



HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE DUNCAN HUNTER – CHAIRMAN

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CHAIRMAN HUNTER OPENING STATEMENT

Full Committee Hearing on Iran: Assessing Geopolitical Dynamics and U.S. Policy Options

Washington, D.C. – Before we begin today’s hearing, I’d like to comment on news this morning that a U.S. air strike killed Abu Zabu al-Zarqawi in Iraq. This success against al-Zarqawi and his top lieutenants manifests the importance of persistence and reflects the extreme competence and capability of the United States counter-terrorism efforts in Iraq. This important strategic success reflects the need for continued American persistence and patience in completing the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Today, the Committee meets to assess another threat to our national security – the current challenges posed by Iran and to discuss what options we have to confront that threat. Earlier this year (February 1, 2006), we held a hearing where we heard from witnesses who addressed the potentially catastrophic implications of a nuclear Iran. This morning, barely four months later, we continue to remain engaged and focused on this critical issue and look forward to the testimony of two experts on the Middle East and Iran. They are Dr. Patrick Clawson, Deputy Director for Research, Washington Institute for Near East Policy and Mr. Ray Takeyh, Senior Fellow for Middle Eastern Studies, Council on Foreign Relations.

Gentlemen, welcome and thank you for coming this morning. We look forward to your testimony and your perspectives on the latest developments, including the recent proposal to offer Iran a package of incentives in return for restrictions on its nuclear program.

While the details are not yet public, recent media reports indicate that this proposal would allow Iran to enrich uranium. I hesitate to prejudge this proposal, but I must admit that I am skeptical of any plan that allows Tehran to enrich uranium – even if it’s for supposedly peaceful purposes.

My skepticism is based on several concerns. First, the history of Iran’s nuclear program is replete with examples of deceiving and defying the international community. How will this new diplomatic effort ensure compliance?

Equally troubling are Iran's other policies. We continue to hear that Iran is supporting militant groups in Iraq, and there are press reports that U.S. forces have found Iranian supplied explosives in Iraq. Outside of Iraq, Iran's support of terrorism extends throughout the region. According to a 2006 State Department report, "Iran remained the most active state sponsor of terrorism."

Advancing these policies is a regime that is driven by an ideology that derives from the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The conduct and statements of Iran's newly elected President should, at the very least, give pause to those who think Iran can be deterred from pursuing a nuclear weapons program.

If Iran were to possess nuclear weapons, it would destabilize the security balance of the region by either threatening their use, by proliferating such weapons and technology to terrorists, or by encouraging other states to pursue their own nuclear weapons programs.

I am also concerned about China's and Russia's economic ties with Iran. In the last decade, Russia has been a steady supplier of nuclear capabilities to Iran. China has also shared nuclear technology with Iran, while increasing close energy ties to Iran. In 2004, for example, China and Iran signed an oil and gas deal worth an estimated \$100 billion. I hope the witnesses today will share their perspectives on how China and Russia might back a future Security Council resolution or a possible sanctions regime, given these substantial financial and economic dealings.

While I understand the need to pursue a diplomatic track and value the benefits of multilateral cooperation and agreements, we must also look at the other options available to us. Are there alternatives that might provide a viable remedy to this serious impasse? For example, in our earlier hearing, our witnesses discussed strategies to encourage internal regime change and the potential consequences of sanctions. Would a regional containment strategy that strengthens existing partnerships with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) be able to counterbalance a nuclear Iran? Are there other options that our witnesses believe we should be pursuing?

We may not reach the same conclusions today as we continue our dialogue and focus on Iran, but one fact is clear: the acquisition of nuclear technology by Iran is serious and poses a significant national security challenge.

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