 the most troubling aspect of all about this agreement—what it means for America's credibility in the Middle East. Since 1979, Republican and Democratic Administrations have sought to contain the Islamic Republic of Iran and prevent it from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. Our allies and partners have entrusted much of their own security to the United States because they have believed that our commitments were credible. In this way, America's role in the region has been to suppress security competition between states with long histories of mistrust and to prevent that competition from breaking down into open war.

I fear this agreement will 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 Islamic Republic's control in Iran for years to come.

After turning three decades of U.S. foreign policy on its head, is it any wonder that this agreement may lead our allies and partners to question America's commitment to their security? As that happens, those states are increasingly likely to take matters into their own hands—and, indeed, we already see plenty of evidence of that trend. These fateful decisions could likely manifest themselves in growing regional security competition, new arms races, and possibly nuclear proliferation.

It would be ironic, but not historically unprecedented, that a diplomatic agreement intended to decrease the risk of conflict actually increased those risks instead. All of us hope that will not be the case now, but it is the job of the Defense Department to be ready when our highest hopes fail us, and I fear there is much work to do.